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ИНОСТРАННЫЙ ЯЗЫК: УЧИМСЯ У КЛАССИКОВ

**А. Конан Дойль,  
О. Генри, Ч. Диккенс,  
О. Уайльд и другие**

**ORIGINAL**

75 BEST —  
SHORT STORIES

75 ЛУЧШИХ РАССКАЗОВ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ

## 75 лучших рассказов = 75 Best Short Stories (Сборник рассказов)

### My Adventure in Norfolk (A.J. Alan)

I don't know how it is with you, but during February *my* wife generally says to me: 'Have you thought at all about what we are going to do for August?' And, of course, I say, 'No,' and then she begins looking through the advertisements of bungalows<sup>1</sup> to let.

Well, this happened last year, as usual, and she eventually produced one that looked possible. It said: 'Norfolk<sup>2</sup> – Hickling Broad – Furnished Bungalow – Garden – Garage, Boathouse,' and all the rest of it – Oh – *and* plate and linen. It also mentioned an exorbitant rent. I pointed out the bit about the rent, but my wife said: 'Yes, you'll have to go down and see the landlord, and get him to come down. They always do.' As a matter of fact, they always don't, but that's a detail.

Anyway, I wrote off to the landlord and asked if he could arrange for me to stay the night in the place to see what it was really like. He wrote back and said: 'Certainly,' and that he was engaging Mrs. So-and-So to come in and 'oblige me,' and make up the beds and so forth.

I tell you, we do things thoroughly – in our family – I have to sleep in all the beds, and when I come home my wife counts the bruises and decides whether they will do or not.

At any rate, I arrived, in a blinding snowstorm, at about *the* most desolate spot on God's earth. I'd come to Potter Heigham by train, and been driven on (it was a good five miles from the station). Fortunately, Mrs. Selston, the old lady who was going to 'do' for me, was there, and she'd lighted a fire, and cooked me a steak, for which I was truly thankful.

I somehow think the cow, or whatever they get steaks off, had only died that morning. It was very – er – obstinate. While I dined, she talked to me. She *would* tell me all about an operation her husband had just had. *All* about it. It was almost a lecture on surgery. The steak was rather underdone, and it sort of made me feel I was illustrating her lecture. Anyway, she put me clean off my dinner, and then departed for the night.

I explored the bungalow and just had a look outside. It was, of course, very dark, but not snowing quite so hard. The garage stood about fifteen yards from the back door. I walked round it, but didn't go in. I also went down to the edge of the broad, and verified the boathouse. The whole place looked as though it might be all right in the summertime, but just then it made one wonder why people ever wanted to go to the North Pole.

Anyhow, I went indoors, and settled down by the fire. You've no idea how quiet it was; even the waterfowl had taken a night off – at least, they weren't working.

At a few minutes to eleven I heard the first noise there'd been since Mrs. What's-her-name – Selston – had cleared out. It was the sound of a car. If it had gone straight by I probably shouldn't have noticed it at all, only it didn't go straight by; it seemed to stop farther up the road, before it got to the house. Even that didn't make much impression. After all, cars *do* stop.

It must have been five or ten minutes before it was borne in on me that it hadn't gone on again. So I got up and looked out of the window. It had left off snowing, and there was a glare through the gate that showed that there were headlamps somewhere just out of sight. I thought I might as well stroll out and investigate.

I found a fair-sized limousine pulled up in the middle of the road about twenty yards short of my gate. The light was rather blinding, but when I got close to it I found a girl with the bonnet open, tinkering with the engine. Quite an attractive young female, from what one could see, but she was so muffled up in furs that it was rather hard to tell.

I said:

'Er – good evening – anything I can do.'

She said she didn't know what was the matter. The engine had just stopped, and wouldn't

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<sup>1</sup> **bungalows** – a *bungalow* is a small one-storied house with a veranda

<sup>2</sup> **Norfolk** – a historic county on the North Sea coast in eastern England

start again. And it *had* ! It wouldn't even turn, either with the self-starter or the handle. The whole thing was awfully hot, and I asked her whether there was any water in the radiator. She didn't see why there shouldn't be, there always had been. This didn't strike me as entirely conclusive. I said, we'd better put some in, and see what happened. She said, why not use snow? But I thought not. There was an idea at the back of my mind that there was some reason why it was unwise to use melted snow, and it wasn't until I arrived back with a bucketful that I remembered what it was. Of course – goitre.

When I got back to her she'd got the radiator cap off, and inserted what a Danish friend of mine calls a 'funeral.' We poured a little water in.... Luckily I'd warned her to stand clear. The first tablespoonful that went in came straight out again, red hot, and blew the 'funeral' sky-high. We waited a few minutes until things had cooled down a bit, but it was no go. As fast as we poured water in it simply ran out again into the road underneath. It was quite evident that she'd been driving with the radiator bone dry and that her engine had seized right up.

I told her so. She said:

'Does that mean I've got to stop here all night?'

I explained that it wasn't as bad as all that; that is, if she cared to accept the hospitality of my poor roof (and it *was* a poor roof – it let the wet in). But she wouldn't hear of it. By the by, she didn't know the – er – circumstances, so it wasn't that. No, she wanted to leave the car where it was and go on on foot.

I said:

'Don't be silly, it's miles to anywhere.'

However, at that moment we heard a car coming along the road, the same way as she'd come. We could see its lights, too, although it was a very long way off. You know how flat Norfolk is – you can see a terrific distance.

I said:

'There's the way out of all your troubles. This thing, whatever it is, will give you a tow to the nearest garage, or at any rate a lift to some hotel.'

One would have expected her to show some relief, but she didn't. I began to wonder what she jolly well *did* want. She wouldn't let me help her to stop where she was, and she didn't seem anxious for anyone to help her to go anywhere else.

She was quite peculiar about it. She gripped hold of my arm, and said:

'What do you think this is that's coming?'

I said:

'I'm sure I don't know, being a stranger in these parts, but it sounds like a lorry full of milk cans.'

I offered to lay her sixpence about it (this was before the betting-tax came in). She'd have had to pay, too, because it *was* a lorry full of milk cans. The driver had to pull up because there wasn't room to get by.

He got down and asked if there was anything he could do to help. We explained the situation. He said he was going to Norwich<sup>1</sup>, and was quite ready to give her a tow if she wanted it. However, she wouldn't do that, and it was finally decided to shove her car into my garage for the night, to be sent for next day, and the lorry was to take her along to Norwich.

Well, I managed to find the key of the garage, and the lorry-driver – Williams, his name was – and I ran the car in and locked the door. This having been done – (ablative absolute) – I suggested that it was a very cold night. Williams agreed, and said he didn't mind if he did. So I took them both indoors and mixed them a stiff whisky and water each. There wasn't any soda. And, naturally, the whole thing had left *me* very cold, too. I hadn't an overcoat on.

Up to now I hadn't seriously considered the young woman. For one thing it had been dark, *and* there had been a seized engine to look at. Er – I'm afraid that's not a very gallant remark. What I mean is that to anyone with a mechanical mind a motor-car in that condition is much more

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<sup>1</sup> **Norwich** – a city in Norfolk; the first settlement was founded in Saxon times; in the 12th century, in the times of the Danes, and later, after the Norman Conquest, Norwich became an important market centre.

interesting than – er – well, it *is* very interesting – but why labour the point? However, in the sitting-room, in the lamplight, it was possible to get more of an idea. She was a little older than I'd thought, and her eyes were too close together.

Of course, she wasn't a – how shall I put it? Her manners weren't quite easy and she was careful with her English. *You* know. But that wasn't it. She treated us with a lack of friendliness which was – well, we'd done nothing to deserve it. There was a sort of vague hostility and suspicion, which seemed rather hard lines, considering. Also, she was so anxious to keep in the shadow that if I hadn't moved the lamp away she'd never have got near the fire at all.

And the way she hurried the wretched Williams over his drink was quite distressing; and foolish, too, as *he* was going to drive, but that was her – funnel. When he'd gone out to start up his engine I asked her if she was all right for money, and she apparently was. Then they started off, and I shut up the place and went upstairs.

There happened to be a local guide-book in my bedroom, with maps in it. I looked at these and couldn't help wondering where the girl in the car had come from; I mean my road seemed so very unimportant. The sort of road one might use if one wanted to avoid people. If one were driving a stolen car, for instance. This was quite a thrilling idea. I thought it might be worth while having another look at the car. So I once more unhooked the key from the kitchen dresser and sallied forth into the snow. It was as black as pitch, and so still that my candle hardly flickered. It wasn't a large garage, and the car nearly filled it. By the by, we'd backed it in so as to make it easier to tow it out again.

The engine I'd already seen, so I squeezed past along the wall and opened the door in the body part of the car. At least, I only turned the handle, and the door was pushed open from the inside and – something – fell out on me. It pushed me quite hard, and wedged me against the wall. It also knocked the candle out of my hand and left me in the dark – which was a bit of a nuisance. I wondered what on earth the thing was – barging into me like that – so I felt it, rather gingerly, and found it was a man – a dead man – with a moustache. He'd evidently been sitting propped up against the door. I managed to put him back, as decorously as possible, and shut the door again.

After a lot of grovelling about under the car I found the candle and lighted it, and opened the opposite door and switched on the little lamp in the roof – and then – oo-er!

Of course, I had to make some sort of examination. He was an extremely tall and thin individual. He must have been well over six feet three. He was dark and very cadaverous-looking. In fact, I don't suppose he'd ever looked so cadaverous in his life. He was wearing a trench coat.

It wasn't difficult to tell what he'd died of. He'd been shot through the back. I found the hole just under the right scrofula, or scalpel – what is shoulder-blade, anyway? Oh, clavicle – stupid of me – well, that's where it was, and the bullet had evidently gone through into the lung. I say 'evidently,' and leave it at that.

There were no papers in his pockets, and no tailor's name on his clothes, but there was a note-case, with nine pounds in it. Altogether a most unpleasant business. Of course, it doesn't do to question the workings of Providence, but one couldn't help wishing it hadn't happened. It was just a little mysterious, too – er – who had killed him. It wasn't likely that the girl had or she wouldn't have been joy-riding about the country with him; and if someone else had murdered him why hadn't she mentioned it? Anyway, she hadn't and she'd gone, so one couldn't do anything for the time being. No telephone, of course. I just locked up the garage and went to bed. That was two o'clock.

Next morning I woke early, for some reason or other, and it occurred to me as a good idea to go and have a look at things – by daylight, and before Mrs. Selston turned up. So I did. The first thing that struck me was that it had snowed heavily during the night, because there were no wheel tracks or footprints, and the second was that I'd left the key in the garage door. I opened it and went in. The place was completely empty. No car, no body, no nothing. There was a patch of grease on the floor where I'd dropped the candle, otherwise there was nothing to show I'd been there before. One of two things must have happened: either some people had come along during the night and taken the car away, or else I'd fallen asleep in front of the fire and dreamt the whole thing.

Then I remembered the whisky glasses.

They should still be in the sitting-room. I went back to look, and they were, all three of them. So it *hadn't* been a dream and the car *had* been fetched away, but they must have been jolly quiet over it.

The girl had left her glass on the mantel-piece, and it showed several very clearly defined finger-marks. Some were mine, naturally, because I'd fetched the glass from the kitchen and poured out the drink for her, but hers, her finger-marks, were clean, and mine were oily, so it was quite easy to tell them apart. It isn't necessary to point out that this glass was very important. There'd evidently been a murder, or something of that kind, and the girl must have known all about it, even if she hadn't actually done it herself, so anything she had left in the way of evidence ought to be handed over to the police; and this was all she *had* left. So I packed it up with meticulous care in an old biscuit-box out of the larder.

When Mrs. Selston came I settled up with her and came back to Town. Oh, I called on the landlord on the way and told him I'd 'let him know' about the bungalow. Then I caught my train, and in due course drove straight to Scotland Yard. I went up and saw my friend there. I produced the glass and asked him if his people could identify the marks. He said: 'Probably not,' but he sent it down to the fingerprint department and asked me where it came from. I said: 'Never you mind; let's have the identification first.' He said: 'All right.'

They're awfully quick, these people – the clerk was back in three minutes with a file of papers. They knew the girl all right. They told me her name and showed me her photograph; not flattering. Quite an adventurous lady, from all accounts. In the early part of her career she'd done time twice for shop-lifting, chiefly in the book department. Then she'd what they call 'taken up with' a member of one of those race-gangs one sometimes hears about.

My pal went on to say that there'd been a fight between two of these gangs, in the course of which her friend had got shot. She'd managed to get him away in a car, but it had broken down somewhere in Norfolk. So she'd left it and the dead man in someone's garage, and had started off for Norwich in a lorry. Only she never got there. On the way the lorry had skidded, and both she and the driver – a fellow called Williams – had been thrown out, and they'd rammed their heads against a brick wall, which everyone knows is a fatal thing to do. At least, it was in their case.

I said: 'Look here, it's all very well, but you simply can't know all this; there hasn't been time – it only happened last night.'

He said: 'Last night be blown! It all happened in February, nineteen nineteen. The people you've described have been dead for years.'

I said: 'Oh!'

And to think that I might have stuck to that nine pounds!

## Marjorie's Three Gifts (Louisa May Alcott)

Marjorie sat on the door-step, shelling peas, quite unconscious what a pretty picture she made, with the roses peeping at her through the lattice work of the porch, the wind playing hide-and-seek in her curly hair, while the sunshine with its silent magic changed her faded gingham to a golden gown, and shimmered on the bright tin pan as if it were a silver shield. Old Rover lay at her feet, the white kitten purred on her shoulder, and friendly robins hopped about her in the grass, chirping 'A happy birthday, Marjorie!'

But the little maid neither saw nor heard, for her eyes were fixed on the green pods, and her thoughts were far away. She was recalling the fairy-tale granny told her last night, and wishing with all her heart that such things happened nowadays. For in this story, as a poor girl like herself sat spinning before the door, a Brownie<sup>1</sup> came by, and gave the child a good-luck penny; then a fairy passed, and left a talisman<sup>2</sup> which would keep her always happy; and last of all, the prince rolled up in his chariot<sup>3</sup>, and took her away to reign with him over a lovely kingdom, as a reward for her

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1 **Brownie** – in English and Scottish folklore, a small fairy, a mythical being that inhabited houses and barns

2 **talisman** – an object acting as a charm to bring good fortune and avert evil

3 **chariot** – an open vehicle of ancient times with two or four wheels; it originated in about 3000 BC in

many kindnesses to others.

When Marjorie imagined this part of the story, it was impossible to help giving one little sigh, and for a minute she forgot her work, so busy was she thinking what beautiful presents she would give to all the poor children in her realm when THEY had birthdays. Five impatient young peas took this opportunity to escape from the half-open pod in her hand and skip down the steps, to be immediately gobbled up by an audacious robin, who gave thanks in such a shrill chirp that Marjorie woke up, laughed, and fell to work again. She was just finishing, when a voice called out from the lane, –

‘Hi, there! come here a minute, child!’ and looking up, she saw a little old man in a queer little carriage drawn by a fat little pony.

Running down to the gate, Marjorie dropped a curtsy, saying pleasantly, –

‘What did you wish, sir?’

‘Just undo that check-rein for me. I am lame, and Jack wants to drink at your brook,’ answered the old man, nodding at her till his spectacles danced on his nose.

Marjorie was rather afraid of the fat pony who tossed his head, whisked his tail, and stamped his feet as if he was of a peppery temper. But she liked to be useful, and just then felt as if there were few things she could NOT do if she tried, because it was her birthday. So she proudly let down the rein, and when Jack went splashing into the brook, she stood on the bridge, waiting to check him up again after he had drunk his fill of the clear, cool water.

The old gentleman sat in his place, looking up at the little girl, who was smiling to herself as she watched the blue dragon-flies dance among the ferns, a blackbird tilt on the alder boughs, and listened to the babble of the brook.

‘How old are you, child?’ asked the old man, as if he rather envied this rosy creature her youth and health.

‘Twelve to-day, sir,’ and Marjorie stood up straight and tall, as if mindful of her years.

‘Had any presents?’ asked the old man, peering up with an odd smile.

‘One, sir, – here it is,’ and she pulled out of her pocket a tin savings-bank in the shape of a desirable family mansion, painted red, with a green door and black chimney. Proudly displaying it on the rude railing of the bridge, she added, with a happy face, –

‘Granny gave it to me, and all the money in it is going to be mine.’

‘How much have you got?’ asked the old gentleman, who appeared to like to sit there in the middle of the brook, while Jack bathed his feet and leisurely gurgled and sneezed.

‘Not a penny yet, but I’m going to earn some,’ answered Marjorie, patting the little bank with an air of resolution pretty to see.

‘How will you do it?’ continued the inquisitive old man.

‘Oh, I’m going to pick berries and dig dandelions, and weed, and drive cows, and do chores. It is vacation, and I can work all the time, and earn ever so much.’

‘But vacation is play-time, – how about that?’

‘Why, that sort of work IS play, and I get bits of fun all along. I always have a good swing when I go for the cows, and pick flowers with the dandelions. Weeding isn’t so nice, but berrying is very pleasant, and we have good times all together.’

‘What shall you do with your money when you get it?’

‘Oh, lots of things! Buy books and clothes for school, and, if I get a great deal, give some to granny. I’d love to do that, for she takes care of me, and I’d be so proud to help her!’

‘Good little lass!’ said the old gentleman, as he put his hand in his pocket. ‘Would you now?’ he added, apparently addressing himself to a large frog who sat upon a stone, looking so wise and grandfatherly that it really did seem quite proper to consult him. At all events, he gave his opinion in the most decided manner, for, with a loud croak, he turned an undignified somersault into the brook, splashing up the water at a great rate. ‘Well, perhaps it wouldn’t be best on the whole. Industry is a good teacher, and money cannot buy happiness, as I know to my sorrow.’

The old gentleman still seemed to be talking to the frog, and as he spoke he took his hand out



of his pocket with less in it than he had at first intended.

‘What a very queer person!’ thought Marjorie, for she had not heard a word, and wondered what he was thinking about down there.

Jack walked out of the brook just then, and she ran to check him up; not an easy task for little hands, as he preferred to nibble the grass on the bank. But she did it cleverly, smoothed the ruffled mane, and, dropping another curtsy, stood aside to let the little carriage pass.

‘Thank you, child – thank you. Here is something for your bank, and good luck to it.’

As he spoke, the old man laid a bright gold dollar in her hand, patted the rosy cheek, and vanished in a cloud of dust, leaving Marjorie so astonished at the grandeur of the gift, that she stood looking at it as if it had been a fortune. It was to her; and visions of pink calico<sup>1</sup> gowns, new grammars, and fresh hat-ribbons danced through her head in delightful confusion, as her eyes rested on the shining coin in her palm.

Then, with a solemn air, she invested her first money by popping it down the chimney of the scarlet mansion, and peeping in with one eye to see if it landed safely on the ground-floor. This done, she took a long breath, and looked over the railing to be sure it was not all a dream. No; the wheel marks were still there, the brown water was not yet clear, and, if a witness was needed, there sat the big frog again, looking so like the old gentleman, with his bottle-green coat, speckled trousers, and twinkling eyes, that Marjorie burst out laughing, and clapped her hands, saying aloud,

– ‘I’ll play he was the Brownie, and this is the good-luck penny he gave me. Oh, what fun!’ and away she skipped, rattling the dear new bank like a castanet<sup>2</sup>.

When she had told granny all about it, she got knife and basket, and went out to dig dandelions; for the desire to increase her fortune was so strong, she could not rest a minute. Up and down she went, so busily peering and digging, that she never lifted up her eyes till something like a great white bird skimmed by so low she could not help seeing it. A pleasant laugh sounded behind her as she started up, and, looking round, she nearly sat down again in sheer surprise, for there close by was a slender little lady, comfortably established under a big umbrella.

‘If there *were* any fairies, I’d be sure that was one,’ thought Marjorie, staring with all her might, for her mind was still full of the old story; and curious things do happen on birthdays, as every one knows.

It really did seem rather elfish<sup>3</sup> to look up suddenly and see a lovely lady all in white, with shining hair and a wand in her hand, sitting under what looked very like a large yellow mushroom in the middle of a meadow, where, till now, nothing but cows and grasshoppers had been seen. Before Marjorie could decide the question, the pleasant laugh came again, and the stranger said, pointing to the white thing that was still fluttering over the grass like a little cloud, –

‘Would you kindly catch my hat for me, before it blows quite away?’

Down went basket and knife, and away ran Marjorie, entirely satisfied now that there was no magic about the new-comer; for if she had been an elf, couldn’t she have got her hat without any help from a mortal child? Presently, however, it did begin to seem as if that hat was bewitched, for it led the nimble-footed Marjorie such a chase that the cows stopped feeding to look on in placid wonder; the grasshoppers vainly tried to keep up, and every ox-eye daisy did its best to catch the runaway, but failed entirely, for the wind liked a game of romps, and had it that day. As she ran, Marjorie heard the lady singing, like the princess in the story of the Goose-Girl, –

‘Blow, breezes, blow!  
Let Curdkin’s hat go!  
Blow, breezes, blow!  
Let him after it go!

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<sup>1</sup> **calico** – a cotton fabric with simple design, first made in Calicut, India, in the 11th century

<sup>2</sup> **castanet** – a musical instrument of a clapper type consisting of two pieces hinged by a cord, usually held in the hand and used by dancers in Spain and some parts of Italy

<sup>3</sup> **elfish** – in Germanic folklore, an elf is a spirit in a tiny human form; it usually causes disease and brings mischief.

O'er hills, dales and rocks,  
Away be it whirled,  
Till the silvery locks  
Are all combed and curled.'

This made her laugh so that she tumbled into a clover-bed, and lay there a minute to get her breath. Just then, as if the playful wind repented of its frolic, the long veil fastened to the hat caught in a blackberry-vine nearby, and held the truant fast till Marjorie secured it.

'Now come and see what I am doing,' said the lady, when she had thanked the child.

Marjorie drew near confidently, and looked down at the wide-spread book before her. She gave a start, and laughed out with surprise and delight; for there was a lovely picture of her own little home, and her own little self on the door-step, all so delicate, and beautiful, and true, it seemed as if done by magic.

'Oh, how pretty! There is Rover, and Kitty and the robins, and me! How could you ever do it, ma'am?' said Marjorie, with a wondering glance at the long paint-brush, which had wrought what seemed a miracle to her childish eyes.

'I'll show you presently; but tell me, first, if it looks quite right and natural to you. Children sometimes spy out faults that no one else can see,' answered the lady, evidently pleased with the artless praise her work received.

'It looks just like our house, only more beautiful. Perhaps that is because I know how shabby it really is. That moss looks lovely on the shingles, but the roof leaks. The porch is broken, only the roses hide the place; and my gown is all faded, though it once was as bright as you have made it. I wish the house and everything would stay pretty forever, as they will in the picture.'

While Marjorie spoke, the lady had been adding more color to the sketch, and when she looked up, something warmer and brighter than sunshine shone in her face, as she said, so cheerily, it was like a bird's song to hear her, –

'It can't be summer always, dear, but we can make fair weather for ourselves if we try. The moss, the roses, and soft shadows show the little house and the little girl at their best, and that is what we all should do; for it is amazing how lovely common things become, if one only knows how to look at them.'

'I wish *I* did,' said Marjorie, half to herself, remembering how often she was discontented, and how hard it was to get on, sometimes.

'So do I,' said the lady, in her happy voice. 'Just believe that there is a sunny side to everything, and try to find it, and you will be surprised to see how bright the world will seem, and how cheerful you will be able to keep your little self.'

'I guess granny has found that out, for she never frets. I do, but I'm going to stop it, because I'm twelve today, and that is too old for such things,' said Marjorie, recollecting the good resolutions she had made that morning when she woke.

'I am twice twelve, and not entirely cured yet; but I try, and don't mean to wear blue spectacles if I can help it,' answered the lady, laughing so blithely that Marjorie was sure she would not have to try much longer. 'Birthdays were made for presents, and I should like to give you one. Would it please you to have this little picture?' she added, lifting it out of the book.

'Truly my own? Oh, yes, indeed!' cried Marjorie, coloring with pleasure, for she had never owned so beautiful a thing before.

'Then you shall have it, dear. Hang it where you can see it often, and when you look, remember that it is the sunny side of home, and help to keep it so.'

Marjorie had nothing but a kiss to offer by way of thanks, as the lovely sketch was put into her hand; but the giver seemed quite satisfied, for it was a very grateful little kiss. Then the child took up her basket and went away, not dancing and singing now, but slowly and silently; for this gift made her thoughtful as well as glad. As she climbed the wall, she looked back to nod good-by to the pretty lady; but the meadow was empty, and all she saw was the grass blowing in the wind.

'Now, deary, run out and play, for birthdays come but once a year, and we must make them as



merry as we can,' said granny, as she settled herself for her afternoon nap, when the Saturday cleaning was all done, and the little house as neat as wax.

So Marjorie put on a white apron in honor of the occasion, and, taking Kitty in her arms, went out to enjoy herself. Three swings on the gate seemed to be a good way of beginning the festivities; but she only got two, for when the gate creaked back the second time, it stayed shut, and Marjorie hung over the pickets, arrested by the sound of music.

'It's soldiers,' she said, as the fife and drum drew nearer, and flags were seen waving over the barberry-bushes at the corner.

'No; it's a picnic,' she added in a moment; for she saw hats with wreaths about them bobbing up and down, as a gaily-trimmed hay-cart full of children came rumbling down the lane.

'What a nice time they are going to have!' thought Marjorie, sadly contrasting that merry-making with the quiet party she was having all by herself.

Suddenly her face shone, and Kitty was waved over her head like a banner, as she flew out of the gate, crying, rapturously, –

'It's Billy! and I know he's come for me!'

It certainly WAS Billy, proudly driving the old horse, and beaming at his little friend from the bower of flags and chestnut-boughs, where he sat in state, with a crown of daisies on his sailor-hat and a spray of blooming sweetbrier in his hand. Waving his rustic sceptre, he led off the shout of 'Happy birthday, Marjorie!' which was set up as the wagon stopped at the gate, and the green boughs suddenly blossomed with familiar faces, all smiling on the little damsel, who stood in the lane quite overpowered with delight.

'It's a s'prise<sup>1</sup> party!' cried one small lad, tumbling out behind.

'We are going up the mountain to have fun!' added a chorus of voices, as a dozen hands beckoned wildly.

'We got it up on purpose for you, so tie your hat and come away,' said a pretty girl, leaning down to kiss Marjorie, who had dropped Kitty, and stood ready for any splendid enterprise.

A word to granny, and away went the happy child, sitting up beside Billy, under the flags that waved over a happier load than any royal chariot ever bore.

It would be vain to try and tell all the plays and pleasures of happy children on a Saturday afternoon, but we may briefly say that Marjorie found a mossy stone all ready for her throne, and Billy crowned her with a garland like his own. That a fine banquet was spread, and eaten with a relish many a Lord Mayor's<sup>2</sup> feast has lacked. Then how the whole court danced and played together afterward! The lords climbed trees and turned somersaults, the ladies gathered flowers and told secrets under the sweetfern-bushes, the queen lost her shoe jumping over the waterfall, and the king paddled into the pool below and rescued it. A happy little kingdom, full of summer sunshine, innocent delights, and loyal hearts; for love ruled, and the only war that disturbed the peaceful land was waged by the mosquitoes as night came on.

Marjorie stood on her throne watching the sunset while her maids of honor packed up the remains of the banquet, and her knights prepared the chariot. All the sky was gold and purple, all the world bathed in a soft, red light, and the little girl was very happy as she looked down at the subjects who had served her so faithfully that day.

'Have you had a good time, Marjy?' asked King William; who stood below, with his royal nose on a level with her majesty's two dusty little shoes.

'Oh, Billy, it has been just splendid! But I don't see why you should all be so kind to me,' answered Marjorie, with such a look of innocent wonder, that Billy laughed to see it.

'Because you are so sweet and good, we can't help loving you, – that's why,' he said, as if this simple fact was reason enough.

'I'm going to be the best girl that ever was, and love everybody in the world,' cried the child, stretching out her arms as if ready, in the fullness of her happy heart, to embrace all creation.

'Don't turn into an angel and fly away just yet, but come home, or granny will never lend you

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<sup>1</sup> s'prise = surprise

<sup>2</sup> Lord Mayor – the title given to the mayor of London or some other large city

to us any more.’

With that, Billy jumped her down, and away they ran, to ride gaily back through the twilight, singing like a flock of nightingales.

As she went to bed that night, Marjorie looked at the red bank, the pretty picture, and the daisy crown, saying to herself, –

‘It has been a *very* nice birthday, and I am something like the girl in the story, after all, for the old man gave me a good-luck penny, the kind lady told me how to keep happy, and Billy came for me like the prince. The girl didn’t go back to the poor house again, but I’m glad *I* did, for *my* granny isn’t a cross one, and my little home is the dearest in the world.’

Then she tied her night-cap, said her prayers, and fell asleep; but the moon, looking in to kiss the blooming face upon the pillow, knew that three good spirits had come to help little Marjorie from that day forth, and their names were Industry, Cheerfulness, and Love.

## **An Awakening (Sherwood Anderson)**

Belle Carpenter had a dark skin, grey eyes and thick lips. She was tall and strong. When black thoughts visited her she grew angry and wished she were a man and could fight someone with her fists. She worked in the millinery shop kept by Mrs. Nate McHugh and during the day sat trimming hats by a window at the rear of the store. She was the daughter of Henry Carpenter, bookkeeper in the First National Bank of Winesburg, Ohio<sup>1</sup>, and lived with him in a gloomy old house far out at the end of Buckeye Street. The house was surrounded by pine trees and there was no grass beneath the trees. A rusty tin eaves-trough had slipped from its fastenings at the back of the house and when the wind blew it beat against the roof of a small shed, making a dismal drumming noise that sometimes persisted all through the night.

When she was a young girl Henry Carpenter made life almost unbearable for his daughter, but as she emerged from girlhood into womanhood he lost his power over her. The bookkeeper’s life was made up of innumerable little pettinesses. When he went to the bank in the morning he stepped into a closet and put on a black alpaca coat that had become shabby with age. At night when he returned to his home he donned another black alpaca coat. Every evening he pressed the clothes worn in the streets. He had invented an arrangement of boards for the purpose. The trousers to his street suit were placed between the boards and the boards were clamped together with heavy screws. In the morning he wiped the boards with a damp cloth and stood them upright behind the dining room door. If they were moved during the day he was speechless with anger and did not recover his equilibrium for a week.

The bank cashier was a little bully and was afraid of his daughter. She, he realized, knew the story of his brutal treatment of the girl’s mother and hated him for it. One day she went home at noon and carried a handful of soft mud, taken from the road, into the house. With the mud she smeared the face of the boards used for the pressing of trousers and then went back to her work feeling relieved and happy.

Belle Carpenter occasionally walked out in the evening with George Willard, a reporter on the Winesburg Eagle. Secretly she loved another man, but her love affair, about which no one knew, caused her much anxiety. She was in love with Ed Handby, bartender in Ed Griffith’s Saloon, and went about with the young reporter as a kind of relief to her feelings. She did not think that her station in life would permit her to be seen in the company of the bartender, and she walked about under the trees with George Willard and let him kiss her to relieve a longing that was very insistent in her nature. She felt that she could keep the younger man within bounds. About Ed Handby she was somewhat uncertain.

Handby, the bartender, was a tall broad-shouldered man of thirty who lived in a room upstairs above Griffith’s saloon. His fists were large and his eyes unusually small but his voice, as though striving to conceal the power back of his fists, was soft and quiet.

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<sup>1</sup> **Ohio** – the US state in the Midwest (106 125 sq. km), joined the USA after the American Revolutionary War in 1783

At twenty-five the bartender had inherited a large farm from an uncle in Indiana<sup>1</sup>. When sold the farm brought in eight thousand dollars which Ed spent in six months. Going to Sandusky<sup>2</sup>, on Lake Erie<sup>3</sup>, he began an orgy of dissipation, the story of which afterward filled his home town with awe. Here and there he went throwing the money about, driving carriages through the streets, giving wine parties to crowds of men and women, playing cards for high stakes and keeping mistresses whose wardrobes cost him hundreds of dollars. One night at a resort called Cedar Point he got into a fight and ran amuck like a wild thing. With his fist he broke a large mirror in the wash-room of a hotel and later went about smashing windows and breaking chairs in dance halls for the joy of hearing the glass rattle on the floor and seeing the terror in the eyes of clerks, who had come from Sandusky to spend the evening at the resort with their sweethearts.

The affair between Ed Handby and Belle Carpenter on the surface amounted to nothing. He had succeeded in spending but one evening in her company. On that evening he hired a horse and buggy at Wesley Moyer's livery barn and took her for a drive. The conviction that she was the woman his nature demanded and that he must get her, settled upon him and he told her of his desires. The bartender was ready to marry and to begin trying to earn money for the support of his wife, but so simple was his nature that he found it difficult to explain his intentions. His body ached with physical longing and with his body he expressed himself. Taking the milliner into his arms and holding her tightly, in spite of her struggles, he kissed her until she became helpless. Then he brought her back to town and let her out of the buggy. 'When I get hold of you again I'll not let you go. You can't play with me,' he declared as he turned to drive away. Then, jumping out of the buggy, he gripped her shoulders with his strong hands. 'I'll keep you for good the next time,' he said. 'You might as well make up your mind to that. It's you and me for it and I'm going to have you before I get through.'

One night in January when there was a new moon George Willard, who was, in Ed Handby's mind, the only obstacle to his getting Belle Carpenter, went for a walk. Early that evening George went into Ransom Surbeck's pool room with Seth Richmond and Art Wilson, son of the town butcher. Seth Richmond stood with his back against the wall and remained silent, but George Willard talked. The pool room was filled with Winesburg boys and they talked of women. The young reporter got into that vein. He said that women should look out for themselves that the fellow who went out with a girl was not responsible for what happened. As he talked he looked about, eager for attention. He held the floor for five minutes and then Art Wilson began to talk. Art was learning the barber's trade in Cal Prouse's shop and already began to consider himself an authority in such matters as baseball, horse racing, drinking and going about with women. He began to tell of a night when he with two men from Winesburg went into a house of prostitution at the County Seat. The butcher's son held a cigar in the side of his mouth and as he talked spat on the floor. 'The women in the place couldn't embarrass me although they tried hard enough,' he boasted. 'One of the girls in the house tried to get fresh but I fooled her. As soon as she began to talk I went and sat in her lap. Everyone in the room laughed when I kissed her. I taught her to let me alone.'

George Willard went out of the pool room and into Main Street. For days the weather had been bitter cold with a high wind blowing down on the town from Lake Erie, eighteen miles to the north, but on that night the wind had died away and a new moon made the night unusually lovely. Without thinking where he was going or what he wanted to do George went out of Main Street and began walking in dimly lighted streets filled with frame houses.

Out of doors under the black sky filled with stars he forgot his companions of the pool room. Because it was dark and he was alone he began to talk aloud. In a spirit of play he reeled along the street imitating a drunken man and then imagined himself a soldier clad in shining boots that reached to the knees and wearing a sword that jingled as he walked. As a soldier he pictured himself as an inspector, passing before a long line of men who stood at attention. He began to examine the accoutrements of the men. Before a tree he stopped and began to scold. 'Your pack is not in order,'

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<sup>1</sup> **Indiana** – the US state in the Midwest (93 491 sq. km), joined the USA after the American Revolutionary War

<sup>2</sup> **Sandusky** – a city on Lake Erie in northern Ohio, founded by the British in 1745

<sup>3</sup> **Lake Erie** – one of the five Great Lakes on the USA-Canadian border

he said sharply. 'How many times will I have to speak of this matter? Everything must be in order here. We have a difficult task before us and no difficult task can be done without order.'

Hypnotized by his own words the young man stumbled along the board sidewalk saying more words. 'There is a law for armies and for men too,' he muttered, lost in reflection. 'The law begins with little things and spreads out until it covers everything. In every little thing there must be order, in the place where men work, in their clothes, in their thoughts. I myself must be orderly. I must learn that law. I must get myself into touch with something orderly and big that swings through the night like a star. In my little way I must begin to learn something, to give and swing and work with life, with the law.'

George Willard stopped by a picket fence near a street lamp and his body began to tremble. He had never before thought such thoughts as had just come into his head and he wondered where they had come from. For the moment it seemed to him that some voice outside of himself had been talking as he walked. He was amazed and delighted with his own mind and when he walked on again spoke of the matter with fervor. 'To come out of Ransom Surbeck's pool room and think things like that,' he whispered. 'It is better to be alone. If I talked like Art Wilson the boys would understand me but they wouldn't understand what I have been thinking down here.'

In Winesburg, as in all Ohio towns of twenty years ago, there was a section in which lived day laborers. As the time of factories had not yet come the laborers worked in the fields or were section hands on the railroads. They worked twelve hours a day and received one dollar for the long day of toil. The houses in which they lived were small cheaply constructed wooden affairs with a garden at the back. The more comfortable among them kept cows and perhaps a pig, housed in a little shed at the rear of the garden.

With his head filled with resounding thoughts George Willard walked into such a street on the clear January night. The street was dimly lighted and in places there was no sidewalk. In the scene that lay about him there was something that excited his already aroused fancy. For a year he had been devoting all of his odd moments to the reading of books and now some tale he had read concerning life in old world towns of the middle ages came sharply back to his mind so that he stumbled forward with the curious feeling of one revisiting a place that had been a part of some former existence. On an impulse he turned out of the street and went into a little dark alleyway behind the sheds in which lived the cows and pigs.

For a half hour he stayed in the alleyway, smelling the strong smell of animals too closely housed and letting his mind play with the strange new thoughts that came to him. The very rankness of the smell of manure in the clear sweet air awoke something heady in his brain. The poor little houses lighted by kerosene lamps, the smoke from the chimneys mounting straight up into the clear air, the grunting of pigs, the women clad in cheap calico dresses and washing dishes in the kitchens, the footsteps of men coming out of the houses and going off to the stores and saloons of Main Street, the dogs barking and the children crying – all these things made him seem, as he lurked in the darkness, oddly detached and apart from all life.

The excited young man, unable to bear the weight of his own thoughts, began to move cautiously along the alleyway. A dog attacked him and had to be driven away with stones and a man appeared at the door of one of the houses and began to swear at the dog. George went into a vacant lot and throwing back his head looked up at the sky. He felt unutterably big and re-made by the simple experience through which he had been passing and in a kind of fervor of emotion put up his hands, thrusting them into the darkness above his head and muttering words. The desire to say words overcame him and he said words without meaning, rolling them over on his tongue and saying them because they were brave words, full of meaning. 'Death,' he muttered, 'night, the sea, fear, loneliness.' George Willard came out of the vacant lot and stood again on the sidewalk facing the houses. He felt that all of the people in the little street must be brothers and sisters to him and he wished he had the courage to call them out of their houses and to shake their hands. 'If there were only a woman here I would take hold of her hand and we would run until we were both tired out,' he thought. 'That would make me feel better.' With the thought of a woman in his mind he walked out of the street and went toward the house where Belle Carpenter lived. He thought she would

understand his mood and that he would achieve in her presence a position he had long been wanting to achieve. In the past when he had been with her and had kissed her lips he had come away filled with anger at himself. He had felt like one being used for some obscure purpose and had not enjoyed the feeling. Now he thought he had suddenly become too big to be used.

When George Willard got to Belle Carpenter's house there had already been a visitor there before him. Ed Handby had come to the door and calling Belle out of the house had tried to talk to her. He had wanted to ask the woman to come away with him and to be his wife, but when she came and stood by the door he lost his self-assurance and became sullen. 'You stay away from that kid,' he growled, thinking of George Willard, and then, not knowing what else to say, turned to go away. 'If I catch you together I will break your bones and his too,' he added. The bartender had come to woo, not to threaten, and was angry with himself because of his failure.

When her lover had departed Belle went indoors and ran hurriedly upstairs. From a window at the upper part of the house she saw Ed Handby cross the street and sit down on a horse block before the house of a neighbor. In the dim light the man sat motionless holding his head in his hands. She was made happy by the sight and when George Willard came to the door she greeted him effusively and hurriedly put on her hat. She thought that as she walked through the streets with young Willard, Ed Handby would follow and she wanted to make him suffer.

For an hour Belle Carpenter and the young reporter walked about under the trees in the sweet night air. George Willard was full of big words. The sense of power that had come to him during the hour in the darkness of the alleyway remained with him and he talked boldly, swaggering along and swinging his arms about. He wanted to make Belle Carpenter realize that he was aware of his former weakness and that he had changed. 'You will find me different,' he declared, thrusting his hands into his pockets and looking boldly into her eyes. 'I don't know why but it is so. You have got to take me for a man or let me alone. That's how it is.'

Up and down the quiet streets under the new moon went the woman and the boy. When George had finished talking they turned down a side street and went across a bridge into a path that ran up the side of a hill. The hill began at Waterworks Pond and climbed upwards to the Winesburg Fair Grounds. On the hillside grew dense bushes and small trees and among the bushes were little open spaces carpeted with long grass, now stiff and frozen.

As he walked behind the woman up the hill George Willard's heart began to beat rapidly and his shoulders straightened. Suddenly he decided that Belle Carpenter was about to surrender herself to him. The new force that had manifested itself in him had he felt been at work upon her and had led to her conquest. The thought made him half drunk with the sense of masculine power. Although he had been annoyed that as they walked about she had not seemed to be listening to his words, the fact that she had accompanied him to this place took all his doubts away. 'It is different. Everything has become different,' he thought and taking hold of her shoulder turned her about and stood looking at her, his eyes shining with pride.

Belle Carpenter did not resist. When he kissed her upon the lips she leaned heavily against him and looked over his shoulder into the darkness. In her whole attitude there was a suggestion of waiting. Again, as in the alleyway, George Willard's mind ran off into words and, holding the woman tightly, he whispered the words into the still night. 'Lust,' he whispered, 'lust and night and women.'

George Willard did not understand what happened to him that night on the hillside. Later, when he got to his own room, he wanted to weep and then grew half insane with anger and hate. He hated Belle Carpenter and was sure that all his life he would continue to hate her. On the hillside he had led the woman to one of the little open spaces among the bushes and had dropped to his knees beside her. As in the vacant lot, by the laborers' houses, he had put up his hands in gratitude for the new power in himself and was waiting for the woman to speak when Ed Handby appeared.

The bartender did not want to beat the boy, who he thought had tried to take his woman away. He knew that beating was unnecessary, that he had power within himself to accomplish his purpose without that. Gripping George by the shoulder and pulling him to his feet he held him with one hand while he looked at Belle Carpenter seated on the grass. Then with a quick wide movement of

his arm he sent the younger man sprawling away into the bushes and began to bully the woman, who had risen to her feet. 'You're no good,' he said roughly. 'I've half a mind not to bother with you. I'd let you alone if I didn't want you so much.'

On his hands and knees in the bushes George Willard stared at the scene before him and tried hard to think. He prepared to spring at the man who had humiliated him. To be beaten seemed infinitely better than to be thus hurled ignominiously aside.

Three times the young reporter sprang at Ed Handby and each time the bartender, catching him by the shoulder, hurled him back into the bushes. The older man seemed prepared to keep the exercise going indefinitely but George Willard's head struck the root of a tree and he lay still. Then Ed Handby took Belle Carpenter by the arm and marched her away.

George heard the man and woman making their way through the bushes. As he crept down the hillside his heart was sick within him. He hated himself and he hated the fate that had brought about his humiliation. When his mind went back to the hour alone in the alleyway he was puzzled, and stopping in the darkness, listened, hoping to hear again the voice, outside himself, that had so short a time before put new courage into his heart. When his way homeward led him again into the street of frame houses he could not bear the sight and began to run, wanting to get quickly out of the neighborhood that now seemed to him utterly squalid and commonplace.

## **Where Was Wych Street? (Stacy Aumonier)**

In the public bar of the Wagtail, in Wapping<sup>1</sup>, four men and a woman were drinking beer and discussing diseases. It was not a pretty subject, and the company was certainly not a handsome one. It was a dark November evening, and the dingy lighting of the bar seemed but to emphasize the bleak exterior. Drifts of fog and damp from without mingled with the smoke of shag. The sanded floor was kicked into a muddy morass not unlike the surface of the pavement. An old lady down the street had died from pneumonia the previous evening, and the event supplied a fruitful topic of conversation. The things that one could get! Everywhere were germs eager to destroy one. At any minute the symptoms might break out. And so – one foregathered in a cheerful spot amidst friends, and drank forgetfulness.

Prominent in this little group was Baldwin Meadows, a sallow-faced villain with battered features and prominent cheek-bones, his face cut and scarred by a hundred fights. Ex-seaman, ex-boxer, ex-fish-porter – indeed, to every one's knowledge, ex-everything. No one knew how he lived. By his side lurched an enormous coloured man who went by the name of Harry Jones. Grinning above a tankard sat a pimply-faced young man who was known as The Agent. Silver rings adorned his fingers. He had no other name, and most emphatically no address, but he 'arranged things' for people, and appeared to thrive upon it in a scrambling, fugitive manner. The other two people were Mr. and Mrs. Dawes. Mr. Dawes was an entirely negative person, but Mrs. Dawes shone by virtue of a high, whining, insistent voice, keyed to within half a note of hysteria.

Then, at one point, the conversation suddenly took a peculiar turn. It came about through Mrs. Dawes mentioning that her aunt, who died from eating tinned lobster, used to work in a corset shop in Wych Street. When she said that, The Agent, whose right eye appeared to survey the ceiling, whilst his left eye looked over the other side of his tankard, remarked:

'Where was Wych Street, ma?'

'Lord!' exclaimed Mrs. Dawes. 'Don't you know, dearie? You must be a young 'un, you must. Why, when I was a gal every one knew Wych Street. It was just down there where they built the Kingsway, like.'

Baldwin Meadows cleared his throat, and said:

'Wych Street used to be a turnin' runnin' from Long Acre into Wellington Street.'

'Oh, no, old boy,' chipped in Mr. Dawes, who always treated the ex-man with great deference. 'If you'll excuse me, Wych Street was a narrow lane at the back of the old Globe

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<sup>1</sup> **Wapping** – an area in eastern London



Theatre<sup>1</sup> that used to pass by the church.'

'I know what I'm talkin' about,' growled Meadows. Mrs. Dawes's high nasal whine broke in: 'Hi, Mr. Booth, you used ter know yer wye abaht. Where was Wych Street?'

Mr. Booth, the proprietor, was polishing a tap. He looked up.

'Wych Street? Yus, of course I knoo Wych Street. Used to go there with some of the boys – when I was Covent Garden<sup>2</sup> way. It was at right angles to the Strand<sup>3</sup>, just east of Wellington Street.'

'No, it warn't. It were alongside the Strand, before yer come to Wellington Street.'

The coloured man took no part in the discussion, one street and one city being alike to him, provided he could obtain the material comforts dear to his heart; but the others carried it on with a certain amount of acerbity.

Before any agreement had been arrived at three other men entered the bar. The quick eye of Meadows recognized them at once as three of what was known at that time as 'The Gallows Ring.' Every member of 'The Gallows Ring' had done time, but they still carried on a lucrative industry devoted to blackmail, intimidation, shoplifting, and some of the clumsier recreations. Their leader, Ben Orming, had served seven years for bashing a Chinaman down at Rotherhithe.

'The Gallows Ring' was not popular in Wapping, for the reason that many of their depredations had been inflicted upon their own class. When Meadows and Harry Jones took it into their heads to do a little wild prancing they took the trouble to go up into the West-end. They considered 'The Gallows Ring' an ungentlemanly set; nevertheless, they always treated them with a certain external deference – an unpleasant crowd to quarrel with.

Ben Orming ordered beer for the three of them, and they leant against the bar and whispered in sullen accents. Something had evidently miscarried with the Ring. Mrs. Dawes continued to whine above the general drone of the bar. Suddenly she said:

'Ben, you're a hot old devil, you are. We was just 'aving a discussion like. Where was Wych Street?'

Ben scowled at her, and she continued:

'Some sez it was one place, some sez it was another. I *know* where it was, 'cors my aunt what died from blood p'ison, after eatin' tinned lobster, used to work at a corset shop—'

'Yus,' barked Ben, emphatically. 'I know where Wych Street was – it was just sarth of the river, afore yer come to Waterloo Station<sup>4</sup>.'

It was then that the coloured man, who up to that point had taken no part in the discussion, thought fit to intervene.

'Nope. You's all wrong, cap'n. Wych Street were alongside de church, way over where the Strand takes a side-line up west.'

Ben turned on him fiercely.

'What the blazes does a blanketty nigger know abaht it? I've told yer where Wych Street was.'

'Yus, and I know where it was,' interposed Meadows.

'Yer both wrong. Wych Street was a turning running from Long Acre into Wellington Street.'

'I didn't ask yer what *you* thought,' growled Ben.

'Well, I suppose I've a right to an opinion?'

'You always think you know everything, you do.'

'You can just keep yer mouth shut.'

'It 'ud take more'n you to shut it.'

Mr. Booth thought it advisable at this juncture to bawl across the bar: 'Now, gentlemen, no quarrelling – please.'

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1 **the old Globe Theatre** – a theatre built in 1599 on the south bank of the Thames and famous for the performance of the greatest Shakespeare's plays; it remained in use until 1644.

2 **Covent Garden** – 1) London's wholesale flower, fruit and vegetable market in central London at the time when the story was written; 2) the Royal Opera House which is near the place where the market used to be.

3 **the Strand** – the street in central London linking the West End and the City of London

4 **Waterloo Station** – a main line railway station in London

The affair might have been subsided at that point, but for Mrs. Dawes. Her emotions over the death of the old lady in the street had been so stirred that she had been, almost unconsciously, drinking too much gin. She suddenly screamed out:

‘Don’t you take no lip from ’im, Mr. Medders. The dirty, thieving devil, ’e always thinks ’e’s goin’ to come it over every one.’

She stood up threateningly, and one of Ben’s supporters gave her a gentle push backwards. In three minutes the bar was in a complete state of pandemonium. The three members of ‘The Gallows Ring’ fought two men and a woman, for Mr. Dawes merely stood in a corner and screamed out:

‘Don’t! Don’t!’

Mrs. Dawes stabbed the man who had pushed her through the wrist with a hatpin. Meadows and Ben Orming closed on each other and fought savagely with the naked fists. A lucky blow early in the encounter sent Meadows reeling against the wall, with blood streaming down his temple. Then the coloured man hurled a pewter tankard straight at Ben and it hit him on the knuckles. The pain maddened him to a frenzy. His other supporter had immediately got to grips with Harry Jones, and picked up one of the high stools and, seizing an opportunity, brought it down crash on to the coloured man’s skull.

The whole affair was a matter of minutes. Mr. Booth was bawling out in the street. A whistle sounded. People were running in all directions.

‘Beat it! Beat it for God’s sake!’ called the man who had been stabbed through the wrist. His face was very white, and he was obviously about to faint.

Ben and the other man, whose name was Toller, dashed to the door. On the pavement there was a confused scramble. Blows were struck indiscriminately. Two policemen appeared. One was laid hors de combat<sup>1</sup> by a kick on the knee-cap from Toller. The two men fled into the darkness, followed by a hue-and-cry. Born and bred in the locality, they took every advantage of their knowledge. They tacked through alleys and raced down dark mews, and clambered over walls. Fortunately for them, the people they passed, who might have tripped them up or aided in the pursuit, merely fled indoors. The people in Wapping are not always on the side of the pursuer. But the police held on. At last Ben and Toller slipped through the door of an empty house in Aztec Street barely ten yards ahead of their nearest pursuer. Blows rained on the door, but they slipped the bolts, and then fell panting to the floor. When Ben could speak, he said:

‘If they cop us, it means swinging.’

‘Was the nigger done in?’

‘I think so. But even if ’e wasn’t, there was that other affair the night before last. The game’s up.’

The ground-floor rooms were shuttered and bolted, but they knew that the police would probably force the front door. At the back there was no escape, only a narrow stable yard, where lanterns were already flashing. The roof only extended thirty yards either way and the police would probably take possession of it. They made a round of the house, which was sketchily furnished. There was a loaf, a small piece of mutton, and a bottle of pickles, and – the most precious possession – three bottles of whisky. Each man drank half a glass of neat whisky; then Ben said: ‘We’ll be able to keep ’em quiet for a bit, anyway,’ and he went and fetched an old twelve-bore gun and a case of cartridges. Toller was opposed to this last desperate resort, but Ben continued to murmur, ‘It means swinging, anyway.’

And thus began the notorious siege of Aztec Street. It lasted three days and four nights. You may remember that, on forcing a panel of the front door, Sub-Inspector Wraithe, of the V Division, was shot through the chest. The police then tried other methods. A hose was brought into play without effect. Two policemen were killed and four wounded. The military was requisitioned. The street was picketed. Snipers occupied windows of the houses opposite. A distinguished member of the Cabinet drove down in a motor-car, and directed operations in a top-hat. It was the introduction of poison-gas which was the ultimate cause of the downfall of the citadel. The body of Ben Orming was never found, but that of Toller was discovered near the front door with a bullet through his

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<sup>1</sup> **hors de combat** – disabled due to the wound or injury

heart. The medical officer to the Court pronounced that the man had been dead three days, but whether killed by a chance bullet from a sniper or whether killed deliberately by his fellow-criminal was never revealed. For when the end came Orming had apparently planned a final act of venom. It was known that in the basement a considerable quantity of petrol had been stored. The contents had probably been carefully distributed over the most inflammable materials in the top rooms. The fire broke out, as one witness described it, 'almost like an explosion.' Orming must have perished in this. The roof blazed up, and the sparks carried across the yard and started a stack of light timber in the annexe of Messrs. Morrel's piano-factory. The factory and two blocks of tenement buildings were burnt to the ground. The estimated cost of the destruction was one hundred and eighty thousand pounds. The casualties amounted to seven killed and fifteen wounded.

At the inquiry held under Chief Justice Pengammon various odd interesting facts were revealed. Mr. Lowes-Parlby, the brilliant young K.C.<sup>1</sup>, distinguished himself by his searching cross-examination of many witnesses. At one point a certain Mrs. Dawes was put in the box. 'Now,' said Mr. Lowes-Parlby, 'I understand that on the evening in question, Mrs. Dawes, you, and the victims, and these other people who have been mentioned, were all seated in the public bar of the Wagtail, enjoying its no doubt excellent hospitality and indulging in a friendly discussion. Is that so?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Now, will you tell his lordship what you were discussing?'

'Diseases, sir.'

'Diseases! And did the argument become acrimonious?'

'Pardon?'

'Was there a serious dispute about diseases?'

'No, sir.'

'Well, what was the subject of the dispute?'

'We was arguin' as to where Wych Street was, sir.'

'What's that?' said his lordship.

'The witness states, my lord, that they were arguing as to where Wych Street was.'

'Wych Street? Do you mean W-Y-C-H?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You mean the narrow old street that used to run across the site of what is now the Gaiety Theatre?'

Mr. Lowes-Parlby smiled in his most charming manner.

'Yes, my lord, I believe the witness refers to the same street you mention, though, if I may be allowed to qualify your lordship's description of the locality, may I suggest that it was a little further east – at the side of the old Globe Theatre, which was adjacent to St. Martin's in the Strand? That is the street you were all arguing about, isn't it, Mrs. Dawes?'

'Well, sir, my aunt who died from eating tinned lobster used to work at a corset-shop. I ought to know.'

His lordship ignored the witness. He turned to the counsel rather peevishly.

'Mr. Lowes-Parlby, when I was your age I used to pass through Wych Street every day of my life. I did so for nearly twelve years. I think it hardly necessary for you to contradict me.'

The counsel bowed. It was not his place to dispute with a chief justice, although that chief justice be a hopeless old fool; but another eminent K.C., an elderly man with a tawny beard, rose in the body of the court, and said:

'If I may be allowed to interpose, your lordship, I also spent a great deal of my youth passing through Wych Street. I have gone into the matter, comparing past and present ordnance survey maps. If I am not mistaken, the street the witness was referring to began near the hoarding at the entrance to Kingsway<sup>2</sup> and ended at the back of what is now the Aldwych Theatre<sup>3</sup>.'

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<sup>1</sup> K. C. – King's Counsel

<sup>2</sup> Kingsway – a street in central London where companies' offices are located

<sup>3</sup> the Aldwych Theatre – a theatre on the corner of Drury Lane in the West End, built in 1905

‘Oh, no, Mr. Backer!’ exclaimed Lowes-Parlby.

His lordship removed his glasses and snapped out:

‘The matter is entirely irrelevant to the case.’

It certainly was, but the brief passage-of-arms left an unpleasant tang of bitterness behind. It was observed that Mr. Lowes-Parlby never again quite got the prehensile grip upon his cross-examination that he had shown in his treatment of the earlier witnesses. The coloured man, Harry Jones, had died in hospital, but Mr. Booth, the proprietor of the Wagtail, Baldwin Meadows, Mr. Dawes, and the man who was stabbed in the wrist, all gave evidence of a rather nugatory character. Lowes-Parlby could do nothing with it. The findings of this Special Inquiry do not concern us. It is sufficient to say that the witnesses already mentioned all returned to Wapping. The man who had received the thrust of a hatpin through his wrist did not think it advisable to take any action against Mrs. Dawes. He was pleasantly relieved to find that he was only required as a witness of an abortive discussion.

\* \* \* \* \*

In a few weeks’ time the great Aztec Street siege remained only a romantic memory to the majority of Londoners. To Lowes-Parlby the little dispute with Chief Justice Pengammon rankled unreasonably. It is annoying to be publicly snubbed for making a statement which you know to be absolutely true, and which you have even taken pains to verify. And Lowes-Parlby was a young man accustomed to score. He made a point of looking everything up, of being prepared for an adversary thoroughly. He liked to give the appearance of knowing everything. The brilliant career just ahead of him at times dazzled him. He was one of the darlings of the gods. Everything came to Lowes-Parlby. His father had distinguished himself at the bar before him, and had amassed a modest fortune. He was an only son. At Oxford he had carried off every possible degree. He was already being spoken of for very high political honours. But the most sparkling jewel in the crown of his successes was Lady Adela Charters, the daughter of Lord Vermeer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. She was his fiancée, and it was considered the most brilliant match of the season. She was young and almost pretty, and Lord Vermeer was immensely wealthy and one of the most influential men in Great Britain. Such a combination was irresistible. There seemed to be nothing missing in the life of Francis Lowes-Parlby, K.C.

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One of the most regular and absorbed spectators at the Aztec Street inquiry was old Stephen Garrit. Stephen Garrit held a unique but quite inconspicuous position in the legal world at that time. He was a friend of judges, a specialist at various abstruse legal rulings, a man of remarkable memory, and yet – an amateur. He had never taken sick, never eaten the requisite dinners, never passed an examination in his life; but the law of evidence was meat and drink to him. He passed his life in the Temple, where he had chambers. Some of the most eminent counsel in the world would take his opinion, or come to him for advice. He was very old, very silent, and very absorbed. He attended every meeting of the Aztec Street inquiry, but from beginning to end he never volunteered an opinion.

After the inquiry was over he went and visited an old friend at the London Survey Office. He spent two mornings examining maps. After that he spent two mornings pottering about the Strand, Kingsway, and Aldwych; then he worked out some careful calculations on a ruled chart. He entered the particulars in a little book which he kept for purposes of that kind, and then retired to his chambers to study other matters. But before doing so, he entered a little apophthegm in another book. It was apparently a book in which he intended to compile a summary of his legal experiences. The sentence ran:

‘The basic trouble is that people make statements without sufficient data.’

Old Stephen need not have appeared in this story at all, except for the fact that he was present

at the dinner at Lord Vermeer's, where a rather deplorable incident occurred. And you must acknowledge that in the circumstances it is useful to have such a valuable and efficient witness.

Lord Vermeer was a competent, forceful man, a little quick-tempered and autocratic. He came from Lancashire<sup>1</sup>, and before entering politics had made an enormous fortune out of borax, artificial manure, and starch.

It was a small dinner-party, with a motive behind it. His principal guest was Mr. Sandeman, the London agent of the Ameer of Bakkan<sup>2</sup>. Lord Vermeer was very anxious to impress Mr. Sandeman and to be very friendly with him: the reasons will appear later. Mr. Sandeman was a self-confessed cosmopolitan. He spoke seven languages and professed to be equally at home in any capital in Europe. London had been his headquarters for over twenty years. Lord Vermeer also invited Mr. Arthur Toombs, a colleague in the Cabinet, his prospective son-in-law, Lowes-Parlby, K.C., James Trolley, a very tame Socialist M.P.<sup>3</sup>, and Sir Henry and Lady Breyd, the two latter being invited, not because Sir Henry was of any use, but because Lady Breyd was a pretty and brilliant woman who might amuse his principal guest. The sixth guest was Stephen Garrit.

The dinner was a great success. When the succession of courses eventually came to a stop, and the ladies had retired, Lord Vermeer conducted his male guests into another room for a ten minutes' smoke before rejoining them. It was then that the unfortunate incident occurred. There was no love lost between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman. It is difficult to ascribe the real reason of their mutual animosity, but on the several occasions when they had met there had invariably passed a certain sardonic by-play. They were both clever, both comparatively young, each a little suspect and jealous of the other; moreover, it was said in some quarters that Mr. Sandeman had had intentions himself with regard to Lord Vermeer's daughter, that he had been on the point of a proposal when Lowes-Parlby had butted in and forestalled him. Mr. Sandeman had dined well, and he was in the mood to dazzle with a display of his varied knowledge and experiences. The conversation drifted from a discussion of the rival claims of great cities to the slow, inevitable removal of old landmarks. There had been a slightly acrimonious disagreement between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman as to the claims of Budapest and Lisbon, and Mr. Sandeman had scored because he extracted from his rival a confession that, though he had spent two months in Budapest, he had only spent two days in Lisbon. Mr. Sandeman had lived for four years in either city. Lowes-Parlby changed the subject abruptly.

'Talking of landmarks,' he said, 'we had a queer point arise in that Aztec Street inquiry. The original dispute arose owing to a discussion between a crowd of people in a pub as to where Wych Street was.'

'I remember,' said Lord Vermeer. 'A perfectly absurd discussion. Why, I should have thought that any man over forty would remember exactly where it was.'

'Where would you say it was, sir?' asked Lowes-Parlby.

'Why to be sure, it ran from the corner of Chancery Lane<sup>4</sup> and ended at the second turning after the Law Courts<sup>5</sup>, going west.'

Lowes-Parlby was about to reply, when Mr. Sandeman cleared his throat and said, in his supercilious, oily voice:

'Excuse me, my lord. I know my Paris, and Vienna, and Lisbon, every brick and stone, but I look upon London as my home. I know my London even better. I have a perfectly clear recollection of Wych Street. When I was a student I used to visit there to buy books. It ran parallel to New Oxford Street<sup>6</sup> on the south side, just between it and Lincoln's Inn Fields<sup>7</sup>.'

There was something about this assertion that infuriated Lowes-Parlby. In the first place, it was so hopelessly wrong and so insufferably asserted. In the second place, he was already smarting

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1 **Lancashire** – a county in northwestern England

2 **Bakkan** – a province and city in Vietnam

3 **M. P.** – Member of Parliament

4 **Chancery Lane** – a street in central London where lawyers' offices are located

5 **the Law Courts** – the main building of the House of Justice where all important judicial decisions are adopted

6 **New Oxford Street** – a street in central London, the shopping centre of the city

7 **Lincoln's Inn Fields** – a street in central London

under the indignity of being shown up about Lisbon. And then there suddenly flashed through his mind the wretched incident when he had been publicly snubbed by Justice Pengammon about the very same point; and he knew that he was right each time. Damn Wych Street! He turned on Mr. Sandeman.

‘Oh, nonsense! You may know something about these eastern cities; you certainly know nothing about London if you make a statement like that. Wych Street was a little further east of what is now the Gaiety Theatre. It used to run by the side of the old Globe Theatre, parallel to the Strand.’

The dark moustache of Mr. Sandeman shot upwards, revealing a narrow line of yellow teeth. He uttered a sound that was a mingling of contempt and derision; then he drawled out: ‘Really? How wonderful – to have such comprehensive knowledge!’

He laughed, and his small eyes fixed his rival. Lowes-Parlby flushed a deep red. He gulped down half a glass of port and muttered just above a whisper: ‘Damned impudence!’ Then, in the rudest manner he could display, he turned his back deliberately on Sandeman and walked out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the company of Adela he tried to forget the little contretemps. The whole thing was so absurd – so utterly undignified. As though *he* didn’t know! It was the little accumulation of pin-pricks all arising out of that one argument. The result had suddenly goaded him to – well, being rude, to say the least of it. It wasn’t that Sandeman mattered. To the devil with Sandeman! But what would his future father-in-law think? He had never before given way to any show of ill-temper before him. He forced himself into a mood of rather fatuous jocularly. Adela was at her best in those moods. They would have lots of fun together in the days to come. Her almost pretty, not too clever face was dimpled with kittenish glee. Life was a tremendous rag to her. They were expecting Toccata, the famous opera-singer. She had been engaged at a very high fee to come on from Covent Garden. Mr. Sandeman was very fond of music. Adela was laughing, and discussing which was the most honourable position for the great Sandeman to occupy. There came to Lowes-Parlby a sudden abrupt misgiving. What sort of wife would this be to him when they were not just fooling? He immediately dismissed the curious, furtive little stab of doubt. The splendid proportions of the room calmed his senses. A huge bowl of dark red roses quickened his perceptions. His career... The door opened. But it was not La Toccata. It was one of the household flunkies. Lowes-Parlby turned again to his *inamorata*<sup>1</sup>.

‘Excuse me, sir. His lordship says will you kindly go and see him in the library?’

Lowes-Parlby regarded the messenger, and his heart beat quickly. An uncontrollable presage of evil racked his nerve-centres. Something had gone wrong; and yet the whole thing was so absurd, trivial. In a crisis – well, he could always apologize. He smiled confidently at Adela, and said:

‘Why, of course; with pleasure. Please excuse me, dear.’ He followed the impressive servant out of the room. His foot had barely touched the carpet of the library when he realized that his worst apprehensions were to be plumbed to the depths. For a moment he thought Lord Vermeer was alone, then he observed old Stephen Garrit, lying in an easy-chair in the corner like a piece of crumpled parchment. Lord Vermeer did not beat about the bush. When the door was closed, he bawled out, savagely:

‘What the devil have you done?’

‘Excuse me, sir. I’m afraid I don’t understand. Is it Sandeman–?’

‘Sandeman has gone.’

‘Oh, I’m sorry.’

‘Sorry! By God, I should think you might be sorry! You insulted him. My prospective son-in-law insulted him in my own house!’

‘I’m awfully sorry. I didn’t realize–’

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<sup>1</sup> *inamorata* = sweetheart, beloved (*Italian*)



‘Realize! Sit down, and don’t assume for one moment that you continue to be my prospective son-in-law. Your insult was a most intolerable piece of effrontery, not only to him, but to me.’

‘But I—’

‘Listen to me. Do you know that the government were on the verge of concluding a most far-reaching treaty with that man? Do you know that the position was just touch-and-go? The concessions we were prepared to make would have cost the State thirty million pounds, and it would have been cheap. Do you hear that? It would have been cheap! Bakkan is one of the most vulnerable outposts of the Empire. It is a terrible danger-zone. If certain powers can usurp our authority – and, mark you, the whole blamed place is already riddled with this new pernicious doctrine – you know what I mean – before we know where we are the whole East will be in a blaze. India! My God! This contract we were negotiating would have countered this outward thrust. And you, you blockhead, you come here and insult the man upon whose word the whole thing depends.’

‘I really can’t see, sir, how I should know all this.’

‘You can’t see it! But, you fool, you seemed to go out of your way. You insulted him about the merest quibble – in my house!’

‘He said he knew where Wych Street was. He was quite wrong. I corrected him.’

‘Wych Street! Wych Street be damned! If he said Wych Street was in the moon, you should have agreed with him. There was no call to act in the way you did. And you – you think of going into politics!’

The somewhat cynical inference of this remark went unnoticed. Lowes-Parlby was too unnerved. He mumbled:

‘I’m very sorry.’

‘I don’t want your sorrow. I want something more practical.’

‘What’s that, sir?’

‘You will drive straight to Mr. Sandeman’s, find him, and apologize. Tell him you find that he was right about Wych Street after all. If you can’t find him to-night, you must find him to-morrow morning. I give you till midday to-morrow. If by that time you have not offered a handsome apology to Mr. Sandeman, you do not enter this house again, you do not see my daughter again. Moreover, all the power I possess will be devoted to hounding you out of that profession you have dishonoured. Now you can go.’

Dazed and shaken, Lowes-Parlby drove back to his flat at Knightsbridge<sup>1</sup>. Before acting he must have time to think. Lord Vermeer had given him till to-morrow midday. Any apologizing that was done should be done after a night’s reflection. The fundamental purposes of his being were to be tested. He knew that. He was at a great crossing. Some deep instinct within him was grossly outraged. Is it that a point comes when success demands that a man shall sell his soul? It was all so absurdly trivial – a mere argument about the position of a street that had ceased to exist. As Lord Vermeer said, what did it matter about Wych Street?

Of course he should apologize. It would hurt horribly to do so, but would a man sacrifice everything on account of some footling argument about a street?

In his own rooms, Lowes-Parlby put on a dressing-gown, and, lighting a pipe, he sat before the fire. He would have given anything for companionship at such a moment – the right companionship. How lovely it would be to have – a woman, just the right woman, to talk this all over with; some one who understood and sympathized. A sudden vision came to him of Adela’s face grinning about the prospective visit of La Toccata, and again the low voice of misgiving whispered in his ears. Would Adela be – just the right woman? In very truth, did he really love Adela? Or was it all – a rag? Was life a rag – a game played by lawyers, politicians, and people?

The fire burned low, but still he continued to sit thinking, his mind principally occupied with the dazzling visions of the future. It was past midnight when he suddenly muttered a low ‘Damn!’ and walked to the bureau. He took up a pen and wrote:

*‘Dear Mr. Sandema n, –*

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<sup>1</sup> **Knightsbridge** – an area in west-central London with expensive jewellers’ and antique shops

I must apologize for acting so rudely to you last night. It was quite unpardonable of me, especially as I since find, on going into the matter, that you were quite right about the position of Wych Street. I can't think how I made the mistake. Please forgive me.

'Yours cordially,

'FRANCIS LOWES-PARLBY.'

Having written this, he sighed and went to bed. One might have imagined at that point that the matter was finished. But there are certain little greedy demons of conscience that require a lot of stilling, and they kept Lowes-Parlby awake more than half the night. He kept on repeating to himself, 'It's all positively absurd!' But the little greedy demons pranced around the bed, and they began to group things into two definite issues. On the one side, the great appearances; on the other, something at the back of it all, something deep, fundamental, something that could only be expressed by one word – truth. If he had *really* loved Adela – if he weren't so absolutely certain that Sandeman was wrong and he was right – why should he have to say that Wych Street was where it wasn't? 'Isn't there, after all,' said one of the little demons, 'something which makes for greater happiness than success? Confess this, and we'll let you sleep.'

Perhaps that is one of the most potent weapons the little demons possess. However full our lives may be, we ever long for moments of tranquillity. And conscience holds before our eyes some mirror of an ultimate tranquillity. Lowes-Parlby was certainly not himself. The gay, debonair, and brilliant egoist was tortured, and tortured almost beyond control; and it had all apparently risen through the ridiculous discussion about a street. At a quarter past three in the morning he arose from his bed with a groan, and, going into the other room, he tore the letter to Mr. Sandeman to pieces.

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Three weeks later old Stephen Garrit was lunching with the Lord Chief Justice. They were old friends, and they never found it incumbent to be very conversational. The lunch was an excellent, but frugal, meal. They both ate slowly and thoughtfully, and their drink was water. It was not till they reached the dessert stage that his lordship indulged in any very informative comment, and then he recounted to Stephen the details of a recent case in which he considered that the presiding judge had, by an unprecedented paralogy, misinterpreted the law of evidence. Stephen listened with absorbed attention. He took two cob-nuts from the silver dish, and turned them over meditatively, without cracking them. When his lordship had completely stated his opinion and peeled a pear, Stephen mumbled:

'I have been impressed, very impressed indeed. Even in my own field of limited observation – the opinion of an outsider, you may say – so often it happens – the trouble caused by an affirmation without sufficiently established data. I have seen lives lost, ruin brought about, endless suffering. Only last week, a young man – a brilliant career – almost shattered. People make statements without—'

He put the nuts back on the dish, and then, in an apparently irrelevant manner, he said abruptly:

'Do you remember Wych Street, my lord?'

The Lord Chief justice grunted.

'Wych Street! Of course I do.'

'Where would you say it was, my lord?'

'Why, here, of course.'

His lordship took a pencil from his pocket and sketched a plan on the tablecloth.

'It used to run from there to here.'

Stephen adjusted his glasses and carefully examined the plan. He took a long time to do this, and when he had finished his hand instinctively went towards a breast pocket where he kept a note-book with little squared pages. Then he stopped and sighed. After all, why argue with the law? The law was like that – an excellent thing, not infallible, of course (even the plan of the Lord Chief

justice was a quarter of a mile out), but still an excellent, a wonderful thing. He examined the bony knuckles of his hands and yawned slightly.

‘Do you remember it?’ said the Lord Chief justice.

Stephen nodded sagely, and his voice seemed to come from a long way off:

‘Yes, I remember it, my lord. It was a melancholy little street.’

## **The Water Ghost of Harrowby Hall (John Kendrick Bangs)**

The trouble with Harrowby Hall was that it was haunted, and, what was worse, the ghost did not content itself with merely appearing at the bedside of the afflicted person who saw it, but persisted in remaining there for one mortal hour before it would disappear.

It never appeared except on Christmas Eve, and then as the clock was striking twelve, in which respect alone was it lacking in that originality which in these days is a *sine qua non*<sup>1</sup> of success in spectral life. The owners of Harrowby Hall had done their utmost to rid themselves of the damp and dewy lady who rose up out of the best bedroom floor at midnight, but without avail. They had tried stopping the clock, so that the ghost would not know when it was midnight; but she made her appearance just the same, with that fearful miasmatic personality of hers, and there she would stand until everything about her was thoroughly saturated.

Then the owners of Harrowby Hall caulked up every crack in the floor with the very best quality of hemp, and over this was placed layers of tar and canvas; the walls were made water-proof, and the doors and windows likewise, the proprietors having conceived the notion that the unexorcised lady would find it difficult to leak into the room after these precautions had been taken; but even this did not suffice. The following Christmas Eve she appeared as promptly as before, and frightened the occupant of the room quite out of his senses by sitting down alongside of him and gazing with her cavernous blue eyes into his; and he noticed, too, that in her long, aqueously bony fingers bits of dripping sea-weed were entwined, the ends hanging down, and these ends she drew across his forehead until he became like one insane. And then he swooned away, and was found unconscious in his bed the next morning by his host, simply saturated with sea-water and fright, from the combined effects of which he never recovered, dying four years later of pneumonia and nervous prostration at the age of seventy-eight.

The next year the master of Harrowby Hall decided not to have the best spare bedroom opened at all, thinking that perhaps the ghost’s thirst for making herself disagreeable would be satisfied by haunting the furniture, but the plan was as unavailing as the many that had preceded it.

The ghost appeared as usual in the room – that is, it was supposed she did, for the hangings were dripping wet the next morning, and in the parlor below the haunted room a great damp spot appeared on the ceiling. Finding no one there, she immediately set out to learn the reason why, and she chose none other to haunt than the owner of the Harrowby himself. She found him in his own cosy room drinking whiskey – whiskey undiluted – and felicitating himself upon having foiled her ghostship, when all of a sudden the curl went out of his hair, his whiskey bottle filled and overflowed, and he was himself in a condition similar to that of a man who has fallen into a water-butt. When he recovered from the shock, which was a painful one, he saw before him the lady of the cavernous eyes and sea-weed fingers. The sight was so unexpected and so terrifying that he fainted, but immediately came to, because of the vast amount of water in his hair, which, trickling down over his face, restored his consciousness.

Now it so happened that the master of Harrowby was a brave man, and while he was not particularly fond of interviewing ghosts, especially such quenching ghosts as the one before him, he was not to be daunted by an apparition. He had paid the lady the compliment of fainting from the effects of his first surprise, and now that he had come to he intended to find out a few things he felt he had a right to know. He would have liked to put on a dry suit of clothes first, but the apparition declined to leave him for an instant until her hour was up, and he was forced to deny himself that pleasure. Every time he would move she would follow him, with the result that everything she came

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<sup>1</sup> *sine qua non* – necessary conditions (*Latin*)

in contact with got a ducking. In an effort to warm himself up he approached the fire, an unfortunate move as it turned out, because it brought the ghost directly over the fire, which immediately was extinguished. The whiskey became utterly valueless as a comforter to his chilled system, because it was by this time diluted to a proportion of ninety per cent of water. The only thing he could do to ward off the evil effects of his encounter he did, and that was to swallow ten two-grain quinine pills, which he managed to put into his mouth before the ghost had time to interfere. Having done this, he turned with some asperity to the ghost, and said:

‘Far be it from me to be impolite to a woman, madam, but I’m hanged if it wouldn’t please me better if you’d stop these infernal visits of yours to this house. Go sit out on the lake, if you like that sort of thing; soak the water-butt, if you wish; but do not, I implore you, come into a gentleman’s house and saturate him and his possessions in this way. It is damned disagreeable.’

‘Henry Hartwick Oglethorpe,’ said the ghost, in a gurgling voice, ‘you don’t know what you are talking about.’

‘Madam,’ returned the unhappy householder, ‘I wish that remark were strictly truthful. I was talking about you. It would be shillings and pence – nay, pounds, in my pocket, madam, if I did not know you.’

‘That is a bit of specious nonsense,’ returned the ghost, throwing a quart of indignation into the face of the master of Harrowby. ‘It may rank high as repartee, but as a comment upon my statement that you do not know what you are talking about, it savors of irrelevant impertinence. You do not know that I am compelled to haunt this place year after year by inexorable fate. It is no pleasure to me to enter this house, and ruin and mildew everything I touch. I never aspired to be a shower-bath, but it is my doom. Do you know who I am?’

‘No, I don’t,’ returned the master of Harrowby. ‘I should say you were the Lady of the Lake, or Little Sallie Waters.’

‘You are a witty man for your years,’ said the ghost.

‘Well, my humor is drier than yours ever will be,’ returned the master.

‘No doubt. I’m never dry. I am the Water Ghost of Harrowby Hall, and dryness is a quality entirely beyond my wildest hope. I have been the incumbent of this highly unpleasant office for two hundred years to-night.’

‘How the deuce did you ever come to get elected?’ asked the master.

‘Through a suicide,’ replied the spectre. ‘I am the ghost of that fair maiden whose picture hangs over the mantel-piece in the drawing-room. I should have been your great-great-great-great-great-aunt if I had lived, Henry Hartwick Oglethorpe, for I was the own sister of your great-great-great-great-grandfather.’

‘But what induced you to get this house into such a predicament?’

‘I was not to blame, sir,’ returned the lady. ‘It was my father’s fault. He it was who built Harrowby Hall, and the haunted chamber was to have been mine. My father had it furnished in pink and yellow, knowing well that blue and gray formed the only combination of color I could tolerate. He did it merely to spite me, and, with what I deem a proper spirit, I declined to live in the room; whereupon my father said I could live there or on the lawn, he didn’t care which. That night I ran from the house and jumped over the cliff into the sea.’

‘That was rash,’ said the master of Harrowby.

‘So I’ve heard,’ returned the ghost. ‘If I had known what the consequences were to be I should not have jumped; but I really never realized what I was doing until after I was drowned. I had been drowned a week when a sea-nymph came to me and informed me that I was to be one of her followers forever afterwards, adding that it should be my doom to haunt Harrowby Hall for one hour every Christmas Eve throughout the rest of eternity. I was to haunt that room on such Christmas Eves as I found it inhabited; and if it should turn out not to be inhabited, I was and am to spend the allotted hour with the head of the house.’

‘I’ll sell the place.’

‘That you cannot do, for it is also required of me that I shall appear as the deeds are to be delivered to any purchaser, and divulge to him the awful secret of the house.’

‘Do you mean to tell me that on every Christmas Eve that I don’t happen to have somebody in that guest-chamber, you are going to haunt me wherever I may be, ruining my whiskey, taking all the curl out of my hair, extinguishing my fire, and soaking me through to the skin?’ demanded the master.

‘You have stated the case, Oglethorpe. And what is more,’ said the water ghost, ‘it doesn’t make the slightest difference where you are, if I find that room empty, wherever you may be I shall douse you with my spectral pres—’

Here the clock struck one, and immediately the apparition faded away. It was perhaps more of a trickle than a fade, but as a disappearance it was complete.

‘By St. George and his Dragon!’<sup>1</sup> ejaculated the master of Harrowby, wringing his hands. ‘It is guineas to hot-cross buns that next Christmas there’s an occupant of the spare room, or I spend the night in a bath-tub.’

But the master of Harrowby would have lost his wager had there been any one there to take him up, for when Christmas Eve came again he was in his grave, never having recovered from the cold contracted that awful night. Harrowby Hall was closed, and the heir to the estate was in London, where to him in his chambers came the same experience that his father had gone through, saving only that being younger and stronger, he survived the shock. Everything in his rooms was ruined – his clocks were rusted in the works; a fine collection of water-color drawings was entirely obliterated by the onslaught of the water ghost; and what was worse, the apartments below his were drenched with the water soaking through the floors, a damage for which he was compelled to pay, and which resulted in his being requested by his landlady to vacate the premises immediately.

The story of the visitation inflicted upon his family had gone abroad, and no one could be got to invite him out to any function save afternoon teas and receptions. Fathers of daughters declined to permit him to remain in their houses later than eight o’clock at night, not knowing but that some emergency might arise in the supernatural world which would require the unexpected appearance of the water ghost in this on nights other than Christmas Eve, and before the mystic hour when weary churchyards, ignoring the rules which are supposed to govern polite society, begin to yawn. Nor would the maids themselves have aught to do with him, fearing the destruction by the sudden incursion of aqueous femininity of the costumes which they held most dear.

So the heir of Harrowby Hall resolved, as his ancestors for several generations before him had resolved, that something must be done. His first thought was to make one of his servants occupy the haunted room at the crucial moment; but in this he failed, because the servants themselves knew the history of that room and rebelled. None of his friends would consent to sacrifice their personal comfort to his, nor was there to be found in all England a man so poor as to be willing to occupy the doomed chamber on Christmas Eve for pay.

Then the thought came to the heir to have the fireplace in the room enlarged, so that he might evaporate the ghost at its first appearance, and he was felicitating himself upon the ingenuity of his plan, when he remembered what his father had told him – how that no fire could withstand the lady’s extremely contagious dampness. And then he bethought him of steam-pipes. These, he remembered, could lie hundreds of feet deep in water, and still retain sufficient heat to drive the water away in vapor; and as a result of this thought the haunted room was heated by steam to a withering degree, and the heir for six months attended daily the Turkish baths, so that when Christmas Eve came he could himself withstand the awful temperature of the room.

The scheme was only partially successful. The water ghost appeared at the specified time, and found the heir of Harrowby prepared; but hot as the room was, it shortened her visit by no more than five minutes in the hour, during which time the nervous system of the young master was well-nigh shattered, and the room itself was cracked and warped to an extent which required the outlay of a large sum of money to remedy. And worse than this, as the last drop of the water ghost was slowly sizzling itself out on the floor, she whispered to her would-be conqueror that his scheme

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<sup>1</sup> **St. George and his Dragon** – a Christian martyr of the 3d century and the patron saint of England; St. George saved a Libyan king’s daughter from the dragon and killed the monster in return for the promise that the people of Libya would be baptized.

would avail him nothing, because there was still water in great plenty where she came from, and that next year would find her rehabilitated and as exasperatingly saturating as ever.

It was then that the natural action of the mind, in going from one extreme to the other, suggested to the ingenious heir of Harrowby the means by which the water ghost was ultimately conquered, and happiness once more came within the grasp of the house of Oglethorpe.

The heir provided himself with a warm suit of fur under-clothing. Donning this with the furry side in, he placed over it a rubber garment, tightfitting, which he wore just as a woman wears a jersey. On top of this he placed another set of under-clothing, this suit made of wool, and over this was a second rubber garment like the first. Upon his head he placed a light and comfortable diving helmet, and so clad, on the following Christmas Eve he awaited the coming of his tormentor.

It was a bitterly cold night that brought to a close this twenty-fourth day of December. The air outside was still, but the temperature was below zero. Within all was quiet, the servants of Harrowby Hall awaiting with beating hearts the outcome of their master's campaign against his supernatural visitor.

The master himself was lying on the bed in the haunted room, clad as has already been indicated, and then –

The clock clanged out the hour of twelve.

There was a sudden banging of doors, a blast of cold air swept through the halls, the door leading into the haunted chamber flew open, a splash was heard, and the water ghost was seen standing at the side of the heir of Harrowby, from whose outer dress there streamed rivulets of water, but whose own person deep down under the various garments he wore was as dry and as warm as he could have wished.

'Ha!' said the young master of Harrowby. 'I'm glad to see you.'

'You are the most original man I've met, if that is true,' returned the ghost. 'May I ask where did you get that hat?'

'Certainly, madam,' returned the master, courteously. 'It is a little portable observatory I had made for just such emergencies as this. But, tell me, is it true that you are doomed to follow me about for one mortal hour – to stand where I stand, to sit where I sit?'

'That is my delectable fate,' returned the lady.

'We'll go out on the lake,' said the master, starting up.

'You can't get rid of me that way,' returned the ghost. 'The water won't swallow me up; in fact, it will just add to my present bulk.'

'Nevertheless,' said the master, firmly, 'we will go out on the lake.'

'But, my dear sir,' returned the ghost, with a pale reluctance, 'it is fearfully cold out there. You will be frozen hard before you've been out ten minutes.'

'Oh no, I'll not,' replied the master. 'I am very warmly dressed. Come!' This last in a tone of command that made the ghost ripple.

And they started.

They had not gone far before the water ghost showed signs of distress.

'You walk too slowly,' she said. 'I am nearly frozen. My knees are so stiff now I can hardly move. I beseech you to accelerate your step.'

'I should like to oblige a lady,' returned the master, courteously, 'but my clothes are rather heavy, and a hundred yards an hour is about my speed. Indeed, I think we would better sit down here on this snowdrift, and talk matters over.'

'Do not! Do not do so, I beg!' cried the ghost. 'Let me move on. I feel myself growing rigid as it is. If we stop here, I shall be frozen stiff.'

'That, madam,' said the master slowly, and seating himself on an ice-cake – 'that is why I have brought you here. We have been on this spot just ten minutes, we have fifty more. Take your time about it, madam, but freeze, that is all I ask of you.'

'I cannot move my right leg now,' cried the ghost, in despair, 'and my overskirt is a solid sheet of ice. Oh, good, kind Mr. Oglethorpe, light a fire, and let me go free from these icy fetters.'

'Never, madam. It cannot be. I have you at last.'



‘Alas!’ cried the ghost, a tear trickling down her frozen cheek. ‘Help me, I beg. I congeal!’

‘Congeal, madam, congeal!’ returned Oglethorpe, coldly. ‘You have drenched me and mine for two hundred and three years, madam. To-night you have had your last drench.’

‘Ah, but I shall thaw out again, and then you’ll see. Instead of the comfortably tepid, genial ghost I have been in my past, sir, I shall be iced-water,’ cried the lady, threateningly.

‘No, you won’t, either,’ returned Oglethorpe; ‘for when you are frozen quite stiff, I shall send you to a cold-storage warehouse, and there shall you remain an icy work of art forever more.’

‘But warehouses burn.’

‘So they do, but this warehouse cannot burn. It is made of asbestos and surrounding it are fire-proof walls, and within those walls the temperature is now and shall forever be 416 degrees below the zero point; low enough to make an icicle of any flame in this world – or the next,’ the master added, with an ill-suppressed chuckle.

‘For the last time let me beseech you. I would go on my knees to you, Oglethorpe, were they not already frozen. I beg of you do not doo—’

Here even the words froze on the water ghost’s lips and the clock struck one. There was a momentary tremor throughout the ice-bound form, and the moon, coming out from behind a cloud, shone down on the rigid figure of a beautiful woman sculptured in clear, transparent ice. There stood the ghost of Harrowby Hall, conquered by the cold, a prisoner for all time.

The heir of Harrowby had won at last, and to-day in a large storage house in London stands the frigid form of one who will never again flood the house of Oglethorpe with woe and sea-water.

As for the heir of Harrowby, his success in coping with a ghost has made him famous, a fame that still lingers about him, although his victory took place some twenty years ago; and so far from being unpopular with the fair sex, as he was when we first knew him, he has not only been married twice, but is to lead a third bride to the altar before the year is out.

## Aunt Joanna (Sabine Baring-Gould)

In the Land’s End district is the little church-town of Zennor. There is no village to speak of – a few scattered farms, and here and there a cluster of cottages. The district is bleak, the soil does not lie deep over granite that peers through the surface on exposed spots, where the furious gales from the ocean sweep the land. If trees ever existed there, they have been swept away by the blast, but the golden furze or gorse defies all winds, and clothes the moorland with a robe of splendour, and the heather flushes the slopes with crimson towards the decline of summer, and mantles them in soft, warm brown in winter, like the fur of an animal.

In Zennor is a little church, built of granite, rude and simple of construction, crouching low, to avoid the gales, but with a tower that has defied the winds and the lashing rains, because wholly devoid of sculptured detail, which would have afforded the blasts something to lay hold of and eat away. In Zennor parish is one of the finest cromlechs<sup>1</sup> in Cornwall<sup>2</sup>, a huge slab of unwrought stone like a table, poised on the points of standing upright blocks as rude as the mass they sustain.

Near this monument of a hoar and indeed unknown antiquity lived an old woman by herself, in a small cottage of one story in height, built of moor stones set in earth, and pointed only with lime. It was thatched with heather, and possessed but a single chimney that rose but little above the apex of the roof, and had two slates set on the top to protect the rising smoke from being blown down the chimney into the cottage when the wind was from the west or from the east. When, however, it drove from north or south, then the smoke must take care of itself. On such occasions it was wont to find its way out of the door, and little or none went up the chimney.

The only fuel burnt in this cottage was peat – not the solid black peat from deep, bogs, but turf of only a spade graft, taken from the surface, and composed of undissolved roots. Such fuel gives flame, which the other does not; but, on the other hand, it does not throw out the same amount of heat, nor does it last one half the time.

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<sup>1</sup> **cromlechs** – in prehistoric architecture, a *cromlech* is an acircle of stones enclosed by a broad rampant

<sup>2</sup> **Cornwall** – a historic county on the Atlantic coast in southwestern England

The woman who lived in the cottage was called by the people of the neighbourhood Aunt Joanna. What her family name was but few remembered, nor did it concern herself much. She had no relations at all, with the exception of a grand-niece, who was married to a small tradesman, a wheelwright near the church. But Joanna and her great-niece were not on speaking terms. The girl had mortally offended the old woman by going to a dance at St. Ives<sup>1</sup>, against her express orders. It was at this dance that she had met the wheelwright, and this meeting, and the treatment the girl had met with from her aunt for having gone to it, had led to the marriage. For Aunt Joanna was very strict in her Wesleyanism<sup>2</sup>, and bitterly hostile to all such carnal amusements as dancing and play-acting. Of the latter there was none in that wild west Cornish district, and no temptation ever afforded by a strolling company setting up its booth within reach of Zennor. But dancing, though denounced, still drew the more independent spirits together. Rose Penaluna had been with her great-aunt after her mother's death. She was a lively girl, and when she heard of a dance at St. Ives, and had been asked to go to it, although forbidden by Aunt Joanna, she stole from the cottage at night, and found her way to St. Ives.

Her conduct was reprehensible certainly. But that of Aunt Joanna was even more so, for when she discovered that the girl had left the house she barred her door, and refused to allow Rose to re-enter it. The poor girl had been obliged to take refuge the same night at the nearest farm and sleep in an outhouse, and next morning to go into St. Ives and entreat an acquaintance to take her in till she could enter into service. Into service she did not go, for when Abraham Hext, the carpenter, heard how she had been treated, he at once proposed, and in three weeks married her. Since then no communication had taken place between the old woman and her grand-niece. As Rose knew, Joanna was implacable in her resentments, and considered that she had been acting aright in what she had done.

The nearest farm to Aunt Joanna's cottage was occupied by the Hockins. One day Elizabeth, the farmer's wife, saw the old woman outside the cottage as she was herself returning from market; and, noticing how bent and feeble Joanna was, she halted, and talked to her, and gave her good advice.

'See you now, auntie, you'm gettin' old and crimmed wi' rheumatics. How can you get about? An' there's no knowin' but you might be took bad in the night. You ought to have some little lass wi' you to mind you.'

'I don't want nobody, thank the Lord.'

'Not just now, auntie, but suppose any chance ill-luck were to come on you. And then, in the bad weather, you'm not fit to go abroad after the turves, and you can't get all you want – tay and sugar and milk for yourself now. It would be handy to have a little maid by you.'

'Who should I have?' asked Joanna.

'Well, now, you couldn't do better than take little Mary, Rose Hext's eldest girl. She's a handy maid, and bright and pleasant to speak to.'

'No,' answered the old woman, 'I'll have none o' they Hexts, not I. The Lord is agin Rose and all her family, I know it. I'll have none of them.'

'But, auntie, you must be nigh on ninety.'

'I be ower that. But what o' that? Didn't Sarah<sup>3</sup>, the wife of Abraham<sup>4</sup>, live to an hundred and seven and twenty years, and that in spite of him worritin' of her wi' that owdacious maid of hem, Hagar<sup>5</sup>? If it hadn't been for their goings on, of Abraham and Hagar, it's my belief that she'd ha' held on to a hundred and fifty-seven. I thank the Lord I've never had no man to worrit me. So why I shouldn't equal Sarah's life I don't see.'

Then she went indoors and shut the door.

After that a week elapsed without Mrs. Hockin seeing the old woman. She passed the cottage,

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1 **St. Yves** – a coastal town in Cornwall

2 **Wesleyanism** – the Wesleyan church, one of the Protestant churches, founded by John Wesley (1703–1791), a clergyman and church reformer; the members of the Wesleyan church promise to live a sinless life.

3 **Sarah** – a biblical figure, in the Old Testament, the wife of Abraham and the mother of Isaac

4 **Abraham** – in the Old Testament, the first of the Hebrew patriarchs, revered in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

5 **Hagar** – in the Old Testament, Sarah's maid and Abraham's mistress, the mother of his illegitimate son, Ishmael

but no Joanna was about. The door was not open, and usually it was. Elizabeth spoke about this to her husband. 'Jabez,' said she, 'I don't like the looks o' this; I've kept my eye open, and there be no Auntie Joanna hoppin' about. Whativer can be up? It's my opinion us ought to go and see.'

'Well, I've naught on my hands now,' said the farmer, 'so I reckon we will go.' The two walked together to the cottage. No smoke issued from the chimney, and the door was shut. Jabez knocked, but there came no answer; so he entered, followed by his wife.

There was in the cottage but the kitchen, with one bedroom at the side. The hearth was cold. 'There's some'ut up,' said Mrs. Hockin.

'I reckon it's the old lady be down,' replied her husband, and, throwing open the bedroom door, he said: 'Sure enough, and no mistake – there her be, dead as a dried pilchard.'

And in fact Auntie Joanna had died in the night, after having so confidently affirmed her conviction that she would live to the age of a hundred and twenty-seven.

'Whativer shall we do?' asked Mrs. Hockin. 'I reckon,' said her husband, 'us had better take an inventory of what is here, lest wicked rascals come in and steal anything and everything.'

'Folks bain't so bad as that, and a corpse in the house,' observed Mrs. Hockin. 'Don't be sure o' that – these be terrible wicked times,' said the husband. 'And I sez, sez I, no harm is done in seein' what the old creetur had got.'

'Well, surely,' acquiesced Elizabeth, 'there is no harm in that.' In the bedroom was an old oak chest, and this the farmer and his wife opened. To their surprise they found in it a silver teapot, and half a dozen silver spoons.

'Well, now,' exclaimed Elizabeth Hockin, 'fancy her havin' these – and me only Britannia metal<sup>1</sup>.'

'I reckon she came of a good family,' said Jabez. 'Leastwise, I've heard as how she were once well off.'

'And look here!' exclaimed Elizabeth, 'there's fine and beautiful linen underneath – sheets and pillow-cases.'

'But look here!' cried Jabez, 'blessed if the taypot bain't chock-full o' money! Whereiver did she get it from?'

'Her's been in the way of showing folk the Zennor Quoit, visitors from St. Ives and Penzance<sup>2</sup>, and she's had scores o' shillings that way.'

'Lord!' exclaimed Jabez. 'I wish she'd left it to me, and I could buy a cow; I want another cruel bad.'

'Ay, we do, terrible,' said Elizabeth. 'But just look to her bed, what torn and wretched linen be on that – and here these fine bedclothes all in the chest.'

'Who'll get the silver taypot and spoons, and the money?' inquired Jabez.

'Her had no kin – none but Rose Hext, and her couldn't abide her. Last words her said to me was that she'd 'have never naught to do wi' the Hexts, they and all their belongings.'

'That was her last words?'

'The very last words her spoke to me – or to anyone.'

'Then,' said Jabez, 'I'll tell ye what, Elizabeth, it's our moral dooty to abide by the wishes of Aunt Joanna. It never does to go agin what is might. And as hem expressed herself that strong, why us, as honest folks, must carry out her wishes, and see that none of all her savings go to them darned and dratted Hexts.'

'But who be they to go to, then?'

'Well – we'll see. Fust us will have her removed, and provide that her be daycent buried. Them Hexts be in a poor way, and couldn't afford the expense, and it do seem to me, Elizabeth, as it would be a liberal and a kindly act in us to take all the charges on ourselves. Us is the closest neighbours.'

'Ay – and her have had milk of me these ten or twelve years, and I've never charged her a penny, thinking her couldn't afford it. But her could, her were a-hoardin' of hem money – and not

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<sup>1</sup> **Britannia metal** – the alloy composed of tin, antimony and copper, used for making household utensils

<sup>2</sup> **Penzance** – a town in Cornwall where the English Channel joins the Atlantic Ocean

paying me. That were not honest, and what I say is, that I have a right to some of her savin's, to pay the milk bill – and it's butter I've let her have now and then in a liberal way.'

'Very well, Elizabeth. Fust of all, we'll take the silver taypot and the spoons wi' us, to get 'em out of harm's way.'

'And I'll carry the linen sheets and pillow-cases. My word I – why didn't she use 'em, instead of them rags?'

All Zennor declared that the Hockins were a most neighbourly and generous couple, when it was known that they took upon themselves to defray the funeral expenses.

Mrs. Hext came to the farm, and said that she was willing to do what she could, but Mrs. Hockin replied:

'My good Rose, it's no good. I seed your aunt when her was ailin', and nigh on death, and her laid it on me solemn as could be that we was to bury her, and that she'd have nothin' to do wi' the Hexts at no price.'

Rose sighed, and went away.

Rose had not expected to receive anything from her aunt. She had never been allowed to look at the treasures in the oak chest. As far as she had been aware, Aunt Joanna had been extremely poor. But she remembered that the old woman had at one time befriended her, and she was ready to forgive the harsh treatment to which she had finally been subjected. In fact, she had repeatedly made overtures to her great-aunt to be reconciled, but these overtures had been always rejected. She was, accordingly, not surprised to learn from Mrs. Hockin that the old woman's last words had been as reported.

But, although disowned and disinherited, Rose, her husband, and children dressed in black, and were chief mourners at the funeral. Now it had so happened that when it came to the laying out of Aunt Joanna, Mrs. Hockin had looked at the beautiful linen sheets she had found in the oak chest, with the object of furnishing the corpse with one as a winding-sheet. But – she said to herself – it would really be a shame to spoil a pair, and where else could she get such fine and beautiful old linen as was this? So she put the sheets away and furnished for the purpose a clean but coarse and ragged sheet such as Aunt Joanna had in common use. That was good enough to moulder in the grave. It would be positively sinful, because wasteful, to give up to corruption and the worm such fine white linen as Aunt Joanna had hoarded. The funeral was conducted, otherwise, liberally. Aunt Joanna was given an elm, and not a mean deal board coffin, such as is provided for paupers; and a handsome escutcheon<sup>1</sup> of white metal was put on the lid.

Moreover, plenty of gin was drunk, and cake and cheese eaten at the house, all at the expense of the Hockins. And the conversation among those who attended, and ate and drank, and wiped their eyes, was rather anent the generosity of the Hockins than of the virtues of the departed.

Mr. and Mrs. Hockin heard this, and their hearts swelled within them. Nothing so swells the heart as the consciousness of virtue being recognised. Jabez in an undertone informed a neighbour that he were'nt goin' to stick at the funeral expenses, not he; he'd have a neat stone erected above the grave with work on it, at twopence a letter. The name and the date of departure of Aunt Joanna, and her age, and two lines of a favourite hymn of his, all about earth being no dwelling-place, heaven being properly her home.

It was not often that Elizabeth Hockin cried, but she did this day; she wept tears of sympathy with the deceased, and happiness at the ovation accorded to herself and her husband. At length, as the short winter day closed in, the last of those who had attended the funeral, and had returned to the farm to recruit and regale after it, departed, and the Hockins were left to themselves.

'It were a beautiful day,' said Jabez. 'Ay,' responded Elizabeth, 'and what a sight o' people came here.'

'This here buryin' of Aunt Joanna have set us up tremendous in the estimation of the neighbours.'

'I'd like to know who else would ha' done it for a poor old creetur as is no relation; ay – and one as owed a purty long bill to me for milk and butter through ten or twelve years.'

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<sup>1</sup> **escutcheon** – a metal plate placed on a wooden article either to decorate it or to protect the wood

‘Well,’ said Jabez, ‘I’ve allus heard say that a good deed brings its own reward wi’ it – and it’s a fine proverb. I feels it in my insides.’

‘P’raps it’s the gin, Jabez.’

‘No – it’s virtue. It’s warmer nor gin a long sight. Gin gives a smouldering spark, but a good conscience is a blaze of furze.’

The farm of the Hockins was small, and Hockin looked after his cattle himself. One maid was kept, but no man in the house. All were wont to retire early to bed; neither Hockin nor his wife had literary tastes, and were not disposed to consume much oil, so as to read at night.

During the night, at what time she did not know, Mrs. Hockin awoke with a start, and found that her husband was sitting up in bed listening. There was a moon that night, and no clouds in the sky. The room was full of silver light. Elizabeth Hockin heard a sound of feet in the kitchen, which was immediately under the bedroom of the couple.

‘There’s someone about,’ she whispered; ‘go down, Jabez.’

‘I wonder, now, who it be. P’raps its Sally.’

‘It can’t be Sally – how can it, when she can’t get out o’ hem room wi’out passin’ through ours?’

‘Run down, Elizabeth, and see.’

‘It’s your place to go, Jabez.’

‘But if it was a woman – and me in my night-shirt?’

‘And, Jabez, if it was a man, a robber – and me in my night-shirt? It ’ud be shameful.’

‘I reckon us had best go down together.’

‘We’ll do so – but I hope it’s not–’

‘What?’

Mrs. Hockin did not answer. She and her husband crept from bed, and, treading on tiptoe across the room, descended the stair.

There was no door at the bottom, but the staircase was boarded up at the side; it opened into the kitchen.

They descended very softly and cautiously, holding each other, and when they reached the bottom, peered timorously into the apartment that served many purposes – kitchen, sitting-room, and dining-place. The moonlight poured in through the broad, low window.

By it they saw a figure. There could be no mistaking it – it was that of Aunt Joanna, clothed in the tattered sheet that Elizabeth Hockin had allowed for her grave-clothes. The old woman had taken one of the fine linen sheets out of the cupboard in which it had been placed, and had spread it over the long table, and was smoothing it down with her bony hands.

The Hockins trembled, not with cold, though it was mid-winter, but with terror. They dared not advance, and they felt powerless to retreat.

Then they saw Aunt Joanna go to the cupboard, open it, and return with the silver spoons; she placed all six on the sheet, and with a lean finger counted them.

She turned her face towards those who were watching her proceedings, but it was in shadow, and they could not distinguish the features nor note the expression with which she regarded them.

Presently she went back to the cupboard, and returned with the silver teapot. She stood at one end of the table, and now the reflection of the moon on the linen sheet was cast upon her face, and they saw that she was moving her lips – but no sound issued from them.

She thrust her hand into the teapot and drew forth the coins, one by one, and rolled them along the table. The Hockins saw the glint of the metal, and the shadow cast by each piece of money as it rolled. The first coin lodged at the further left-hand corner and the second rested near it; and so on, the pieces were rolled, and ranged themselves in order, ten in a row. Then the next ten were run across the white cloth in the same manner, and dropped over on their sides below the first row; thus also the third ten. And all the time the dead woman was mouthing, as though counting, but still inaudibly.

The couple stood motionless observing proceedings, till suddenly a cloud passed before the face of the moon, so dense as to eclipse the light.

Then in a paroxysm of terror both turned and fled up the stairs, bolted their bedroom door, and jumped into bed.

There was no sleep for them that night. In the gloom when the moon was concealed, in the glare when it shone forth, it was the same, they could hear the light rolling of the coins along the table, and the click as they fell over. Was the supply inexhaustible? It was not so, but apparently the dead woman did not weary of counting the coins. When all had been ranged, she could be heard moving to the further end of the table, and there re-commencing the same proceeding of coin-rolling.

Not till near daybreak did this sound cease, and not till the maid, Sally, had begun to stir in the inner bedchamber did Hockin and his wife venture to rise. Neither would suffer the servant girl to descend till they had been down to see in what condition the kitchen was. They found that the table had been cleared, the coins were all back in the teapot, and that and the spoons were where they had themselves placed them. The sheet, moreover, was neatly folded, and replaced where it had been before.

The Hockins did not speak to one another of their experiences during the past night, so long as they were in the house, but when Jabez was in the field, Elizabeth went to him and said: 'Husband, what about Aunt Joanna?'

'I don't know – maybe it were a dream.'

'Curious us should ha' dreamed alike.'

'I don't know that; 'twere the gin made us dream, and us both had gin, so us dreamed the same thing.'

''Twere more like real truth than dream,' observed Elizabeth. 'We'll take it as dream,' said Jabez. 'Mebbe it won't happen again.' But precisely the same sounds were heard on the following night. The moon was obscured by thick clouds, and neither of the two had the courage to descend to the kitchen. But they could hear the patter of feet, and then the roll and click of the coins. Again sleep was impossible.

'Whatever shall we do?' asked Elizabeth Hockin next morning of her husband. 'Us can't go on like this wi' the dead woman about our house nightly. There's no tellin' she might take it into her head to come upstairs and pull the sheets off us. As we took hers, she may think it fair to carry off ours.'

'I think,' said Jabez sorrowfully, 'we'll have to return 'em.'

'But how?'

After some consultation the couple resolved on conveying all the deceased woman's goods to the churchyard, by night, and placing them on her grave.

'I reckon,' said Hockin, 'we'll bide in the porch and watch what happens. If they be left there till mornin', why we may carry 'em back wi' an easy conscience. We've spent some pounds over her buryin'.'

'What have it come to?'

'Three pounds five and fourpence, as I make it out.'

'Well,' said Elizabeth, 'we must risk it.'

When night had fallen murk, the farmer and his wife crept from their house, carrying the linen sheets, the teapot, and the silver spoons. They did not start till late, for fear of encountering any villagers on the way, and not till after the maid, Sally, had gone to bed.

They fastened the farm door behind them. The night was dark and stormy, with scudding clouds, so dense as to make deep night, when they did not part and allow the moon to peer forth.

They walked timorously, and side by side, looking about them as they proceeded, and on reaching the churchyard gate they halted to pluck up courage before opening and venturing within. Jabez had furnished himself with a bottle of gin, to give courage to himself and his wife.

Together they heaped the articles that had belonged to Aunt Joanna upon the fresh grave, but as they did so the wind caught the linen and unfurled and flapped it, and they were forced to place stones upon it to hold it down. Then, quaking with fear, they retreated to the church porch, and Jabez, uncorking the bottle, first took a long pull himself, and then presented it to his wife.



And now down came a tearing rain, driven by a blast from the Atlantic, howling among the gravestones, and screaming in the battlements of the tower and its bell-chamber windows. The night was so dark, and the rain fell so heavily, that they could see nothing for full half an hour. But then the clouds were rent asunder, and the moon glared white and ghastly over the churchyard.

Elizabeth caught her husband by the arm and pointed. There was, however, no need for her to indicate that on which his eyes were fixed already.

Both saw a lean hand come up out of the grave, and lay hold of one of the fine linen sheets and drag at it. They saw it drag the sheet by one corner, and then it went down underground, and the sheet followed, as though sucked down in a vortex; fold on fold it descended, till the entire sheet had disappeared.

‘Her have taken it for her windin’ sheet,’ whispered Elizabeth. ‘Whativer will her do wi’ the rest?’

‘Have a drop o’ gin; this be terrible tryin’,’ said Jabez in an undertone; and again the couple put their lips to the bottle, which came away considerably lighter after the draughts.

‘Look!’ gasped Elizabeth.

Again the lean hand with long fingers appeared above the soil, and this was seen groping about the grass till it laid hold of the teapot. Then it groped again, and gathered up the spoons, that flashed in the moonbeams. Next, up came the second hand, and a long arm that stretched along the grave till it reached the other sheets. At once, on being raised, these sheets were caught by the wind, and flapped and fluttered like half-hoisted sails. The hands retained them for a while till they bellied with the wind, and then let them go, and they were swept away by the blast across the churchyard, over the wall, and lodged in the carpenter’s yard that adjoined, among his timber.

‘She have sent ’em to the Hexts,’ whispered Elizabeth. Next the hands began to trifle with the teapot, and to shake out some of the coins.

In a minute some silver pieces were flung with so true an aim that they fell clinking down on the floor of the porch.

How many coins, how much money was cast, the couple were in no mood to estimate. Then they saw the hands collect the pillow-cases, and proceed to roll up the teapot and silver spoons in them, and, that done, the white bundle was cast into the air, and caught by the wind and carried over the churchyard wall into the wheelwright’s yard.

At once a curtain of vapour rushed across the face of the moon, and again the graveyard was buried in darkness. Half an hour elapsed before the moon shone out again. Then the Hockins saw that nothing was stirring in the cemetery.

‘I reckon us may go now,’ said Jabez.

‘Let us gather up what she chucked to us,’ advised Elizabeth. So the couple felt about the floor, and collected a number of coins. What they were they could not tell till they reached their home, and had lighted a candle.

‘How much be it?’ asked Elizabeth.

‘Three pound five and fourpence, exact,’ answered Jabez.

## **The Inconsiderate Waiter (James Matthew Barrie)**

Frequently I have to ask myself in the street for the name of the man I bowed to just now, and then, before I can answer, the wind of the first corner blows him from my memory. I have a theory, however, that those puzzling faces, which pass before I can see who cut the coat, all belong to club waiters.

Until William forced his affairs upon me that was all I did know of the private life of waiters, though I have been in the club for twenty years. I was even unaware whether they slept downstairs or had their own homes; nor had I the interest to inquire of other members, nor they the knowledge to inform me. I hold that this sort of people should be fed and clothed and given airing and wives and children, and I subscribe yearly, I believe for these purposes; but to come into closer relation with waiters is bad form; they are club fittings, and William should have kept his distress to

himself, or taken it away and patched it up like a rent in one of the chairs. His inconsiderateness has been a pair of spectacles to me for months.

It is not correct taste to know the name of a club waiter, so I must apologise for knowing William's, and still more for not forgetting it. If, again, to speak of a waiter is bad form, to speak bitterly is the comic degree of it. But William has disappointed me sorely. There were years when I would defer dining several minutes that he might wait on me. His pains to reserve the window-seat for me were perfectly satisfactory. I allowed him privileges, as to suggest dishes, and would give him information, as that someone had startled me in the reading-room by slamming a door. I have shown him how I cut my finger with a piece of string. Obviously he was gratified by these attentions, usually recommending a liqueur; and I fancy he must have understood my sufferings, for he often looked ill himself. Probably he was rheumatic, but I cannot say for certain, as I never thought of asking, and he had the sense to see that the knowledge would be offensive to me.

In the smoking-room we have a waiter so independent that once, when he brought me a yellow chartreuse<sup>1</sup>, and I said I had ordered green, he replied, 'No, sir; you said yellow.' William could never have been guilty of such effrontery. In appearance, of course, he is mean, but I can no more describe him than a milkmaid could draw cows. I suppose we distinguish one waiter from another much as we pick our hat from the rack. We could have plotted a murder safely before William. He never presumed to have any opinions of his own. When such was my mood he remained silent, and if I announced that something diverting had happened to me he laughed before I told him what it was. He turned the twinkle in his eye off or on at my bidding as readily as if it was the gas. To my 'Sure to be wet to-morrow,' he would reply, 'Yes, sir;' and to Trelawney's 'It doesn't look like rain,' two minutes afterward, he would reply, 'No, sir.' It was one member who said Lightning Rod would win the Derby<sup>2</sup> and another who said Lightning Rod had no chance, but it was William who agreed with both. He was like a cheroot<sup>3</sup>, which may be smoked from either end. So used was I to him that, had he died or got another situation (or whatever it is such persons do when they disappear from the club), I should probably have told the head waiter to bring him back, as I disliked changes.

It would not become me to know precisely when I began to think William an ingrate, but I date his lapse from the evening when he brought me oysters. I detest oysters, and no one knew it better than William. He has agreed with me that he could not understand any gentleman's liking them. Between me and a certain member who smacks his lips twelve times to a dozen of them William knew I liked a sardine to be placed until we had reached the soup, and yet he gave me the oysters and the other man my sardine. Both the other member and I quickly called for brandy and the head waiter. To do William justice, he shook, but never can I forget his audacious explanation: 'Beg pardon, sir, but I was thinking of something else.'

In these words William had flung off the mask, and now I knew him for what he was.

I must not be accused of bad form for looking at William on the following evening. What prompted me to do so was not personal interest in him, but a desire to see whether I dare let him wait on me again. So, recalling that a caster was off a chair yesterday, one is entitled to make sure that it is on to-day before sitting down. If the expression is not too strong, I may say that I was taken aback by William's manner. Even when crossing the room to take my orders he let his one hand play nervously with the other. I had to repeat 'Sardine on toast' twice, and instead of answering 'Yes, sir,' as if my selection of sardine on toast was a personal gratification to him, which is the manner one expects of a waiter, he glanced at the clock, then out at the window, and, starting, asked, 'Did you say sardine on toast, sir?'

It was the height of summer, when London smells like a chemist's shop, and he who has the dinner-table at the window needs no candles to show him his knife and fork. I lay back at intervals, now watching a starved-looking woman sleep on a door-step, and again complaining of the club

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1 **chartreuse** – the liqueur made from more than 130 different plants by the monks of La Grande Chartreuse in France

2 **Derby** – one of the most famous English horse races, an annual event since 1730; the Derby is run on the first Saturday of June.

3 **cheroot** – a thin cigar open at both ends

bananas. By-and-by I saw a girl of the commonest kind, ill-clad and dirty, as all these Arabs are. Their parents should be compelled to feed and clothe them comfortably, or at least to keep them indoors, where they cannot offend our eyes. Such children are for pushing aside with one's umbrella; but this girl I noticed because she was gazing at the club windows. She had stood thus for perhaps ten minutes when I became aware that someone was leaning over me to look out at the window. I turned round. Conceive my indignation on seeing that the rude person was William.

'How dare you, William?' I said, sternly. He seemed not to hear me. Let me tell, in the measured words of one describing a past incident, what then took place. To get nearer the window he pressed heavily on my shoulder.

'William, you forget yourself!' I said, meaning – as I see now – that he had forgotten me.

I heard him gulp, but not to my reprimand. He was scanning the street. His hands chattered on my shoulder, and, pushing him from me, I saw that his mouth was agape.

'What are you looking for?' I asked.

He stared at me, and then, like one who had at last heard the echo of my question, seemed to be brought back to the club. He turned his face from me for an instant, and answered shakily:

'I beg your pardon, sir! I—I shouldn't have done it. Are the bananas too ripe, sir?'

He recommended the nuts, and awaited my verdict so anxiously while I ate one that I was about to speak graciously, when I again saw his eyes drag him to the window.

'William,' I said, my patience giving way at last, 'I dislike being waited on by a melancholy waiter.'

'Yes, sir,' he replied, trying to smile, and then broke out passionately, 'For God's sake, sir, tell me, have you seen a little girl looking in at the club windows?'

He had been a good waiter once, and his distracted visage was spoiling my dinner.

'There,' I said, pointing to the girl, and no doubt would have added that he must bring me coffee immediately, had he continued to listen. But already he was beckoning to the child. I have not the least interest in her (indeed, it had never struck me that waiters had private affairs, and I still think it a pity that they should have); but as I happened to be looking out at the window I could not avoid seeing what occurred. As soon as the girl saw William she ran into the street, regardless of vehicles, and nodded three times to him. Then she disappeared.

I have said that she was quite a common child, without attraction of any sort, and yet it was amazing the difference she made in William. He gasped relief, like one who had broken through the anxiety that checks breathing, and into his face there came a silly laugh of happiness. I had dined well, on the whole, so I said:

'I am glad to see you cheerful again, William.'

I meant that I approved his cheerfulness because it helped my digestion, but he must needs think I was sympathising with him.

'Thank you, sir,' he answered. 'Oh, sir! when she nodded and I saw it was all right I could have gone down on my knees to God.'

I was as much horrified as if he had dropped a plate on my toes. Even William, disgracefully emotional as he was at the moment, flung out his arms to recall the shameful words.

'Coffee, William!' I said, sharply.

I sipped my coffee indignantly, for it was plain to me that William had something on his mind.

'You are not vexed with me, sir?' he had the hardihood to whisper.

'It was a liberty,' I said.

'I know, sir; but I was beside myself.'

'That was a liberty also.'

He hesitated, and then blurted out:

'It is my wife, sir. She—'

I stopped him with my hand. William, whom I had favoured in so many ways, was a married man! I might have guessed as much years before had I ever reflected about waiters, for I knew vaguely that his class did this sort of thing. His confession was distasteful to me, and I said

warningly:

‘Remember where you are, William.’

‘Yes, sir; but you see, she is so delicate—’

‘Delicate! I forbid your speaking to me on unpleasant topics.’

‘Yes, sir; begging your pardon.’

It was characteristic of William to beg my pardon and withdraw his wife, like some unsuccessful dish, as if its taste would not remain in the mouth. I shall be chided for questioning him further about his wife, but, though doubtless an unusual step, it was only bad form superficially, for my motive was irreproachable. I inquired for his wife, not because I was interested in her welfare, but in the hope of allaying my irritation. So I am entitled to invite the wayfarer who has bespattered me with mud to scrape it off.

I desired to be told by William that the girl’s signals meant his wife’s recovery to health. He should have seen that such was my wish and answered accordingly. But, with the brutal inconsiderateness of his class, he said:

‘She has had a good day; but the doctor, he – the doctor is afeard she is dying.’

Already I repented my questions. William and his wife seemed in league against me, when they might so easily have chosen some other member.

‘Pooh! the doctor,’ I said.

‘Yes, sir,’ he answered.

‘Have you been married long, William?’

‘Eight years, sir. Eight years ago she was – I–I mind her when... and now the doctor says—’

The fellow gaped at me. ‘More coffee, sir?’ he asked.

‘What is her ailment?’

‘She was always one of the delicate kind, but full of spirit, and – and you see, she has had a baby lately—’

‘William!’

‘And she – I – the doctor is afeard she’s not picking up.’

‘I feel sure she will pick up.’

‘Yes, sir?’

It must have been the wine I had drunk that made me tell him:

‘I was once married, William. My wife – it was just such a case as yours.’

‘She did not get better sir?’

‘No.’

After a pause he said, ‘Thank you, sir,’ meaning for the sympathy that made me tell him that. But it must have been the wine.

‘That little girl comes here with a message from your wife?’

‘Yes; if she nods three times it means my wife is a little better.’

‘She nodded thrice to-day.’

‘But she is told to do that to relieve me, and maybe those nods don’t tell the truth.’

‘Is she your girl?’

‘No; we have none but the baby. She is a neighbour’s; she comes twice a day.’

‘It is heartless of her parents not to send her every hour.’

‘But she is six years old,’ he said, ‘and has a house and two sisters to look after in the daytime, and a dinner to cook. Gentlefolk don’t understand.’

‘I suppose you live in some low part, William.’

‘Off Drury Lane,’ he answered, flushing; ‘but – but it isn’t low. You see, we were never used to anything better, and I mind when I let her see the house before we were married, she – she a sort of cried because she was so proud of it. That was eight years ago, and now – she’s afeard she’ll die when I’m away at my work.’

‘Did she tell you that?’

‘Never; she always says she is feeling a little stronger.’

‘Then how can you know she is afraid of that?’

‘I don’t know how I know, sir; but when I am leaving the house in the morning I look at her from the door, and she looks at me, and then I—I know.’

‘A green chartreuse, William!’

I tried to forget William’s vulgar story in billiards, but he had spoiled my game. My opponent, to whom I can give twenty, ran out when I was sixty-seven, and I put aside my cue pettishly. That in itself was bad form, but what would they have thought had they known that a waiter’s impertinence caused it! I grew angrier with William as the night wore on, and next day I punished him by giving my orders through another waiter.

As I had my window-seat, I could not but see that the girl was late again. Somehow I dawdled over my coffee. I had an evening paper before me, but there was so little in it that my eyes found more of interest in the street. It did not matter to me whether William’s wife died, but when that girl had promised to come, why did she not come? These lower classes only give their word to break it. The coffee was undrinkable.

At last I saw her. William was at another window, pretending to do something with the curtains. I stood up, pressing closer to the window. The coffee had been so bad that I felt shaky. She nodded three times, and smiled.

‘She is a little better,’ William whispered to me, almost gaily.

‘Whom are you speaking of?’ I asked, coldly, and immediately retired to the billiard-room, where I played a capital game. The coffee was much better there than in the dining-room.

Several days passed, and I took care to show William that I had forgotten his maunderings. I chanced to see the little girl (though I never looked for her) every evening, and she always nodded three times, save once, when she shook her head, and then William’s face grew white as a napkin. I remember this incident because that night I could not get into a pocket. So badly did I play that the thought of it kept me awake in bed, and that, again, made me wonder how William’s wife was. Next day I went to the club early (which was not my custom) to see the new books. Being in the club at any rate, I looked into the dining-room to ask William if I had left my gloves there, and the sight of him reminded me of his wife; so I asked for her. He shook his head mournfully, and I went off in a rage.

So accustomed am I to the club that when I dine elsewhere I feel uncomfortable next morning, as if I had missed a dinner. William knew this; yet here he was, hounding me out of the club! That evening I dined (as the saying is) at a restaurant, where no sauce was served with the asparagus. Furthermore, as if that were not triumph enough for William, his doleful face came between me and every dish, and I seemed to see his wife dying to annoy me.

I dined next day at the club for self-preservation, taking, however, a table in the middle of the room, and engaging a waiter who had once nearly poisoned me by not interfering when I put two lumps of sugar into my coffee instead of one, which is my allowance. But no William came to me to acknowledge his humiliation, and by-and-by I became aware that he was not in the room. Suddenly the thought struck me that his wife must be dead, and I – it was the worst cooked and the worst served dinner I ever had in the club.

I tried the smoking-room. Usually the talk there is entertaining, but on that occasion it was so frivolous that I did not remain five minutes. In the card-room a member told me excitedly that a policeman had spoken rudely to him; and my strange comment was:

‘After all, it is a small matter.’

In the library, where I had not been for years, I found two members asleep, and, to my surprise, William on a ladder dusting books.

‘You have not heard, sir?’ he said, in answer to my raised eyebrows. Descending the ladder, he whispered tragically: ‘It was last evening, sir. I—I lost my head, and I – swore at a member.’

I stepped back from William, and glanced apprehensively at the two members. They still slept.

‘I hardly knew,’ William went on, ‘what I was doing all day yesterday, for I had left my wife so weakly that—’

I stamped my foot.

'I beg your pardon for speaking of her,' he had the grace to say, 'but I couldn't help slipping up to the window often yesterday to look for Jenny, and when she did come, and I saw she was crying, it – it sort of confused me, and I didn't know right, sir, what I was doing. I hit against a member, Mr. Myddleton Finch, and he – he jumped and swore at me. Well, sir, I had just touched him after all, and I was so miserable, it a kind of stung me to be treated like – like that, and me a man as well as him; and I lost my senses, and – and I swore back.'

William's shamed head sank on his chest, but I even let pass his insolence in likening himself to a member of the club, so afraid was I of the sleepers waking and detecting me in talk with a waiter.

'For the love of God,' William cried, with coarse emotion, 'don't let them dismiss me!'

'Speak lower!' I said. 'Who sent you here?'

'I was turned out of the dining-room at once, and told to attend to the library until they had decided what to do with me. Oh, sir, I'll lose my place!'

He was blubbering, as if a change of waiters was a matter of importance.

'This is very bad, William,' I said. 'I fear I can do nothing for you.'

'Have mercy on a distracted man!' he entreated. 'I'll go on my knees to Mr. Myddleton Finch.'

How could I but despise a fellow who would be thus abject for a pound a week?

'I dare not tell her,' he continued, 'that I have lost my place. She would just fall back and die.'

'I forbade your speaking of your wife,' I said, sharply, 'unless you can speak pleasantly of her.'

'But she may be worse now, sir, and I cannot even see Jenny from here. The library windows look to the back.'

'If she dies,' I said, 'it will be a warning to you to marry a stronger woman next time.'

Now everyone knows that there is little real affection among the lower orders. As soon as they have lost one mate they take another. Yet William, forgetting our relative positions, drew himself up and raised his fist, and if I had not stepped back I swear he would have struck me.

The highly improper words William used I will omit, out of consideration for him. Even while he was apologising for them I retired to the smoking-room, where I found the cigarettes so badly rolled that they would not keep alight. After a little I remembered that I wanted to see Myddleton Finch about an improved saddle of which a friend of his has the patent. He was in the newsroom, and, having questioned him about the saddle, I said:

'By the way, what is this story about your swearing at one of the waiters?'

'You mean about his swearing at me,' Myddleton Finch replied, reddening.

'I am glad that was it,' I said; 'for I could not believe you guilty of such bad form.'

'If I did swear–' he was beginning, but I went on:

'The version which has reached me was that you swore at him, and he repeated the word. I heard he was to be dismissed and you reprimanded.'

'Who told you that?' asked Myddleton Finch, who is a timid man.

'I forget; it is club talk,' I replied, lightly. 'But of course the committee will take your word. The waiter, whichever one he is, richly deserves his dismissal for insulting you without provocation.'

Then our talk returned to the saddle, but Myddleton Finch was abstracted, and presently he said:

'Do you know, I fancy I was wrong in thinking that the waiter swore at me, and I'll withdraw my charge to-morrow.'

Myddleton Finch then left me, and, sitting alone, I realised that I had been doing William a service. To some slight extent I may have intentionally helped him to retain his place in the club, and I now see the reason, which was that he alone knows precisely to what extent I like my claret<sup>1</sup> heated.

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<sup>1</sup> **claret** – famous Bordeaux wine made since Roman times in the region around the city of Bordeaux in France; the word *claret* is not used in modern French.

For a mere second I remembered William's remark that he should not be able to see the girl Jenny from the library windows. Then this recollection drove from my head that I had only dined in the sense that my dinner-bill was paid. Returning to the dining-room, I happened to take my chair at the window, and while I was eating a deviled kidney I saw in the street the girl whose nods had such an absurd effect on William.

The children of the poor are as thoughtless as their parents, and this Jenny did not sign to the windows in the hope that William might see her, though she could not see him. Her face, which was disgracefully dirty, bore doubt and dismay on it, but whether she brought good news it would not tell. Somehow I had expected her to signal when she saw me, and, though her message could not interest me, I was in the mood in which one is irritated at that not taking place which he is awaiting. Ultimately she seemed to be making up her mind to go away.

A boy was passing with the evening papers, and I hurried out to get one, rather thoughtlessly, for we have all the papers in the club. Unfortunately, I misunderstood the direction the boy had taken; but round the first corner (out of sight of the club windows) I saw the girl Jenny, and so asked her how William's wife was.

'Did he send you to me?' she replied, impertinently taking me for a waiter. 'My!' she added, after a second scrutiny, 'I b'lieve you're one of them. His missis is a bit better, and I was to tell him as she took all the tapiocar.'

'How could you tell him?' I asked.

'I was to do like this,' she replied, and went through the supping of something out of a plate in dumb-show.

'That would not show she ate all the tapioca,' I said.

'But I was to end like this,' she answered, licking an imaginary plate with her tongue.

I gave her a shilling (to get rid of her), and returned to the club disgusted.

Later in the evening I had to go to the club library for a book, and while William was looking in vain for it (I had forgotten the title) I said to him:

'By the way, William, Mr. Myddleton Finch is to tell the committee that he was mistaken in the charge he brought against you, so you will doubtless be restored to the dining-room to-morrow.'

The two members were still in their chairs, probably sleeping lightly; yet he had the effrontery to thank me.

'Don't thank me,' I said, blushing at the imputation. 'Remember your place, William!'

'But Mr. Myddleton Finch knew I swore,' he insisted.

'A gentleman,' I replied, stiffly, 'cannot remember for twenty-four hours what a waiter has said to him.'

'No, sir; but—'

To stop him I had to say: 'And, ah, William, your wife is a little better. She has eaten the tapioca — all of it.'

'How can you know, sir?'

'By an accident.'

'Jenny signed to the window?'

'No.'

'Then you saw her, and went out, and—'

'Nonsense!'

'Oh, sir, to do that for me! May God bl—'

'William!'

'Forgive me, sir; but — when I tell my missis, she will say it was thought of your own wife as made you do it.'

He wrung my hand. I dared not withdraw it, lest we should waken the sleepers.

William returned to the dining-room, and I had to show him that if he did not cease looking gratefully at me I must change my waiter. I also ordered him to stop telling me nightly how his wife was, but I continued to know, as I could not help seeing the girl Jenny from the window. Twice in a week I learned from this objectionable child that the ailing woman had again eaten all the tapioca.

Then I became suspicious of William. I will tell why.

It began with a remark of Captain Upjohn's. We had been speaking of the inconvenience of not being able to get a hot dish served after 1 A.M., and he said:

'It is because these lazy waiters would strike. If the beggars had a love of their work they would not rush away from the club the moment one o'clock strikes. That glum fellow who often waits on you takes to his heels the moment he is clear of the club steps. He ran into me the other night at the top of the street, and was off without apologising.'

'You mean the foot of the street, Upjohn,' I said; for such is the way to Drury Lane.

'No; I mean the top. The man was running west.'

'East.'

'West.'

I smiled, which so annoyed him that he bet me two to one in sovereigns. The bet could have been decided most quickly by asking William a question, but I thought, foolishly doubtless, that it might hurt his feelings, so I watched him leave the club. The possibility of Upjohn's winning the bet had seemed remote to me. Conceive my surprise, therefore when William went westward.

Amazed, I pursued him along two streets without realising that I was doing so. Then curiosity put me into a hansom<sup>1</sup>. We followed William, and it proved to be a three-shilling fare, for, running when he was in breath and walking when he was out of it, he took me to West Kensington<sup>2</sup>.

I discharged my cab, and from across the street watched William's incomprehensible behaviour. He had stopped at a dingy row of workmen's houses, and knocked at the darkened window of one of them. Presently a light showed. So far as I could see, someone pulled up the blind and for ten minutes talked to William. I was uncertain whether they talked, for the window was not opened, and I felt that, had William spoken through the glass loud enough to be heard inside, I must have heard him too. Yet he nodded and beckoned. I was still bewildered when, by setting off the way he had come, he gave me the opportunity of going home.

Knowing from the talk of the club what the lower orders are, could I doubt that this was some discreditable love-affair of William's? His solicitude for his wife had been mere pretence; so far as it was genuine, it meant that he feared she might recover. He probably told her that he was detained nightly in the club till three.

I was miserable next day, and blamed the deviled kidneys for it. Whether William was unfaithful to his wife was nothing to me, but I had two plain reasons for insisting on his going straight home from his club: the one that, as he had made me lose a bet, I must punish him; the other that he could wait upon me better if he went to bed betimes.

Yet I did not question him. There was something in his face that – Well, I seemed to see his dying wife in it.

I was so out of sorts that I could eat no dinner. I left the club. Happening to stand for some time at the foot of the street, I chanced to see the girl Jenny coming, and – no; let me tell the truth, though the whole club reads: I was waiting for her.

'How is William's wife to-day?' I asked.

'She told me to nod three times,' the little slattern replied; 'but she looked like nothing but a dead one till she got the brandy.'

'Hush, child!' I said, shocked. 'You don't know how the dead look.'

'Bless yer,' she answered, 'don't I just! Why, I've helped to lay 'em out. I'm going on seven.'

'Is William good to his wife?'

'Course he is. Ain't she his missis?'

'Why should that make him good to her?' I asked, cynically, out of my knowledge of the poor. But the girl, precocious in many ways, had never had any opportunities of studying the lower classes in the newspapers, fiction, and club talk. She shut one eye, and, looking up wonderingly, said:

'Ain't you green – just!'

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1 **hansom** – a low two-wheeled open carriage with the elevated driver's seat

2 **West Kensington** – a fashionable district in central London



‘When does William reach home at night?’

‘‘Tain’t night; it’s morning. When I wakes up at half dark and half light, and hears a door shutting, I know as it’s either father going off to his work or Mr. Hicking come home from his.’

‘Who is Mr. Hicking?’

‘Him as we’ve been speaking on – William. We calls him mister, ’cause he’s a toff. Father’s just doing jobs in Covent Gardens, but Mr. Hicking, he’s a waiter, and a clean shirt every day. The old woman would like father to be a waiter, but he hain’t got the ’ristocratic look.’

‘What old woman?’

‘Go ’long! that’s my mother. Is it true there’s a waiter in the club just for to open the door?’

‘Yes; but–’

‘And another just for to lick the stamps? My!’

‘William leaves the club at one o’clock?’ I said, interrogatively.

She nodded. ‘My mother,’ she said, ‘is one to talk, and she says Mr. Hicking as he should get away at twelve, ’cause his missis needs him more’n the gentlemen need him. The old woman do talk.’

‘And what does William answer to that?’

‘He says as the gentlemen can’t be kept waiting for their cheese.’

‘But William does not go straight home when he leaves the club?’

‘That’s the kid.’

‘Kid!’ I echoed, scarcely understanding, for, knowing how little the poor love their children, I had asked William no questions about the baby.

‘Didn’t you know his missis had a kid?’

‘Yes; but that is no excuse for William’s staying away from his sick wife,’ I answered, sharply. A baby in such a home as William’s, I reflected, must be trying; but still – besides, his class can sleep through any din.

‘The kid ain’t in our court,’ the girl explained. ‘He’s in W.<sup>1</sup>, he is, and I’ve never been out of W.C.; leastwise, not as I knows of.’

‘This is W. I suppose you mean that the child is at West Kensington? Well, no doubt it was better for William’s wife to get rid of the child–’

‘Better!’ interposed the girl. ‘‘Tain’t better for her not to have the kid. Ain’t her not having him what she’s always thinking on when she looks like a dead one?’

‘How could you know that?’

‘‘Cause,’ answered the girl, illustrating her words with a gesture, ‘I watches her, and I sees her arms going this way, just like as she wanted to hug her kid.’

‘Possibly you are right,’ I said, frowning; ‘but William had put the child out to nurse because it disturbed his night’s rest. A man who has his work to do–’

‘You are green!’

‘Then why have the mother and child been separated?’

‘Along of that there measles. Near all the young ’uns in our court has ’em bad.’

‘Have you had them?’

‘I said the young ’uns.’

‘And William sent the baby to West Kensington to escape infection?’

‘Took him, he did.’

‘Against his wife’s wishes?’

‘Na-o!’

‘You said she was dying for want of the child?’

‘Wouldn’t she rayther die than have the kid die?’

‘Don’t speak so heartlessly, child. Why does William not go straight home from the club? Does he go to West Kensington to see it?’

‘‘Tain’t a hit, it’s an ’e. Course he do.’

‘Then he should not. His wife has the first claim on him.’

'Ain't you green! It's his missis as wants him to go. Do you think she could sleep till she knowed how the kid was?'

'But he does not go into the house at West Kensington?'

'Is he soft? Course he don't go in, fear of taking the infection to the kid. They just holds the kid up at the window to him, so as he can have a good look. Then he comes home and tells his missis. He sits foot of the bed and tells.'

'And that takes place every night? He can't have much to tell.'

'He has just.'

'He can only say whether the child is well or ill.'

'My! He tells what a difference there is in the kid since he seed him last.'

'There can be no difference!'

'Go 'long! Ain't a kid always growing? Haven't Mr. Hicking to tell how the hair is getting darker, and heaps of things beside?'

'Such as what?'

'Like whether he larfed, and if he has her nose, and how as he knowed him. He tells her them things more 'n once.'

'And all this time he is sitting at the foot of the bed?'

''Cept when he holds her hand.'

'But when does he get to bed himself?'

'He don't get much. He tells her as he has a sleep at the club.'

'He cannot say that.'

'Hain't I heard him? But he do go to his bed a bit, and then they both lies quiet, her pretending she is sleeping so as he can sleep, and him 'feard to sleep case he shouldn't wake up to give her the bottle stuff.'

'What does the doctor say about her?'

'He's a good one, the doctor. Sometimes he says she would get better if she could see the kid through the window.'

'Nonsense!'

'And if she was took to the country.'

'Then why does not William take her?'

'My! you are green! And if she drank port wines.'

'Doesn't she?'

'No; but William, he tells her about the gentlemen drinking them.'

On the tenth day after my conversation with this unattractive child I was in my brougham<sup>1</sup>, with the windows up, and I sat back, a paper before my face lest anyone should look in. Naturally, I was afraid of being seen in company of William's wife and Jenny, for men about town are uncharitable, and, despite the explanation I had ready, might have charged me with pitying William. As a matter of fact, William was sending his wife into Surrey to stay with an old nurse of mine, and I was driving her down because my horses needed an outing. Besides, I was going that way at any rate.

I had arranged that the girl Jenny, who was wearing an outrageous bonnet, should accompany us, because, knowing the greed of her class, I feared she might blackmail me at the club.

William joined us in the suburbs, bringing the baby with him, as I had foreseen they would all be occupied with it, and to save me the trouble of conversing with them. Mrs. Hicking I found too pale and fragile for a workingman's wife, and I formed a mean opinion of her intelligence from her pride in the baby, which was a very ordinary one. She created quite a vulgar scene when it was brought to her, though she had given me her word not to do so, what irritated me even more than her tears being her ill-bred apology that she 'had been 'feared baby wouldn't know her again.' I would have told her they didn't know any one for years had I not been afraid of the girl Jenny, who

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<sup>1</sup> **brougham** – a four-wheeled one-horse carriage designed in 1838 by Henry Brougham, a former lord chancellor of England

dandled the infant on her knees and talked to it as if it understood. She kept me on tenter-hooks<sup>1</sup> by asking it offensive questions, such as, ‘Oo know who give me that bonnet?’ and answering them herself, ‘It was the pretty gentleman there;’ and several times I had to affect sleep because she announced, ‘Kiddy wants to kiss the pretty gentleman.’

Irksome as all this necessarily was to a man of taste, I suffered even more when we reached our destination. As we drove through the village the girl Jenny uttered shrieks of delight at the sight of flowers growing up the cottage walls, and declared they were ‘just like a music-’all without the drink license.’ As my horses required a rest, I was forced to abandon my intention of dropping these persons at their lodgings and returning to town at once, and I could not go to the inn lest I should meet inquisitive acquaintances. Disagreeable circumstances, therefore, compelled me to take tea with a waiter’s family – close to a window too, through which I could see the girl Jenny talking excitedly to the villagers, and telling them, I felt certain, that I had been good to William. I had a desire to go out and put myself right with those people.

William’s long connection with the club should have given him some manners, but apparently his class cannot take them on, for, though he knew I regarded his thanks as an insult, he looked them when he was not speaking them, and hardly had he sat down, by my orders, than he remembered that I was a member of the club, and jumped up. Nothing is in worse form than whispering, yet again and again, when he thought I was not listening, he whispered to Mrs. Hicking, ‘You don’t feel faint?’ or ‘How are you now?’ He was also in extravagant glee because she ate two cakes (it takes so little to put these people in good spirits), and when she said she felt like another being already the fellow’s face charged me with the change. I could not but conclude, from the way Mrs. Hicking let the baby pound her, that she was stronger than she had pretended.

I remained longer than was necessary, because I had something to say to William which I knew he would misunderstand, and so I put off saying it. But when he announced that it was time for him to return to London, – at which his wife suddenly paled, so that he had to sign to her not to break down, – I delivered the message.

‘William,’ I said, ‘the head waiter asked me to say that you could take a fortnight’s holiday just now. Your wages will be paid as usual.’

Confound them! William had me by the hand, and his wife was in tears before I could reach the door.

‘Is it your doing again, sir?’ William cried.

‘William!’ I said, fiercely.

‘We owe everything to you,’ he insisted. ‘The port wine–’

‘Because I had no room for it in my cellar.’

‘The money for the nurse in London–’

‘Because I objected to being waited on by a man who got no sleep.’

‘These lodgings–’

‘Because I wanted to do something for my old nurse.’

‘And now, sir, a fortnight’s holiday!’

‘Good-bye, William!’ I said, in a fury.

But before I could get away Mrs. Hicking signed to William to leave the room, and then she kissed my hand. She said something to me. It was about my wife. Somehow I – What business had William to tell her about my wife?

They are all back in Drury Lane now, and William tells me that his wife sings at her work just as she did eight years ago. I have no interest in this, and try to check his talk of it; but such people have no sense of propriety, and he even speaks of the girl Jenny, who sent me lately a gaudy pair of worsted gloves worked by her own hand. The meanest advantage they took of my weakness, however, was in calling their baby after me. I have an uncomfortable suspicion, too, that William has given the other waiters his version of the affair; but I feel safe so long as it does not reach the committee.

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<sup>1</sup> I kept me on tenter-hooks – *idiom* kept me in a state of anxiety

# **The Solid Gold Reef Company, Limited (Walter Besant)**

## **Act I**

'You dear old boy,' said the girl, 'I am sure I wish it could be, with all my heart, if I have any heart.'

'I don't believe you have,' replied the boy gloomily.

'Well, but, Reg, consider; you've got no money.'

'I've got five thousand pounds. If a man can't make his way upon that he must be a poor stick.'

'You would go abroad with it and dig, and take your wife with you – to wash and cook.'

'We would do something with the money here. You should stay in London, Rosie.'

'Yes. In a suburban villa, at Shepherd's Bush, perhaps. No, Reg, when I marry, if ever I do – I am in no hurry – I will step out of this room into one exactly like it.' The room was a splendid drawing-room in Palace Gardens, splendidly furnished. 'I shall have my footmen and my carriage, and I shall—'

'Rosie, give me the right to earn all these things for you!' the young man cried impetuously.

'You can only earn them for me by the time you have one foot in the grave. Hadn't I better in the meantime marry some old gentleman with his one foot in the grave, so as to be ready for you against the time you come home? In two or three years the other foot, I dare say, would slide into the grave as well.'

'You laugh at my trouble. You feel nothing.'

'If the pater would part, but he won't; he says he wants all his money for himself, and that I've got to marry well. Besides, Reg' – here her face clouded and she lowered her voice – 'there are times when he looks anxious. We didn't always live in Palace Gardens. Suppose we should lose it all as quickly as we got it. Oh!' she shivered and trembled. 'No, I will never, never marry a poor man. Get rich, my dear boy, and you may aspire even to the valuable possession of this heartless hand.'

She held it out. He took it, pressed it, stooped and kissed her. Then he dropped her hand and walked quickly out of the room.

'Poor Reggie!' she murmured. 'I wish – I wish – but what is the use of wishing?'

## **Act II**

Two men – one young, the other about fifty – sat in the veranda of a small bungalow. It was after breakfast. They lay back in long bamboo chairs, each with a cigar. It looked as if they were resting. In reality they were talking business, and that very seriously.

'Yes, sir,' said the elder man, with something of an American accent, 'I have somehow taken a fancy to this place. The situation is healthy.'

'Well, I don't know; I've had more than one touch of fever here.'

'The climate is lovely—'

'Except in the rains.'

'The soil is fertile—'

'I've dropped five thousand in it, and they haven't come up again yet.'

'They will. I have been round the estate, and I see money in it. Well, sir, here's my offer: five thousand down, hard cash, as soon as the papers are signed.'

Reginald sat up. He was on the point of accepting the proposal, when a pony rode up to the house, and the rider, a native groom, jumped off and gave him a note. He opened it and read. It was from his nearest neighbour, two or three miles away:

Don't sell that man your estate. Gold has been found. The whole country is full of gold. Hold on. He's an assayer. If he offers to buy, be quite sure that he has found gold on your land.

F.G.

He put the note into his pocket, gave a verbal message to the boy, and turned to his guest, without betraying the least astonishment or emotion.

'I beg your pardon. The note was from Bellamy, my next neighbour. Well? You were saying—'

'Only that I have taken a fancy – perhaps a foolish fancy – to this place of yours, and I'll give you, if you like, all that you have spent upon it.'

'Well,' he replied reflectively, but with a little twinkle in his eye, 'that seems handsome. But the place isn't really worth the half that I spent upon it. Anybody would tell you that. Come, let us be honest, whatever we are. I'll tell you a better way. We will put the matter into the hands of Bellamy. He knows what a coffee plantation is worth. He shall name a price, and if we can agree upon that, we will make a deal of it.'

The other man changed colour. He wanted to settle the thing at once as between gentlemen. What need of third parties? But Reginald stood firm, and he presently rode away, quite sure that in a day or two this planter, too, would have heard the news.

A month later, the young coffee-planter stood on the deck of a steamer homeward bound. In his pocket-book was a plan of his auriferous estate; in a bag hanging round his neck was a small collection of yellow nuggets; in his boxes was a chosen assortment of quartz.

### Act III

'Well, sir,' said the financier, 'you've brought this thing to me. You want my advice. Well, my advice is, don't fool away the only good thing that will ever happen to you. Luck such as this doesn't come more than once in a lifetime.'

'I have been offered ten thousand pounds for my estate.'

'Oh! Have you! Ten thousand? That was very liberal – very liberal indeed. Ten thousand for a gold reef!'

'But I thought as an old friend of my father you would, perhaps—'

'Young man, don't fool it away. He's waiting for you, I suppose, round the corner, with a bottle of fizz, ready to close.'

'He is.'

'Well, go and drink his champagne. Always get whatever you can. And then tell him that you'll see him—'

'I certainly will, sir, if you advise it. And then?'

'And then – leave it to me. And, young man, I think I heard, a year or two ago, something about you and my girl Rosie.'

'There was something, sir. Not enough to trouble you about it.'

'She told me. Rosie tells me all her love affairs.'

'Is she – is she unmarried?'

'Oh, yes! and for the moment I believe she is free. She has had one or two engagements, but, somehow, they have come to nothing. There was the French count, but that was knocked on the head very early in consequence of things discovered. And there was the Boom in Guano, but he fortunately smashed, much to Rosie's joy, because she never liked him. The last was Lord Evergreen. He was a nice old chap when you could understand what he said, and Rosie would have liked the title very much, though his grandchildren opposed the thing. Well, sir, I suppose you couldn't understand the trouble we took to keep that old man alive for his own wedding. Science did all it could, but 'twas of no use—' The financier sighed. 'The ways of Providence are inscrutable. He died, sir, the day before.'

'That was very sad.'

'A dashing of the cup from the lip, sir. My daughter would have been a countess. Well, young

gentleman, about this estate of yours. I think I see a way – I think, I am not yet sure – that I do see a way. Go now. See this liberal gentleman, and drink his champagne. And come here in a week. Then, if I still see my way, you shall understand what it means to hold the position in the City which is mine.’

‘And – and – may I call upon Rosie?’

‘Not till this day week – not till I have made my way plain.’

## **Act IV**

‘And so it means this. Oh, Rosie, you look lovelier than ever, and I’m as happy as a king. It means this. Your father is the greatest genius in the world. He buys my property for sixty thousand pounds – sixty thousand. That’s over two thousand a year for me, and he makes a company out of it with a hundred and fifty thousand capital. He says that, taking ten thousand out of it for expenses, there will be a profit of eighty thousand. And all that he gives to you – eighty thousand, that’s three thousand a year for you; and sixty thousand, that’s two more, my dearest Rosie. You remember what you said, that when you married you should step out of one room like this into another just as good?’

‘Oh, Reggie,’ she sank upon his bosom – ‘you know I never could love anybody but you. It’s true I was engaged to old Lord Evergreen, but that was only because he had one foot – you know – and when the other foot went in too, just a day too soon, I actually laughed. So the pater is going to make a company of it, is he? Well, I hope he won’t put any of his own money into it, I’m sure, because of late all the companies have turned out so badly.’

‘But, my child, the place is full of gold.’

‘Then why did he turn it into a company, my dear boy? And why didn’t he make you stick to it? But you know nothing of the City. Now, let us sit down and talk about what we shall do – don’t, you ridiculous boy!’

## **Act V**

Another house just like the first. The bride stepped out of one palace into another. With their five or six thousand a year, the young couple could just manage to make both ends meet. The husband was devoted; the wife had everything that she could wish. Who could be happier than this pair in a nest so luxurious, their life so padded, their days so full of sunshine? It was a year after marriage. The wife, contrary to her usual custom, was the first at breakfast. A few letters were waiting for her – chiefly invitations. She opened and read them. Among them lay one addressed to her husband. Not looking at the address, she opened and read that as well:

Dear Reginald:

I venture to address you as an old friend of your own and school-fellow of your mother’s. I am a widow with four children. My husband was the vicar of your old parish – you remember him and me. I was left with a little income of about two hundred a year. Twelve months ago I was persuaded in order to double my income – a thing which seemed certain from the prospectus – to invest everything in a new and rich gold mine. Everything. And the mine has never paid anything. The company – it is called the Solid Gold Reef Company, is in liquidation because, though there is really the gold there, it costs too much to get it. I have no relatives anywhere to help me. Unless I can get assistance my children and I must go at once – tomorrow – into the workhouse. Yes, we are paupers. I am ruined by the cruel lies of that prospectus, and the wickedness which deluded me, and I know not how many others, out of my money. I have been foolish, and am punished; but those people, who will punish them? Help me, if you can, my dear Reginald. Oh! For... *GOD*’ S... sake, help my children and me. Help your mother’s friend, your own old friend.

‘This,’ said Rosie meditatively, ‘is exactly the kind of thing to make Reggie uncomfortable. Why, it might make him unhappy all day. Better burn it.’ She dropped the letter into the fire. ‘He’s an impulsive, emotional nature, and he doesn’t understand the City. If people are so foolish – What a lot of fibs the poor old pater does tell, to be sure! He’s a regular novelist – Oh! here you are, you lazy boy!’

‘Kiss me, Rosie.’ He looked as handsome as Apollo, and as cheerful. ‘I wish all the world were as happy as you and me. Heigho! some poor devils, I’m afraid—’

‘Tea or coffee, Reg?’

## **An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge (Ambrose Bierce)**

### **Chapter I**

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama<sup>1</sup>, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man’s hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the ties supporting the rails of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners – two private soldiers of the Federal army<sup>2</sup>, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as ‘support,’ that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest – a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the center of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground – a gentle slope topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loopholed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway up the slope between the bridge and fort were the spectators – a single company of infantry in line, at ‘parade rest,’ the butts of their rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the center of the bridge, not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates, but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his habit, which was that of a planter. His features were good – a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well fitting frock coat. He wore a moustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded.

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<sup>1</sup> **Alabama** – the US state in the south (131 334 sq. km); the first Europeans who came there were the Spanish, the first settlement was founded by the French in 1701; after the war of 1763, the territory was ceded to England.

<sup>2</sup> **the Federal army** – the army of the federal government in the American Civil War of 1861–1865 with 11 Southern states

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgement as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his 'unsteadfast footing,' then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift – all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or nearby – it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each new stroke with impatience and – he knew not why – apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. 'If I could free my hands,' he thought, 'I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance.'

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

## Chapter II

Peyton Fahrquhar was a well to do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner and like other slave owners a politician, he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause<sup>1</sup>. Circumstances of an imperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with that gallant army which had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth<sup>2</sup>, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in wartime. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in the aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Fahrquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Fahrquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was fetching the water her

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<sup>1</sup> **the Southern cause** – the southern states seceded from the Union in 1860–1861; the Northern and the Southern states had different economies, different attitude to slavery, trade and the very idea of states' rights.

<sup>2</sup> **Corinth** – a city in northeastern Mississippi; the bloody battle took place to the north of the city during the American Civil War.



husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

‘The Yanks<sup>3</sup> are repairing the railroads,’ said the man, ‘and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order and built a stockade on the north bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels, or trains will be summarily hanged. I saw the order.’

‘How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?’ Fahrquhar asked.

‘About thirty miles.’

‘Is there no force on this side of the creek?’

‘Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge.’

‘Suppose a man – a civilian and student of hanging – should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel,’ said Fahrquhar, smiling, ‘what could he accomplish?’

The soldier reflected. ‘I was there a month ago,’ he replied. ‘I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tinder.’

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal.

### Chapter III

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened – ages later, it seemed to him – by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fiber of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well defined lines of ramification and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness – of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud splash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river! – the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the darkness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface – knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. ‘To be hanged and drowned,’ he thought, ‘that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair.’

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrist apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort! – what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavor! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water snake. ‘Put it back, put it

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3 **the Yanks** – Yankees, a nickname of the citizens of New England states; the word was used by Southerners for Northerners and Federal soldiers during the American Civil War.

back!’ He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang that he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire, his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf – he saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon flies’ wings, the strokes of the water spiders’ legs, like oars which had lifted their boat – all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him. The captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a gray eye and remembered having read that gray eyes were keenest, and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter-swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking at the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning’s work. How coldly and pitilessly – with what an even, calm intonation, presaging, and enforcing tranquility in the men – with what accurately measured interval fell those cruel words:

‘Company!.. Attention!.. Shoulder arms!.. Ready!.. Aim!.. Fire!’

Farquhar dived – dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara<sup>1</sup>, yet he heard the dull thunder of the volley and, rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther downstream – nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning:

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<sup>1</sup> **Niagara** – Niagara Falls on the Niagara River in northeastern North America, on the USA-Canadian border

‘The officer,’ he reasoned, ‘will not make that martinet’s error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!’

An appalling splash within two yards of him was followed by a loud, rushing sound, DIMINUENDO, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its depths! A rising sheet of water curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken an hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

‘They will not do that again,’ he thought; ‘the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me – the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. That is a good gun.’

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round – spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men, all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color – that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration that made him giddy and sick. In few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream – the southern bank – and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of Aeolian harps<sup>1</sup>. He had no wish to perfect his escape – he was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

A whiz and a rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he traveled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman’s road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famished. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which – once, twice, and again – he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain and lifting his hand to it found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue – he could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he had fallen asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene – perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium<sup>2</sup>. He stands at the gate of his own home.

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<sup>1</sup> **Aeolian harps** – *Aeolian harp* is a musical instrument in which sound is produced by the movement of the wind over the strings; in Greek mythology, Aeolus is the god of the winds.

<sup>2</sup> **delirium** – mental state marked by confused thinking, hallucinations, etc. as a result of the intoxication of the brain caused by fever or some other physical disorder

All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forwards with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him with a sound like the shock of a cannon – then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

## **An Heiress from Redhorse (Ambrose Bierce)**

**Coronado, June 20th**

I find myself more and more interested in him. It is not, I am sure, his – do you know any noun corresponding to the adjective ‘handsome’? One does not like to say ‘beauty’ when speaking of a man. He is handsome enough, heaven knows; I should not even care to trust you with him – faithful of all possible wives that you are – when he looks his best, as he always does. Nor do I think the fascination of his manner has much to do with it. You recollect that the charm of art inheres in that which is indefinable, and to you and me, my dear Irene, I fancy there is rather less of that in the branch of art under consideration than to girls in their first season. I fancy I know how my fine gentleman produces many of his effects, and could, perhaps, give him a pointer on heightening them. Nevertheless, his manner is something truly delightful. I suppose what interests me chiefly is the man’s brains. His conversation is the best I have ever heard, and altogether unlike anyone’s else. He seems to know everything, as, indeed, he ought, for he has been everywhere, read everything, seen all there is to see – sometimes I think rather more than is good for him – and had acquaintance with the QUEEREST people. And then his voice – Irene, when I hear it I actually feel as if I ought to have PAID AT THE DOOR, though, of course, it is my own door.

**July 3d**

I fear my remarks about Dr. Barritz must have been, being thoughtless, very silly, or you would not have written of him with such levity, not to say disrespect. Believe me, dearest, he has more dignity and seriousness (of the kind, I mean, which is not inconsistent with a manner sometimes playful and always charming) than any of the men that you and I ever met. And young Raynor – you knew Raynor at Monterey<sup>1</sup> – tells me that the men all like him, and that he is treated with something like deference everywhere. There is a mystery, too – something about his connection with the Blavatsky people<sup>2</sup> in Northern India. Raynor either would not or could not tell me the particulars. I infer that Dr. Barritz is thought – don’t you dare to laugh at me – a magician! Could anything be finer than that? An ordinary mystery is not, of course, as good as a scandal, but when it relates to dark and dreadful practices – to the exercise of unearthly powers – could anything be more piquant? It explains, too, the singular influence the man has upon me. It is the indefinable in his art – black art. Seriously, dear, I quite tremble when he looks me full in the eyes with those unfathomable orbs of his, which I have already vainly attempted to describe to you. How dreadful if we have the power to make one fall in love! Do you know if the Blavatsky crowd have that power – outside of Sepoy?<sup>3</sup>

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1 **Monterey** – a city in California, 135 km south of San Francisco; the first Europeans in the region were the Spanish in 1542.

2 **the Blavatsky people** – followers of Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), an occultist and spiritualist; she founded the Theosophical Society to promote theosophy (divine wisdom), a philosophical-religious system.

3 **Sepoy** – 1) a place in India; 2) an Indian soldier in the service of the British India Company.

## July 1

The strangest thing! Last evening while Auntie was attending one of the hotel hops (I hate them) Dr. Barritz called. It was scandalously late – I actually believe he had talked with Auntie in the ballroom, and learned from her that I was alone. I had been all the evening contriving how to worm out of him the truth about his connection with the Thugs<sup>1</sup> in Sepoy, and all of that black business, but the moment he fixed his eyes on me (for I admitted him, I'm ashamed to say) I was helpless, I trembled, I blushed, I – O Irene, Irene, I love the man beyond expression, and you know how it is yourself!

Fancy! I, an ugly duckling from Redhorse – daughter (they say) of old Calamity Jim – certainly his heiress, with no living relation but an absurd old aunt, who spoils me a thousand and fifty ways – absolutely destitute of everything but a million dollars and a hope in Paris – I daring to love a god like him! My dear, if I had you here, I could tear your hair out with mortification.

I am convinced that he is aware of my feeling, for he stayed but a few moments, said nothing but what another man might have said half as well, and pretending that he had an engagement went away. I learned to-day (a little bird told me – the bell bird) that he went straight to bed. How does that strike you as evidence of exemplary habits?

## July 17th

That little wretch, Raynor, called yesterday, and his babble set me almost wild. He never runs down – that is to say, when he exterminates a score of reputations, more or less, he does not pause between one reputation and the next. (By the way, he inquired about you, and his manifestations of interest in you had, I confess, a good deal of *vraisemblance*<sup>2</sup>.)

Mr. Raynor observes no game laws; like Death (which he would inflict if slander were fatal) he has all seasons for his own. But I like him, for we knew one another at Redhorse when we were young and true-hearted and barefooted. He was known in those far fair days as 'Giggles,' and I – O Irene, can you ever forgive me? – I was called 'Gunny.' God knows why; perhaps in allusion to the material of my pinafores; perhaps because the name is in alliteration with 'Giggles,' for Gig and I were inseparable playmates, and the miners may have thought it a delicate compliment to recognize some kind of relationship between us.

Later, we took in a third – another of Adversity's brood, who, like Garrick<sup>3</sup> between Tragedy and Comedy, had a chronic inability to adjudicate the rival claims (to himself) of Frost and Famine. Between him and the grave there was seldom anything more than a single suspender and the hope of a meal which would at the same time support life and make it insupportable. He literally picked up a precarious living for himself and an aged mother by 'chloriding the dumps,' that is to say, the miners permitted him to search the heaps of waste rock for such pieces of "pay ore" as had been overlooked; and these he sacked up and sold at the Syndicate Mill<sup>4</sup>. He became a member of our firm – 'Gunny, Giggles, and Dumps,' thenceforth – through my favor; for I could not then, nor can I now, be indifferent to his courage and prowess in defending against Giggles the immemorial right of his sex to insult a strange and unprotected female – myself. After old Jim struck it in the Calamity, and I began to wear shoes and go to school, and in emulation Giggles took to washing his face, and became Jack Raynor, of Wells, Fargo & Co., and old Mrs. Barts was herself chlorided to her fathers, Dumps drifted over to San Juan Smith and turned stage driver, and was killed by road agents, and so forth.

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1 **the Thugs** – members of the Indian organization of professional assassins who travelled throughout the country for several centuries since 1356

2 **vraisemblance** = love of truth (*French*)

3 **Garrick** – David Garrick (1717–1779), a famous English actor, producer and dramatist, one of the managers of the Drury Lane Theatre in London

4 **the Syndicate Mill** – a mill belonging to the Syndicate, an association of racketeers in control of organized crime in the USA

Why do I tell you all this, dear? Because it is heavy on my heart. Because I walk the Valley of Humility. Because I am subduing myself to permanent consciousness of my unworthiness to unloose the latchet of Dr. Barritz's shoe. Because – oh, dear, oh, dear – there's a cousin of Dumps at this hotel! I haven't spoken to him. I never had any acquaintance with him, but – do you suppose he has recognized me? Do, please, give me in your next your candid, sure – enough opinion about it, and say you don't think so. Do you think He knows about me already and that is why He left me last evening when He saw that I blushed and trembled like a fool under His eyes? You know I can't bribe ALL the newspapers, and I can't go back on anybody who was good to Gunny at Redhorse – not if I'm pitched out of society into the sea. So the skeleton sometimes rattles behind the door. I never cared much before, as you know, but now – NOW it is not the same. Jack Raynor I am sure of – he will not tell him. He seems, indeed, to hold him in such respect as hardly to dare speak to him at all, and I'm a good deal that way myself. Dear, dear! I wish I had something besides a million dollars! If Jack were three inches taller I'd marry him alive and go back to Redhorse and wear sackcloth again to the end of my miserable days.

### July 25th

We had a perfectly splendid sunset last evening, and I must tell you all about it. I ran away from Auntie and everybody, and was walking alone on the beach. I expect you to believe, you infidel! that I had not looked out of my window on the seaward side of the hotel and seen him walking alone on the beach. If you are not lost to every feeling of womanly delicacy you will accept my statement without question. I soon established myself under my sunshade and had for some time been gazing out dreamily over the sea, when he approached, walking close to the edge of the water – it was ebb tide. I assure you the wet sand actually brightened about his feet! As he approached me, he lifted his hat, saying: 'Miss Dement, may I sit with you? – or will you walk with me?'

The possibility that neither might be agreeable seems not to have occurred to him. Did you ever know such assurance? Assurance? My dear, it was gall, downright GALL! Well, I didn't find it wormwood, and replied, with my untutored Redhorse heart in my throat: 'I-I shall be pleased to do ANYTHING.' Could words have been more stupid? There are depths of fatuity in me, friend o' my soul, which are simply bottomless!

He extended his hand, smiling, and I delivered mine into it without a moment's hesitation, and when his fingers closed about it to assist me to my feet, the consciousness that it trembled made me blush worse than the red west. I got up, however, and after a while, observing that he had not let go my hand, I pulled on it a little, but unsuccessfully. He simply held on, saying nothing, but looking down into my face with some kind of a smile – I didn't know – how could I? – whether it was affectionate, derisive, or what, for I did not look at him. How beautiful he was! – with the red fires of the sunset burning in the depths of his eyes. Do you know, dear, if the Thugs and Experts of the Blavatsky region have any special kind of eyes? Ah, you should have seen his superb attitude, the godlike inclination of his head as he stood over me after I had got upon my feet! It was a noble picture, but I soon destroyed it, for I began at once to sink again to the earth. There was only one thing for him to do, and he did it; he supported me with an arm about my waist.

'Miss Dement, are you ill?' he said.

It was not an exclamation; there was neither alarm nor solicitude in it. If he had added: 'I suppose that is about what I am expected to say,' he would hardly have expressed his sense of the situation more clearly. His manner filled me with shame and indignation, for I was suffering acutely. I wrenched my hand out of his, grasped the arm supporting me, and, pushing myself free, fell plump into the sand and sat helpless. My hat had fallen off in the struggle, and my hair tumbled about my face and shoulders in the most mortifying way.

'Go away from me,' I cried, half choking. 'Oh, PLEASE go away, you – you Thug! How dare you think THAT when my leg is asleep?'

I actually said those identical words! And then I broke down and sobbed. Irene, I BLUBBERED!

His manner altered in an instant – I could see that much through my fingers and hair. He dropped on one knee beside me, parted the tangle of hair, and said, in the tenderest way: ‘My poor girl, God knows I have not intended to pain you. How should I? – I who love you – I who have loved you for – for years and years!’

He had pulled my wet hands away from my face and was covering them with kisses. My cheeks were like two coals, my whole face was flaming and, I think, steaming. What could I do? I hid it on his shoulder – there was no other place. And, oh, my dear friend, how my leg tingled and thrilled, and how I wanted to kick!

We sat so for a long time. He had released one of my hands to pass his arm about me again, and I possessed myself of my handkerchief and was drying my eyes and my nose. I would not look up until that was done; he tried in vain to push me a little away and gaze into my eyes. Presently, when it was all right, and it had grown a bit dark, I lifted my head, looked him straight in the eyes, and smiled my best – my level best, dear.

‘What do you mean,’ I said, ‘by “years and years”?’

‘Dearest,’ he replied, very gravely, very earnestly, ‘in the absence of the sunken cheeks, the hollow eyes, the lank hair, the slouching gait, the rags, dirt, and youth, can you not – will you not understand? Gunny, I’m Dumps!’

In a moment I was upon my feet and he upon his. I seized him by the lapels of his coat and peered into his handsome face in the deepening darkness. I was breathless with excitement.

‘And you are not dead?’ I asked, hardly knowing what I said.

‘Only dead in love, dear. I recovered from the road agent’s bullet, but this, I fear, is fatal.’

‘But about Jack – Mr. Raynor? Don’t you know–’

‘I am ashamed to say, darling, that it was through that unworthy person’s invitation that I came here from Vienna.’

Irene, they have played it upon your affectionate friend,

MARY JANE DEMENT.

P.S. – The worst of it is that there is no mystery. That was an invention of Jack to arouse my curiosity and interest. James is not a Thug. He solemnly assures me that in all his wanderings he has never set foot in Sepoy.

## **The Coin of Dionysius (Ernest Bramah)<sup>1</sup>**

It was eight o’clock at night and raining, scarcely a time when a business so limited in its clientele as that of a coin dealer could hope to attract any customer, but a light was still showing in the small shop that bore over its window the name of Baxter, and in the even smaller office at the back the proprietor himself sat reading the latest *Pall Mall*<sup>2</sup>. His enterprise seemed to be justified, for presently the door bell gave its announcement, and throwing down his paper Mr. Baxter went forward.

As a matter of fact the dealer had been expecting someone and his manner as he passed into the shop was unmistakably suggestive of a caller of importance. But at the first glance towards his visitor the excess of deference melted out of his bearing, leaving the urbane, self-possessed shopman in the presence of the casual customer.

‘Mr. Baxter, I think?’ said the latter. He had laid aside his dripping umbrella and was unbuttoning overcoat and coat to reach an inner pocket. ‘You hardly remember me, I suppose? Mr. Carlyle – two years ago – I took up a case for you–’

‘To be sure, Mr. Carlyle, the private detective–’

‘Inquiry agent,’ corrected Mr. Carlyle precisely.

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<sup>1</sup> **Dionysius** (430 BC–367 BC) – a tyrant of Syracuse, an ancient Greek city on the east coast of Sicily

<sup>2</sup> **Pall Mall** – *Pall Mall Gazette*, a British newspaper, one of the “poblars”

‘Well,’ smiled Mr. Baxter, ‘for that matter I am a coin dealer and not an antiquarian or a numismatist. Is there anything in that way that I can do for you?’

‘Yes,’ replied his visitor; ‘it is my turn to consult you.’ He had taken a small wash-leather bag from the inner pocket and now turned something carefully out upon the counter. ‘What can you tell me about that?’

The dealer gave the coin a moment’s scrutiny.

‘There is no question about this,’ he replied. ‘It is a Sicilian tetradrachm<sup>1</sup> of Dionysius.’

‘Yes, I know that – I have it on the label out of the cabinet. I can tell you further that it’s supposed to be one that Lord Seastoke gave two hundred and fifty pounds for at the Brice sale in ’94.’

‘It seems to me that you can tell me more about it than I can tell you,’ remarked Mr. Baxter. ‘What is it that you really want to know?’

‘I want to know,’ replied Mr. Carlyle, ‘whether it is genuine or not.’

‘Has any doubt been cast upon it?’

‘Certain circumstances raised a suspicion – that is all.’

The dealer took another look at the tetradrachm through his magnifying glass, holding it by the edge with the careful touch of an expert. Then he shook his head slowly in a confession of ignorance.

‘Of course I could make a guess—’

‘No, don’t,’ interrupted Mr. Carlyle hastily. ‘An arrest hangs on it and nothing short of certainty is any good to me.’

‘Is that so, Mr. Carlyle?’ said Mr. Baxter, with increased interest.

‘Well, to be quite candid, the thing is out of my line. Now if it was a rare Saxon penny or a doubtful noble I’d stake my reputation on my opinion, but I do very little in the classical series.’

Mr. Carlyle did not attempt to conceal his disappointment as he returned the coin to the bag and replaced the bag in the inner pocket.

‘I had been relying on you,’ he grumbled reproachfully. ‘Where on earth am I to go now?’

‘There is always the British Museum.’

‘Ah, to be sure, thanks. But will anyone who can tell me be there now?’

‘Now? No fear!’ replied Mr. Baxter. ‘Go round in the morning—’

‘But I must know to-night,’ explained the visitor, reduced to despair again. ‘To-morrow will be too late for the purpose.’

Mr. Baxter did not hold out much encouragement in the circumstances.

‘You can scarcely expect to find anyone at business now,’ he remarked. ‘I should have been gone these two hours myself only I happened to have an appointment with an American millionaire who fixed his own time.’ Something indistinguishable from a wink slid off Mr. Baxter’s right eye. ‘Offmunson he’s called, and a bright young pedigree-hunter has traced his descent from Offa<sup>2</sup>, King of Mercia<sup>3</sup>. So he – quite naturally – wants a set of Offas as a sort of collateral proof.’

‘Very interesting,’ murmured Mr. Carlyle, fidgeting with his watch. ‘I should love an hour’s chat with you about your millionaire customers – some other time. Just now – look here, Baxter, can’t you give me a line of introduction to some dealer in this sort of thing who happens to live in town? You must know dozens of experts.’

‘Why, bless my soul, Mr. Carlyle, I don’t know a man of them away from his business,’ said Mr. Baxter, staring. ‘They may live in Park Lane or they may live in Petticoat Lane for all I know. Besides, there aren’t so many experts as you seem to imagine. And the two best will very likely quarrel over it. You’ve had to do with “expert witnesses,” I suppose?’

‘I don’t want a witness; there will be no need to give evidence. All I want is an absolutely authoritative pronouncement that I can act on. Is there no one who can really say whether the thing is genuine or not?’

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<sup>1</sup> **tetradrachm** – an ancient Greek coin used for trade with the Scythians and the Celts

<sup>2</sup> **Offa** – the king of Mercia (757–796), one of the most powerful kings of Anglo-Saxon England

<sup>3</sup> **Mercia** – one of the most powerful kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England in the 7th–9th centuries



Mr. Baxter's meaning silence became cynical in its implication as he continued to look at his visitor across the counter. Then he relaxed.

'Stay a bit; there is a man – an amateur – I remember hearing wonderful things about some time ago. They say he really does know.'

'There you are,' explained Mr. Carlyle, much relieved. 'There always is someone. Who is he?'

'Funny name,' replied Baxter. 'Something Wynn or Wynn something.' He craned his neck to catch sight of an important motor-car that was drawing to the kerb before his window. 'Wynn Carrados! You'll excuse me now, Mr. Carlyle, won't you? This looks like Mr. Offmunson.'

Mr. Carlyle hastily scribbled the name down on his cuff.

'Wynn Carrados, right. Where does he live?'

'Haven't the remotest idea,' replied Baxter, referring the arrangement of his tie to the judgment of the wall mirror. 'I have never seen the man myself. Now, Mr. Carlyle, I'm sorry I can't do any more for you. You won't mind, will you?'

Mr. Carlyle could not pretend to misunderstand. He enjoyed the distinction of holding open the door for the transatlantic representative of the line of Offa as he went out, and then made his way through the muddy streets back to his office. There was only one way of tracing a private individual at such short notice – through the pages of the directories, and the gentleman did not flatter himself by a very high estimate of his chances.

Fortune favoured him, however. He very soon discovered a Wynn Carrados living at Richmond<sup>1</sup>, and, better still, further search failed to unearth another. There was, apparently, only one householder at all events of that name in the neighbourhood of London. He jotted down the address and set out for Richmond.

The house was some distance from the station, Mr. Carlyle learned. He took a taxicab and drove, dismissing the vehicle at the gate. He prided himself on his power of observation and the accuracy of his deductions which resulted from it – a detail of his business. 'It's nothing more than using one's eyes and putting two and two together,' he would modestly declare, when he wished to be deprecatory rather than impressive. By the time he had reached the front door of 'The Turrets' he had formed some opinion of the position and tastes of the people who lived there.

A man-servant admitted Mr. Carlyle and took his card – his private card, with the bare request for an interview that would not detain Mr. Carrados for ten minutes. Luck still favoured him; Mr. Carrados was at home and would see him at once. The servant, the hall through which they passed, and the room into which he was shown, all contributed something to the deductions which the quietly observant gentleman, was half unconsciously recording.

'Mr. Carlyle,' announced the servant.

The room was a library or study. The only occupant, a man of about Carlyle's own age, had been using a typewriter up to the moment of his visitor's entrance. He now turned and stood up with an expression of formal courtesy.

'It's very good of you to see me at this hour,' apologised Mr. Carlyle.

The conventional expression of Mr. Carrados's face changed a little.

'Surely my man has got your name wrong?' he explained. 'Isn't it Louis Calling?'

Mr. Carlyle stopped short and his agreeable smile gave place to a sudden flash of anger or annoyance.

'No sir,' he replied stiffly. 'My name is on the card which you have before you.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Mr. Carrados, with perfect good-humour. 'I hadn't seen it. But I used to know a Calling some years ago – at St. Michael's.'

'St. Michael's!' Mr. Carlyle's features underwent another change, no less instant and sweeping than before. 'St. Michael's! Wynn Carrados? Good heavens! it isn't Max Wynn – old "Winning" Wynn?'

'A little older and a little fatter – yes,' replied Carrados. 'I have changed my name you see.'

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<sup>1</sup> **Richmond** – an outer borough (an incorporate town or district with special privileges) of London, along the River Thames

‘Extraordinary thing meeting like this,’ said his visitor, dropping into a chair and staring hard at Mr. Carrados. ‘I have changed more than my name. How did you recognize me?’

‘The voice,’ replied Carrados. ‘It took me back to that little smoke-dried attic den of yours where we—’

‘My God!’ exclaimed Carlyle bitterly, ‘don’t remind me of what we were going to do in those days.’ He looked round the well-furnished, handsome room and recalled the other signs of wealth that he had noticed. ‘At all events, you seem fairly comfortable, Wynn.’

‘I am alternately envied and pitied,’ replied Carrados, with a placid tolerance of circumstance that seemed characteristic of him. ‘Still, as you say, I am fairly comfortable.’

‘Envied, I can understand. But why are you pitied?’

‘Because I am blind,’ was the tranquil reply.

‘Blind!’ exclaimed Mr. Carlyle, using his own eyes superlatively. ‘Do you mean – literally blind?’

‘Literally... I was riding along a bridle-path through a wood about a dozen years ago with a friend. He was in front. At one point a twig sprang back – you know how easily a thing like that happens. It just flicked my eye – nothing to think twice about.’

‘And that blinded you?’

‘Yes, ultimately. It’s called amaurosis.’

‘I can scarcely believe it. You seem so sure and self-reliant. Your eyes are full of expression – only a little quieter than they used to be. I believe you were typing when I came... Aren’t you having me?’

‘You miss the dog and the stick?’ smiled Carrados. ‘No; it’s a fact.’

‘What an awful affliction for you, Max. You were always such an impulsive, reckless sort of fellow – never quiet. You must miss such a fearful lot.’

‘Has anyone else recognized you?’ asked Carrados quietly.

‘Ah, that was the voice, you said,’ replied Carlyle.

‘Yes; but other people heard the voice as well. Only I had no blundering, self-confident eyes to be hoodwinked.’

‘That’s a rum way of putting it,’ said Carlyle. ‘Are your ears never hoodwinked, may I ask?’

‘Not now. Nor my fingers. Nor any of my other senses that have to look out for themselves.’

‘Well, well,’ murmured Mr. Carlyle, cut short in his sympathetic emotions. ‘I’m glad you take it so well. Of course, if you find it an advantage to be blind, old man—’ He stopped and reddened. ‘I beg your pardon,’ he concluded stiffly.

‘Not an advantage, perhaps,’ replied the other thoughtfully. ‘Still it has compensations that one might not think of. A new world to explore, new experiences, new powers awakening; strange new perceptions; life in the fourth dimension. But why do you beg my pardon, Louis?’

‘I am an ex-solicitor, struck off in connexion with the falsifying of a trust account, Mr. Carrados,’ replied Carlyle, rising.

‘Sit down, Louis,’ said Carrados suavely. His face, even his incredibly living eyes, beamed placid good-nature. ‘The chair on which you will sit, the roof above you, all the comfortable surroundings to which you have so amiably alluded, are the direct result of falsifying a trust account. But do I call you “Mr. Carlyle” in consequence? Certainly not, Louis.’

‘I did not falsify the account,’ cried Carlyle hotly. He sat down however, and added more quietly: ‘But why do I tell you all this? I have never spoken of it before.’

‘Blindness invites confidence,’ replied Carrados. ‘We are out of the running – human rivalry ceases to exist. Besides, why shouldn’t you? In my case the account *was* falsified.’

‘Of course that’s all bunkum, Max’ commented Carlyle. ‘Still, I appreciate your motive.’

‘Practically everything I possess was left to me by an American cousin, on the condition that I took the name of Carrados. He made his fortune by an ingenious conspiracy of doctoring the crop reports and unloading favourably in consequence. And I need hardly remind you that the receiver is equally guilty with the thief.’

‘But twice as safe. I know something of that, Max... Have you any idea what my business is?’

‘You shall tell me,’ replied Carrados.

‘I run a private inquiry agency. When I lost my profession I had to do something for a living. This occurred. I dropped my name, changed my appearance and opened an office. I knew the legal side down to the ground and I got a retired Scotland Yard man to organize the outside work.’

‘Excellent!’ cried Carrados. ‘Do you unearth many murders?’

‘No,’ admitted Mr. Carlyle; ‘our business lies mostly on the conventional lines among divorce and defalcation.’

‘That’s a pity,’ remarked Carrados. ‘Do you know, Louis, I always had a secret ambition to be a detective myself. I have even thought lately that I might still be able to do something at it if the chance came my way. That makes you smile?’

‘Well, certainly, the idea—’

‘Yes, the idea of a blind detective – the blind tracking the alert—’

‘Of course, as you say, certain facilities are no doubt quickened,’ Mr. Carlyle hastened to add considerably, ‘but, seriously, with the exception of an artist, I don’t suppose there is any man who is more utterly dependent on his eyes.’

Whatever opinion Carrados might have held privately, his genial exterior did not betray a shadow of dissent. For a full minute he continued to smoke as though he derived an actual visual enjoyment from the blue sprays that travelled and dispersed across the room. He had already placed before his visitor a box containing cigars of a brand which that gentleman keenly appreciated but generally regarded as unattainable, and the matter-of-fact ease and certainty with which the blind man had brought the box and put it before him had sent a questioning flicker through Carlyle’s mind.

‘You used to be rather fond of art yourself, Louis,’ he remarked presently. ‘Give me your opinion of my latest purchase – the bronze lion on the cabinet there.’ Then, as Carlyle’s gaze went about the room, he added quickly: ‘No, not that cabinet – the one on your left.’

Carlyle shot a sharp glance at his host as he got up, but Carrados’s expression was merely benignly complacent. Then he strolled across to the figure.

‘Very nice,’ he admitted. ‘Late Flemish, isn’t it?’

‘No, It is a copy of Vidal’s “Roaring Lion.”’

‘Vidal?’

‘A French artist.’ The voice became indescribably flat. ‘He, also, had the misfortune to be blind, by the way.’

‘You old humbug, Max!’ shrieked Carlyle, ‘you’ve been thinking that out for the last five minutes.’ Then the unfortunate man bit his lip and turned his back towards his host.

‘Do you remember how we used to pile it up on that obtuse ass Sanders, and then roast him?’ asked Carrados, ignoring the half-smothered exclamation with which the other man had recalled himself.

‘Yes,’ replied Carlyle quietly. ‘This is very good,’ he continued, addressing himself to the bronze again. ‘How ever did he do it?’

‘With his hands.’

‘Naturally. But, I mean, how did he study his model?’

‘Also with his hands. He called it ‘seeing near.’’

‘Even with a lion – handled it?’

‘In such cases he required the services of a keeper, who brought the animal to bay while Vidal exercised his own particular gifts... You don’t feel inclined to put me on the track of a mystery, Louis?’

Unable to regard this request as anything but one of old Max’s unquenchable pleasantries, Mr. Carlyle was on the point of making a suitable reply when a sudden thought caused him to smile knowingly. Up to that point, he had, indeed, completely forgotten the object of his visit. Now that he remembered the doubtful Dionysius and Baxter’s recommendation he immediately assumed that some mistake had been made. Either Max was not the Wynn Carrados he had been seeking or else the dealer had been misinformed; for although his host was wonderfully expert in the face of his

misfortune, it was inconceivable that he could decide the genuineness of a coin without seeing it. The opportunity seemed a good one of getting even with Carrados by taking him at his word.

‘Yes,’ he accordingly replied, with crisp deliberation, as he re-crossed the room; ‘yes, I will, Max. Here is the clue to what seems to be a rather remarkable fraud.’ He put the tetradrachm into his host’s hand. ‘What do you make of it?’

For a few seconds Carrados handled the piece with the delicate manipulation of his finger-tips while Carlyle looked on with a self-appreciative grin. Then with equal gravity the blind man weighed the coin in the balance of his hand. Finally he touched it with his tongue.

‘Well?’ demanded the other.

‘Of course I have not much to go on, and if I was more fully in your confidence I might come to another conclusion—’

‘Yes, yes,’ interposed Carlyle, with amused encouragement.

‘Then I should advise you to arrest the parlourmaid, Nina Brun, communicate with the police authorities of Padua<sup>1</sup> for particulars of the career of Helene Brunesi, and suggest to Lord Seastoke that he should return to London to see what further depredations have been made in his cabinet.’

Mr. Carlyle’s groping hand sought and found a chair, on to which he dropped blankly. His eyes were unable to detach themselves for a single moment from the very ordinary spectacle of Mr. Carrados’s mildly benevolent face, while the sterilized ghost of his now forgotten amusement still lingered about his features.

‘Good heavens!’ he managed to articulate, ‘how do you know?’

‘Isn’t that what you wanted of me?’ asked Carrados suavely.

‘Don’t humbug, Max,’ said Carlyle severely. ‘This is no joke.’ An undefined mistrust of his own powers suddenly possessed him in the presence of this mystery. ‘How do you come to know of Nina Brun and Lord Seastoke?’

‘You are a detective, Louis,’ replied Carrados. ‘How does one know these things? By using one’s eyes and putting two and two together.’

Carlyle groaned and flung out an arm petulantly.

‘Is it all bunkum, Max? Do you really see all the time – though that doesn’t go very far towards explaining it.’

‘Like Vidal, I see very well – at close quarters,’ replied Carrados, lightly running a forefinger along the inscription on the tetradrachm. ‘For longer range I keep another pair of eyes. Would you like to test them?’

Mr. Carlyle’s assent was not very gracious; it was, in fact, faintly sulky. He was suffering the annoyance of feeling distinctly unimpressive in his own department; but he was also curious.

‘The bell is just behind you, if you don’t mind,’ said his host. ‘Parkinson will appear. You might take note of him while he is in.’

The man who had admitted Mr. Carlyle proved to be Parkinson.

‘This gentleman is Mr. Carlyle, Parkinson,’ explained Carrados the moment the man entered. ‘You will remember him for the future?’

Parkinson’s apologetic eye swept the visitor from head to foot, but so lightly and swiftly that it conveyed to that gentleman the comparison of being very deftly dusted.

‘I will endeavour to do so, sir,’ replied Parkinson, turning again to his master.

‘I shall be at home to Mr. Carlyle whenever he calls. That is all.’

‘Very well, sir.’

‘Now, Louis,’ remarked Mr. Carrados briskly, when the door had closed again, ‘you have had a good opportunity of studying Parkinson. What is he like?’

‘In what way?’

‘I mean as a matter of description. I am a blind man – I haven’t seen my servant for twelve years – what idea can you give me of him? I asked you to notice.’

‘I know you did, but your Parkinson is the sort of man who has very little about him to describe. He is the embodiment of the ordinary. His height is about average—’

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<sup>1</sup> **Padua** – a city in northern Italy, west of Venice, first mentioned in 302 BC

‘Five feet nine,’ murmured Carrados. ‘Slightly above the mean.’

‘Scarcely noticeably so. Clean-shaven. Medium brown hair. No particularly marked features. Dark eyes. Good teeth.’

‘False,’ interposed Carrados. ‘The teeth – not the statement.’

‘Possibly,’ admitted Mr. Carlyle. ‘I am not a dental expert and I had no opportunity of examining Mr. Parkinson’s mouth in detail. But what is the drift of all this?’

‘His clothes?’

‘Oh, just the ordinary evening dress of a valet. There is not much room for variety in that.’

‘You noticed, in fact, nothing special by which Parkinson could be identified?’

‘Well, he wore an unusually broad gold ring on the little finger of the left hand.’

‘But that is removable. And yet Parkinson has an ineradicable mole – a small one, I admit – on his chin. And you a human sleuth-hound. Oh, Louis!’

‘At all events,’ retorted Carlyle, writhing a little under this good-humoured satire, although it was easy enough to see in it Carrados’s affectionate intention – ‘at all events, I dare say I can give as good a description of Parkinson as he can give of me.’

‘That is what we are going to test. Ring the bell again.’

‘Seriously?’

‘Quite. I am trying my eyes against yours. If I can’t give you fifty out of a hundred I’ll renounce my private detectorial ambition forever.’

‘It isn’t quite the same,’ objected Carlyle, but he rang the bell.

‘Come in and close the door, Parkinson,’ said Carrados when the man appeared. ‘Don’t look at Mr. Carlyle again – in fact, you had better stand with your back towards him, he won’t mind. Now describe to me his appearance as you observed it.’

Parkinson tendered his respectful apologies to Mr. Carlyle for the liberty he was compelled to take, by the deferential quality of his voice.

‘Mr. Carlyle, sir, wears patent leather boots of about size seven and very little used. There are five buttons, but on the left boot one button – the third up – is missing, leaving loose threads and not the more usual metal fastener. Mr. Carlyle’s trousers, sir, are of a dark material, a dark grey line of about a quarter of an inch width on a darker ground. The bottoms are turned permanently up and are, just now, a little muddy, if I may say so.’

‘Very muddy,’ interposed Mr. Carlyle generously. ‘It is a wet night, Parkinson.’

‘Yes, sir; very unpleasant weather. If you will allow me, sir, I will brush you in the hall. The mud is dry now, I notice. Then, sir,’ continued Parkinson, reverting to the business in hand, ‘there are dark green cashmere hose. A curb-pattern key-chain passes into the left-hand trouser pocket.’

From the visitor’s nether garments the photographic-eyed Parkinson proceeded to higher ground, and with increasing wonder Mr. Carlyle listened to the faithful catalogue of his possessions. His fether-and-link albert of gold and platinum was minutely described. His spotted blue ascot, with its gentlemanly pearl scarf pin, was set forth, and the fact that the buttonhole in the left lapel of his morning coat showed signs of use was duly noted. What Parkinson saw he recorded, but he made no deductions. A handkerchief carried in the cuff of the right sleeve was simply that to him and not an indication that Mr. Carlyle was, indeed, left-handed.

But a more delicate part of Parkinson’s undertaking remained. He approached it with a double cough.

‘As regards Mr. Carlyle’s personal appearance, sir—’

‘No, enough!’ cried the gentleman concerned hastily. ‘I am more than satisfied. You are a keen observer, Parkinson.’

‘I have trained myself to suit my master’s requirements, sir,’ replied the man. He looked towards Mr. Carrados, received a nod and withdrew.

Mr. Carlyle was the first to speak.

‘That man of yours would be worth five pounds a week to me, Max,’ he remarked thoughtfully. ‘But, of course—’

‘I don’t think that he would take it,’ replied Carrados, in a voice of equally detached

speculation. 'He suits me very well. But you have the chance of using his services – indirectly.'

'You still mean that – seriously?'

'I notice in you a chronic disinclination to take me seriously, Louis. It is really – to an Englishman – almost painful. Is there something inherently comic about me or the atmosphere of The Turrets?'

'No, my friend,' replied Mr. Carlyle, 'but there is something essentially prosperous. That is what points to the improbable. Now what is it?'

'It might be merely a whim, but it is more than that,' replied Carrados. 'It is, well, partly vanity, partly ennui, partly' – certainly there was something more nearly tragic in his voice than comic now – 'partly hope.'

Mr. Carlyle was too tactful to pursue the subject.

'Those are three tolerable motives,' he acquiesced. 'I'll do anything you want, Max, on one condition.'

'Agreed. And it is?'

'That you tell me how you knew so much of this affair.' He tapped the silver coin which lay on the table near them. 'I am not easily flabbergasted,' he added.

'You won't believe that there is nothing to explain – that it was purely second-sight?'

'No,' replied Carlyle tersely: 'I won't.'

'You are quite right. And yet the thing is very simple.'

'They always are – when you know,' soliloquised the other. 'That's what makes them so confoundedly difficult when you don't.'

'Here is this one then. In Padua, which seems to be regaining its old reputation as the birthplace of spurious antiques, by the way, there lives an ingenious craftsman named Pietro Stelli. This simple soul, who possesses a talent not inferior to that of Cavino at his best, has for many years turned his hand to the not unprofitable occupation of forging rare Greek and Roman coins. As a collector and student of certain Greek colonials and a specialist in forgeries I have been familiar with Stelli's workmanship for years. Latterly he seems to have come under the influence of an international crook called – at the moment – Dompierre, who soon saw a way of utilizing Stelli's genius on a royal scale. Helene Brunesi, who in private life is – and really is, I believe – Madame Dompierre, readily lent her services to the enterprise.'

'Quite so,' nodded Mr. Carlyle, as his host paused.

'You see the whole sequence, of course?'

'Not exactly – not in detail,' confessed Mr. Carlyle.

'Dompierre's idea was to gain access to some of the most celebrated cabinets of Europe and substitute Stelli's fabrications for the genuine coins. The princely collection of rarities that he would thus amass might be difficult to dispose of safely, but I have no doubt that he had matured his plans. Helene, in the person of Nina Brun, an Anglicised French parlourmaid – a part which she fills to perfection – was to obtain wax impressions of the most valuable pieces and to make the exchange when the counterfeits reached her. In this way it was obviously hoped that the fraud would not come to light until long after the real coins had been sold, and I gather that she has already done her work successfully in general houses. Then, impressed by her excellent references and capable manner, my housekeeper engaged her, and for a few weeks she went about her duties here. It was fatal to this detail of the scheme, however, that I have the misfortune to be blind. I am told that Helene has so innocently angelic a face as to disarm suspicion, but I was incapable of being impressed and that good material was thrown away. But one morning my material fingers – which, of course, knew nothing of Helene's angelic face – discovered an unfamiliar touch about the surface of my favourite Euclidean<sup>1</sup>, and, although there was doubtless nothing to be seen, my critical sense of smell reported that wax had been recently pressed against it. I began to make discreet inquiries and in the meantime my cabinets went to the local bank for safety. Helene countered by receiving a telegram from Angiers, calling her to the death-bed of her aged mother. The aged mother succumbed; duty compelled Helene to remain at the side of her stricken patriarchal father, and

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<sup>1</sup> **Euclidean** – here: one of ancient Greek coins

doubtless The Turrets was written off the syndicate's operations as a bad debt.'

'Very interesting,' admitted Mr. Carlyle; 'but at the risk of seeming obtuse' – his manner had become delicately chastened – 'I must say that I fail to trace the inevitable connexion between Nina Brun and this particular forgery – assuming that it is a forgery.'

'Set your mind at rest about that, Louis,' replied Carrados. 'It is a forgery, and it is a forgery that none but Pietro Stelli could have achieved. That is the essential connexion. Of course, there are accessories. A private detective coming urgently to see me with a notable tetradrachm in his pocket, which he announces to be the clue to a remarkable fraud – well, really, Louis, one scarcely needs to be blind to see through that.'

'And Lord Seastoke? I suppose you happened to discover that Nina Brun had gone there?'

'No, I cannot claim to have discovered that, or I should certainly have warned him at once when I found out – only recently – about the gang. As a matter of fact, the last information I had of Lord Seastoke was a line in yesterday's *Morning Post* to the effect that he was still at Cairo. But many of these pieces—' He brushed his finger almost lovingly across the vivid chariot race that embellished the reverse of the coin, and broke off to remark: 'You really ought to take up the subject, Louis. You have no idea how useful it might prove to you some day.'

'I really think I must,' replied Carlyle grimly. 'Two hundred and fifty pounds the original of this cost, I believe.'

'Cheap, too; it would make five hundred pounds in New York to-day. As I was saying, many are literally unique. This gem by Kimon is – here is his signature, you see; Peter is particularly good at lettering – and as I handled the genuine tetradrachm about two years ago, when Lord Seastoke exhibited it at a meeting of our society in Albemarle Street, there is nothing at all wonderful in my being able to fix the locale of your mystery. Indeed, I feel that I ought to apologize for it all being so simple.'

'I think,' remarked Mr. Carlyle, critically examining the loose threads on his left boot, 'that the apology on that head would be more appropriate from me.'

## **Aunt Jane's Album (Eliza Calvert Hall)**

They were a bizarre mass of color on the sweet spring landscape, those patchwork quilts, swaying in a long line under the elms and maples. The old orchard made a blossoming background for them, and farther off on the horizon rose the beauty of fresh verdure and purple mist on those low hills, or 'knobs', that are to the heart of the Kentuckian<sup>1</sup> as the Alps to the Swiss or the sea to the sailor.

I opened the gate softly and paused for a moment between the blossoming lilacs that grew on each side of the path. The fragrance of the white and the purple blooms was like a resurrection-call over the graves of many a dead spring; and as I stood, shaken with thoughts as the flowers are with the winds, Aunt Jane came around from the back of the house, her black silk cape fluttering from her shoulders, and a calico sunbonnet hiding her features in its cavernous depth. She walked briskly to the clothes-line and began patting and smoothing the quilts where the breeze had disarranged them.

'Aunt Jane,' I called out, 'are you having a fair all by yourself?'

She turned quickly, pushing back the sunbonnet from her eyes.

'Why, child,' she said, with a happy laugh, 'you come pretty nigh skeerin' me. No, I ain't havin' any fair; I'm jest givin' my quilts their spring airin'. Twice a year I put 'em out in the sun and wind; and this mornin' the air smelt so sweet, I thought it was a good chance to freshen 'em up for the summer. It's about time to take 'em in now.'

She began to fold the quilts and lay them over her arm, and I did the same. Back and forth we went from the clothes-line to the house, and from the house to the clothes-line, until the quilts were safely housed from the coming dewfall and piled on every available chair in the front room. I looked at them in sheer amazement. There seemed to be every pattern that the ingenuity of woman

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<sup>1</sup> **Kentuckian** – a resident of Kentucky, the US state in the south (102 694 sq. km)

could devise and the industry of woman put together, – ‘four-patches,’ ‘nine-patches,’ ‘log-cabins,’ ‘wild-goose chases,’ ‘rising suns,’ hexagons, diamonds, and only Aunt Jane knows what else. As for color, a Sandwich Islander<sup>1</sup> would have danced with joy at the sight of those reds, purples, yellows, and greens.

‘Did you really make all these quilts, Aunt Jane?’ I asked wonderingly.

Aunt Jane’s eyes sparkled with pride.

‘Every stitch of ’em, child,’ she said, ‘except the quiltin’. The neighbors used to come in and help some with that. I’ve heard folks say that piecin’ quilts was nothin’ but a waste o’ time, but that ain’t always so. They used to say that Sarah Jane Mitchell would set down right after breakfast and piece till it was time to git dinner, and then set and piece till she had to git supper, and then piece by candle-light till she fell asleep in her cheer.

‘I ricollect goin’ over there one day, and Sarah Jane was gittin’ dinner in a big hurry, for Sam had to go to town with some cattle, and there was a big basket o’ quilt pieces in the middle o’ the kitchen floor, and the house lookin’ like a pigpen, and the children runnin’ around half naked. And Sam he laughed, and says he, “Aunt Jane, if we could wear quilts and eat quilts we’d be the richest people in the country.” Sam was the best-natured man that ever was, or he couldn’t ’a’ put up with Sarah Jane’s shiftless ways. Hannah Crawford said she sent Sarah Jane a bundle o’ caliker once by Sam, and Sam always declared he lost it. But Uncle Jim Matthews said he was ridin’ along the road jest behind Sam, and he saw Sam throw it into the creek jest as he got on the bridge. I never blamed Sam a bit if he did.

‘But there never was any time wasted on my quilts, child. I can look at every one of ’em with a clear conscience. I did my work faithful; and then, when I might ’a’ set and held my hands, I’d make a block or two o’ patchwork, and before long I’d have enough to put together in a quilt. I went to piecin’ as soon as I was old enough to hold a needle and a piece o’ cloth, and one o’ the first things I can remember was settin’ on the back door-step sewin’ my quilt pieces, and mother praisin’ my stitches. Nowadays folks don’t have to sew unless they want to, but when I was a child there warn’t any sewin’-machines, and it was about as needful for folks to know how to sew as it was for ’em to know how to eat; and every child that was well raised could hem and run and backstitch and gether and overhand by the time she was nine years old. Why, I’d pieced four quilts by the time I was nineteen years old, and when me and Abram set up housekeepin’ I had bedclothes enough for three beds.

‘I’ve had a heap o’ comfort all my life makin’ quilts, and now in my old age I wouldn’t take a fortune for ’em. Set down here, child, where you can see out o’ the winder and smell the lilacs, and we’ll look at ’em all. You see, some folks has albums to put folks’ pictures in to remember ’em by, and some folks has a book and writes down the things that happen every day so they won’t forgit ’em; but, honey, these quilts is my albums and my di’ries, and whenever the weather’s bad and I can’t git out to see folks, I jest spread out my quilts and look at ’em and study over ’em, and it’s jest like goin’ back fifty or sixty years and livin’ my life over agin.

‘There ain’t nothin’ like a piece o’ caliker for bringin’ back old times, child, unless it’s a flower or a bunch o’ thyme or a piece o’ pennyroy’l – anything that smells sweet. Why, I can go out yonder in the yard and gether a bunch o’ that purple lilac and jest shut my eyes and see faces I ain’t seen for fifty years, and somethin’ goes through me like a flash o’ lightnin’, and it seems like I’m young agin jest for that minute.’

Aunt Jane’s hands were stroking lovingly a ‘nine-patch’ that resembled the coat of many colors.

‘Now this quilt, honey,’ she said, ‘I made out o’ the pieces o’ my children’s clothes, their little dresses and waists and aprons. Some of ’em’s dead, and some of ’em’s grown and married and a long way off from me, further off than the ones that’s dead, I sometimes think. But when I set down and look at this quilt and think over the pieces, it seems like they all come back, and I can see ’em

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<sup>1</sup> **a Sandwich Islander** – a resident of the Sandwich Islands, the second name of the Hawaiian Islands, a group of the volcanic islands in the Pacific Ocean; the first European who visited the islands in 1778 was Captain James Cook (1728–1779).



playin' around the floors and goin' in and out, and hear 'em cryin' and laughin' and callin' me jest like they used to do before they grew up to men and women, and before there was any little graves o' mine out in the old buryin'-ground over yonder.'

Wonderful imagination of motherhood that can bring childhood back from the dust of the grave and banish the wrinkles and gray hairs of age with no other talisman than a scrap of faded calico!

The old woman's hands were moving tremulously over the surface of the quilt as if they touched the golden curls of the little dream children who had vanished from her hearth so many years ago. But there were no tears either in her eyes or in her voice. I had long noticed that Aunt Jane always smiled when she spoke of the people whom the world calls 'dead,' or the things it calls 'lost' or 'past.' These words seemed to have for her higher and tenderer meanings than are placed on them by the sorrowful heart of humanity.

But the moments were passing, and one could not dwell too long on any quilt, however well beloved. Aunt Jane rose briskly, folded up the one that lay across her knees, and whisked out another from the huge pile in an old splint-bottomed chair.

'Here's a piece o' one o' Sally Ann's purple caliker dresses. Sally Ann always thought a heap o' purple caliker. Here's one o' Milly Amos' gingham – that pink-and-white one. And that piece o' white with the rosebuds in it, that's Miss Penelope's. She give it to me the summer before she died. Bless her soul! That dress jest matched her face exactly. Somehow her and her clothes always looked alike, and her voice matched her face, too. One o' the things I'm lookin' forward to, child, is seein' Miss Penelope agin and hearin' her sing. Voices and faces is alike; there's some that you can't remember, and there's some you can't forgit. I've seen a heap o' people and heard a heap o' voices, but Miss Penelope's face was different from all the rest, and so was her voice. Why, if she said "Good morning" to you, you'd hear that "Good mornin'" all day, and her singin' – I know there never was anything like it in this world. My grandchildren all laugh at me for thinkin' so much o' Miss Penelope's singin', but then they never heard her, and I have: that's the difference. My grandchild Henrietta was down here three or four years ago, and says she, "Grandma, don't you want to go up to Louisville with me and hear Patti sing?" And says I, "Patty who, child?" Says I, "If it was to hear Miss Penelope sing, I'd carry these old bones o' mine clear from here to New York. But there ain't anybody else I want to hear sing bad enough to go up to Louisville or anywhere else. And some o' these days," says I, "*I'm goin' to hear Miss Penelope sing.*"'

Aunt Jane laughed blithely, and it was impossible not to laugh with her.

'Honey,' she said, in the next breath, lowering her voice and laying her finger on the rosebud piece, 'honey, there's one thing I can't git over. Here's a piece o' Miss Penelope's dress, but *where's Miss Penelope*? Ain't it strange that a piece o' caliker'll outlast you and me? Don't it look like folks ought 'o hold on to their bodies as long as other folks holds on to a piece o' the dresses they used to wear?'

Questions as old as the human heart and its human grief! Here is the glove, but where is the hand it held but yesterday? Here the jewel that she wore, but where is she?

'Where is the Pompadour<sup>1</sup> now?

*This* was the Pompadour's fan!'

Strange, that such things as gloves, jewels, fans, and dresses can outlast a woman's form.

'Behold! I show you a mystery' – the mystery of mortality. And an eery feeling came over me as I entered into the old woman's mood and thought of the strong, vital bodies that had clothed themselves in those fabrics of purple and pink and white, and that now were dust and ashes lying in sad, neglected graves on farm and lonely roadside. There lay the quilt on our knees, and the gay scraps of calico seemed to mock us with their vivid colors. Aunt Jane's cheerful voice called me back from the tombs.

'Here's a piece o' one o' my dresses,' she said; 'brown ground with a red ring in it. Abram picked it out. And here's another one, that light yellor ground with the vine runnin' through it. I

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<sup>1</sup> **Pompadour** – Marquise de Pompadour (1721–1764), the mistress of Louis XV, king of France; she was a well-educated woman and a patron of art and literature.

never had so many caliker dresses that I didn't want one more, for in my day folks used to think a caliker dress was good enough to wear anywhere. Abram knew my failin', and two or three times a year he'd bring me a dress when he come from town. And the dresses he'd pick out always suited me better'n the ones I picked.'

'I ricollect I finished this quilt the summer before Mary Frances was born, and Sally Ann and Milly Amos and Maria Petty come over and give me a lift on the quiltin'. Here's Milly's work, here's Sally Ann's, and here's Maria's.'

I looked, but my inexperienced eye could see no difference in the handiwork of the three women. Aunt Jane saw my look of incredulity.

'Now, child,' she said, earnestly, 'you think I'm foolin' you, but, la! there's jest as much difference in folks' sewin' as there is in their handwritin'. Milly made a fine stitch, but she couldn't keep on the line to save her life; Maria never could make a reg'lar stitch, some'd be long and some short, and Sally Ann's was reg'lar, but all of 'em coarse. I can see 'em now stoopin' over the quiltin' frames – Milly talkin' as hard as she sewed, Sally Ann throwin' in a word now and then, and Maria never openin' her mouth except to ask for the thread or the chalk. I ricollect they come over after dinner, and we got the quilt out o' the frames long before sundown, and the next day I begun bindin' it, and I got the premium on it that year at the Fair.

'I hardly ever showed a quilt at the Fair that I didn't take the premium, but here's one quilt that Sarah Jane Mitchell beat me on.'

And Aunt Jane dragged out a ponderous, red-lined affair, the very antithesis of the silken, down-filled comfortable that rests so lightly on the couch of the modern dame.

'It makes me laugh jest to think o' that time, and how happy Sarah Jane was. It was way back yonder in the fifties. I ricollect we had a mighty fine Fair that year. The crops was all fine that season, and such apples and pears and grapes you never did see. The Floral Hall was full o' things, and the whole county turned out to go to the Fair. Abram and me got there the first day bright and early, and we was walkin' around the amp'itheater and lookin' at the townfolks and the sights, and we met Sally Ann. She stopped us, and says she, "Sarah Jane Mitchell's got a quilt in the Floral Hall in competition with yours and Milly Amos". Says I, "Is that all the competition there is?" And Sally Ann says, "All that amounts to anything. There's one more, but it's about as bad a piece o' sewin' as Sarah Jane's, and that looks like it'd hardly hold together till the Fair's over. And," says she, "I don't believe there'll be any more. It looks like this was an off year on that particular kind o' quilt. I didn't get mine done," says she, "and neither did Maria Petty, and maybe it's a good thing after all."

'Well, I saw in a minute what Sally Ann was aimin' at. And I says to Abram, "Abram, haven't you got somethin' to do with app'intin' the judges for the women's things?" And he says, "Yes." And I says, "Well, you see to it that Sally Ann gits app'inted to help judge the caliker quilts." And bless your soul, Abram got me and Sally Ann both app'inted. The other judge was Mis' Doctor Brigham, one o' the town ladies. We told her all about what we wanted to do, and she jest laughed and says, "Well, if that ain't the kindest, nicest thing! Of course we'll do it."

'Seein' that I had a quilt there, I hadn't a bit o' business bein' a judge; but the first thing I did was to fold my quilt up and hide it under Maria Petty's big worsted quilt, and then we pinned the blue ribbon on Sarah Jane's and the red on Milly's. I'd fixed it all up with Milly, and she was jest as willin' as I was for Sarah Jane to have the premium. There was jest one thing I was afraid of: Milly was a good-hearted woman, but she never had much control over her tongue. And I says to her, says I: "Milly, it's mighty good of you to give up your chance for the premium, but if Sarah Jane ever finds it out, that'll spoil everything. For," says I, "there ain't any kindness in doin' a person a favor and then tellin' everybody about it." And Milly laughed, and says she: "I know what you mean, Aunt Jane. It's mighty hard for me to keep from tellin' everything I know and some things I don't know, but," says she, "I'm never goin' to tell this, even to Sam." And she kept her word, too. Every once in a while she'd come up to me and whisper, "I ain't told it yet, Aunt Jane," jest to see me laugh.

'As soon as the doors was open, after we'd all got through judgin' and puttin' on the ribbons,

Milly went and hunted Sarah Jane up and told her that her quilt had the blue ribbon. They said the pore thing like to 'a' fainted for joy. She turned right white, and had to lean up against the post for a while before she could git to the Floral Hall. I never shall forgit her face. It was worth a dozen premiums to me, and Milly, too. She jest stood lookin' at that quilt and the blue ribbon on it, and her eyes was full o' tears and her lips quiverin', and then she started off and brought the children in to look at "Mammy's quilt." She met Sam on the way out, and says she: "Sam, what do you reckon? My quilt took the premium." And I believe in my soul Sam was as much pleased as Sarah Jane. He came saunterin' up, tryin' to look unconcerned, but anybody could see he was mighty well satisfied. It does a husband and wife a heap o' good to be proud of each other, and I reckon that was the first time Sam ever had cause to be proud o' pore Sarah Jane. It's my belief that he thought more o' Sarah Jane all the rest o' her life jest on account o' that premium. Me and Sally Ann helped her pick it out. She had her choice betwixt a butter-dish and a cup, and she took the cup. Folks used to laugh and say that that cup was the only thing in Sarah Jane's house that was kept clean and bright, and if it hadn't 'a' been solid silver, she'd 'a' wore it all out rubbin' it up. Sarah Jane died o' pneumonia about three or four years after that, and the folks that nursed her said she wouldn't take a drink o' water or a dose o' medicine out o' any cup but that. There's some folks, child, that don't have to do anything but walk along and hold out their hands, and the premiums jest naturally fall into 'em; and there's others that work and strive the best they know how, and nothin' ever seems to come to 'em; and I reckon nobody but the Lord and Sarah Jane knows how much happiness she got out o' that cup. I'm thankful she had that much pleasure before she died.'

There was a quilt hanging over the foot of the bed that had about it a certain air of distinction. It was a solid mass of patchwork, composed of squares, parallelograms, and hexagons. The squares were of dark gray and red-brown, the hexagons were white, the parallelograms black and light gray. I felt sure that it had a history that set it apart from its ordinary fellows.

'Where did you get the pattern, Aunt Jane?' I asked. 'I never saw anything like it.'

The old lady's eyes sparkled, and she laughed with pure pleasure.

'That's what everybody says,' she exclaimed, jumping up and spreading the favored quilt over two laden chairs, where its merits became more apparent and striking. 'There ain't another quilt like this in the State o' Kentucky, or the world, for that matter. My granddaughter Henrietta, Mary Frances' youngest child, brought me this pattern *from Europe*.'

She spoke the words as one might say, 'from Paradise,' or 'from Olympus<sup>1</sup>,' or 'from the Lost Atlantis<sup>2</sup>.' 'Europe' was evidently a name to conjure with, a country of mystery and romance unspeakable. I had seen many things from many lands beyond the sea, but a quilt pattern from Europe! Here at last was something new under the sun. In what shop of London or Paris were quilt patterns kept on sale for the American tourist?

'You see,' said Aunt Jane, 'Henrietta married a mighty rich man, and jest as good as he's rich, too, and they went to Europe on their bridal trip. When she come home she brought me the prettiest shawl you ever saw. She made me stand up and shut my eyes, and she put it on my shoulders and made me look in the lookin'-glass, and then she says, "I brought you a new quilt pattern, too, grandma, and I want you to piece one quilt by it and leave it to me when you die." And then she told me about goin' to a town over yonder they call Florence<sup>3</sup>, and how she went into a big church that was built hundreds o' years before I was born. And she said the floor was made o' little pieces o' colored stone, all laid together in a pattern, and they called it mosaic. And says I, "Honey, has it got anything to do with Moses and his law?" You know the Commandments<sup>4</sup> was called the Mosaic Law<sup>5</sup>, and was all on tables o' stone. And Henrietta jest laughed, and says she: "No, grandma; I

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<sup>1</sup> **Olympus** – a mount in Greece (2,917 m); in Greek mythology, the place where gods lived.

<sup>2</sup> **the Lost Atlantis** – a legendary island in the Atlantic Ocean, described by antique authors as a highly developed and powerful civilization

<sup>3</sup> **Florence** – a city in central Italy, founded in the 1st century BC and notable for its works of art

<sup>4</sup> **the Commandments** – in the Bible, the list of religious principles revealed to Moses, a Hebrew prophet of the 14th–13th centuries BC, on Mount Sinai

<sup>5</sup> **the Mosaic Law** – the religious principles of Judaism revealed to Moses, a Hebrew prophet of the 14th–13th centuries BC

don't believe it has. But," says she, "the minute I stepped on that pavement I thought about you, and I drew this pattern off on a piece o' paper and brought it all the way to Kentucky for you to make a quilt by." Henrietta bought the worsted for me, for she said it had to be jest the colors o' that pavement over yonder, and I made it that very winter.'

Aunt Jane was regarding the quilt with worshipful eyes, and it really was an effective combination of color and form.

'Many a time while I was piecin' that,' she said, 'I thought about the man that laid the pavement in that old church, and wondered what his name was, and how he looked, and what he'd think if he knew there was a old woman down here in Kentucky usin' his patterns to make a bed quilt.'

It was indeed a far cry from the Florentine artisan of centuries ago to this humble worker in calico and worsted, but between the two stretched a cord of sympathy that made them one – the eternal aspiration after beauty.

'Honey,' said Aunt Jane, suddenly, 'did I ever show you my premiums?'

And then, with pleasant excitement in her manner, she arose, fumbled in her deep pocket for an ancient bunch of keys, and unlocked a cupboard on one side of the fireplace. One by one she drew them out, unrolled the soft yellow tissue-paper that enfolded them, and ranged them in a stately line on the old cherry center-table – nineteen sterling silver cups and goblets. 'Abram took some of 'em on his fine stock, and I took some of 'em on my quilts and salt-risin' bread and cakes,' she said, impressively.

To the artist his medals, to the soldier his cross of the Legion of Honor<sup>1</sup>, and to Aunt Jane her silver cups. All the triumph of a humble life was symbolized in these shining things. They were simple and genuine as the days in which they were made. A few of them boasted a beaded edge or a golden lining, but no engraving or embossing marred their silver purity. On the bottom of each was the stamp: 'John B. Akin, Danville, Ky.' There they stood,

'Filled to the brim with precious memories,' – memories of the time when she and Abram had worked together in field or garden or home, and the County Fair brought to all a yearly opportunity to stand on the height of achievement and know somewhat the taste of Fame's enchanted cup.

'There's one for every child and every grandchild,' she said, quietly, as she began wrapping them in the silky paper, and storing them carefully away in the cupboard, there to rest until the day when children and grandchildren would claim their own, and the treasures of the dead would come forth from the darkness to stand as heirlooms on fashionable sideboards and damask<sup>2</sup>-covered tables.

'Did you ever think, child,' she said, presently, 'how much piecin' a quilt's like livin' a life? And as for sermons, why, they ain't no better sermon to me than a patchwork quilt, and the doctrines is right there a heap plainer'n they are in the catechism<sup>3</sup>. Many a time I've set and listened to Parson Page preachin' about predestination and free-will, and I've said to myself, "Well, I ain't never been through Centre College up at Danville, but if I could jest git up in the pulpit with one of my quilts, I could make it a heap plainer to folks than parson's makin' it with all his big words." You see, you start out with jest so much caliker; you don't go to the store and pick it out and buy it, but the neighbors will give you a piece here and a piece there, and you'll have a piece left every time you cut out a dress, and you take jest what happens to come. And that's like predestination. But when it comes to the cuttin' out, why, you're free to choose your own pattern. You can give the same kind o' pieces to two persons, and one'll make a "nine-patch" and one'll make a "wild-goose chase," and there'll be two quilts made out o' the same kind o' pieces, and jest as different as they can be. And that is jest the way with livin'. The Lord sends us the pieces, but we can cut 'em out and put 'em together pretty much to suit ourselves, and there's a heap more in the cuttin' out and the sewin' than there is in the caliker. The same sort o' things comes into all lives, jest as the

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1 **the Legion of Hono(u)r** – the National Order of the Legion of Honour, a military and civil order of the French Republic, created by Napoleon in 1802

2 **damask** – a silk, fine, patterned fabric, originally produced in Damascus, Syria

3 **catechism** – a religious instruction in the form of questions and answers

Apostle says, "There hath no trouble taken you but is common to all men."

'The same trouble'll come into two people's lives, and one'll take it and make one thing out of it, and the other'll make somethin' entirely different. There was Mary Harris and Mandy Crawford. They both lost their husbands the same year; and Mandy set down and cried and worried and wondered what on earth she was goin' to do, and the farm went to wrack and the children turned out bad, and she had to live with her son-in-law in her old age. But Mary, she got up and went to work, and made everybody about her work, too; and she managed the farm better'n it ever had been managed before, and the boys all come up steady, hard-workin' men, and there wasn't a woman in the county better fixed up than Mary Harris. Things is predestined to come to us, honey, but we're jest as free as air to make what we please out of 'em. And when it comes to puttin' the pieces together, there's another time when we're free. You don't trust to luck for the caliker to put your quilt together with; you go to the store and pick it out yourself, any color you like. There's folks that always looks on the bright side and makes the best of everything, and that's like puttin' your quilt together with blue or pink or white or some other pretty color; and there's folks that never see anything but the dark side, and always lookin' for trouble, and treasurin' it up after they git it, and they're puttin' their lives together with black, jest like you would put a quilt together with some dark, ugly color. You can spoil the prettiest quilt pieces that ever was made jest by puttin' 'em together with the wrong color, and the best sort o' life is miserable if you don't look at things right and think about 'em right.

'Then there's another thing. I've seen folks piece and piece, but when it come to puttin' the blocks together and quiltin' and linin' it, they'd give out; and that's like folks that do a little here and a little there, but their lives ain't of much use after all, any more'n a lot o' loose pieces o' patchwork. And then while you're livin' your life, it looks pretty much like a jumble o' quilt pieces before they're put together; but when you git through with it, or pretty nigh through, as I am now, you'll see the use and the purpose of everything in it. Everything'll be in its right place jest like the squares in this "four-patch," and one piece may be pretty and another one ugly, but it all looks right when you see it finished and joined together.'

Did I say that every pattern was represented? No, there was one notable omission. Not a single 'crazy quilt' was there in the collection. I called Aunt Jane's attention to this lack.

'Child,' she said, 'I used to say there wasn't anything I couldn't do if I made up my mind to it. But I hadn't seen a "crazy quilt" then. The first one I ever seen was up at Danville at Mary Frances', and Henrietta says, "Now, grandma, you've got to make a crazy quilt; you've made every other sort that ever was heard of." And she brought me the pieces and showed me how to baste 'em on the square, and said she'd work the fancy stitches around 'em for me. Well, I set there all the mornin' tryin' to fix up that square, and the more I tried, the uglier and crookeder the thing looked. And finally I says: "Here, child, take your pieces. If I was to make this the way you want me to, they'd be a crazy quilt and a crazy woman, too.'"

Aunt Jane was laying the folded quilts in neat piles here and there about the room. There was a look of unspeakable satisfaction on her face – the look of the creator who sees his completed work and pronounces it good.

'I've been a hard worker all my life,' she said, seating herself and folding her hands restfully, 'but 'most all my work has been the kind that "perishes with the usin'," as the Bible says. That's the discouragin' thing about a woman's work. Milly Amos used to say that if a woman was to see all the dishes that she had to wash before she died, piled up before her in one pile, she'd lie down and die right then and there. I've always had the name o' bein' a good housekeeper, but when I'm dead and gone there ain't anybody goin' to think o' the floors I've swept, and the tables I've scrubbed, and the old clothes I've patched, and the stockin's I've darned. Abram might 'a' remembered it, but he ain't here. But when one o' my grandchildren or great-grandchildren sees one o' these quilts, they'll think about Aunt Jane, and, wherever I am then, I'll know I ain't forgotten.

'I reckon everybody wants to leave somethin' behind that'll last after they're dead and gone. It don't look like it's worth while to live unless you can do that. The Bible says folks 'rest from their labors, and their works do follow them,' but that ain't so. They go, and maybe they do rest, but

their works stay right here, unless they're the sort that don't outlast the usin'. Now, some folks has money to build monuments with – great, tall, marble pillars, with angels on top of 'em, like you see in Cave Hill and them big city buryin'-grounds. And some folks can build churches and schools and hospitals to keep folks in mind of 'em, but all the work I've got to leave behind me is jest these quilts, and sometimes, when I'm settin' here, workin' with my caliker and gingham pieces, I'll finish off a block, and I laugh and say to myself, "Well, here's another stone for the monument."

'I reckon you think, child, that a caliker or a worsted quilt is a curious sort of a monument – 'bout as perishable as the sweepin' and scrubbin' and mendin'. But if folks values things rightly, and knows how to take care of 'em, there ain't many things that'll last longer'n a quilt. Why, I've got a blue and white counterpane that my mother's mother spun and wove, and there ain't a sign o' givin' out in it yet. I'm goin' to will that to my granddaughter that lives in Danville, Mary Frances' oldest child. She was down here last summer, and I was lookin' over my things and packin' 'em away, and she happened to see that counterpane and says she, "Grandma, I want you to will me that." And says I: "What do you want with that old thing, honey? You know you wouldn't sleep under such a counterpane as that." And says she, "No, but I'd hang it up over my parlor door for a—"

'Portière?'<sup>1</sup> I suggested, as Aunt Jane hesitated for the unaccustomed word.

'That's it, child. Somehow I can't ricollect these new-fangled words, any more'n I can understand these new-fangled ways. Who'd ever 'a' thought that folks'd go to stringin' up bed-coverin's in their doors? And says I to Janie, "You can hang your great-grandmother's counterpane up in your parlor door if you want to, but," says I, "don't you ever make a door-curtain out o' one o' my quilts." But la! the way things turn around, if I was to come back fifty years from now, like as not I'd find 'em usin' my quilts for window-curtains or door-mats.'

We both laughed, and there rose in my mind a picture of a twentieth-century house decorated with Aunt Jane's 'nine-patches' and 'rising suns.' How could the dear old woman know that the same esthetic sense that had drawn from their obscurity the white and blue counterpanes of colonial days would forever protect her loved quilts from such a desecration as she feared? As she lifted a pair of quilts from a chair nearby, I caught sight of a pure white spread in striking contrast with the many-hued patchwork.

'Where did you get that Marseilles<sup>2</sup> spread, Aunt Jane?' I asked, pointing to it. Aunt Jane lifted it and laid it on my lap without a word. Evidently she thought that here was something that could speak for itself. It was two layers of snowy cotton cloth thinly lined with cotton, and elaborately quilted into a perfect imitation of a Marseilles counterpane. The pattern was a tracery of roses, buds, and leaves, very much conventionalized, but still recognizable for the things they were. The stitches were fairylike, and altogether it might have covered the bed of a queen.

'I made every stitch o' that spread the year before me and Abram was married,' she said. 'I put it on my bed when we went to housekeepin'; it was on the bed when Abram died, and when I die I want 'em to cover me with it.' There was a life-history in the simple words. I thought of Desdemona<sup>3</sup> and her bridal sheets, and I did not offer to help Aunt Jane as she folded this quilt.

'I reckon you think,' she resumed presently, 'that I'm a mean, stingy old creetur not to give Janie the counterpane now, instead o' hoardin' it up, and all these quilts too, and keepin' folks waitin' for 'em till I die. But, honey, it ain't all selfishness. I'd give away my best dress or my best bonnet or an acre o' ground to anybody that needed 'em more'n I did; but these quilts – Why, it looks like my whole life was sewed up in 'em, and I ain't goin' to part with 'em while life lasts.'

There was a ring of passionate eagerness in the old voice, and she fell to putting away her treasures as if the suggestion of losing them had made her fearful of their safety.

I looked again at the heap of quilts. An hour ago they had been patchwork, and nothing more. But now! The old woman's words had wrought a transformation in the homely mass of calico and silk and worsted. Patchwork? Ah, no! It was memory, imagination, history, biography, joy, sorrow,

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1 **portière** – heavy curtains hung in a doorway

2 **Marseilles** – a city and port in southern France on the Mediterranean Sea, founded 2,500 years ago

3 **Desdemona** – a fictional character in Shakespeare's tragedy 'Othello' (1603)

philosophy, religion, romance, realism, life, love, and death; and over all, like a halo, the love of the artist for his work and the soul's longing for earthly immortality.

No wonder the wrinkled fingers smoothed them as reverently as we handle the garments of the dead.

## **The Queer Feet (Gilbert Keith Chesterton)**

If you meet a member of that select club, 'The Twelve True Fishermen,' entering the Vernon Hotel for the annual club dinner, you will observe, as he takes off his overcoat, that his evening coat is green and not black. If (supposing that you have the star-defying audacity to address such a being) you ask him why, he will probably answer that he does it to avoid being mistaken for a waiter. You will then retire crushed. But you will leave behind you a mystery as yet unsolved and a tale worth telling.

If (to pursue the same vein of improbable conjecture) you were to meet a mild, hard-working little priest, named Father Brown, and were to ask him what he thought was the most singular luck of his life, he would probably reply that upon the whole his best stroke was at the Vernon Hotel, where he had averted a crime and, perhaps, saved a soul, merely by listening to a few footsteps in a passage. He is perhaps a little proud of this wild and wonderful guess of his, and it is possible that he might refer to it. But since it is immeasurably unlikely that you will ever rise high enough in the social world to find 'The Twelve True Fishermen,' or that you will ever sink low enough among slums and criminals to find Father Brown, I fear you will never hear the story at all unless you hear it from me.

The Vernon Hotel at which The Twelve True Fishermen held their annual dinners was an institution such as can only exist in an oligarchical society which has almost gone mad on good manners. It was that topsy-turvy product – an 'exclusive' commercial enterprise. That is, it was a thing which paid not by attracting people, but actually by turning people away. In the heart of a plutocracy tradesmen become cunning enough to be more fastidious than their customers. They positively create difficulties so that their wealthy and weary clients may spend money and diplomacy in overcoming them. If there were a fashionable hotel in London which no man could enter who was under six foot, society would meekly make up parties of six-foot men to dine in it. If there were an expensive restaurant which by a mere caprice of its proprietor was only open on Thursday afternoon, it would be crowded on Thursday afternoon. The Vernon Hotel stood, as if by accident, in the corner of a square in Belgravia<sup>1</sup>. It was a small hotel; and a very inconvenient one. But its very inconveniences were considered as walls protecting a particular class. One inconvenience, in particular, was held to be of vital importance: the fact that practically only twenty-four people could dine in the place at once. The only big dinner table was the celebrated terrace table, which stood open to the air on a sort of veranda overlooking one of the most exquisite old gardens in London. Thus it happened that even the twenty-four seats at this table could only be enjoyed in warm weather; and this making the enjoyment yet more difficult made it yet more desired. The existing owner of the hotel was a Jew named Lever; and he made nearly a million out of it, by making it difficult to get into. Of course he combined with this limitation in the scope of his enterprise the most careful polish in its performance. The wines and cooking were really as good as any in Europe, and the demeanour of the attendants exactly mirrored the fixed mood of the English upper class. The proprietor knew all his waiters like the fingers on his hand; there were only fifteen of them all told. It was much easier to become a Member of Parliament than to become a waiter in that hotel. Each waiter was trained in terrible silence and smoothness, as if he were a gentleman's servant. And, indeed, there was generally at least one waiter to every gentleman who dined.

The club of The Twelve True Fishermen would not have consented to dine anywhere but in such a place, for it insisted on a luxurious privacy; and would have been quite upset by the mere thought that any other club was even dining in the same building. On the occasion of their annual dinner the Fishermen were in the habit of exposing all their treasures, as if they were in a private

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<sup>1</sup> **Belgravia** – an area in the borough of Westminster in London, east of Chelsea and south of Hyde Park

house, especially the celebrated set of fish knives and forks which were, as it were, the insignia of the society, each being exquisitely wrought in silver in the form of a fish, and each loaded at the hilt with one large pearl. These were always laid out for the fish course, and the fish course was always the most magnificent in that magnificent repast. The society had a vast number of ceremonies and observances, but it had no history and no object; that was where it was so very aristocratic. You did not have to be anything in order to be one of the Twelve Fishers; unless you were already a certain sort of person, you never even heard of them. It had been in existence twelve years. Its president was Mr. Audley. Its vice-president was the Duke of Chester.

If I have in any degree conveyed the atmosphere of this appalling hotel, the reader may feel a natural wonder as to how I came to know anything about it, and may even speculate as to how so ordinary a person as my friend Father Brown came to find himself in that golden galley. As far as that is concerned, my story is simple, or even vulgar. There is in the world a very aged rioter and demagogue who breaks into the most refined retreats with the dreadful information that all men are brothers, and wherever this leveller went on his pale horse it was Father Brown's trade to follow. One of the waiters, an Italian, had been struck down with a paralytic stroke that afternoon; and his Jewish employer, marvelling mildly at such superstitions, had consented to send for the nearest Popish priest<sup>1</sup>. With what the waiter confessed to Father Brown we are not concerned, for the excellent reason that that cleric kept it to himself; but apparently it involved him in writing out a note or statement for the conveying of some message or the righting of some wrong. Father Brown, therefore, with a meek impudence which he would have shown equally in Buckingham Palace<sup>2</sup>, asked to be provided with a room and writing materials. Mr. Lever was torn in two. He was a kind man, and had also that bad imitation of kindness, the dislike of any difficulty or scene. At the same time the presence of one unusual stranger in his hotel that evening was like a speck of dirt on something just cleaned. There was never any borderland or anteroom in the Vernon Hotel, no people waiting in the hall, no customers coming in on chance. There were fifteen waiters. There were twelve guests. It would be as startling to find a new guest in the hotel that night as to find a new brother taking breakfast or tea in one's own family. Moreover, the priest's appearance was second-rate and his clothes muddy; a mere glimpse of him afar off might precipitate a crisis in the club. Mr. Lever at last hit on a plan to cover, since he might not obliterate, the disgrace. When you enter (as you never will) the Vernon Hotel, you pass down a short passage decorated with a few dingy but important pictures, and come to the main vestibule and lounge which opens on your right into passages leading to the public rooms, and on your left to a similar passage pointing to the kitchens and offices of the hotel. Immediately on your left hand is the corner of a glass office, which abuts upon the lounge – a house within a house, so to speak, like the old hotel bar which probably once occupied its place.

In this office sat the representative of the proprietor (nobody in this place ever appeared in person if he could help it), and just beyond the office, on the way to the servants' quarters, was the gentlemen's cloak room, the last boundary of the gentlemen's domain. But between the office and the cloak room was a small private room without other outlet, sometimes used by the proprietor for delicate and important matters, such as lending a duke a thousand pounds or declining to lend him sixpence. It is a mark of the magnificent tolerance of Mr. Lever that he permitted this holy place to be for about half an hour profaned by a mere priest, scribbling away on a piece of paper. The story which Father Brown was writing down was very likely a much better story than this one, only it will never be known. I can merely state that it was very nearly as long, and that the last two or three paragraphs of it were the least exciting and absorbing.

For it was by the time that he had reached these that the priest began a little to allow his thoughts to wander and his animal senses, which were commonly keen, to awaken. The time of darkness and dinner was drawing on; his own forgotten little room was without a light, and perhaps the gathering gloom, as occasionally happens, sharpened the sense of sound. As Father Brown

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<sup>1</sup> **Popish priest** = Catholic priest

<sup>2</sup> **Buckingham Palace** – royal residence in London; the famous architect John Nash converted the house built in 1705 for the Duke of Buckingham into a royal residence for king George IV.



wrote the last and least essential part of his document, he caught himself writing to the rhythm of a recurrent noise outside, just as one sometimes thinks to the tune of a railway train. When he became conscious of the thing he found what it was: only the ordinary patter of feet passing the door, which in an hotel was no very unlikely matter. Nevertheless, he stared at the darkened ceiling, and listened to the sound. After he had listened for a few seconds dreamily, he got to his feet and listened intently, with his head a little on one side. Then he sat down again and buried his brow in his hands, now not merely listening, but listening and thinking also.

The footsteps outside at any given moment were such as one might hear in any hotel; and yet, taken as a whole, there was something very strange about them. There were no other footsteps. It was always a very silent house, for the few familiar guests went at once to their own apartments, and the well-trained waiters were told to be almost invisible until they were wanted. One could not conceive any place where there was less reason to apprehend anything irregular. But these footsteps were so odd that one could not decide to call them regular or irregular. Father Brown followed them with his finger on the edge of the table, like a man trying to learn a tune on the piano.

First, there came a long rush of rapid little steps, such as a light man might make in winning a walking race. At a certain point they stopped and changed to a sort of slow, swinging stamp, numbering not a quarter of the steps, but occupying about the same time. The moment the last echoing stamp had died away would come again the run or ripple of light, hurrying feet, and then again the thud of the heavier walking. It was certainly the same pair of boots, partly because (as has been said) there were no other boots about, and partly because they had a small but unmistakable creak in them. Father Brown had the kind of head that cannot help asking questions; and on this apparently trivial question his head almost split. He had seen men run in order to jump. He had seen men run in order to slide. But why on earth should a man run in order to walk? Or, again, why should he walk in order to run? Yet no other description would cover the antics of this invisible pair of legs. The man was either walking very fast down one-half of the corridor in order to walk very slow down the other half; or he was walking very slow at one end to have the rapture of walking fast at the other. Neither suggestion seemed to make much sense. His brain was growing darker and darker, like his room.

Yet, as he began to think steadily, the very blackness of his cell seemed to make his thoughts more vivid; he began to see as in a kind of vision the fantastic feet capering along the corridor in unnatural or symbolic attitudes. Was it a heathen religious dance? Or some entirely new kind of scientific exercise? Father Brown began to ask himself with more exactness what the steps suggested. Taking the slow step first: it certainly was not the step of the proprietor. Men of his type walk with a rapid waddle, or they sit still. It could not be any servant or messenger waiting for directions. It did not sound like it. The poorer orders (in an oligarchy) sometimes lurch about when they are slightly drunk, but generally, and especially in such gorgeous scenes, they stand or sit in constrained attitudes. No; that heavy yet springy step, with a kind of careless emphasis, not specially noisy, yet not caring what noise it made, belonged to only one of the animals of this earth. It was a gentleman of western Europe, and probably one who had never worked for his living.

Just as he came to this solid certainty, the step changed to the quicker one, and ran past the door as feverishly as a rat. The listener remarked that though this step was much swifter it was also much more noiseless, almost as if the man were walking on tiptoe. Yet it was not associated in his mind with secrecy, but with something else – something that he could not remember. He was maddened by one of those half-memories that make a man feel half-witted. Surely he had heard that strange, swift walking somewhere. Suddenly he sprang to his feet with a new idea in his head, and walked to the door. His room had no direct outlet on the passage, but let on one side into the glass office, and on the other into the cloak room beyond. He tried the door into the office, and found it locked. Then he looked at the window, now a square pane full of purple cloud cleft by livid sunset, and for an instant he smelt evil as a dog smells rats.

The rational part of him (whether the wiser or not) regained its supremacy. He remembered that the proprietor had told him that he should lock the door, and would come later to release him. He told himself that twenty things he had not thought of might explain the eccentric sounds outside;

he reminded himself that there was just enough light left to finish his own proper work. Bringing his paper to the window so as to catch the last stormy evening light, he resolutely plunged once more into the almost completed record. He had written for about twenty minutes, bending closer and closer to his paper in the lessening light; then suddenly he sat upright. He had heard the strange feet once more.

This time they had a third oddity. Previously the unknown man had walked, with levity indeed and lightning quickness, but he had walked. This time he ran. One could hear the swift, soft, bounding steps coming along the corridor, like the pads of a fleeing and leaping panther. Whoever was coming was a very strong, active man, in still yet tearing excitement. Yet, when the sound had swept up to the office like a sort of whispering whirlwind, it suddenly changed again to the old slow, swaggering stamp.

Father Brown flung down his paper, and, knowing the office door to be locked, went at once into the cloak room on the other side. The attendant of this place was temporarily absent, probably because the only guests were at dinner and his office was a sinecure. After groping through a grey forest of overcoats, he found that the dim cloak room opened on the lighted corridor in the form of a sort of counter or half-door, like most of the counters across which we have all handed umbrellas and received tickets. There was a light immediately above the semicircular arch of this opening. It threw little illumination on Father Brown himself, who seemed a mere dark outline against the dim sunset window behind him. But it threw an almost theatrical light on the man who stood outside the cloak room in the corridor.

He was an elegant man in very plain evening dress; tall, but with an air of not taking up much room; one felt that he could have slid along like a shadow where many smaller men would have been obvious and obstructive. His face, now flung back in the lamplight, was swarthy and vivacious, the face of a foreigner. His figure was good, his manners good humoured and confident; a critic could only say that his black coat was a shade below his figure and manners, and even bulged and bagged in an odd way. The moment he caught sight of Brown's black silhouette against the sunset, he tossed down a scrap of paper with a number and called out with amiable authority: 'I want my hat and coat, please; I find I have to go away at once.'

Father Brown took the paper without a word, and obediently went to look for the coat; it was not the first menial work he had done in his life. He brought it and laid it on the counter; meanwhile, the strange gentleman who had been feeling in his waistcoat pocket, said laughing: 'I haven't got any silver; you can keep this.' And he threw down half a sovereign, and caught up his coat.

Father Brown's figure remained quite dark and still; but in that instant he had lost his head. His head was always most valuable when he had lost it. In such moments he put two and two together and made four million. Often the Catholic Church (which is wedded to common sense) did not approve of it. Often he did not approve of it himself. But it was real inspiration – important at rare crises – when whosoever shall lose his head the same shall save it.

'I think, sir,' he said civilly, 'that you have some silver in your pocket.'

The tall gentleman stared. 'Hang it,' he cried, 'if I choose to give you gold, why should you complain?'

'Because silver is sometimes more valuable than gold,' said the priest mildly; 'that is, in large quantities.'

The stranger looked at him curiously. Then he looked still more curiously up the passage towards the main entrance. Then he looked back at Brown again, and then he looked very carefully at the window beyond Brown's head, still coloured with the after-glow of the storm. Then he seemed to make up his mind. He put one hand on the counter, vaulted over as easily as an acrobat and towered above the priest, putting one tremendous hand upon his collar.

'Stand still,' he said, in a hacking whisper. 'I don't want to threaten you, but—'

'I do want to threaten you,' said Father Brown, in a voice like a rolling drum, 'I want to threaten you with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.'

'You're a rum sort of cloak-room clerk,' said the other.

‘I am a priest, Monsieur Flambeau,’ said Brown, ‘and I am ready to hear your confession.’

The other stood gasping for a few moments, and then staggered back into a chair.

The first two courses of the dinner of The Twelve True Fishermen had proceeded with placid success. I do not possess a copy of the menu; and if I did it would not convey anything to anybody. It was written in a sort of super-French employed by cooks, but quite unintelligible to Frenchmen. There was a tradition in the club that the hors d’oeuvres should be various and manifold to the point of madness. They were taken seriously because they were avowedly useless extras, like the whole dinner and the whole club. There was also a tradition that the soup course should be light and unpretending – a sort of simple and austere vigil for the feast of fish that was to come. The talk was that strange, slight talk which governs the British Empire, which governs it in secret, and yet would scarcely enlighten an ordinary Englishman even if he could overhear it. Cabinet ministers on both sides were alluded to by their Christian names with a sort of bored benignity. The Radical Chancellor of the Exchequer<sup>1</sup>, whom the whole Tory party<sup>2</sup> was supposed to be cursing for his extortions, was praised for his minor poetry, or his saddle in the hunting field. The Tory leader, whom all Liberals were supposed to hate as a tyrant, was discussed and, on the whole, praised – as a Liberal. It seemed somehow that politicians were very important. And yet, anything seemed important about them except their politics. Mr. Audley, the chairman, was an amiable, elderly man who still wore Gladstone<sup>3</sup> collars; he was a kind of symbol of all that phantasmal and yet fixed society. He had never done anything – not even anything wrong. He was not fast; he was not even particularly rich. He was simply in the thing; and there was an end of it. No party could ignore him, and if he had wished to be in the Cabinet he certainly would have been put there. The Duke of Chester, the vice-president, was a young and rising politician. That is to say, he was a pleasant youth, with flat, fair hair and a freckled face, with moderate intelligence and enormous estates. In public his appearances were always successful and his principle was simple enough. When he thought of a joke he made it, and was called brilliant. When he could not think of a joke he said that this was no time for trifling, and was called able. In private, in a club of his own class, he was simply quite pleasantly frank and silly, like a schoolboy. Mr. Audley, never having been in politics, treated them a little more seriously. Sometimes he even embarrassed the company by phrases suggesting that there was some difference between a Liberal and a Conservative. He himself was a Conservative, even in private life. He had a roll of grey hair over the back of his collar, like certain old-fashioned statesmen, and seen from behind he looked like the man the empire wants. Seen from the front he looked like a mild, self-indulgent bachelor, with rooms in the Albany – which he was.

As has been remarked, there were twenty-four seats at the terrace table, and only twelve members of the club. Thus they could occupy the terrace in the most luxurious style of all, being ranged along the inner side of the table, with no one opposite, commanding an uninterrupted view of the garden, the colours of which were still vivid, though evening was closing in somewhat luridly for the time of year. The chairman sat in the centre of the line, and the vice-president at the right-hand end of it. When the twelve guests first trooped into their seats it was the custom (for some unknown reason) for all the fifteen waiters to stand lining the wall like troops presenting arms to the king, while the fat proprietor stood and bowed to the club with radiant surprise, as if he had never heard of them before. But before the first chink of knife and fork this army of retainers had vanished, only the one or two required to collect and distribute the plates darting about in deathly silence. Mr. Lever, the proprietor, of course had disappeared in convulsions of courtesy long before. It would be exaggerative, indeed, irreverent, to say that he ever positively appeared again. But when the important course, the fish course, was being brought on, there was – how shall I put it? – A vivid shadow, a projection of his personality, which told that he was hovering near. The sacred fish course consisted (to the eyes of the vulgar) in a sort of monstrous pudding, about the size and shape of a wedding cake, in which some considerable number of interesting fishes had finally lost the

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1 **the Exchequer** – the government department responsible for receiving and distributing the public revenue, founded in the 12th century; later the Exchequer was joined with the Treasury.

2 **Gladstone** – William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), four-time prime minister of Great Britain

3 **Gladstone** – William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), four-time prime minister of Great Britain

shapes which God had given to them. The Twelve True Fishermen took up their celebrated fish knives and fish forks, and approached it as gravely as if every inch of the pudding cost as much as the silver fork it was eaten with. So it did, for all I know. This course was dealt with in eager and devouring silence; and it was only when his plate was nearly empty that the young duke made the ritual remark: 'They can't do this anywhere but here.'

'Nowhere,' said Mr. Audley, in a deep bass voice, turning to the speaker and nodding his venerable head a number of times. 'Nowhere, assuredly, except here. It was represented to me that at the Café Anglais—'

Here he was interrupted and even agitated for a moment by the removal of his plate, but he recaptured the valuable thread of his thoughts. 'It was represented to me that the same could be done at the Café Anglais. Nothing like it, sir,' he said, shaking his head ruthlessly, like a hanging judge. 'Nothing like it.'

'Overrated place,' said a certain Colonel Pound, speaking (by the look of him) for the first time for some months.

'Oh, I don't know,' said the Duke of Chester, who was an optimist, 'it's jolly good for some things. You can't beat it at—'

A waiter came swiftly along the room, and then stopped dead. His stoppage was as silent as his tread; but all those vague and kindly gentlemen were so used to the utter smoothness of the unseen machinery which surrounded and supported their lives, that a waiter doing anything unexpected was a start and a jar. They felt as you and I would feel if the inanimate world disobeyed — if a chair ran away from us.

The waiter stood staring a few seconds, while there deepened on every face at table a strange shame which is wholly the product of our time. It is the combination of modern humanitarianism with the horrible modern abyss between the souls of the rich and poor. A genuine historic aristocrat would have thrown things at the waiter, beginning with empty bottles, and very probably ending with money. A genuine democrat would have asked him, with comrade-like clearness of speech, what the devil he was doing. But these modern plutocrats could not bear a poor man near to them, either as a slave or as a friend. That something had gone wrong with the servants was merely a dull, hot embarrassment. They did not want to be brutal, and they dreaded the need to be benevolent. They wanted the thing, whatever it was, to be over. It was over. The waiter, after standing for some seconds rigid, like a cataleptic, turned round and ran madly out of the room.

When he reappeared in the room, or rather in the doorway, it was in company with another waiter, with whom he whispered and gesticulated with southern fierceness. Then the first waiter went away, leaving the second waiter, and reappeared with a third waiter. By the time a fourth waiter had joined this hurried synod<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Audley felt it necessary to break the silence in the interests of Tact. He used a very loud cough, instead of a presidential hammer, and said: 'Splendid work young Moocher's doing in Burmah<sup>2</sup>. Now, no other nation in the world could have—'

A fifth waiter had sped towards him like an arrow, and was whispering in his ear: 'So sorry. Important! Might the proprietor speak to you?'

The chairman turned in disorder, and with a dazed stare saw Mr. Lever coming towards them with his lumbering quickness. The gait of the good proprietor was indeed his usual gait, but his face was by no means usual. Generally it was a genial copper-brown; now it was a sickly yellow.

'You will pardon me, Mr. Audley,' he said, with asthmatic breathlessness. 'I have great apprehensions. Your fish-plates, they are cleared away with the knife and fork on them!'

'Well, I hope so,' said the chairman, with some warmth.

'You see him?' panted the excited hotel keeper; 'you see the waiter who took them away? You know him?'

'Know the waiter?' answered Mr. Audley indignantly. 'Certainly not!'

Mr. Lever opened his hands with a gesture of agony. 'I never send him,' he said. 'I know not when or why he come. I send my waiter to take away the plates, and he find them already away.'

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<sup>1</sup> **synod** – in the Christian church, a local assembly of church officials

<sup>2</sup> **Burmah** – Burma (now Myanmar), a country in Southeast Asia

Mr. Audley still looked rather too bewildered to be really the man the empire wants; none of the company could say anything except the man of wood – Colonel Pound – who seemed galvanised into an unnatural life. He rose rigidly from his chair, leaving all the rest sitting, screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and spoke in a raucous undertone as if he had half-forgotten how to speak. ‘Do you mean,’ he said, ‘that somebody has stolen our silver fish service?’

The proprietor repeated the open-handed gesture with even greater helplessness and in a flash all the men at the table were on their feet.

‘Are all your waiters here?’ demanded the colonel, in his low, harsh accent.

‘Yes; they’re all here. I noticed it myself,’ cried the young duke, pushing his boyish face into the inmost ring. ‘Always count ’em as I come in; they look so queer standing up against the wall.’

‘But surely one cannot exactly remember,’ began Mr. Audley, with heavy hesitation.

‘I remember exactly, I tell you,’ cried the duke excitedly. ‘There never have been more than fifteen waiters at this place, and there were no more than fifteen tonight, I’ll swear; no more and no less.’

The proprietor turned upon him, quaking in a kind of palsy of surprise. ‘You say – you say,’ he stammered, ‘that you see all my fifteen waiters?’

‘As usual,’ assented the duke. ‘What is the matter with that!’

‘Nothing,’ said Lever, with a deepening accent, ‘only you did not. For one of zem is dead upstairs.’

There was a shocking stillness for an instant in that room. It may be (so supernatural is the word death) that each of those idle men looked for a second at his soul, and saw it as a small dried pea. One of them – the duke, I think – even said with the idiotic kindness of wealth: ‘Is there anything we can do?’

‘He has had a priest,’ said the Jew, not untouched.

Then, as to the clang of doom, they awoke to their own position. For a few weird seconds they had really felt as if the fifteenth waiter might be the ghost of the dead man upstairs. They had been dumb under that oppression, for ghosts were to them an embarrassment, like beggars. But the remembrance of the silver broke the spell of the miraculous; broke it abruptly and with a brutal reaction. The colonel flung over his chair and strode to the door. ‘If there was a fifteenth man here, friends,’ he said, ‘that fifteenth fellow was a thief. Down at once to the front and back doors and secure everything; then we’ll talk. The twenty-four pearls of the club are worth recovering.’

Mr. Audley seemed at first to hesitate about whether it was gentlemanly to be in such a hurry about anything; but, seeing the duke dash down the stairs with youthful energy, he followed with a more mature motion.

At the same instant a sixth waiter ran into the room, and declared that he had found the pile of fish plates on a sideboard, with no trace of the silver.

The crowd of diners and attendants that tumbled helter-skelter down the passages divided into two groups. Most of the Fishermen followed the proprietor to the front room to demand news of any exit. Colonel Pound, with the chairman, the vice-president, and one or two others darted down the corridor leading to the servants’ quarters, as the more likely line of escape. As they did so they passed the dim alcove or cavern of the cloak room, and saw a short, black-coated figure, presumably an attendant, standing a little way back in the shadow of it.

‘Hallo, there!’ called out the duke. ‘Have you seen anyone pass?’

The short figure did not answer the question directly, but merely said: ‘Perhaps I have got what you are looking for, gentlemen.’

They paused, wavering and wondering, while he quietly went to the back of the cloak room, and came back with both hands full of shining silver, which he laid out on the counter as calmly as a salesman. It took the form of a dozen quaintly shaped forks and knives.

‘You – you –’ began the colonel, quite thrown off his balance at last. Then he peered into the dim little room and saw two things: first, that the short, black-clad man was dressed like a clergyman; and, second, that the window of the room behind him was burst, as if someone had passed violently through. ‘Valuable things to deposit in a cloak room, aren’t they?’ remarked the

clergyman, with cheerful composure.

‘Did – did you steal those things?’ stammered Mr. Audley, with staring eyes.

‘If I did,’ said the cleric pleasantly, ‘at least I am bringing them back again.’

‘But you didn’t,’ said Colonel Pound, still staring at the broken window.

‘To make a clean breast of it, I didn’t,’ said the other, with some humour. And he seated himself quite gravely on a stool. ‘But you know who did,’ said the colonel.

‘I don’t know his real name,’ said the priest placidly, ‘but I know something of his fighting weight, and a great deal about his spiritual difficulties. I formed the physical estimate when he was trying to throttle me, and the moral estimate when he repented.’

‘Oh, I say – repented!’ cried young Chester, with a sort of crow of laughter.

Father Brown got to his feet, putting his hands behind him. ‘Odd, isn’t it,’ he said, ‘that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and secure remain hard and frivolous, and without fruit for God or man? But there, if you will excuse me, you trespass a little upon my province. If you doubt the penitence as a practical fact, there are your knives and forks. You are The Twelve True Fishers, and there are all your silver fish. But He has made me a fisher of men.’

‘Did you catch this man?’ asked the colonel, frowning.

Father Brown looked him full in his frowning face. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread.’

There was a long silence. All the other men present drifted away to carry the recovered silver to their comrades, or to consult the proprietor about the queer condition of affairs. But the grim-faced colonel still sat sideways on the counter, swinging his long, lank legs and biting his dark moustache.

At last he said quietly to the priest: ‘He must have been a clever fellow, but I think I know a cleverer.’

‘He was a clever fellow,’ answered the other, ‘but I am not quite sure of what other you mean.’

‘I mean you,’ said the colonel, with a short laugh. ‘I don’t want to get the fellow jailed; make yourself easy about that. But I’d give a good many silver forks to know exactly how you fell into this affair, and how you got the stuff out of him. I reckon you’re the most up-to-date devil of the present company.’

Father Brown seemed rather to like the saturnine candour of the soldier. ‘Well,’ he said, smiling, ‘I mustn’t tell you anything of the man’s identity, or his own story, of course; but there’s no particular reason why I shouldn’t tell you of the mere outside facts which I found out for myself.’

He hopped over the barrier with unexpected activity, and sat beside Colonel Pound, kicking his short legs like a little boy on a gate. He began to tell the story as easily as if he were telling it to an old friend by a Christmas fire.

‘You see, colonel,’ he said, ‘I was shut up in that small room there doing some writing, when I heard a pair of feet in this passage doing a dance that was as queer as the dance of death. First came quick, funny little steps, like a man walking on tiptoe for a wager; then came slow, careless, creaking steps, as of a big man walking about with a cigar. But they were both made by the same feet, I swear, and they came in rotation; first the run and then the walk, and then the run again. I wondered at first idly and then wildly why a man should act these two parts at once. One walk I knew; it was just like yours, colonel. It was the walk of a well-fed gentleman waiting for something, who strolls about rather because he is physically alert than because he is mentally impatient. I knew that I knew the other walk, too, but I could not remember what it was. What wild creature had I met on my travels that tore along on tiptoe in that extraordinary style? Then I heard a clink of plates somewhere; and the answer stood up as plain as St. Peter’s<sup>1</sup>. It was the walk of a waiter – that walk with the body slanted forward, the eyes looking down, the ball of the toe spurning away the ground,

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<sup>1</sup> **St. Peter** – the Apostle, one of Christ’s disciples; when asked thrice, after Jesus Christ’s arrest, if he knew Him, St. Peter said ‘No’.

the coat tails and napkin flying. Then I thought for a minute and a half more. And I believe I saw the manner of the crime, as clearly as if I were going to commit it.'

Colonel Pound looked at him keenly, but the speaker's mild grey eyes were fixed upon the ceiling with almost empty wistfulness.

'A crime,' he said slowly, 'is like any other work of art. Don't look surprised; crimes are by no means the only works of art that come from an infernal workshop. But every work of art, divine or diabolic, has one indispensable mark – I mean, that the centre of it is simple, however much the fulfilment may be complicated. Thus, in Hamlet, let us say, the grotesqueness of the grave-digger, the flowers of the mad girl, the fantastic finery of Osric, the pallor of the ghost and the grin of the skull are all oddities in a sort of tangled wreath round one plain tragic figure of a man in black. Well, this also,' he said, getting slowly down from his seat with a smile, 'this also is the plain tragedy of a man in black. Yes,' he went on, seeing the colonel look up in some wonder, 'the whole of this tale turns on a black coat. In this, as in Hamlet, there are the rococo<sup>1</sup> excrescences – yourselves, let us say. There is the dead waiter, who was there when he could not be there. There is the invisible hand that swept your table clear of silver and melted into air. But every clever crime is founded ultimately on some one quite simple fact – some fact that is not itself mysterious. The mystification comes in covering it up, in leading men's thoughts away from it. This large and subtle and (in the ordinary course) most profitable crime, was built on the plain fact that a gentleman's evening dress is the same as a waiter's. All the rest was acting, and thundering good acting, too.'

'Still,' said the colonel, getting up and frowning at his boots, 'I am not sure that I understand.'

'Colonel,' said Father Brown, 'I tell you that this archangel<sup>2</sup> of impudence who stole your forks walked up and down this passage twenty times in the blaze of all the lamps, in the glare of all the eyes. He did not go and hide in dim corners where suspicion might have searched for him. He kept constantly on the move in the lighted corridors, and everywhere that he went he seemed to be there by right. Don't ask me what he was like; you have seen him yourself six or seven times tonight. You were waiting with all the other grand people in the reception room at the end of the passage there, with the terrace just beyond. Whenever he came among you gentlemen, he came in the lightning style of a waiter, with bent head, flapping napkin and flying feet. He shot out on to the terrace, did something to the table cloth, and shot back again towards the office and the waiters' quarters. By the time he had come under the eye of the office clerk and the waiters he had become another man in every inch of his body, in every instinctive gesture. He strolled among the servants with the absent-minded insolence which they have all seen in their patrons. It was no new thing to them that a swell from the dinner party should pace all parts of the house like an animal at the Zoo; they know that nothing marks the Smart Set more than a habit of walking where one chooses. When he was magnificently weary of walking down that particular passage he would wheel round and pace back past the office; in the shadow of the arch just beyond he was altered as by a blast of magic, and went hurrying forward again among the Twelve Fishermen, an obsequious attendant. Why should the gentlemen look at a chance waiter? Why should the waiters suspect a first-rate walking gentleman? Once or twice he played the coolest tricks. In the proprietor's private quarters he called out breezily for a syphon of soda water, saying he was thirsty. He said genially that he would carry it himself, and he did; he carried it quickly and correctly through the thick of you, a waiter with an obvious errand. Of course, it could not have been kept up long, but it only had to be kept up till the end of the fish course.

'His worst moment was when the waiters stood in a row; but even then he contrived to lean against the wall just round the corner in such a way that for that important instant the waiters thought him a gentleman, while the gentlemen thought him a waiter. The rest went like winking. If any waiter caught him away from the table, that waiter caught a languid aristocrat. He had only to time himself two minutes before the fish was cleared, become a swift servant, and clear it himself. He put the plates down on a sideboard, stuffed the silver in his breast pocket, giving it a bulgy look, and ran like a hare (I heard him coming) till he came to the cloak room. There he had only to be a

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1 **rococo** – a style in painting, sculpture, architecture and decorative arts, originated in Paris in the early 19th century

2 **archangel** – in the hierarchy of angels, one of the chief angels

plutocrat again – a plutocrat called away suddenly on business. He had only to give his ticket to the cloak-room attendant, and go out again elegantly as he had come in. Only – only I happened to be the cloak-room attendant.’

‘What did you do to him?’ cried the colonel, with unusual intensity. ‘What did he tell you?’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the priest immovably, ‘that is where the story ends.’

‘And the interesting story begins,’ muttered Pound. ‘I think I understand his professional trick. But I don’t seem to have got hold of yours.’

‘I must be going,’ said Father Brown.

They walked together along the passage to the entrance hall, where they saw the fresh, freckled face of the Duke of Chester, who was bounding buoyantly along towards them.

‘Come along, Pound,’ he cried breathlessly. ‘I’ve been looking for you everywhere. The dinner’s going again in spanking style, and old Audley has got to make a speech in honour of the forks being saved. We want to start some new ceremony, don’t you know, to commemorate the occasion. I say, you really got the goods back, what do you suggest?’

‘Why,’ said the colonel, eyeing him with a certain sardonic approval, ‘I should suggest that henceforward we wear green coats, instead of black. One never knows what mistakes may arise when one looks so like a waiter.’

‘Oh, hang it all!’ said the young man, ‘a gentleman never looks like a waiter.’

‘Nor a waiter like a gentleman, I suppose,’ said Colonel Pound, with the same lowering laughter on his face. ‘Reverend sir, your friend must have been very smart to act the gentleman.’

Father Brown buttoned up his commonplace overcoat to the neck, for the night was stormy, and took his commonplace umbrella from the stand.

‘Yes,’ he said; ‘it must be very hard work to be a gentleman; but, do you know, I have sometimes thought that it may be almost as laborious to be a waiter.’

And saying ‘Good evening,’ he pushed open the heavy doors of that palace of pleasures. The golden gates closed behind him, and he went at a brisk walk through the damp, dark streets in search of a penny omnibus<sup>1</sup>.

## Ma’ame Pelagie (Kate Chopin)

### I

When the war began, there stood on an imposing mansion of red brick, shaped like the Pantheon<sup>2</sup>. A grove of majestic live-oaks surrounded it.

Thirty years later, only the thick walls were standing, with the dull red brick showing here and there through a matted growth of clinging vines. The huge round pillars were intact; so to some extent was the stone flagging of hall and portico. There had been no home so stately along the whole stretch of Cote Joyeuse. Everyone knew that, as they knew it had cost Philippe Valmet sixty thousand dollars to build, away back in 1840. No one was in danger of forgetting that fact, so long as his daughter Pelagie survived. She was a queenly, white-haired woman of fifty. ‘Ma’ame Pelagie,’ they called her, though she was unmarried, as was her sister Pauline, a child in Ma’ame Pelagie’s eyes; a child of thirty-five.

The two lived alone in a three-roomed cabin, almost within the shadow of the ruin. They lived for a dream, for Ma’ame Pelagie’s dream, which was to rebuild the old home.

It would be pitiful to tell how their days were spent to accomplish this end; how the dollars had been saved for thirty years and the picayunes hoarded; and yet, not half enough gathered! But Ma’ame Pelagie felt sure of twenty years of life before her, and counted upon as many more for her sister. And what could not come to pass in twenty – in forty – years?

Often, of pleasant afternoons, the two would drink their black coffee, seated upon the

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<sup>1</sup> **omnibus** – a large vehicle designed to carry passengers on a fixed route, a bus

<sup>2</sup> **the Pantheon** – the 18th century building in Paris, an example of Neoclassical architecture with columns and a high dome



stone-flagged portico whose canopy was the blue sky of Louisiana. They loved to sit there in the silence, with only each other and the sheeny, prying lizards for company, talking of the old times and planning for the new; while light breezes stirred the tattered vines high up among the columns, where owls nested.

‘We can never hope to have all just as it was, Pauline,’ Ma’ame Pelagie would say; ‘perhaps the marble pillars of the salon will have to be replaced by wooden ones, and the crystal candelabra left out. Should you be willing, Pauline?’

‘Oh, yes Sesoeur, I shall be willing.’ It was always, ‘Yes, Sesoeur,’ or ‘No, Sesoeur,’ ‘Just as you please, Sesoeur,’ with poor little Mam’selle Pauline. For what did she remember of that old life and that old splendor? Only a faint gleam here and there; the half-consciousness of a young, uneventful existence; and then a great crash. That meant the nearness of war; the revolt of slaves; confusion ending in fire and flame through which she was borne safely in the strong arms of Pelagie, and carried to the log cabin which was still their home. Their brother, Leandre, had known more of it all than Pauline, and not so much as Pelagie. He had left the management of the big plantation with all its memories and traditions to his older sister, and had gone away to dwell in cities. That was many years ago. Now, Leandre’s business called him frequently and upon long journeys from home, and his motherless daughter was coming to stay with her aunts at Cote Joyeuse.

They talked about it, sipping their coffee on the ruined portico. Mam’selle Pauline was terribly excited; the flush that throbbled into her pale, nervous face showed it; and she locked her thin fingers in and out incessantly.

‘But what shall we do with La Petite<sup>1</sup>, Sesoeur? Where shall we put her? How shall we amuse her? Ah, Seigneur!<sup>2</sup>’

‘She will sleep upon a cot in the room next to ours,’ responded Ma’ame Pelagie, ‘and live as we do. She knows how we live, and why we live; her father has told her. She knows we have money and could squander it if we chose. Do not fret, Pauline; let us hope La Petite is a true Valmet.’

Then Ma’ame Pelagie rose with stately deliberation and went to saddle her horse, for she had yet to make her last daily round through the fields; and Mam’selle Pauline threaded her way slowly among the tangled grasses toward the cabin.

The coming of La Petite, bringing with her as she did the pungent atmosphere of an outside and dimly known world, was a shock to these two, living their dream-life. The girl was quite as tall as her aunt Pelagie, with dark eyes that reflected joy as a still pool reflects the light of stars; and her rounded cheek was tinged like the pink crepe myrtle. Mam’selle Pauline kissed her and trembled. Ma’ame Pelagie looked into her eyes with a searching gaze, which seemed to seek a likeness of the past in the living present.

And they made room between them for this young life.

## II

La Petite had determined upon trying to fit herself to the strange, narrow existence which she knew awaited her at Côté Joyeuse. It went well enough at first. Sometimes she followed Ma’ame Pelagie into the fields to note how the cotton was opening, ripe and white; or to count the ears of corn upon the hardy stalks. But oftener she was with her aunt Pauline, assisting in household offices, chattering of her brief past, or walking with the older woman arm-in-arm under the trailing moss of the giant oaks.

Mam’selle Pauline’s steps grew very buoyant that summer, and her eyes were sometimes as bright as a bird’s, unless La Petite were away from her side, when they would lose all other light but one of uneasy expectancy. The girl seemed to love her well in return, and called her endearingly

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1 **La Petite** – baby (*French* )

2 **Seigneur** – Lord, God (*French* )

Tan'tante<sup>3</sup>. But as the time went by, La Petite became very quiet, – not listless, but thoughtful, and slow in her movements. Then her cheeks began to pale, till they were tinged like the creamy plumes of the white crepe myrtle that grew in the ruin.

One day when she sat within its shadow, between her aunts, holding a hand of each, she said: 'Tante Pelagie, I must tell you something, you and Tan'tante.' She spoke low, but clearly and firmly. 'I love you both, – please remember that I love you both. But I must go away from you. I can't live any longer here at Côte Joyeuse.'

A spasm passed through Mam'selle Pauline's delicate frame. La Petite could feel the twitch of it in the wiry fingers that were intertwined with her own. Ma'ame Pelagie remained unchanged and motionless. No human eye could penetrate so deep as to see the satisfaction which her soul felt. She said: 'What do you mean, Petite? Your father has sent you to us, and I am sure it is his wish that you remain.'

'My father loves me, tante Pelagie, and such will not be his wish when he knows. Oh!' she continued with a restless, movement, 'it is as though a weight were pressing me backward here. I must live another life; the life I lived before. I want to know things that are happening from day to day over the world, and hear them talked about. I want my music, my books, my companions. If I had known no other life but this one of privation, I suppose it would be different. If I had to live this life, I should make the best of it. But I do not have to; and you know, tante Pelagie, you do not need to. It seems to me,' she added in a whisper, 'that it is a sin against myself. Ah, Tan'tante! – what is the matter with Tan'tante?'

It was nothing; only a slight feeling of faintness, that would soon pass. She entreated them to take no notice; but they brought her some water and fanned her with a palmetto<sup>2</sup> leaf.

But that night, in the stillness of the room, Mam'selle Pauline sobbed and would not be comforted. Ma'ame Pelagie took her in her arms.

'Pauline, my little sister Pauline,' she entreated, 'I never have seen you like this before. Do you no longer love me? Have we not been happy together, you and I?'

'Oh, yes, Sesoeur.'

'Is it because La Petite is going away?'

'Yes, Sesoeur.'

'Then she is dearer to you than I!' spoke Ma'ame Pelagie with sharp resentment. 'Than I, who held you and warmed you in my arms the day you were born; than I, your mother, father, sister, everything that could cherish you. Pauline, don't tell me that.'

Mam'selle Pauline tried to talk through her sobs.

'I can't explain it to you, Sesoeur. I don't understand it myself. I love you as I have always loved you; next to God. But if La Petite goes away I shall die. I can't understand, – help me, Sesoeur. She seems – she seems like a saviour; like one who had come and taken me by the hand and was leading me somewhere – somewhere I want to go.'

Ma'ame Pelagie had been sitting beside the bed in her peignoir and slippers. She held the hand of her sister who lay there, and smoothed down the woman's soft brown hair. She said not a word, and the silence was broken only by Mam'selle Pauline's continued sobs. Once Ma'ame Pelagie arose to mix a drink of orange-flower water, which she gave to her sister, as she would have offered it to a nervous, fretful child. Almost an hour passed before Ma'ame Pelagie spoke again. Then she said: –

'Pauline, you must cease that sobbing, now, and sleep. You will make yourself ill. La Petite will not go away. Do you hear me? Do you understand? She will stay, I promise you.'

Mam'selle Pauline could not clearly comprehend, but she had great faith in the word of her sister, and soothed by the promise and the touch of Ma'ame Pelagie's strong, gentle hand, she fell asleep.

### III

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<sup>3</sup> **Tan'tante** – *from* tante = aunt (*French*)

<sup>2</sup> **palmetto** – a sort of small palm trees

Ma'ame Pelagie, when she saw that her sister slept, arose noiselessly and stepped outside upon the low-roofed narrow gallery. She did not linger there, but with a step that was hurried and agitated, she crossed the distance that divided her cabin from the ruin.

The night was not a dark one, for the sky was clear and the moon resplendent. But light or dark would have made no difference to Ma'ame Pelagie. It was not the first time she had stolen away to the ruin at night-time, when the whole plantation slept; but she never before had been there with a heart so nearly broken. She was going there for the last time to dream her dreams; to see the visions that hitherto had crowded her days and nights, and to bid them farewell.

There was the first of them, awaiting her upon the very portal; a robust old white-haired man, chiding her for returning home so late. There are guests to be entertained. Does she not know it? Guests from the city and from the near plantations. Yes, she knows it is late. She had been abroad with Felix, and they did not notice how the time was speeding. Felix is there; he will explain it all. He is there beside her, but she does not want to hear what he will tell her father.

Ma'ame Pelagie had sunk upon the bench where she and her sister so often came to sit. Turning, she gazed in through the gaping chasm of the window at her side. The interior of the ruin is ablaze. Not with the moonlight, for that is faint beside the other one – the sparkle from the crystal candelabra, which negroes, moving noiselessly and respectfully about, are lighting, one after the other. How the gleam of them reflects and glances from the polished marble pillars!

The room holds a number of guests. There is old Monsieur Lucien Santien, leaning against one of the pillars, and laughing at something which Monsieur Lafirme is telling him, till his fat shoulders shake. His son Jules is with him – Jules, who wants to marry her. She laughs. She wonders if Felix has told her father yet. There is young Jerome Lafirme playing at checkers upon the sofa with Leandre. Little Pauline stands annoying them and disturbing the game. Leandre reproves her. She begins to cry, and old black Clementine, her nurse, who is not far off, limps across the room to pick her up and carry her away. How sensitive the little one is! But she trots about and takes care of herself better than she did a year or two ago, when she fell upon the stone hall floor and raised a great 'bo-bo' on her forehead. Pelagie was hurt and angry enough about it; and she ordered rugs and buffalo robes to be brought and laid thick upon the tiles, till the little one's steps were surer.

'Il ne faut pas faire mal à Pauline.'<sup>1</sup> She was saying it aloud – 'faire mal à Pauline.'

But she gazes beyond the salon, back into the big dining hall, where the white crepe myrtle grows. Ha! how low that bat has circled. It has struck Ma'ame Pelagie full on the breast. She does not know it. She is beyond there in the dining hall, where her father sits with a group of friends over their wine. As usual they are talking politics. How tiresome! She has heard them say 'la guerre'<sup>2</sup> oftener than once. La guerre. Bah! She and Felix have something pleasanter to talk about, out under the oaks, or back in the shadow of the oleanders.

But they were right! The sound of a cannon, shot at Sumter<sup>3</sup>, has rolled across the Southern States, and its echo is heard along the whole stretch of Cote Joyeuse.

Yet Pelagie does not believe it. Not till La Ricaneuse stands before her with bare, black arms akimbo, uttering a volley of vile abuse and of brazen impudence. Pelagie wants to kill her. But yet she will not believe. Not till Felix comes to her in the chamber above the dining hall – there where that trumpet vine hangs – comes to say good-by to her. The hurt which the big brass buttons of his new gray uniform pressed into the tender flesh of her bosom has never left it. She sits upon the sofa, and he beside her, both speechless with pain. That room would not have been altered. Even the sofa would have been there in the same spot, and Ma'ame Pelagie had meant all along, for thirty years, all along, to lie there upon it someday when the time came to die.

But there is no time to weep, with the enemy at the door. The door has been no barrier. They are clattering through the halls now, drinking the wines, shattering the crystal and glass, slashing the

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<sup>1</sup> **Il ne faut pas faire mal à Pauline.** – Don't do harm to Pauline. (*French*)

<sup>2</sup> **la guerre** = war (*French*)

<sup>3</sup> **Sumter** – a county in South Carolina, US

portraits.

One of them stands before her and tells her to leave the house. She slaps his face. How the stigma stands out red as blood upon his blanched cheek!

Now there is a roar of fire and the flames are bearing down upon her motionless figure. She wants to show them how a daughter of Louisiana<sup>1</sup> can perish before her conquerors. But little Pauline clings to her knees in an agony of terror. Little Pauline must be saved.

‘Il ne faut pas faire mal à Pauline.’ Again she is saying it aloud – ‘faire mal à Pauline.’

The night was nearly spent; Ma’ame Pelagie had glided from the bench upon which she had rested, and for hours lay prone upon the stone flagging, motionless. When she dragged herself to her feet it was to walk like one in a dream. About the great, solemn pillars, one after the other, she reached her arms, and pressed her cheek and her lips upon the senseless brick.

‘Adieu<sup>2</sup>, adieu!’ whispered Ma’ame Pelagie.

There was no longer the moon to guide her steps across the familiar pathway to the cabin. The brightest light in the sky was Venus<sup>3</sup> that swung low in the east. The bats had ceased to beat their wings about the ruin. Even the mocking-bird that had warbled for hours in the old mulberry-tree had sung himself asleep. That darkest hour before the day was mantling the earth. Ma’ame Pelagie hurried through the wet, clinging grass, beating aside the heavy moss that swept across her face, walking on toward the cabin – toward Pauline. Not once did she look back upon the ruin that brooded like a huge monster – a black spot in the darkness that enveloped it.

#### IV

Little more than a year later the transformation which the old Valmet place had undergone was the talk and wonder of Cote Joyeuse. One would have looked in vain for the ruin; it was no longer there; neither was the log cabin. But out in the open, where the sun shone upon it, and the breezes blew about it, was a shapely structure fashioned from woods that the forests of the State had furnished. It rested upon a solid foundation of brick.

Upon a corner of the pleasant gallery sat Leandre smoking his afternoon cigar, and chatting with neighbors who had called. This was to be his pied à terre<sup>4</sup> now; the home where his sisters and his daughter dwelt. The laughter of young people was heard out under the trees, and within the house where La Petite was playing upon the piano. With the enthusiasm of a young artist she drew from the keys strains that seemed marvelously beautiful to Mam’selle Pauline, who stood enraptured near her. Mam’selle Pauline had been touched by the re-creation of Valmet. Her cheek was as full and almost as flushed as La Petite’s. The years were falling away from her.

Ma’ame Pelagie had been conversing with her brother and his friends. Then she turned and walked away; stopping to listen awhile to the music which La Petite was making. But it was only for a moment. She went on around the curve of the veranda, where she found herself alone. She stayed there, erect, holding to the banister rail and looking out calmly in the distance across the fields.

She was dressed in black, with the white kerchief she always wore folded across her bosom. Her thick, glossy hair rose like a silver diadem from her brow. In her deep, dark eyes smouldered the light of fires that would never flame. She had grown very old. Years instead of months seemed to have passed over her since the night she bade farewell to her visions.

Poor Ma’ame Pelagie! How could it be different! While the outward pressure of a young and joyous existence had forced her footsteps into the light, her soul had stayed in the shadow of the ruin.

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1 **Louisiana** – the US state (123,366 sq. km) admitted to the union in 1812 as the 18th member; it borders Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas.

2 **Adieu!** – Goodbye!

3 **Venus** – the second planet from the Sun; when it is visible, it is the brightest in the sky.

4 **pied à terre** – a place of refuge where a person lives from time to time (*French*)

## Desirée's Baby (Kate Chopin)

As the day was pleasant, Madame Valmonde drove over to L'Abri to see Desirée and the baby.

It made her laugh to think of Desirée with a baby. Why, it seemed but yesterday that Desirée was little more than a baby herself; when Monsieur in riding through the gateway of Valmonde had found her lying asleep in the shadow of the big stone pillar.

The little one awoke in his arms and began to cry for 'Dada.' That was as much as she could do or say. Some people thought she might have strayed there of her own accord, for she was of the toddling age. The prevailing belief was that she had been purposely left by a party of Texans<sup>1</sup>, whose canvas-covered wagon, late in the day, had crossed the ferry that Coton Mais kept, just below the plantation. In time Madame Valmonde abandoned every speculation but the one that Desirée had been sent to her by a beneficent Providence to be the child of her affection, seeing that she was without child of the flesh. For the girl grew to be beautiful and gentle, affectionate and sincere, – the idol of Valmonde.

It was no wonder, when she stood one day against the stone pillar in whose shadow she had lain asleep, eighteen years before, that Armand Aubigny riding by and seeing her there, had fallen in love with her. That was the way all the Aubignys fell in love, as if struck by a pistol shot. The wonder was that he had not loved her before; for he had known her since his father brought him home from Paris, a boy of eight, after his mother died there. The passion that awoke in him that day, when he saw her at the gate, swept along like an avalanche, or like a prairie fire, or like anything that drives headlong over all obstacles.

Monsieur Valmonde grew practical and wanted things well considered: that is, the girl's obscure origin. Armand looked into her eyes and did not care. He was reminded that she was nameless. What did it matter about a name when he could give her one of the oldest and proudest in Louisiana? He ordered the corbeille<sup>2</sup> from Paris, and contained himself with what patience he could until it arrived; then they were married.

Madame Valmonde had not seen Desirée and the baby for four weeks. When she reached L'Abri she shuddered at the first sight of it, as she always did. It was a sad-looking place, which for many years had not known the gentle presence of a mistress, old Monsieur Aubigny having married and buried his wife in France, and she having loved her own land too well ever to leave it. The roof came down steep and black like a cowl, reaching out beyond the wide galleries that encircled the yellow stuccoed house. Big, solemn oaks grew close to it, and their thick-leaved, far-reaching branches shadowed it like a pall. Young Aubigny's rule was a strict one, too, and under it his negroes had forgotten how to be gay, as they had been during the old master's easy-going and indulgent lifetime.

The young mother was recovering slowly, and lay full length, in her soft white muslins<sup>3</sup> and laces, upon a couch. The baby was beside her, upon her arm, where he had fallen asleep, at her breast. The yellow nurse woman sat beside a window fanning herself.

Madame Valmonde bent her portly figure over Desirée and kissed her, holding her an instant tenderly in her arms. Then she turned to the child.

'This is not the baby!' she exclaimed, in startled tones. French was the language spoken at Valmonde in those days.

'I knew you would be astonished,' laughed Desirée, 'at the way he has grown. The little cochon de lait!<sup>4</sup> Look at his legs, mamma, and his hands and fingernails, – real finger-nails. Zandrine had to cut them this morning. Isn't it true, Zandrine?'

The woman bowed her turbaned head majestically, 'Mais si<sup>5</sup>, Madame.'

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1 **Texans** – residents of Texas, the US state in the south

2 **corbeille** – a basket; here: a set of clothes (*French*)

3 **muslin** – a thin cotton fabric, first made in Mosul, Iraq

4 **cochon de lait** – a sucking pig; here: a small baby (*French*)

5 **Mais si!** = Oh, yes, yes! (*French*)

‘And the way he cries,’ went on Desirée, ‘is deafening. Armand heard him the other day as far away as La Blanche’s cabin.’

Madame Valmonde had never removed her eyes from the child. She lifted it and walked with it over to the window that was lightest. She scanned the baby narrowly, then looked as searchingly at Zandrine, whose face was turned to gaze across the fields.

‘Yes, the child has grown, has changed,’ said Madame Valmonde, slowly, as she replaced it beside its mother. ‘What does Armand say?’

Desirée’s face became suffused with a glow that was happiness itself.

‘Oh, Armand is the proudest father in the parish, I believe, chiefly because it is a boy, to bear his name; though he says not, – that he would have loved a girl as well. But I know it isn’t true. I know he says that to please me. And mamma,’ she added, drawing Madame Valmonde’s head down to her, and speaking in a whisper, ‘he hasn’t punished one of them – not one of them – since baby is born. Even Negrillon, who pretended to have burnt his leg that he might rest from work – he only laughed, and said Negrillon was a great scamp. Oh, mamma, I’m so happy; it frightens me.’

What Desirée said was true. Marriage, and later the birth of his son had softened Armand Aubigny’s imperious and exacting nature greatly. This was what made the gentle Desirée so happy, for she loved him desperately. When he frowned she trembled, but loved him. When he smiled, she asked no greater blessing of God. But Armand’s dark, handsome face had not often been disfigured by frowns since the day he fell in love with her.

When the baby was about three months old, Desirée awoke one day to the conviction that there was something in the air menacing her peace. It was at first too subtle to grasp. It had only been a disquieting suggestion; an air of mystery among the blacks; unexpected visits from far-off neighbors who could hardly account for their coming. Then a strange, an awful change in her husband’s manner, which she dared not ask him to explain. When he spoke to her, it was with averted eyes, from which the old love-light seemed to have gone out. He absented himself from home; and when there, avoided her presence and that of her child, without excuse. And the very spirit of Satan seemed suddenly to take hold of him in his dealings with the slaves. Desirée was miserable enough to die.

She sat in her room, one hot afternoon, in her peignoir<sup>2</sup>, listlessly drawing through her fingers the strands of her long, silky brown hair that hung about her shoulders. The baby, half naked, lay asleep upon her own great mahogany bed, that was like a sumptuous throne, with its satin-lined half-canopy. One of La Blanche’s little quadroon boys – half naked too – stood fanning the child slowly with a fan of peacock feathers. Desirée’s eyes had been fixed absently and sadly upon the baby, while she was striving to penetrate the threatening mist that she felt closing about her. She looked from her child to the boy who stood beside him, and back again; over and over. ‘Ah!’ It was a cry that she could not help; which she was not conscious of having uttered. The blood turned like ice in her veins, and a clammy moisture gathered upon her face.

She tried to speak to the little quadroon boy; but no sound would come, at first. When he heard his name uttered, he looked up, and his mistress was pointing to the door. He laid aside the great, soft fan, and obediently stole away, over the polished floor, on his bare tiptoes.

She stayed motionless, with gaze riveted upon her child, and her face the picture of fright.

Presently her husband entered the room, and without noticing her, went to a table and began to search among some papers which covered it.

‘Armand,’ she called to him, in a voice which must have stabbed him, if he was human. But he did not notice. ‘Armand,’ she said again. Then she rose and tottered towards him. ‘Armand,’ she panted once more, clutching his arm, ‘look at our child. What does it mean? tell me.’

He coldly but gently loosened her fingers from about his arm and thrust the hand away from him. ‘Tell me what it means!’ she cried despairingly.

‘It means,’ he answered lightly, ‘that the child is not white; it means that you are not white.’

A quick conception of all that this accusation meant for her nerved her with unwonted courage to deny it. ‘It is a lie; it is not true, I am white! Look at my hair, it is brown; and my eyes

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<sup>2</sup> **peignoir** – a loose dressing gown

are gray, Armand, you know they are gray. And my skin is fair,' seizing his wrist. 'Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand,' she laughed hysterically.

'As white as La Blanche's,' he returned cruelly; and went away leaving her alone with their child.

When she could hold a pen in her hand, she sent a despairing letter to Madame Valmonde.

'My mother, they tell me I am not white. Armand has told me I am not white. For God's sake tell them it is not true. You must know it is not true. I shall die. I must die. I cannot be so unhappy, and live.'

The answer that came was brief:

'My own Desirée: Come home to Valmonde; back to your mother who loves you. Come with your child.'

When the letter reached Desirée she went with it to her husband's study, and laid it open upon the desk before which he sat. She was like a stone image: silent, white, motionless after she placed it there.

In silence he ran his cold eyes over the written words.

He said nothing. 'Shall I go, Armand?' she asked in tones sharp with agonized suspense.

'Yes, go.'

'Do you want me to go?'

'Yes, I want you to go.'

He thought Almighty God had dealt cruelly and unjustly with him; and felt, somehow, that he was paying Him back in kind when he stabbed thus into his wife's soul. Moreover he no longer loved her, because of the unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name.

She turned away like one stunned by a blow, and walked slowly towards the door, hoping he would call her back.

'Good-by, Armand,' she moaned.

He did not answer her. That was his last blow at fate.

Desirée went in search of her child. Zandrine was pacing the sombre gallery with it. She took the little one from the nurse's arms with no word of explanation, and descending the steps, walked away, under the live-oak branches.

It was an October afternoon; the sun was just sinking. Out in the still fields the negroes were picking cotton.

Desirée had not changed the thin white garment nor the slippers which she wore. Her hair was uncovered and the sun's rays brought a golden gleam from its brown meshes. She did not take the broad, beaten road which led to the far-off plantation of Valmonde. She walked across a deserted field, where the stubble bruised her tender feet, so delicately shod, and tore her thin gown to shreds.

She disappeared among the reeds and willows that grew thick along the banks of the deep, sluggish bayou<sup>1</sup>; and she did not come back again.

Some weeks later there was a curious scene enacted at L'Abri. In the centre of the smoothly swept back yard was a great bonfire. Armand Aubigny sat in the wide hallway that commanded a view of the spectacle; and it was he who dealt out to a half dozen negroes the material which kept this fire ablaze.

A graceful cradle of willow, with all its dainty furnishings, was laid upon the pyre, which had already been fed with the richness of a priceless layette<sup>2</sup>. Then there were silk gowns, and velvet and satin ones added to these; laces, too, and embroideries; bonnets and gloves; for the corbeille had been of rare quality.

The last thing to go was a tiny bundle of letters; innocent little scribblings that Desirée had sent to him during the days of their espousal<sup>3</sup>. There was the remnant of one back in the drawer from which he took them. But it was not Desirée's; it was part of an old letter from his mother to his father. He read it. She was thanking God for the blessing of her husband's love: –

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1 **bayou** – a river armlet with slow movement

2 **layette** – a dowry of a new-born baby (*French*)

3 **espousal** – marriage, engagement (*archaic*)

‘But above all,’ she wrote, ‘night and day, I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery.’

## **The Traveller’s Story of a Terribly Strange Bed (Wilkie Collins)**

### **Prologue to the First Story**

Before I begin, by the aid of my wife’s patient attention and ready pen, to relate any of the stories which I have heard at various times from persons whose likenesses I have been employed to take, it will not be amiss if I try to secure the reader’s interest in the following pages by briefly explaining how I became possessed of the narrative matter which they contain.

Of myself I have nothing to say, but that I have followed the profession of a travelling portrait-painter for the last fifteen years. The pursuit of my calling has not only led me all through England, but has taken me twice to Scotland and once to Ireland. In moving from district to district, I am never guided beforehand by any settled plan. Sometimes the letters of recommendation which I get from persons who are satisfied with the work I have done for them determine the direction in which I travel. Sometimes I hear of a new neighbourhood in which there is no resident artist of ability, and remove thither on speculation. Sometimes my friends among the picture-dealers say a good word on my behalf to their rich customers, and so pave the way for me in the large towns. Sometimes my prosperous and famous brother artists, hearing of small commissions which it is not worth their while to accept, mention my name, and procure me introductions to pleasant country houses. Thus I get on, now in one way and now in another, not winning a reputation or making a fortune, but happier, perhaps, on the whole, than many men who have got both the one and the other. So, at least, I try to think now, though I started in my youth with as high an ambition as the best of them. Thank God, it is not my business here to speak of past times and their disappointments. A twinge of the old hopeless heartache comes over me sometimes still, when I think of my student days.

One peculiarity of my present way of life is, that it brings me into contact with all sorts of characters. I almost feel, by this time, as if I had painted every civilized variety of the human race. Upon the whole, my experience of the world, rough as it has been, has not taught me to think unkindly of my fellow-creatures. I have certainly received such treatment at the hands of some of my sitters as I could not describe without saddening and shocking any kind-hearted reader; but, taking one year and one place with another, I have cause to remember with gratitude and respect, sometimes even with friendship and affection, a very large proportion of the numerous persons who have employed me.

Some of the results of my experience are curious in a moral point of view. For example, I have found women almost uniformly less delicate in asking me about my terms, and less generous in remunerating me for my services, than men. On the other hand, men, within my knowledge, are decidedly vainer of their personal attractions, and more vexatiously anxious to have them done full justice to on canvas, than women. Taking both sexes together, I have found young people, for the most part, more gentle, more reasonable, and more considerate than old. And, summing up, in a general way, my experience of different ranks (which extends, let me premise, all the way down from peers to publicans), I have met with most of my formal and ungracious receptions among rich people of uncertain social standing; the highest classes and the lowest among my employers almost always contrive – in widely different ways, of course – to make me feel at home as soon as I enter their houses.

The one great obstacle that I have to contend against in the practice of my profession is not, as some persons may imagine, the difficulty of making my sitters keep their heads still while I paint them, but the difficulty of getting them to preserve the natural look and the every-day peculiarities of dress and manner. People will assume an expression, will brush up their hair, will correct any little characteristic carelessness in their apparel – will, in short, when they want to have their



likenesses taken, look as if they were sitting for their pictures. If I paint them under these artificial circumstances, I fail, of course, to present them in their habitual aspect; and my portrait, as a necessary consequence, disappoints everybody, the sitter always included. When we wish to judge of a man's character by his handwriting, we want his customary scrawl dashed off with his common workaday pen, not his best small text traced laboriously with the finest procurable crow-quill point. So it is with portrait-painting, which is, after all, nothing but a right reading of the externals of character recognisably presented to the view of others.

Experience, after repeated trials, has proved to me that the only way of getting sitters who persist in assuming a set look to resume their habitual expression is to lead them into talking about some subject in which they are greatly interested. If I can only beguile them into speaking earnestly, no matter on what topic, I am sure of recovering their natural expression; sure of seeing all the little precious every-day peculiarities of the man or woman peep out, one after another, quite unawares. The long maundering stories about nothing, the wearisome recitals of petty grievances, the local anecdotes unrelieved by the faintest suspicion of anything like general interest, which I have been condemned to hear, as a consequence of thawing the ice off the features of formal sitters by the method just described, would fill hundreds of volumes and promote the repose of thousands of readers. On the other hand, if I have suffered under the tediousness of the many, I have not been without my compensating gains from the wisdom and experience of the few. To some of my sitters I have been indebted for information which has enlarged my mind, to some for advice which has lightened my heart, to some for narratives of strange adventure which riveted my attention at the time, which have served to interest and amuse my fireside circle for many years past, and which are now, I would fain hope, destined to make kind friends for me among a wider audience than any that I have yet addressed.

Singularly enough, almost all the best stories that I have heard from my sitters have been told by accident. I only remember two cases in which a story was volunteered to me; and, although I have often tried the experiment, I cannot call to mind even a single instance in which leading questions (as lawyers call them) on my part, addressed to a sitter, ever produced any result worth recording. Over and over again I have been disastrously successful in encouraging dull people to weary me. But the clever people who have something interesting to say seem, so far as I have observed them, to acknowledge no other stimulant than chance. For every story, excepting one, I have been indebted, in the first instance, to the capricious influence of the same chance. Something my sitter has seen about me, something I have remarked in my sitter, or in the room in which I take the likeness, or in the neighbourhood through which I pass on my way to work, has suggested the necessary association, or has started the right train of recollections, and then the story appeared to begin of its own accord. Occasionally the most casual notice, on my part, of some very unpromising object has smoothed the way for the relation of a long and interesting narrative. I first heard one of the most dramatic stories merely through being carelessly inquisitive to know the history of a stuffed poodle-dog.

It is thus not without reason that I lay some stress on the desirableness of prefacing the following narrative by a brief account of the curious manner in which I became possessed of it. As to my capacity for repeating the story correctly, I can answer for it that my memory may be trusted. I may claim it as a merit, because it is, after all, a mechanical one, that I forget nothing, and that I can call long-past conversations and events as readily to my recollection as if they had happened but a few weeks ago. Of two things at least I feel tolerably certain before-hand, in meditating over its contents: first, that I can repeat correctly all that I have heard; and, secondly, that I have never missed anything worth hearing when my sitters were addressing me on an interesting subject. Although I cannot take the lead in talking while I am engaged in painting, I can listen while others speak, and work all the better for it.

So much in the way of general preface to the pages for which I am about to ask the reader's attention. Let me now advance to particulars, and describe how I came to hear the story. I begin with it because it is the story that I have oftenest 'rehearsed,' to borrow a phrase from the stage. Wherever I go, I am sooner or later sure to tell it. Only last night I was persuaded into repeating it

once more by the inhabitants of the farm-house in which I am now staying.

Not many years ago, on returning from a short holiday visit to a friend settled in Paris, I found professional letters awaiting me at my agent's in London, which required my immediate presence in Liverpool. Without stopping to unpack, I proceeded by the first conveyance to my new destination; and, calling at the picture-dealer's shop where portrait-painting engagements were received for me, found to my great satisfaction that I had remunerative employment in prospect, in and about Liverpool<sup>1</sup>, for at least two months to come. I was putting up my letters in high spirits, and was just leaving the picture-dealer's shop to look out for comfortable lodgings, when I was met at the door by the landlord of one of the largest hotels in Liverpool – an old acquaintance whom I had known as manager of a tavern in London in my student days.

'Mr. Kerby!' he exclaimed, in great astonishment. 'What an unexpected meeting! the last man in the world whom I expected to see, and yet the very man whose services I want to make use of!'

'What! more work for me?' said I. 'Are all the people in Liverpool going to have their portraits painted?'

'I only know of one,' replied the landlord, 'a gentleman staying at my hotel, who wants a chalk drawing done of him. I was on my way here to inquire for any artist whom our picture-dealing friend could recommend. How glad I am that I met you before I had committed myself to employing a stranger!'

'Is this likeness wanted at once?' I asked, thinking of the number of engagements that I had already got in my pocket.

'Immediately – to-day – this very hour, if possible,' said the landlord. 'Mr. Faulkner, the gentleman I am speaking of, was to have sailed yesterday for the Brazils from this place; but the wind shifted last night to the wrong quarter, and he came ashore again this morning. He may, of course, be detained here for some time; but he may also be called on board ship at half an hour's notice, if the wind shifts back again in the right direction. This uncertainty makes it a matter of importance that the likeness should be begun immediately. Undertake it if you possibly can, for Mr. Faulkner is a liberal gentleman, who is sure to give you your own terms.'

I reflected for a minute or two. The portrait was only wanted in chalk, and would not take long; besides, I might finish it in the evening, if my other engagements pressed hard upon me in the daytime. Why not leave my luggage at the picture-dealer's, put off looking for lodgings till night, and secure the new commission boldly by going back at once with the landlord to the hotel? I decided on following this course almost as soon as the idea occurred to me; put my chalks in my pocket, and a sheet of drawing-paper in the first of my portfolios that came to hand; and so presented myself before Mr. Faulkner, ready to take his likeness, literally at five minutes' notice.

I found him a very pleasant, intelligent man, young and handsome. He had been a great traveller, had visited all the wonders of the East, and was now about to explore the wilds of the vast South American continent. Thus much he told me good-humouredly and unconstrainedly while I was preparing my drawing materials.

As soon as I had put him in the right light and position, and had seated myself opposite to him, he changed the subject of conversation, and asked me, a little confusedly as I thought, if it was not a customary practice among portrait-painters to gloss over the faults in their sitters' faces, and to make as much as possible of any good points which their features might possess.

'Certainly,' I answered. 'You have described the whole art and mystery of successful portrait-painting in a few words.'

'May I beg, then,' said he, 'that you will depart from the usual practice in my case, and draw me with all my defects, exactly as I am? The fact is,' he went on, after a moment's pause, 'the likeness you are now preparing to take is intended for my mother; my roving disposition makes me a great anxiety to her, and she parted from me this last time very sadly and unwillingly. I don't know how the idea came into my head, but it struck me this morning that I could not better employ the time while I was delayed here on shore than by getting my likeness done to send to her as a

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<sup>1</sup> **Liverpool** – a city and port on the Irish Sea in northeastern England

keepsake. She has no portrait of me since I was a child, and she is sure to value a drawing of me more than anything else I could send to her. I only trouble you with this explanation to prove that I am really sincere in my wish to be drawn unflatteringly, exactly as I am.'

Secretly respecting and admiring him for what he had just said, I promised that his directions should be implicitly followed, and began to work immediately. Before I had pursued my occupation for ten minutes, the conversation began to flag, and the usual obstacle to my success with a sitter gradually set itself up between us. Quite unconsciously, of course, Mr. Faulkner stiffened his neck, shut his mouth, and contracted his eyebrows – evidently under the impression that he was facilitating the process of taking his portrait by making his face as like a lifeless mask as possible. All traces of his natural animated expression were fast disappearing, and he was beginning to change into a heavy and rather melancholy-looking man.

This complete alteration was of no great consequence so long as I was only engaged in drawing the outline of his face and the general form of his features. I accordingly worked on doggedly for more than an hour; then left off to point my chalks again, and to give my sitter a few minutes' rest. Thus far the likeness had not suffered through Mr. Faulkner's unfortunate notion of the right way of sitting for his portrait; but the time of difficulty, as I well knew, was to come. It was impossible for me to think of putting any expression into the drawing unless I could contrive some means, when he resumed his chair, of making him look like himself again. 'I will talk to him about foreign parts,' thought I, 'and try if I can't make him forget that he is sitting for his picture in that way.'

While I was pointing my chalks, Mr. Faulkner was walking up and down the room. He chanced to see the portfolio I had brought with me leaning against the wall, and asked if there were any sketches in it. I told him there were a few which I had made during my recent stay in Paris. 'In Paris?' he repeated, with a look of interest; 'may I see them?'

I gave him the permission he asked as a matter of course. Sitting down, he took the portfolio on his knee, and began to look through it. He turned over the first five sketches rapidly enough; but when he came to the sixth I saw his face flush directly, and observed that he took the drawing out of the portfolio, carried it to the window, and remained silently absorbed in the contemplation of it for full five minutes. After that he turned round to me, and asked very anxiously if I had any objection to parting with that sketch.

It was the least interesting drawing of the collection – merely a view in one of the streets running by the backs of the houses in the Palais Royal<sup>1</sup>. Some four or five of these houses were comprised in the view, which was of no particular use to me in any way, and which was too valueless, as a work of art, for me to think of selling it. I begged his acceptance of it at once. He thanked me quite warmly; and then, seeing that I looked a little surprised at the odd selection he had made from my sketches, laughingly asked me if I could guess why he had been so anxious to become possessed of the view which I had given him.

'Probably,' I answered, 'there is some remarkable historical association connected with that street at the back of the Palais Royal, of which I am ignorant.'

'No,' said Mr. Faulkner; 'at least none that I know of. The only association connected with the place in *my* mind is a purely personal association. Look at this house in your drawing – the house with the water-pipe running down it from top to bottom. I once passed a night there – a night I shall never forget to the day of my death. I have had some awkward travelling adventures in my time; but *that* adventure! Well, never mind, suppose we begin the sitting. I make but a bad return for your kindness in giving me the sketch by thus wasting your time in mere talk.'

'Come! come!' thought I, as he went back to the sitter's chair, 'I shall see your natural expression on your face if I can only get you to talk about that adventure.' It was easy enough to lead him in the right direction. At the first hint from me, he returned to the subject of the house in the back street. Without, I hope, showing any undue curiosity, I contrived to let him see that I felt a deep interest in everything he now said. After two or three preliminary hesitations, he at last, to my great joy, fairly started on the narrative of his adventure. In the interest of his subject he soon

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<sup>1</sup> the Palais Royal – an area and a famous theatre in Paris

completely forgot that he was sitting for his portrait, – the very expression that I wanted came over his face, – and my drawing proceeded toward completion, in the right direction, and to the best purpose. At every fresh touch I felt more and more certain that I was now getting the better of my grand difficulty; and I enjoyed the additional gratification of having my work lightened by the recital of a true story, which possessed, in my estimation, all the excitement of the most exciting romance.

This, as I recollect it, is how Mr. Faulkner told me his adventure.

### **The Traveller's Story of a Terribly Strange Bed**

Shortly after my education at college was finished, I happened to be staying at Paris with an English friend. We were both young men then, and lived, I am afraid, rather a wild life, in the delightful city of our sojourn. One night we were idling about the neighbourhood of the Palais Royal, doubtful to what amusement we should next betake ourselves. My friend proposed a visit to Frascati's<sup>1</sup>; but his suggestion was not to my taste. I knew Frascati's, as the French saying is, by heart; had lost and won plenty of five-franc pieces there, merely for amusement's sake, until it was amusement no longer, and was thoroughly tired, in fact, of all the ghastly respectabilities of such a social anomaly as a respectable gambling-house. 'For Heaven's sake,' said I to my friend, 'let us go somewhere where we can see a little genuine, blackguard, poverty-stricken gaming with no false gingerbread glitter thrown over it all. Let us get away from fashionable Frascati's, to a house where they don't mind letting in a man with a ragged coat, or a man with no coat, ragged or otherwise.' 'Very well,' said my friend, 'we needn't go out of the Palais Royal to find the sort of company you want. Here's the place just before us; as blackguard a place, by all report, as you could possibly wish to see.' In another minute we arrived at the door and entered the house, the back of which you have drawn in your sketch.

When we got upstairs, and had left our hats and sticks with the doorkeeper, we were admitted into the chief gambling-room. We did not find many people assembled there. But, few as the men were who looked up at us on our entrance, they were all types – lamentably true types – of their respective classes.

We had come to see blackguards; but these men were something worse. There is a comic side, more or less appreciable, in all blackguardism – here there was nothing but tragedy – mute, weird tragedy. The quiet in the room was horrible. The thin, haggard, long-haired young man, whose sunken eyes fiercely watched the turning up of the cards, never spoke; the flabby, fat-faced, pimply player, who pricked his piece of pasteboard perseveringly, to register how often black won, and how often red – never spoke; the dirty, wrinkled old man, with the vulture eyes and the darned great-coat, who had lost his last sou<sup>2</sup>, and still looked on desperately, after he could play no longer – never spoke. Even the voice of the croupier sounded as if it were strangely dulled and thickened in the atmosphere of the room. I had entered the place to laugh, but the spectacle before me was something to weep over. I soon found it necessary to take refuge in excitement from the depression of spirits which was fast stealing on me. Unfortunately I sought the nearest excitement, by going to the table and beginning to play. Still more unfortunately, as the event will show, I won – won prodigiously; won incredibly; won at such a rate that the regular players at the table crowded round me; and staring at my stakes with hungry, superstitious eyes, whispered to one another that the English stranger was going to break the bank.

The game was Rouge et Noir<sup>3</sup>. I had played at it in every city in Europe, without, however, the care or the wish to study the Theory of Chances<sup>4</sup> – that philosopher's stone of all gamblers! And a gambler, in the strict sense of the word, I had never been. I was heart-whole from the corroding

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1 **Frascati's** – a casino in Paris

2 **sou** – a French coin of low value (no longer in use)

3 **Rouge et Noir** – 'Red and Black' (*French*), a French card game played in casinos of France, Italy and Monte Carlo

4 **the Theory of Chances** – a theory used in gambling to predict the outcome of a game, the result of which may be determined by chance, or accident, or miscalculation

passion for play. My gaming was a mere idle amusement. I never resorted to it by necessity, because I never knew what it was to want money. I never practised it so incessantly as to lose more than I could afford, or to gain more than I could coolly pocket without being thrown off my balance by my good luck. In short, I had hitherto frequented gambling-tables – just as I frequented ball-rooms and opera-houses – because they amused me, and because I had nothing better to do with my leisure hours.

But on this occasion it was very different – now, for the first time in my life, I felt what the passion for play really was. My success first bewildered, and then, in the most literal meaning of the word, intoxicated me. Incredible as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that I only lost when I attempted to estimate chances, and played according to previous calculation. If I left everything to luck, and staked without any care or consideration, I was sure to win – to win in the face of every recognized probability in favour of the bank. At first some of the men present ventured their money safely enough on my colour; but I speedily increased my stakes to sums which they dared not risk. One after another they left off playing, and breathlessly looked on at my game.

Still, time after time, I staked higher and higher, and still won. The excitement in the room rose to fever pitch. The silence was interrupted by a deep-muttered chorus of oaths and exclamations in different languages, every time the gold was shovelled across to my side of the table – even the imperturbable croupier dashed his rake on the floor in a (French) fury of astonishment at my success. But one man present preserved his self-possession, and that man was my friend. He came to my side, and whispering in English, begged me to leave the place, satisfied with what I had already gained. I must do him the justice to say that he repeated his warnings and entreaties several times, and only left me and went away after I had rejected his advice (I was to all intents and purposes gambling drunk) in terms which rendered it impossible for him to address me again that night.

Shortly after he had gone, a hoarse voice behind me cried: ‘Permit me, my dear sir – permit me to restore to their proper place two napoleons<sup>1</sup> which you have dropped. Wonderful luck, sir! I pledge you my word of honour, as an old soldier, in the course of my long experience in this sort of thing, I never saw such luck as yours – never! Go on, sir – *Sacre mille bombes!*<sup>2</sup> Go on boldly, and break the bank!’

I turned round and saw, nodding and smiling at me with inveterate civility, a tall man, dressed in a frogged and braided surtout. If I had been in my senses, I should have considered him, personally, as being rather a suspicious specimen of an old soldier. He had goggling bloodshot eyes, mangy moustaches, and a broken nose. His voice betrayed a barrack-room intonation of the worst order, and he had the dirtiest pair of hands I ever saw – even in France. These little personal peculiarities exercised, however, no repelling influence on me. In the mad excitement, the reckless triumph of that moment, I was ready to ‘fraternize’ with anybody who encouraged me in my game. I accepted the old soldier’s offered pinch of snuff; clapped him on the back, and swore he was the honestest fellow in the world – the most glorious relic of the Grand Army that I had ever met with. ‘Go on!’ cried my military friend, snapping his fingers in ecstasy – ‘Go on, and win! Break the bank – *Mille tonnerres!*<sup>3</sup> my gallant English comrade, break the bank!’

And I *did* go on – went on at such a rate, that in another quarter of an hour the croupier<sup>4</sup> called out, ‘Gentlemen, the bank has discontinued for to-night.’ All the notes, and all the gold in that ‘bank’ now lay in a heap under my hands; the whole floating capital of the gambling-house was waiting to pour into my pockets!

‘Tie up the money in your pocket-handkerchief, my worthy sir,’ said the old soldier, as I wildly plunged my hands into my heap of gold. ‘Tie it up, as we used to tie up a bit of dinner in the Grand Army; your winnings are too heavy for any breeches-pockets that ever were sewed. There! that’s it – shovel them in, notes and all! *Credie!* what luck! Stop! another napoleon on the floor!’

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1 **napoleon** – an old French gold coin equal to 20 francs

2 **Sacre mille bombes!** – an exclamation of anxiety (*French*)

3 **Mille tonnerres!** – an exclamation of encouragement (*French*)

4 **croupier** – a person who gathers money and pays out winnings in a gambling house

Ah! *sacre petit polisson de Napoleon!*<sup>1</sup> have I found thee at last? Now then, sir – two tight double knots each way with your honourable permission, and the money's safe. Feel it! feel it, fortunate sir! hard and round as a cannon-ball – *Ah, bah!* if they had only fired such cannon-balls at us at Austerlitz<sup>2</sup> – *nom d'une pipe!*<sup>3</sup> if they only had! And now, as an ancient grenadier, as an ex-brave of the French army, what remains for me to do? I ask what? Simply this: to entreat my valued English friend to drink a bottle of champagne with me, and toast the goddess Fortune in foaming goblets before we part!

'Excellent ex-brave! Convivial ancient grenadier! Champagne by all means! An English cheer for an old soldier! Hurrah! hurrah! Another English cheer for the goddess Fortune! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!'

'Bravo! the Englishman; the amiable, gracious Englishman, in whose veins circulates the vivacious blood of France! Another glass? *Ah, bah!* – the bottle is empty! Never mind! *Vive le vin!*<sup>4</sup> I, the old soldier, order another bottle, and half a pound of bonbons with it!'

'No, no, ex-brave; never – ancient grenadier!<sup>5</sup> *Your* bottle last time; my bottle this. Behold it! Toast away! The French Army! the great Napoleon! the present company! the croupier! the honest croupier's wife and daughters – if he has any! the Ladies generally! everybody in the world!'

By the time the second bottle of champagne was emptied, I felt as if I had been drinking liquid fire – my brain seemed all aflame. No excess in wine had ever had this effect on me before in my life. Was it the result of a stimulant acting upon my system when I was in a highly excited state? Was my stomach in a particularly disordered condition? Or was the champagne amazingly strong?

'Ex-brave of the French Army!' cried I, in a mad state of exhilaration, 'I am on fire! how are you? You have set me on fire. Do you hear, my hero of Austerlitz? Let us have a third bottle of champagne to put the flame out!'

The old soldier wagged his head, rolled his goggle-eyes, until I expected to see them slip out of their sockets; placed his dirty forefinger by the side of his broken nose; solemnly ejaculated 'Coffee!' and immediately ran off into an inner room.

The word pronounced by the eccentric veteran seemed to have a magical effect on the rest of the company present. With one accord they all rose to depart. Probably they had expected to profit by my intoxication; but finding that my new friend was benevolently bent on preventing me from getting dead drunk, had now abandoned all hope of thriving pleasantly on my winnings. Whatever their motive might be, at any rate they went away in a body. When the old soldier returned, and sat down again opposite to me at the table, we had the room to ourselves. I could see the croupier, in a sort of vestibule which opened out of it, eating his supper in solitude. The silence was now deeper than ever.

A sudden change, too, had come over the 'ex-brave'. He assumed a portentously solemn look; and when he spoke to me again, his speech was ornamented by no oaths, enforced by no finger-snapping, enlivened by no apostrophes or exclamations.

'Listen, my dear sir,' said he, in mysteriously confidential tones – 'listen to an old soldier's advice. I have been to the mistress of the house (a very charming woman, with a genius for cookery!) to impress on her the necessity of making us some particularly strong and good coffee. You must drink this coffee in order to get rid of your little amiable exaltation of spirits before you think of going home – you *must*, my good and gracious friend! With all that money to take home to-night, it is a sacred duty to yourself to have your wits about you. You are known to be a winner to an enormous extent by several gentlemen present to-night, who, in a certain point of view, are very worthy and excellent fellows; but they are mortal men, my dear sir, and they have their amiable weaknesses. Need I say more? Ah, no, no! you understand me! Now, this is what you must

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1 **Sacre petit polisson de Napoleon!** – Oh, little prankster of Napoleon! (*French*)

2 **Austerlitz** – the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805, one of the greatest victories of Napoleon over joined Russian-Austrian forces

3 **Nom d'une pipe!** – an exclamation 'listen', 'oh', 'there' (*French*)

4 **Vive le vine!** = Long live the wine! (*French*)

5 **grenadier** – a soldier trained to hurl grenades, small explosive bombs

do – send for a cabriolet<sup>1</sup> when you feel quite well again – draw up all the windows when you get into it – and tell the driver to take you home only through the large and well-lighted thoroughfares. Do this; and you and your money will be safe. Do this; and to-morrow you will thank an old soldier for giving you a word of honest advice.’

Just as the ex-brave ended his oration in very lachrymose tones, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups. My attentive friend handed me one of the cups with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it off at a draught. Almost instantly afterwards, I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. The room whirled round and round furiously; the old soldier seemed to be regularly bobbing up and down before me like the piston of a steam-engine. I was half deafened by a violent singing in my ears; a feeling of utter bewilderment, helplessness, idiocy, overcame me. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance; and stammered out that I felt dreadfully unwell – so unwell that I did not know how I was to get home.

‘My dear friend,’ answered the old soldier – and even his voice seemed to be bobbing up and down as he spoke – ‘my dear friend, it would be madness to go home in *your* state; you would be sure to lose your money; you might be robbed and murdered with the greatest ease. *I* am going to sleep here; do you sleep here, too – they make up capital beds in this house – take one; sleep off the effects of the wine, and go home safely with your winnings to-morrow – to-morrow, in broad daylight.’

I had but two ideas left: one, that I must never let go hold of my handkerchief full of money; the other, that I must lie down somewhere immediately, and fall off into a comfortable sleep. So I agreed to the proposal about the bed, and took the offered arm of the old soldier, carrying my money with my disengaged hand. Preceded by the croupier, we passed along some passages and up a flight of stairs into the bedroom which I was to occupy. The ex-brave shook me warmly by the hand, proposed that we should breakfast together, and then, followed by the croupier, left me for the night.

I ran to the wash-hand stand; drank some of the water in my jug; poured the rest out, and plunged my face into it; then sat down in a chair and tried to compose myself. I soon felt better. The change for my lungs, from the fetid atmosphere of the gambling-room to the cool air of the apartment I now occupied, the almost equally refreshing change for my eyes, from the glaring gaslights of the ‘salon’ to the dim, quiet flicker of one bedroom candle, aided wonderfully the restorative effects of cold water. The giddiness left me, and I began to feel a little like a reasonable being again. My first thought was of the risk of sleeping all night in a gambling-house; my second, of the still greater risk of trying to get out after the house was closed, and of going home alone at night through the streets of Paris with a large sum of money about me. I had slept in worse places than this on my travels; so I determined to lock, bolt, and barricade my door, and take my chance till the next morning.

Accordingly, I secured myself against all intrusion; looked under the bed, and into the cupboard; tried the fastening of the window; and then, satisfied that I had taken every proper precaution, pulled off my upper clothing, put my light, which was a dim one, on the hearth among a feathery litter of wood-ashes, and got into bed, with the handkerchief full of money under my pillow.

I soon felt not only that I could not go to sleep, but that I could not even close my eyes. I was wide awake, and in a high fever. Every nerve in my body trembled – every one of my senses seemed to be preternaturally sharpened. I tossed and rolled, and tried every kind of position, and perseveringly sought out the cold corners of the bed, and all to no purpose. Now I thrust my arms over the clothes; now I poked them under the clothes; now I violently shot my legs straight out down to the bottom of the bed; now I convulsively coiled them up as near my chin as they would go; now I shook out my crumpled pillow, changed it to the cool side, patted it flat, and lay down quietly on my back; now I fiercely doubled it in two, set it up on end, thrust it against the board of the bed, and tried a sitting posture. Every effort was in vain; I groaned with vexation as I felt that I

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<sup>1</sup> **cabriolet** – a two-wheeled, one-horse open carriage, first used in France in the 18th century

was in for a sleepless night.

What could I do? I had no book to read. And yet, unless I found out some method of diverting my mind, I felt certain that I was in the condition to imagine all sorts of horrors; to rack my brain with forebodings of every possible and impossible danger; in short, to pass the night in suffering all conceivable varieties of nervous terror.

I raised myself on my elbow, and looked about the room – which was brightened by a lovely moonlight pouring straight through the window – to see if it contained any pictures or ornaments that I could at all clearly distinguish. While my eyes wandered from wall to wall, a remembrance of Le Maistre's<sup>1</sup> delightful little book, 'Voyage autour de ma Chambre,'<sup>2</sup> occurred to me. I resolved to imitate the French author, and find occupation and amusement enough to relieve the tedium of my wakefulness, by making a mental inventory of every article of furniture I could see, and by following up to their sources the multitude of associations which even a chair, a table, or a wash-hand stand may be made to call forth.

In the nervous unsettled state of my mind at that moment, I found it much easier to make my inventory than to make my reflections, and thereupon soon gave up all hope of thinking in Le Maistre's fanciful track – or, indeed, of thinking at all. I looked about the room at the different articles of furniture, and did nothing more.

There was, first, the bed I was lying in; a four-post bed, of all things in the world to meet with in Paris – yes, a thoroughly clumsy British four-poster, with the regular top lined with chintz – the regular fringed valance all round – the regular stifling, unwholesome curtains, which I remembered having mechanically drawn back against the posts without particularly noticing the bed when I first got into the room. Then there was the marble-topped wash-hand stand, from which the water I had spilled, in my hurry to pour it out, was still dripping, slowly and more slowly, on to the brick floor. Then two small chairs, with my coat, waistcoat, and trousers flung on them. Then a large elbow-chair covered with dirty-white dimity, with my cravat and shirt collar thrown over the back. Then a chest of drawers with two of the brass handles off, and a tawdry, broken china inkstand placed on it by way of ornament for the top. Then the dressing-table, adorned by a very small looking-glass, and a very large pincushion. Then the window – an unusually large window. Then a dark old picture, which the feeble candle dimly showed me. It was a picture of a fellow in a high Spanish hat, crowned with a plume of towering feathers. A swarthy, sinister ruffian, looking upward, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking intently upward – it might be at some tall gallows at which he was going to be hanged. At any rate, he had the appearance of thoroughly deserving it.

This picture put a kind of constraint upon me to look upward too – at the top of the bed. It was a gloomy and not an interesting object, and I looked back at the picture. I counted the feathers in the man's hat – they stood out in relief – three white, two green. I observed the crown of his hat, which was of conical shape, according to the fashion supposed to have been favoured by Guido Fawkes<sup>3</sup>. I wondered what he was looking up at. It couldn't be at the stars; such a desperado<sup>4</sup> was neither astrologer nor astronomer. It must be at the high gallows, and he was going to be hanged presently. Would the executioner come into possession of his conical crowned hat and plume of feathers? I counted the feathers again – three white, two green.

While I still lingered over this very improving and intellectual employment, my thoughts insensibly began to wander. The moonlight shining into the room reminded me of a certain moonlight night in England – the night after a picnic party in a Welsh valley. Every incident of the drive homeward, through lovely scenery, which the moonlight made lovelier than ever, came back to my remembrance, though I had never given the picnic a thought for years; though, if I had *tried* to recollect it, I could certainly have recalled little or nothing of that scene long past. Of all the wonderful faculties that help to tell us we are immortal, which speaks the sublime truth more

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1 **Le Maistre** – Antoine Le Maistre (1608–1658), a French religious figure and theologian

2 '**Voyage autour de ma Chambre**' – 'A Trip Around My Room' (*French*)

3 **Guido Fawkes** – Guy Fawkes (1570–1606), an active participant of the famous Gunpowder Plot against James I of England in 1605

4 **desperado** – a bandit, a ruffian



eloquently than memory? Here was I, in a strange house of the most suspicious character, in a situation of uncertainty, and even of peril, which might seem to make the cool exercise of my recollection almost out of the question; nevertheless, remembering, quite involuntarily, places, people, conversations, minute circumstances of every kind, which I had thought forgotten for ever; which I could not possibly have recalled at will, even under the most favourable auspices. And what cause had produced in a moment the whole of this strange, complicated, mysterious effect? Nothing but some rays of moonlight shining in at my bedroom window.

I was still thinking of the picnic – of our merriment on the drive home – of the sentimental young lady who *would quote* ‘Childe Harold’<sup>1</sup> because it was moonlight. I was absorbed by these past scenes and past amusements, when, in an instant, the thread on which my memories hung snapped asunder; my attention immediately came back to present things more vividly than ever, and I found myself, I neither knew why nor wherefore, looking hard at the picture again.

Looking for what?

Good God! the man had pulled his hat down on his brows! No! the hat itself was gone! Where was the conical crown? Where the feathers – three white, two green? Not there! In place of the hat and feathers, what dusky object was it that now hid his forehead, his eyes, his shading hand?

Was the bed moving?

I turned on my back and looked up. Was I mad? drunk? dreaming? giddy again? or was the top of the bed really moving down – sinking slowly, regularly, silently, horribly, right down throughout the whole of its length and breadth – right down upon me, as I lay underneath?

My blood seemed to stand still. A deadly paralysing coldness stole all over me as I turned my head round on the pillow and determined to test whether the bed-top was really moving or not, by keeping my eye on the man in the picture.

The next look in that direction was enough. The dull, black, frowzy outline of the valance above me was within an inch of being parallel with his waist. I still looked breathlessly. And steadily and slowly – very slowly – I saw the figure, and the line of frame below the figure, vanish, as the valance moved down before it.

I am, constitutionally, anything but timid. I have been on more than one occasion in peril of my life, and have not lost my self-possession for an instant; but when the conviction first settled on my mind that the bed-top was really moving, was steadily and continuously sinking down upon me, I looked up shuddering, helpless, panic-stricken, beneath the hideous machinery for murder, which was advancing closer and closer to suffocate me where I lay.

I looked up, motionless, speechless, breathless. The candle, fully spent, went out; but the moonlight still brightened the room. Down and down, without pausing and without sounding, came the bed-top, and still my panic terror seemed to bind me faster and faster to the mattress on which I lay – down and down it sank, till the dusty odour from the lining of the canopy came stealing into my nostrils.

At that final moment the instinct of self-preservation startled me out of my trance, and I moved at last. There was just room for me to roll myself sideways off the bed. As I dropped noiselessly to the floor, the edge of the murderous canopy touched me on the shoulder.

Without stopping to draw my breath, without wiping the cold sweat from my face, I rose instantly on my knees to watch the bed-top. I was literally spellbound by it. If I had heard footsteps behind me, I could not have turned round; if a means of escape had been miraculously provided for me, I could not have moved to take advantage of it. The whole life in me was, at that moment, concentrated in my eyes.

It descended – the whole canopy, with the fringe round it, came down – down – close down; so close that there was not room now to squeeze my finger between the bed-top and the bed. I felt at the sides, and discovered that what had appeared to me from beneath to be the ordinary light canopy of a four-post bed was in reality a thick, broad mattress, the substance of which was concealed by the valance and its fringe. I looked up and saw the four posts rising hideously bare. In the middle of

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1 ‘Childe Harold’ – ‘Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage’, a poem by George Gordon Byron (1788–1824), a famous British Romantic poet

the bed-top was a huge wooden screw that had evidently worked it down through a hole in the ceiling, just as ordinary presses are worked down on the substance selected for compression. The frightful apparatus moved without making the faintest noise. There had been no creaking as it came down; there was now not the faintest sound from the room above. Amid a dead and awful silence I beheld before me – in the nineteenth century, and in the civilized capital of France – such a machine for secret murder by suffocation as might have existed in the worst days of the Inquisition<sup>1</sup>, in the lonely inns among the Harz Mountains<sup>2</sup>, in the mysterious tribunals of Westphalia<sup>3</sup>! Still, as I looked on it, I could not move, I could hardly breathe, but I began to recover the power of thinking, and in a moment I discovered the murderous conspiracy framed against me in all its horror.

My cup of coffee had been drugged, and drugged too strongly. I had been saved from being smothered by having taken an overdose of some narcotic. How I had chafed and fretted at the fever-fit which had preserved my life by keeping me awake! How recklessly I had confided myself to the two wretches who had led me into this room, determined, for the sake of my winnings, to kill me in my sleep by the surest and most horrible contrivance for secretly accomplishing my destruction! How many men, winners like me, had slept, as I had proposed to sleep, in that bed, and had never been seen or heard of more! I shuddered at the bare idea of it.

But, ere long, all thought was again suspended by the sight of the murderous canopy moving once more. After it had remained on the bed – as nearly as I could guess – about ten minutes, it began to move up again. The villains who worked it from above evidently believed that their purpose was now accomplished. Slowly and silently, as it had descended, that horrible bed-top rose towards its former place. When it reached the upper extremities of the four posts, it reached the ceiling, too. Neither hole nor screw could be seen; the bed became in appearance an ordinary bed again – the canopy – an ordinary canopy<sup>4</sup> – even to the most suspicious eyes.

Now, for the first time, I was able to move – to rise from my knees – to dress myself in my upper clothing – and to consider of how I should escape. If I betrayed by the smallest noise that the attempt to suffocate me had failed, I was certain to be murdered. Had I made any noise already? I listened intently, looking towards the door.

No! no footsteps in the passage outside – no sound of a tread, light or heavy, in the room above – absolute silence everywhere. Besides locking and bolting my door, I had moved an old wooden chest against it, which I had found under the bed. To remove this chest (my blood ran cold as I thought of what its contents might be!) without making some disturbance was impossible; and, moreover, to think of escaping through the house, now barred up for the night, was sheer insanity. Only one chance was left me – the window. I stole to it on tiptoe.

My bedroom was on the first floor, above an entresol, and looked into a back street. I raised my hand to open the window, knowing that on that action hung, by the merest hairbreadth, my chance of safety. They keep vigilant watch in a house of murder. If any part of the frame cracked, if the hinge creaked, I was a lost man! It must have occupied me at least five minutes, reckoning by time – five *hours*, reckoning by suspense – to open that window. I succeeded in doing it silently – in doing it with all the dexterity of a house-breaker – and then looked down into the street. To leap the distance beneath me would be almost certain destruction! Next, I looked round at the sides of the house. Down the left side ran a thick water-pipe – it passed close by the outer edge of the window. The moment I saw the pipe I knew I was saved. My breath came and went freely for the first time since I had seen the canopy of the bed moving down upon me!

To some men the means of escape which I had discovered might have seemed difficult and dangerous enough – to *me* the prospect of slipping down the pipe into the street did not suggest even a thought of peril. I had always been accustomed, by the practice of gymnastics, to keep up my school-boy powers as a daring and expert climber; and knew that my head, hands, and feet would serve me faithfully in any hazards of ascent or descent. I had already got one leg over the

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1 **the Inquisition** – an institution of the Roman Catholic Church established in the 13th century to combat heresy

2 **the Harz Mountains** – a northern mountain range in Germany

3 **Westphalia** – a historic region in northwestern Germany

4 **canopy** – a hood or cover over a door, bed, fireplace, etc.

window-sill, when I remembered the handkerchief filled with money under my pillow. I could well have afforded to leave it behind me, but I was revengefully determined that the miscreants of the gambling-house should miss their plunder as well as their victim. So I went back to the bed and tied the heavy handkerchief at my back by my cravat<sup>1</sup>.

Just as I had made it tight and fixed it in a comfortable place, I thought I heard a sound of breathing outside the door. The chill feeling of horror ran through me again as I listened. No! dead silence still in the passage – I had only heard the night air blowing softly into the room. The next moment I was on the window-sill, and the next I had a firm grip on the water-pipe with my hands and knees.

I slid down into the street easily and quietly, as I thought I should, and immediately set off at the top of my speed to a branch ‘prefecture’ of Police, which I knew was situated in the immediate neighbourhood. A ‘sub-prefect,’ and several picked men among his subordinates, happened to be up, maturing, I believe, some scheme for discovering the perpetrator of a mysterious murder which all Paris was talking of just then. When I began my story, in a breathless hurry and in very bad French, I could see that the sub-prefect suspected me of being a drunken Englishman who had robbed somebody; but he soon altered his opinion as I went on, and before I had anything like concluded, he shoved all the papers before him into a drawer, put on his hat, supplied me with another (for I was bareheaded), ordered a file of soldiers, desired his expert followers to get ready all sorts of tools for breaking open doors and ripping up brick flooring, and took my arm, in the most friendly and familiar manner possible, to lead me with him out of the house. I will venture to say that when the sub-prefect was a little boy, and was taken for the first time to the play, he was not half as much pleased as he was now at the job in prospect for him at the gambling-house!

Away we went through the streets, the sub-prefect cross-examining and congratulating me in the same breath as we marched at the head of our formidable posse comitatus<sup>2</sup>. Sentinels were placed at the back and front of the house the moment we got to it; a tremendous battery of knocks was directed against the door; a light appeared at a window; I was told to conceal myself behind the police; then came more knocks and a cry of ‘Open in the name of the law!’ At that terrible summons bolts and locks gave way before an invisible hand, and the moment after the sub-prefect was in the passage, confronting a waiter half dressed and ghastly pale. This was the short dialogue which immediately took place:

‘We want to see the Englishman who is sleeping in this house.’

‘He went away hours ago.’

‘He did no such thing. His friend went away; *he* remained. Show us to his bedroom!’

‘I swear to you, Monsieur le Sous-préfet<sup>3</sup>, he is not here! He–’

‘I swear to you, Monsieur le Garçon<sup>4</sup>, he is. He slept here; he didn’t find your bed comfortable; he came to us to complain of it; here he is among my men; and here am I ready to look for a flea or two in his bedstead. Renaudin!’ (calling to one of the subordinates, and pointing to the waiter), ‘collar that man, and tie his hands behind him. Now then, gentlemen, let us walk upstairs!’

Every man and woman in the house was secured – the ‘old soldier’ the first. Then I identified the bed in which I had slept, and then we went into the room above.

No object that was at all extraordinary appeared in any part of it. The sub-prefect looked round the place, commanded everybody to be silent, stamped twice on the floor, called for a candle, looked attentively at the spot he had stamped on, and ordered the flooring there to be carefully taken up. This was done in no time. Lights were produced, and we saw a deep rafted cavity between the floor of this room and the ceiling of the room beneath. Through this cavity there ran perpendicularly a sort of case of iron, thickly greased; and inside the case appeared the screw, which communicated with the bed-top below. Extra lengths of screw, freshly oiled; levers covered with felt; all the complete upper works of a heavy press – constructed with infernal ingenuity so as to join the

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1 **cravat** – a piece of linen or lace worn as a tie

2 **posse comitatus** – a group of armed men who help to maintain order, catch criminals, etc.

3 **le Sous-préfet** = sub-prefect (*French*)

4 **le Garçon** = waiter, servant (*French*)

fixtures below, and when taken to pieces again to go into the smallest possible compass – were next discovered and pulled out on the floor. After some little difficulty the sub-prefect succeeded in putting the machinery together, and, leaving his men to work it, descended with me to the bedroom. The smothering canopy was then lowered, but not so noiselessly as I had seen it lowered. When I mentioned this to the sub-prefect, his answer, simple as it was, had a terrible significance. ‘My men,’ said he, ‘are working down the bed-top for the first time; the men whose money you won were in better practice.’

We left the house in the sole possession of two police agents, every one of the inmates being removed to prison on the spot. The sub-prefect, after taking down my *proces verbal*<sup>1</sup> in his office, returned with me to my hotel to get my passport. ‘Do you think,’ I asked, as I gave it to him, ‘that any men have really been smothered in that bed, as they tried to smother *me*?’

‘I have seen dozens of drowned men laid out at the morgue,’ answered the sub-prefect, ‘in whose pocket-books were found letters stating that they had committed suicide in the Seine, because they had lost everything at the gaming-table. Do I know how many of those men entered the same gambling-house that *you* entered? won as *you* won? took that bed as *you* took it? slept in it? were smothered in it? and were privately thrown into the river, with a letter of explanation written by the murderers and placed in their pocket-books? No man can say how many or how few have suffered the fate from which you have escaped. The people of the gambling-house kept their bedstead machinery a secret from *us* – even from the police! The dead kept the rest of the secret for them. Good-night, or rather good-morning, Monsieur Faulkner! Be at my office again at nine o’clock; in the meantime, *au revoir*!’<sup>2</sup>

The rest of my story is soon told. I was examined and reexamined; the gambling-house was strictly searched all through from top to bottom; the prisoners were separately interrogated, and two of the less guilty among them made a confession. I discovered that the old soldier was master of the gambling-house – *justice* discovered that he had been drummed out of the army as a vagabond years ago; that he had been guilty of all sorts of villainies since; that he was in possession of stolen property, which the owners identified; and that he, the croupier, another accomplice, and the woman who had made my cup of coffee were all in the secret of the bedstead. There appeared some reason to doubt whether the inferior persons attached to the house knew anything of the suffocating machinery; and they received the benefit of that doubt, by being treated simply as thieves and vagabonds. As for the old soldier and his two head myrmidons<sup>3</sup>, they went to the galleys; the woman who had drugged my coffee was imprisoned for I forget how many years; the regular attendants at the gambling-house were considered ‘suspicious,’ and placed under ‘surveillance’; and I became, for one whole week (which is a long time), the head ‘lion’ in Parisian society. My adventure was dramatised by three illustrious play-makers, but never saw theatrical daylight; for the censorship forbade the introduction on the stage of a correct copy of the gambling-house bedstead.

One good result was produced by my adventure, which any censorship must have approved: it cured me of ever again trying *rouge-et-noir* as an amusement. The sight of a green cloth, with packs of cards and heaps of money on it, will henceforth be forever associated in my mind with the sight of a bed canopy descending to suffocate me in the silence and darkness of the night.

Just as Mr. Faulkner pronounced these words he started in his chair, and resumed his stiff, dignified position in a great hurry. ‘Bless my soul!’ cried he, with a comic look of astonishment and vexation, ‘while I have been telling you what is the real secret of my interest in the sketch you have so kindly given to me, I have altogether forgotten that I came here to sit for my portrait. For the last hour or more I must have been the worst model you ever had to draw from!’

‘On the contrary, you have been the best,’ said I. ‘I have been trying to catch your likeness; and, while telling your story, you have unconsciously shown me the natural expression I wanted to insure my success.’

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1 **proces verbal** – transcript of interrogation

2 **au revoir** = goodbye (*French*)

3 **myrmidons** – here: accomplices

THE END

### Note by Mrs. Kerby

I cannot let this story end without mentioning what the chance saying was which caused it to be told at the farmhouse the other night. Our friend, the young sailor, among his other quaint objections to sleeping on shore, declared that he particularly hated four-post beds, because he never slept in one without doubting whether the top might not come down in the night and suffocate him. I thought this chance reference to the distinguishing feature of William's narrative curious enough, and my husband agreed with me. But he says it is scarcely worthwhile to mention such a trifle in anything so important as a book. I cannot venture, after this, to do more than slip these lines in modestly at the end of the story. If the printer should notice my few last words, perhaps he may not mind the trouble of putting them into some out-of-the-way corner, in very small type.

L. K.

### That Little Square Box (Arthur Conan Doyle)

'All aboard!' said the captain

'All aboard, sir!' said the mate.

'Then stand by to let her go.'

It was nine o'clock on a Wednesday morning. The good ship *Spartan* was lying off Boston Quay with her cargo under hatches, her passengers shipped, and everything prepared for a start. The warning whistle had been sounded twice, the final bell had been rung. Her bowsprit was turned towards England, and the hiss of escaping steam showed that all was ready for her run of three thousand miles. She strained at the warps that held her like a greyhound at its leash.

I have the misfortune to be a very nervous man. A sedentary literary life has helped to increase the morbid love of solitude which, even in my boyhood, was one of my distinguishing characteristics. As I stood upon the quarter-deck of the Transatlantic steamer, I bitterly cursed the necessity which drove me back to the land of my forefathers. The shouts of the sailors, the rattle of the cordage, the farewells of my fellow-passengers, and the cheers of the mob, each and all jarred upon my sensitive nature. I felt sad too. An indescribable feeling, as of some impending calamity, seemed to haunt me. The sea was calm, and the breeze light. There was nothing to disturb the equanimity of the most confirmed of landmen, yet I felt as if I stood upon the verge of a great though indefinable danger. I have noticed that such presentiments occur often in men of my peculiar temperament, and that they are not uncommonly fulfilled. There is a theory that it arises from a species of second-sight – a subtle spiritual communication with the future. I well remember that Herr Raumer, the eminent spiritualist, remarked on one occasion that I was the most sensitive subject as regards supernatural phenomena that he had ever encountered in the whole of his wide experience. Be that as it may, I certainly felt far from happy as I threaded my way among the weeping, cheering groups which dotted the white decks of the good ship *Spartan*. Had I known the experience which awaited me in the course of the next twelve hours, I would even then at the last moment have sprung upon the shore, and made my escape from the accursed vessel.

'Time's up!' said the captain, closing his chronometer with a snap, and replacing it in his pocket. 'Time's up!' said the mate. There was a last wail from the whistle, a rush of friends and relatives upon the land. One warp was loosened, the gangway was being pushed away, when there was a shout from the bridge, and two men appeared running rapidly down the quay. They were waving their hands and making frantic gestures, apparently with the intention of stopping the ship. 'Look sharp!' shouted the crowd. 'Hold hard!' cried the captain. 'Ease her! stop her! Up with the gangway!' and the two men sprang aboard just as the second warp parted, and a convulsive throb of the engine shot us clear of the shore. There was a cheer from the deck, another from the quay, a mighty fluttering of handkerchiefs, and the great vessel ploughed its way out of the harbour, and

steamed grandly away across the placid bay.

We were fairly started upon our fortnight's voyage. There was a general dive among the passengers in quest of berths and luggage, while a popping of corks in the saloon proved that more than one bereaved traveller was adopting artificial means for drowning the pangs of separation. I glanced round the deck and took a running inventory of my *compagnons de voyage*<sup>1</sup>. They presented the usual types met with upon these occasions. There was no striking face among them. I speak as a connoisseur, for faces are a specialty of mine. I pounce upon a characteristic feature as a botanist does on a flower, and bear it away with me to analyse at my leisure, and classify and label it in my little anthropological museum. There was nothing worthy of me here. Twenty types of young America going to 'Yurrupe', a few respectable middle-aged couples as an antidote, a sprinkling of clergymen and professional men, young ladies, bagmen, British exclusives, and all the *olla podrida*<sup>2</sup> of an ocean-going steamer. I turned away from them and gazed back at the receding shores of America, and, as a cloud of remembrances rose before me, my heart warmed towards the land of my adoption. A pile of portmanteaus and luggage chanced to be lying on one side of the deck, awaiting their turn to be taken below. With my usual love for solitude I walked behind these, and sitting on a coil of rope between them and the vessel's side, I indulged in a melancholy reverie.

I was aroused from this by a whisper behind me. 'Here's a quiet place,' said the voice. 'Sit down, and we can talk it over in safety.'

Glancing through a chink between two colossal chests, I saw that the passengers who had joined us at the last moment were standing at the other side of the pile. They had evidently failed to see me as I crouched in the shadow of the boxes. The one who had spoken was a tall and very thin man with a blue-black beard and a colourless face. His manner was nervous and excited. His companion was a short, plethoric little fellow, with a brisk and resolute air. He had a cigar in his mouth, and a large ulster slung over his left arm. They both glanced round uneasily, as if to ascertain whether they were alone. 'This is just the place,' I heard the other say. They sat down on a bale of goods with their backs turned towards me, and I found myself, much against my will, playing the unpleasant part of eavesdropper to their conversation.

'Well, Muller,' said the taller of the two, 'we've got it aboard right enough.'

'Yes,' assented the man whom he had addressed as Muller; 'it's safe aboard.'

'It was rather a near go.'

'It was that, Flannigan.'

'It wouldn't have done to have missed the ship.'

'No; it would have put our plans out.'

'Ruined them entirely,' said the little man, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes.

'I've got it here,' he said at last.

'Let me see it.'

'Is no one looking?'

'No; they are nearly all below.'

'We can't be too careful where so much is at stake,' said Muller, as he uncoiled the ulster<sup>3</sup> which hung over his arm, and disclosed a dark object which he laid upon the deck. One glance at it was enough to cause me to spring to my feet with an exclamation of horror. Luckily they were so engrossed in the matter on hand that neither of them observed me. Had they turned their heads they would infallibly have seen my pale face glaring at them over the pile of boxes.

From the first moment of their conversation a horrible misgiving had come over me. It seemed more than confirmed as I gazed at what lay before me. It was a little square box made of some dark wood, and ribbed with brass. I suppose it was about the size of a cubic foot. It reminded me of a pistol-case, only it was decidedly higher. There was an appendage to it, however, on which my eyes were riveted, and which suggested the pistol itself rather than its receptacle. This was a

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<sup>1</sup> *compagnons de voyage* = voyage companions (*French*)

<sup>2</sup> *olla podrida* = ragout made of red beans, pork and sausage (*Spanish*)

<sup>3</sup> *ulster* – a long, loose overcoat with a belt

trigger-like arrangement upon the lid, to which a coil of string was attached. Beside this trigger there was a small square aperture through the wood. The tall man, Flannigan, as his companion called him, applied his eye to this and peered in for several minutes with an expression of intense anxiety upon his face.

‘It seems right enough,’ he said at last.

‘I tried not to shake it,’ said his companion.

‘Such delicate things need delicate treatment. Put in some of the needful, Muller.’

The shorter man fumbled in his pocket for some time, and then produced a small paper packet. He opened this, and took out of it half a handful of whitish granules, which he poured down through the hole. A curious clicking noise followed from the inside of the box, and both the men smiled in a satisfied way.

‘Nothing much wrong there,’ said Flannigan.

‘Right as a trivet,’ answered his companion.

‘Look out! here’s some one coming. Take it down to our berth. It wouldn’t do to have any one suspecting what our game is, or, worse still, have them fumbling with it, and letting it off by mistake.’

‘Well, it would come to the same, whoever let it off,’ said Muller.

‘They’d be rather astonished if they pulled the trigger,’ said the taller, with a sinister laugh.

‘Ha, ha! fancy their faces! It’s not a bad bit of workmanship, I flatter myself.’

‘No,’ said Muller. ‘I hear it is your own design, every bit of it, isn’t it?’

‘Yes, the spring and the sliding shutter are my own.’

‘We should take out a patent.’

And the two men laughed again with a cold, harsh laugh, as they took up the little brass-bound package and concealed it in Muller’s voluminous overcoat.

‘Come down, and we’ll stow it in our berth,’ said Flannigan. ‘We won’t need it until tonight, and it will be safe there.’

His companion assented, and the two went arm-in-arm along the deck and disappeared down the hatchway, bearing the mysterious little box away with them. The last words I heard were a muttered injunction from Flannigan to carry it carefully, and avoid knocking it against the bulwarks.

How long I remained sitting on that coil of rope I shall never know. The horror of the conversation I had just overheard was aggravated by the first sinking qualms of sea-sickness. The long roll of the Atlantic was beginning to assert itself over both ship and passengers. I felt prostrated in mind and in body, and fell into a state of collapse, from which I was finally aroused by the hearty voice of our worthy quartermaster<sup>1</sup>.

‘Do you mind moving out of that, sir?’ he said. ‘We want to get this lumber cleared off the deck.’

His bluff manner and ruddy, healthy face seemed to be a positive insult to me in my present condition. Had I been a courageous or a muscular man I could have struck him. As it was, I treated the honest sailor to a melodramatic scowl, which seemed to cause him no small astonishment, and strode past him to the other side of the deck. Solitude was what I wanted – solitude in which I could brood over the frightful crime which was being hatched before my very eyes. One of the quarter-boats was hanging rather low down upon the davits. An idea struck me, and, climbing on the bulwarks, I stepped into the empty boat and lay down in the bottom of it. Stretched on my back, with nothing but the blue sky above me, and an occasional view of the mizzen as the vessel rolled, I was at least alone with my sickness and my thoughts.

I tried to recall the words which had been spoken in the terrible dialogue I had overheard. Would they admit of any construction but the one which stared me in the face? My reason forced me to confess that they would not. I endeavoured to array the various facts which formed the chain of circumstantial evidence, and to find a flaw in it; but no, not a link was missing. There was the strange way in which our passengers had come aboard, enabling them to evade any examination of

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<sup>1</sup> **quartermaster** – an officer responsible for the quartering and movement of troops; on a ship, an officer in charge of steering and signals.

their luggage. The very name of 'Flannigan' smacked of Fenianism, while 'Muller' suggested nothing but Socialism and murder. Then their mysterious manner; their remark that their plans would have been ruined had they missed the ship; their fear of being observed; last, but not least, the clenching evidence in the production of the little square box with the trigger, and their grim joke about the face of the man who should let it off by mistake – could these facts lead to any conclusion other than that they were the desperate emissaries of some body, political or otherwise, and intended to sacrifice themselves, their fellow-passengers, and the ship, in one great holocaust? The whitish granules which I had seen one of them pour into the box formed no doubt a fuse or train for exploding it. I had myself heard a sound come from it which might have emanated from some delicate piece of machinery. But what did they mean by their allusion to tonight? Could it be that they contemplated putting their horrible design into execution on the very first evening of our voyage? The mere thought of it sent a cold shudder over me, and made me for a moment superior even to the agonies of sea-sickness.

I have remarked that I am a physical coward. I am a moral one also. It is seldom that the two defects are united to such a degree in the one character. I have known many men who were most sensitive to bodily danger, and yet were distinguished for the independence and strength of their minds. In my own case, however, I regret to say that my quiet and retiring habits had fostered a nervous dread of doing anything remarkable, or making myself conspicuous, which exceeded, if possible, my fear of personal peril. An ordinary mortal placed under the circumstances in which I now found myself would have gone at once to the captain, confessed his fears, and put the matter into his hands. To me, however, constituted as I am, the idea was most repugnant. The thought of becoming the observed of all observers, cross-questioned by a stranger, and confronted with two desperate conspirators in the character of a denouncer, was hateful to me. Might it not by some remote possibility prove that I was mistaken? What would be my feelings if there should turn out to be no grounds for my accusation? No, I would procrastinate; I would keep my eye on the two desperadoes and dog them at every turn. Anything was better than the possibility of being wrong.

Then it struck me that even at that moment some new phase of the conspiracy might be developing itself. The nervous excitement seemed to have driven away my incipient attack of sickness, for I was able to stand up and lower myself from the boat without experiencing any return of it. I staggered along the deck with the intention of descending into the cabin and finding how my acquaintances of the morning were occupying themselves. Just as I had my hand on the companion-rail, I was astonished by receiving a hearty slap on the back, which nearly shot me down the steps with more haste than dignity.

'Is that you, Hammond?' said a voice which I seemed to recognise.

'God bless me,' I said as I turned round, 'it can't be Dick Merton! Why, how are you, old man?'

This was an unexpected piece of luck in the midst of my perplexities. Dick was just the man I wanted; kindly and shrewd in his nature, and prompt in his actions, I should have no difficulty in telling him my suspicions, and could rely upon his sound sense to point out the best course to pursue. Since I was a little lad in the second form at Harrow, Dick had been my adviser and protector. He saw at a glance that something had gone wrong with me.

'Hullo!' he said, in his kindly way, 'what's put you about, Hammond? You look as white as a sheet. Mal de mer<sup>1</sup>, eh?'

'No, not that altogether,' said I. 'Walk up and down with me, Dick; I want to speak to you. Give me your arm.'

Supporting myself on Dick's stalwart frame, I tottered along by his side; but it was some time before I could muster resolution to speak.

'Have a cigar,' said he, breaking the silence.

'No, thanks,' said I. 'Dick, we shall all be corpses tonight.'

'That's no reason against your having a cigar now,' said Dick, in his cool way, but looking hard at me from under his shaggy eyebrows as he spoke. He evidently thought that my intellect was

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<sup>1</sup> **mal de mer** = seasickness (*French*)



a little gone.

'No,' I continued; 'it's no laughing matter, and I speak in sober earnest, I assure you. I have discovered an infamous conspiracy, Dick, to destroy this ship and every soul that is in her;' and I then proceeded systematically, and in order, to lay before him the chain of evidence which I had collected. 'There, Dick,' I said, as I concluded, 'what do you think of that? and, above all, what am I to do?'

To my astonishment he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

'I'd be frightened,' he said, 'if any fellow but you had told me as much. You always had a way, Hammond, of discovering mares' nests. I like to see the old traits breaking out again. Do you remember at school how you swore there was a ghost in the long room, and how it turned out to be your own reflection in the mirror? Why, man,' he continued, 'what object would anyone have in destroying this ship? We have no great political guns aboard. On the contrary, the majority of the passengers are Americans. Besides, in this sober nineteenth century, the most wholesale murderers stop at including themselves among their victims. Depend upon it, you have misunderstood them, and have mistaken a photographic camera, or something equally innocent, for an infernal machine.' 'Nothing of the sort, sir,' said I, rather touchily. 'You will learn to your cost, I fear, that I have neither exaggerated nor misinterpreted a word. As to the box, I have certainly never before seen one like it. It contained delicate machinery; of that I am convinced, from the way in which the men handled it and spoke of it.'

'You'd make out every packet of perishable goods to be a torpedo,' said Dick, 'if that is to be your only test.'

'The man's name was Flannigan,' I continued.

'I don't think that would go very far in a court of law,' said Dick; 'but come, I have finished my cigar. Suppose we go down together and split a bottle of claret. You can point out these two Orsinis to me if they are still in the cabin.'

'All right,' I answered; 'I am determined not to lose sight of them all day. Don't look hard at them, though; for I don't want them to think that they are being watched.'

'Trust me,' said Dick; 'I'll look as unconscious and guileless as a lamb;' and with that we passed down the companion and into the saloon.

A good many passengers were scattered about the great central table, some wrestling with refractory carpet-bags and rug-straps, some having their luncheon, and a few reading and otherwise amusing themselves. The objects of our quest were not there. We passed down the room and peered into every berth; but there was no sign of them. 'Heavens!' thought I, 'perhaps at this very moment they are beneath our feet, in the hold or engine-room, preparing their diabolical contrivance!' It was better to know the worst than to remain in such suspense.

'Steward,' said Dick, 'are there any other gentlemen about?'

'There's two in the smoking-room, sir,' answered the steward.

The smoking-room was a little snugger, luxuriously fitted up, and adjoining the pantry. We pushed the door open and entered. A sigh of relief escaped from my bosom. The very first object on which my eye rested was the cadaverous face of Flannigan, with its hard-set mouth and unwinking eye. His companion sat opposite to him. They were both drinking, and a pile of cards lay upon the table. They were engaged in playing as we entered. I nudged Dick to show him that we had found our quarry, and we sat down beside them with as unconcerned an air as possible. The two conspirators seemed to take little notice of our presence. I watched them both narrowly. The game at which they were playing was 'Napoleon.' Both were adepts at it; and I could not help admiring the consummate nerve of men who, with such a secret at their hearts, could devote their minds to the manipulating of a long suit or the finessing of a queen. Money changed hands rapidly; but the run of luck seemed to be all against the taller of the two players. At last he threw down his cards on the table with an oath and refused to go on.

'No, I'm hanged if I do!' he said; 'I haven't had more than two of a suit for five hands.'

'Never mind,' said his comrade, as he gathered up his winnings; 'a few dollars one way or the other won't go very far after tonight's work.'

I was astonished at the rascal's audacity, but took care to keep my eyes fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, and drank my wine in as unconscious a manner as possible. I felt that Flannigan was looking towards me with his wolfish eyes to see if I had noticed the allusion. He whispered something to his companion which I failed to catch. It was a caution, I suppose, for the other answered rather angrily –

‘Nonsense! Why shouldn't I say what I like? Over-caution is just what would ruin us.’

‘I believe you want it not to come off,’ said Flannigan.

‘You believe nothing of the sort,’ said the other, speaking rapidly and loudly. ‘You know as well as I do that when I play for a stake I like to win it. But I won't have my words criticised and cut short by you or any other man; I have as much interest in our success as you have – more, I hope.’

He was quite hot about it, and puffed furiously at his cigar for a few minutes. The eyes of the other ruffian wandered alternately from Dick Merton to myself. I knew that I was in the presence of a desperate man, that a quiver of my lip might be the signal for him to plunge a weapon into my heart; but I betrayed more self-command than I should have given myself credit for under such trying circumstances. As to Dick, he was as immovable and apparently as unconscious as the Egyptian Sphinx.

There was silence for some time in the smoking-room, broken only by the crisp rattle of the cards as the man Muller shuffled them up before replacing them in his pocket. He still seemed to be somewhat flushed and irritable. Throwing the end of his cigar into the spittoon, he glanced defiantly at his companion, and turned towards me.

‘Can you tell me, sir,’ he said, ‘when this ship will be heard of again?’

They were both looking at me; but though my face may have turned a trifle paler, my voice was as steady as ever as I answered –

‘I presume, sir, that it will be heard of first when it enters Queenstown Harbour.’

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed the angry little man; ‘I knew you would say that. Don't you kick me under the table, Flannigan; I won't stand it. I know what I am doing. You are wrong, sir,’ he continued, turning to me; ‘utterly wrong.’

‘Some passing ship, perhaps,’ suggested Dick.

‘No, nor that either.’

‘The weather is fine,’ I said; ‘why should we not be heard of at our destination?’

‘I didn't say we shouldn't be heard of at our destination. No doubt we shall in the course of time; but that is not where we shall be heard of first.’

‘Where then?’ asked Dick.

‘That you will never know. Suffice it that a rapid and mysterious agency will signal our whereabouts, and that before the day is out. Ha, ha!’ and he chuckled once again.

‘Come on deck!’ growled his comrade; ‘you have drunk too much of that confounded brandy-and-water. It has loosened your tongue. Come away!’ and taking him by the arm he half led him, half forced him out of the smoking-room, and we heard them stumbling up the companion together, and on to the deck.

‘Well, what do you think now?’ I gasped, as I turned towards Dick. He was as imperturbable as ever.

‘Think!’ he said; ‘why, I think what his companion thinks – that we have been listening to the ravings of a half-drunken man. The fellow stunk of brandy.’

‘Nonsense, Dick! you saw how the other tried to stop his tongue.’

‘Of course he did. He didn't want his friend to make a fool of himself before strangers. Maybe the short one is a lunatic, and the other his private keeper. It's quite possible.’

‘Oh, Dick, Dick,’ I cried; ‘how can you be so blind? Don't you see that every word confirmed our previous suspicion?’

‘Humbug, man!’ said Dick; ‘you're working yourself into a state of nervous excitement. Why, what the devil do *you* make of all that nonsense about a mysterious agent which would signal our whereabouts?’

‘I’ll tell you what he meant, Dick,’ I said, bending forward and grasping my friend’s arm. ‘He meant a sudden glare and a flash seen far out at sea by some lonely fisherman off the American coast. That’s what he meant.’

‘I didn’t think you were such a fool, Hammond,’ said Dick Merton testily. ‘If you try to fix a literal meaning on the twaddle that every drunken man talks, you will come to some queer conclusions. Let us follow their example, and go on deck. You need fresh air, I think. Depend upon it, your liver is out of order. A sea-voyage will do you a world of good.’

‘If ever I see the end of this one,’ I groaned, ‘I’ll promise never to venture on another. They are laying the cloth, so it’s hardly worth while my going up. I’ll stay below and finish my smoke.’

‘I hope dinner will find you in a more pleasant state of mind,’ said Dick; and he went out, leaving me to my thoughts until the clang of the great gong summoned us to the saloon.

My appetite, I need hardly say, had not been improved by the incidents which had occurred during the day. I sat down, however, mechanically at the table, and listened to the talk which was going on around me. There were nearly a hundred first-class passengers, and as the wine began to circulate, their voices combined with the clash of the dishes to form a perfect Babel. I found myself seated between a very stout and nervous old lady and a prim little clergyman; and as neither made any advances, I retired into my shell, and spent my time in observing the appearance of my fellow-voyagers. I could see Dick in the dim distance dividing his attentions between a jointless fowl in front of him and a self-possessed young lady at his side. Captain Dowie was doing the honours at my end, while the surgeon of the vessel was seated at the other. I was glad to notice that Flannigan was placed almost opposite to me. As long as I had him before my eyes I knew that, for the time at least, we were safe. He was sitting with what was meant to be a sociable smile on his grim face. It did not escape me that he drank largely of wine – so largely that even before the dessert appeared his voice had become decidedly husky. His friend Muller was seated a few places lower down. He ate little, and appeared to be nervous and restless.

‘Now, ladies,’ said our genial captain, ‘I trust that you will consider yourselves at home aboard my vessel. I have no fears for the gentlemen. A bottle of champagne, steward. Here’s to a fresh breeze and a quick passage! I trust our friends in America will hear of our safe arrival in twelve days, or a fortnight at the very latest.’

I looked up. Quick as was the glance which passed between Flannigan and his confederate, I was able to intercept it. There was an evil smile upon the former’s thin lips.

The conversation rippled on. Politics, the sea, amusements, religion, each was in turn discussed. I remained a silent though an interested listener. It struck me that no harm could be done by introducing the subject which was ever in my mind. It could be managed in an off-hand way, and would at least have the effect of turning the captain’s thoughts in that direction. I could watch, too, what effect it would have upon the faces of the conspirators.

There was a sudden lull in the conversation. The ordinary subjects of interest appeared to be exhausted. The opportunity was a favourable one.

‘May I ask, captain,’ I said, bending forward, and speaking very distinctly, ‘what you think of Fenian manifestoes?’

The captain’s ruddy face became a shade darker from honest indignation.

‘They are poor cowardly things,’ he said, ‘as silly as they are wicked.’

‘The impotent threats of a set of anonymous scoundrels,’ said a pompous-looking old gentleman beside him.

‘Oh, captain!’ said the fat lady at my side, ‘you don’t really think they would blow up a ship?’

‘I have no doubt they would if they could. But I am very sure they will never blow up mine.’

‘May I ask what precautions are taken against them?’ said an elderly man at the end of the table.

‘All goods sent aboard the ship are strictly examined,’ said Captain Dowie.

‘But suppose a man brought explosives aboard with him?’ said I.

‘They are too cowardly to risk their own lives in that way.’

During this conversation Flannigan had not betrayed the slightest interest in what was going

on. He raised his head now, and looked at the captain.

‘Don’t you think you are rather underrating them?’ he said. ‘Every secret society has produced desperate men – why shouldn’t the Fenians have them too? Many men think it a privilege to die in the service of a cause which seems right in their eyes, though others may think it wrong.’

‘Indiscriminate murder cannot be right in anybody’s eyes,’ said the little clergyman.

‘The bombardment of Paris was nothing else,’ said Flannigan; ‘yet the whole civilised world agreed to look on with folded arms, and change the ugly word “murder” into the more euphonious one of “war.” It seemed right enough to German eyes; why shouldn’t dynamite seem so to the Fenian?’

‘At any rate their empty vapourings have led to nothing as yet,’ said the captain.

‘Excuse me,’ returned Flannigan, ‘but is there not some room for doubt yet as to the fate of the *Dotterel*? I have met men in America who asserted from their own personal knowledge that there was a coal torpedo aboard that vessel.’

‘Then they lied,’ said the captain. ‘It was proved conclusively at the court-martial to have arisen from an explosion of coal-gas – but we had better change the subject, or we may cause the ladies to have a restless night;’ and the conversation once more drifted back into its original channel.

During this little discussion Flannigan had argued his point with a gentlemanly deference and a quiet power for which I had not given him credit. I could not help admiring a man who, on the eve of a desperate enterprise, could courteously argue upon a point which must touch him so nearly. He had, as I have already mentioned, partaken of a considerable quantity of wine; but though there was a slight flush upon his pale cheek, his manner was as reserved as ever. He did not join in the conversation again, but seemed to be lost in thought.

A whirl of conflicting ideas was battling in my own mind. What was I to do? Should I stand up now and denounce them before both passengers and captain? Should I demand a few minutes’ conversation with the latter in his own cabin, and reveal it all? For an instant I was half resolved to do it, but then the old constitutional timidity came back with redoubled force. After all there might be some mistake. Dick had heard the evidence, and had refused to believe in it. I determined to let things go on their course. A strange reckless feeling came over me. Why should I help men who were blind to their own danger? Surely it was the duty of the officers to protect us, not ours to give warning to them. I drank off a couple of glasses of wine, and staggered upon deck with the determination of keeping my secret locked in my own bosom.

It was a glorious evening. Even in my excited state of mind I could not help leaning against the bulwarks and enjoying the refreshing breeze. Away to the westward a solitary sail stood out as a dark speck against the great sheet of flame left by the setting sun. I shuddered as I looked at it. It seemed like a sea of blood. A single star was twinkling faintly above our main-mast, but a thousand seemed to gleam in the water below with every stroke of our propeller. The only blot in the fair scene was the great trail of smoke which stretched away behind us like a black slash upon a crimson curtain. It seemed hard to believe that the great peace which hung over all Nature could be marred by a poor miserable mortal.

‘After all,’ I thought, as I gazed upon the blue depths beneath me, ‘if the worst comes to the worst, it is better to die here than to linger in agony upon a sick-bed on land.’ A man’s life seems a very paltry thing amid the great forces of Nature. All my philosophy could not prevent my shuddering, however, when I turned my head and saw two shadowy figures at the other side of the deck, which I had no difficulty in recognising. They seemed to be conversing earnestly, but I had no opportunity of overhearing what was said; so I contented myself with pacing up and down, and keeping a vigilant watch upon their movements.

It was a relief to me when Dick came on deck. Even an incredulous confidant is better than none at all.

‘Well, old man,’ he said, giving me a facetious dig in the ribs, ‘we’ve not been blown up yet.’

‘No, not yet,’ said I; ‘but that’s no proof that we are not going to be.’

‘Nonsense, man!’ said Dick; ‘I can’t conceive what has put this extraordinary idea into your

head. I have been talking to one of your supposed assassins, and he seems a pleasant fellow enough; quite a sporting character, I should think, from the way he speaks.'

'Dick,' I said, 'I am as certain that those men have an infernal machine, and that we are on the verge of eternity, as if I saw them putting the match to the fuse.'

'Well, if you really think so,' said Dick, half awed for the moment by the earnestness of my manner, 'it is your duty to let the captain know of your suspicions.'

'You are right,' I said; 'I will. My absurd timidity has prevented my doing so sooner. I believe our lives can only be saved by laying the whole matter before him.'

'Well, go and do it now,' said Dick; 'but for goodness' sake don't mix me up in the matter.'

'I'll speak to him when he comes off the bridge,' I answered; 'and in the meantime I don't mean to lose sight of them.'

'Let me know of the result,' said my companion; and with a nod he strolled away in search, I fancy, of his partner at the dinner-table.

Left to myself, I bethought me of my retreat of the morning, and climbing on the bulwark I mounted into the quarter-boat, and lay down there. In it I could reconsider my course of action, and by raising my head I was able at any time to get a view of my disagreeable neighbours.

An hour passed, and the captain was still on the bridge. He was talking to one of the passengers, a retired naval officer, and the two were deep in debate concerning some abstruse point in navigation. I could see the red tips of their cigars from where I lay. It was dark now – so dark that I could hardly make out the figures of Flannigan and his accomplice. They were still standing in the position which they had taken up after dinner. A few of the passengers were scattered about the deck, but many had gone below. A strange stillness seemed to pervade the air. The voices of the watch and the rattle of the wheel were the only sounds which broke the silence.

Another half-hour passed. The captain was still upon the bridge. It seemed as if he would never come down. My nerves were in a state of unnatural tension, so much so that the sound of two steps upon the deck made me start up in a quiver of excitement I peered over the side of the boat, and saw that our suspicious passengers had crossed from the other side and were standing almost directly beneath me. The light of a binnacle fell full upon the ghastly face of the ruffian Flannigan. Even in that short glance I saw that Muller had the ulster, whose use I knew so well, slung loosely over his arm. I sank back with a groan. It seemed that my fatal procrastination had sacrificed two hundred innocent lives.

I had read of the fiendish vengeance which awaited a spy. I knew that men with their lives in their hands would stick at nothing. All I could do was to cower at the bottom of the boat and listen silently to their whispered talk below.

'This place will do,' said a voice.

'Yes, the leeward side is best.'

'I wonder if the trigger will act?'

'I am sure it will.'

'We were to let it off at ten, were we not?'

'Yes, at ten sharp. We have eight minutes yet.' There was a pause. Then the voice began again –

'They'll hear the drop of the trigger, won't they?'

'It doesn't matter. It will be too late for anyone to prevent its going off.'

'That's true. There will be some excitement among those we have left behind, won't there?'

'Rather! How long do you reckon it will be before they hear of us?'

'The first news will get in in about twenty-four hours.'

'That will be mine.'

'No, mine.'

'Ha, ha! we'll settle that.'

There was a pause here. Then I heard Muller's voice in a ghastly whisper, 'There's only five minutes more.'

How slowly the moments seemed to pass! I could count them by the throbbing of my heart.

‘It’ll make a sensation on land,’ said a voice.

‘Yes, it will make a noise in the newspapers.’

I raised my head and peered over the side of the boat. There seemed no hope, no help. Death stared me in the face, whether I did or did not give the alarm. The captain had at last left the bridge. The deck was deserted, save for those two dark figures crouching in the shadow of the boat. Flannigan had a watch lying open in his hand.

‘Three minutes more,’ he said. ‘Put it down upon the deck.’

‘No, put it here on the bulwarks.’

It was the little square box. I knew by the sound that they had placed it near the davit, and almost exactly under my head.

I looked over again. Flannigan was pouring something out of a paper into his hand. It was white and granular – the same that I had seen him use in the morning. It was meant as a fuse, no doubt, for he shovelled it into the little box, and I heard the strange noise which had previously arrested my attention.

‘A minute and a half more,’ he said. ‘Shall you or I pull the string?’

‘I will pull it,’ said Muller.

He was kneeling down and holding the end in his hand. Flannigan stood behind with his arms folded, and an air of grim resolution upon his face.

I could stand it no longer. My nervous system seemed to give way in a moment.

‘Stop!’ I screamed, springing to my feet. ‘Stop, misguided and unprincipled men!’

They both staggered backwards. I fancy they thought I was a spirit, with the moonlight streaming down upon my pale face.

I was brave enough now. I had gone too far to retreat.

‘Cain was damned,’ I cried, ‘and he slew but one; would you have the blood of two hundred upon your souls?’

‘He’s mad!’ said Flannigan. ‘Time’s up! Let it off, Muller.’

I sprang down upon the deck.

‘You shan’t do it!’ I said.

‘By what right do you prevent us?’

‘By every right, human and divine.’

‘It’s no business of yours. Clear out of this!’

‘Never!’ said I.

‘Confound the fellow! There’s too much at stake to stand on ceremony. I’ll hold him, Muller, while you pull the trigger.’

Next moment I was struggling in the herculean grasp of the Irishman. Resistance was useless; I was a child in his hands.

He pinned me up against the side of the vessel, and held me there.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘look sharp. He can’t prevent us.’

I felt that I was standing on the verge of eternity. Half-strangled in the arms of the taller ruffian, I saw the other approach the fatal box. He stooped over it and seized the string. I breathed one prayer when I saw his grasp tighten upon it. Then came a sharp snap, a strange rasping noise. The trigger had fallen, the side of the box flew out, and let off – *two grey carrier-pigeons!*

Little more need be said. It is not a subject on which I care to dwell. The whole thing is too utterly disgusting and absurd. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to retire gracefully from the scene, and let the sporting correspondent of the New York Herald<sup>1</sup> fill my unworthy place. Here is an extract clipped from its columns shortly after our departure from America: –

‘Pigeon-flying Extraordinary. – A novel match has been brought off, last week, between the birds of John H. Flannigan, of Boston, and Jeremiah Muller, a well-known citizen of Ashport. Both men have devoted much time and attention to an improved breed of bird, and the challenge is an old-standing one. The pigeons were backed to a large amount, and there was considerable local interest in the result. The start was from the deck of the Transatlantic steamship *Spartan*, at ten

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<sup>1</sup> the New York Herald – an American daily newspaper published from 1835 till 1924

o'clock on the evening of the day of starting, the vessel being then reckoned to be about a hundred miles from the land. The bird which reached home first was to be declared the winner. Considerable caution had, we believe, to be observed, as British captains have a prejudice against the bringing off of sporting events aboard their vessels. In spite of some little difficulty at the last moment, the trap was sprung almost exactly at ten o'clock. Muller's bird arrived in Ashport in an extreme state of exhaustion on the following afternoon, while Flannigan's has not been heard of. The backers of the latter have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the whole affair has been characterised by extreme fairness. The pigeons were confined in a specially invented trap, which could only be opened by the spring. It was thus possible to feed them through an aperture in the top, but any tampering with their wings was quite out of the question. A few such matches would go far towards popularising pigeon-flying in America, and form an agreeable variety to the morbid exhibitions of human endurance which have assumed such proportions during the last few years.'

## **The Horror of the Heights (Arthur Conan Doyle)**

The idea that the extraordinary narrative which has been called the Joyce-Armstrong Fragment is an elaborate practical joke evolved by some unknown person, cursed by a perverted and sinister sense of humour, has now been abandoned by all who have examined the matter. The most macabre and imaginative of plotters would hesitate before linking his morbid fancies with the unquestioned and tragic facts which reinforce the statement. Though the assertions contained in it are amazing and even monstrous, it is none the less forcing itself upon the general intelligence that they are true, and that we must readjust our ideas to the new situation. This world of ours appears to be separated by a slight and precarious margin of safety from a most singular and unexpected danger. I will endeavour in this narrative, which reproduces the original document in its necessarily somewhat fragmentary form, to lay before the reader the whole of the facts up to date, prefacing my statement by saying that, if there be any who doubt the narrative of Joyce-Armstrong, there can be no question at all as to the facts concerning Lieutenant Myrtle, R. N.<sup>1</sup>, and Mr. Hay Connor, who undoubtedly met their end in the manner described.

The Joyce-Armstrong Fragment was found in the field which is called Lower Haycock, lying one mile to the westward of the village of Withyham, upon the Kent<sup>2</sup> and Sussex<sup>3</sup> border. It was on the 15th September last that an agricultural labourer, James Flynn, in the employment of Mathew Dodd, farmer, of the Chantry Farm, Withyham, perceived a briar pipe lying near the footpath which skirts the hedge in Lower Haycock. A few paces farther on he picked up a pair of broken binocular glasses. Finally, among some nettles in the ditch, he caught sight of a flat, canvas-backed book, which proved to be a note-book with detachable leaves, some of which had come loose and were fluttering along the base of the hedge. These he collected, but some, including the first, were never recovered, and leave a deplorable hiatus in this all-important statement. The note-book was taken by the labourer to his master, who in turn showed it to Dr. J. H. Atherton, of Hartfield. This gentleman at once recognized the need for an expert examination, and the manuscript was forwarded to the Aero Club in London, where it now lies.

The first two pages of the manuscript are missing. There is also one torn away at the end of the narrative, though none of these affect the general coherence of the story. It is conjectured that the missing opening is concerned with the record of Mr. Joyce-Armstrong's qualifications as an aeronaut, which can be gathered from other sources and are admitted to be unsurpassed among the air-pilots of England. For many years he has been looked upon as among the most daring and the most intellectual of flying men, a combination which has enabled him to both invent and test several new devices, including the common gyroscopic attachment which is known by his name. The main body of the manuscript is written neatly in ink, but the last few lines are in pencil and are so ragged as to be hardly legible – exactly, in fact, as they might be expected to appear if they were

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1 **R. N.** – Royal Navy

2 **Kent** – a county in England facing the European continent across the Strait of Dover

3 **Sussex** – a historic county in southeastern England along the English Channel coast

scribbled off hurriedly from the seat of a moving aeroplane. There are, it may be added, several stains, both on the last page and on the outside cover which have been pronounced by the Home Office experts to be blood – probably human and certainly mammalian. The fact that something closely resembling the organism of malaria was discovered in this blood, and that Joyce-Armstrong is known to have suffered from intermittent fever, is a remarkable example of the new weapons which modern science has placed in the hands of our detectives.

And now a word as to the personality of the author of this epoch-making statement. Joyce-Armstrong, according to the few friends who really knew something of the man, was a poet and a dreamer, as well as a mechanic and an inventor. He was a man of considerable wealth, much of which he had spent in the pursuit of his aeronautical hobby. He had four private aeroplanes in his hangars near Devizes, and is said to have made no fewer than one hundred and seventy ascents in the course of last year. He was a retiring man with dark moods, in which he would avoid the society of his fellows. Captain Dangerfield, who knew him better than anyone, says that there were times when his eccentricity threatened to develop into something more serious. His habit of carrying a shot-gun with him in his aeroplane was one manifestation of it.

Another was the morbid effect which the fall of Lieutenant Myrtle had upon his mind. Myrtle, who was attempting the height record, fell from an altitude of something over thirty thousand feet. Horrible to narrate, his head was entirely obliterated, though his body and limbs preserved their configuration. At every gathering of airmen, Joyce-Armstrong, according to Dangerfield, would ask, with an enigmatic smile: ‘And where, pray, is Myrtle’s head?’

On another occasion after dinner, at the mess of the Flying School on Salisbury Plain<sup>1</sup>, he started a debate as to what will be the most permanent danger which airmen will have to encounter. Having listened to successive opinions as to air-pockets, faulty construction, and over-banking, he ended by shrugging his shoulders and refusing to put forward his own views, though he gave the impression that they differed from any advanced by his companions.

It is worth remarking that after his own complete disappearance it was found that his private affairs were arranged with a precision which may show that he had a strong premonition of disaster. With these essential explanations I will now give the narrative exactly as it stands, beginning at page three of the blood-soaked note-book:

‘Nevertheless, when I dined at Rheims<sup>2</sup> with Coselli and Gustav Raymond I found that neither of them was aware of any particular danger in the higher layers of the atmosphere. I did not actually say what was in my thoughts, but I got so near to it that if they had any corresponding idea they could not have failed to express it. But then they are two empty, vainglorious fellows with no thought beyond seeing their silly names in the newspaper. It is interesting to note that neither of them had ever been much beyond the twenty-thousand-foot level. Of course, men have been higher than this both in balloons and in the ascent of mountains. It must be well above that point that the aeroplane enters the danger zone – always presuming that my premonitions are correct.

‘Aeroplaning has been with us now for more than twenty years, and one might well ask: Why should this peril be only revealing itself in our day? The answer is obvious. In the old days of weak engines, when a hundred horse-power Gnome or Green was considered ample for every need, the flights were very restricted. Now that three hundred horse-power is the rule rather than the exception, visits to the upper layers have become easier and more common. Some of us can remember how, in our youth, Garros made a world-wide reputation by attaining nineteen thousand feet, and it was considered a remarkable achievement to fly over the Alps. Our standard now has been immeasurably raised, and there are twenty high flights for one in former years. Many of them have been undertaken with impunity. The thirty-thousand-foot level has been reached time after time with no discomfort beyond cold and asthma. What does this prove? A visitor might descend upon this planet a thousand times and never see a tiger. Yet tigers exist, and if he chanced to come down into a jungle he might be devoured. There are jungles of the upper air, and there are worse

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<sup>1</sup> **Salisbury Plain** – a treeless area, a chalk plateau, in the county of Wiltshire, famous for its prehistoric monuments, the best known of which is Stonehenge

<sup>2</sup> **Rheims** – a city in northeastern France; most French kings were crowned there since 1429.



things than tigers which inhabit them. I believe in time they will map these jungles accurately out. Even at the present moment I could name two of them. One of them lies over the Pau-Biarritz district<sup>1</sup> of France. Another is just over my head as I write here in my house in Wiltshire. I rather think there is a third in the Homburg-Wiesbaden district<sup>2</sup>.

‘It was the disappearance of the airmen that first set me thinking. Of course, everyone said that they had fallen into the sea, but that did not satisfy me at all. First, there was Verrier in France; his machine was found near Bayonne<sup>3</sup>, but they never got his body. There was the case of Baxter also, who vanished, though his engine and some of the iron fixings were found in a wood in Leicestershire<sup>4</sup>. In that case, Dr. Middleton, of Amesbury, who was watching the flight with a telescope, declares that just before the clouds obscured the view he saw the machine, which was at an enormous height, suddenly rise perpendicularly upwards in a succession of jerks in a manner that he would have thought to be impossible. That was the last seen of Baxter. There was a correspondence in the papers, but it never led to anything. There were several other similar cases, and then there was the death of Hay Connor. What a cackle there was about an unsolved mystery of the air, and what columns in the halfpenny papers, and yet how little was ever done to get to the bottom of the business! He came down in a tremendous vol-plane from an unknown height. He never got off his machine and died in his pilot’s seat. Died of what? “Heart disease,” said the doctors. Rubbish! Hay Connor’s heart was as sound as mine is. What did Venables say? Venables was the only man who was at his side when he died. He said that he was shivering and looked like a man who had been badly scared. “Died of fright,” said Venables, but could not imagine what he was frightened about. Only said one word to Venables, which sounded like “Monstrous.” They could make nothing of that at the inquest. But I could make something of it. Monsters! That was the last word of poor Harry Hay Connor. And he DID die of fright, just as Venables thought.

‘And then there was Myrtle’s head. Do you really believe – does anybody really believe – that a man’s head could be driven clean into his body by the force of a fall? Well, perhaps it may be possible, but I, for one, have never believed that it was so with Myrtle. And the grease upon his clothes – “all slimy with grease,” said somebody at the inquest. Queer that nobody got thinking after that! I did – but, then, I had been thinking for a good long time. I’ve made three ascents – how Dangerfield used to chaff me about my shot-gun – but I’ve never been high enough. Now, with this new, light Paul Veroner machine and its one hundred and seventy-five Robur, I should easily touch the thirty thousand tomorrow. I’ll have a shot at the record. Maybe I shall have a shot at something else as well. Of course, it’s dangerous. If a fellow wants to avoid danger he had best keep out of flying altogether and subside finally into flannel slippers and a dressing-gown. But I’ll visit the air-jungle tomorrow – and if there’s anything there I shall know it. If I return, I’ll find myself a bit of a celebrity. If I don’t this note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if YOU please.

‘I chose my Paul Veroner monoplane for the job. There’s nothing like a monoplane when real work is to be done. Beaumont found that out in very early days. For one thing it doesn’t mind damp, and the weather looks as if we should be in the clouds all the time. It’s a bonny little model and answers my hand like a tender-mouthed horse. The engine is a ten-cylinder rotary Robur working up to one hundred and seventy-five. It has all the modern improvements – enclosed fuselage, high-curved landing skids, brakes, gyroscopic steadiers, and three speeds, worked by an alteration of the angle of the planes upon the Venetian-blind<sup>5</sup> principle. I took a shot-gun with me and a dozen cartridges filled with buck-shot. You should have seen the face of Perkins, my old mechanic, when I directed him to put them in. I was dressed like an Arctic explorer, with two jerseys under my overalls, thick socks inside my padded boots, a storm-cap with flaps, and my talc goggles. It was stifling outside the hangars, but I was going for the summit of the Himalayas, and had to dress for the part. Perkins knew there was something on and implored me to take him with me. Perhaps I

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1 **the Pau-Biarritz district** – a district along the Bay of Biscay in southwestern France, near the Spanish border

2 **the Homburg-Wiesbaden district** – a district in the south and southwest of Germany

3 **Bayonne** – a town in southwestern France

4 **Leicestershire** – a county in England, in the East Midlands region

5 **Venetian blind** – a wind screen made of horizontal stripes of wood or plastic

should if I were using the biplane, but a monoplane is a one-man show – if you want to get the last foot of life out of it. Of course, I took an oxygen bag; the man who goes for the altitude record without one will either be frozen or smothered – or both.

‘I had a good look at the planes, the rudder-bar, and the elevating lever before I got in. Everything was in order so far as I could see. Then I switched on my engine and found that she was running sweetly. When they let her go she rose almost at once upon the lowest speed. I circled my home field once or twice just to warm her up, and then with a wave to Perkins and the others, I flattened out my planes and put her on her highest. She skimmed like a swallow downwind for eight or ten miles until I turned her nose up a little and she began to climb in a great spiral for the cloud-bank above me. It’s all-important to rise slowly and adapt yourself to the pressure as you go.

‘It was a close, warm day for an English September, and there was the hush and heaviness of impending rain. Now and then there came sudden puffs of wind from the south-west – one of them so gusty and unexpected that it caught me napping and turned me half-round for an instant. I remember the time when gusts and whirls and air-pockets used to be things of danger – before we learned to put an overmastering power into our engines. Just as I reached the cloud-banks, with the altimeter marking three thousand, down came the rain. My word, how it poured! It drummed upon my wings and lashed against my face, blurring my glasses so that I could hardly see. I got down on to a low speed, for it was painful to travel against it. As I got higher it became hail, and I had to turn tail to it. One of my cylinders was out of action – a dirty plug, I should imagine, but still I was rising steadily with plenty of power. After a bit the trouble passed, whatever it was, and I heard the full, deep-throated purr – the ten singing as one. That’s where the beauty of our modern silencers comes in. We can at last control our engines by ear. How they squeal and squeak and sob when they are in trouble! All those cries for help were wasted in the old days, when every sound was swallowed up by the monstrous racket of the machine. If only the early aviators could come back to see the beauty and perfection of the mechanism which have been bought at the cost of their lives!

‘About nine-thirty I was nearing the clouds. Down below me, all blurred and shadowed with rain, lay the vast expanse of Salisbury Plain. Half a dozen flying machines were doing hackwork at the thousand-foot level, looking like little black swallows against the green background. I dare say they were wondering what I was doing up in cloud-land. Suddenly a grey curtain drew across beneath me and the wet folds of vapours were swirling round my face. It was clammily cold and miserable. But I was above the hail-storm, and that was something gained. The cloud was as dark and thick as a London fog. In my anxiety to get clear, I cocked her nose up until the automatic alarm-bell rang, and I actually began to slide backwards. My sopped and dripping wings had made me heavier than I thought, but presently I was in lighter cloud, and soon had cleared the first layer. There was a second – opal-coloured and fleecy – at a great height above my head, a white, unbroken ceiling above, and a dark, unbroken floor below, with the monoplane labouring upwards upon a vast spiral between them. It is deadly lonely in these cloud-spaces. Once a great flight of some small water-birds went past me, flying very fast to the westwards. The quick whirl of their wings and their musical cry were cheery to my ear. I fancy that they were teal, but I am a wretched zoologist. Now that we humans have become birds we must really learn to know our brethren by sight.

‘The wind down beneath me whirled and swayed the broad cloud-plain. Once a great eddy formed in it, a whirlpool of vapour, and through it, as down a funnel, I caught sight of the distant world. A large white biplane was passing at a vast depth beneath me. I fancy it was the morning mail service betwixt Bristol and London. Then the drift swirled inwards again and the great solitude was unbroken.

‘Just after ten I touched the lower edge of the upper cloud – stratum. It consisted of fine diaphanous vapour drifting swiftly from the westwards. The wind had been steadily rising all this time and it was now blowing a sharp breeze – twenty-eight an hour by my gauge. Already it was very cold, though my altimeter only marked nine thousand. The engines were working beautifully, and we went droning steadily upwards. The cloud-bank was thicker than I had expected, but at last it thinned out into a golden mist before me, and then in an instant I had shot out from it, and there

was an unclouded sky and a brilliant sun above my head – all blue and gold above, all shining silver below, one vast, glimmering plain as far as my eyes could reach. It was a quarter past ten o'clock, and the barograph<sup>1</sup> needle pointed to twelve thousand eight hundred. Up I went and up, my ears concentrated upon the deep purring of my motor, my eyes busy always with the watch, the revolution indicator, the petrol lever, and the oil pump. No wonder aviators are said to be a fearless race. With so many things to think of there is no time to trouble about oneself. About this time I noted how unreliable is the compass when above a certain height from earth. At fifteen thousand feet mine was pointing east and a point south. The sun and the wind gave me my true bearings.

'I had hoped to reach an eternal stillness in these high altitudes, but with every thousand feet of ascent the gale grew stronger. My machine groaned and trembled in every joint and rivet as she faced it, and swept away like a sheet of paper when I banked her on the turn, skimming down wind at a greater pace, perhaps, than ever mortal man has moved. Yet I had always to turn again and tack up in the wind's eye, for it was not merely a height record that I was after. By all my calculations it was above little Wiltshire that my air-jungle lay, and all my labour might be lost if I struck the outer layers at some farther point.

'When I reached the nineteen-thousand-foot level, which was about midday, the wind was so severe that I looked with some anxiety to the stays of my wings, expecting momentarily to see them snap or slacken. I even cast loose the parachute behind me, and fastened its hook into the ring of my leathern belt, so as to be ready for the worst. Now was the time when a bit of scamped work by the mechanic is paid for by the life of the aeronaut. But she held together bravely. Every cord and strut was humming and vibrating like so many harp-strings, but it was glorious to see how, for all the beating and the buffeting, she was still the conqueror of Nature and the mistress of the sky. There is surely something divine in man himself that he should rise so superior to the limitations which Creation seemed to impose – rise, too, by such unselfish, heroic devotion as this air-conquest has shown. Talk of human degeneration! When has such a story as this been written in the annals of our race?

'These were the thoughts in my head as I climbed that monstrous, inclined plane with the wind sometimes beating in my face and sometimes whistling behind my ears, while the cloud-land beneath me fell away to such a distance that the folds and hummocks of silver had all smoothed out into one flat, shining plain. But suddenly I had a horrible and unprecedented experience. I have known before what it is to be in what our neighbours have called a *tourbillon*<sup>2</sup>, but never on such a scale as this. That huge, sweeping river of wind of which I have spoken had, as it appears, whirlpools within it which were as monstrous as itself. Without a moment's warning I was dragged suddenly into the heart of one. I spun round for a minute or two with such velocity that I almost lost my senses, and then fell suddenly, left wing foremost, down the vacuum funnel in the centre. I dropped like a stone, and lost nearly a thousand feet. It was only my belt that kept me in my seat, and the shock and breathlessness left me hanging half-insensible over the side of the fuselage. But I am always capable of a supreme effort – it is my one great merit as an aviator. I was conscious that the descent was slower. The whirlpool was a cone rather than a funnel, and I had come to the apex. With a terrific wrench, throwing my weight all to one side, I levelled my planes and brought her head away from the wind. In an instant I had shot out of the eddies and was skimming down the sky. Then, shaken but victorious, I turned her nose up and began once more my steady grind on the upward spiral. I took a large sweep to avoid the danger-spot of the whirlpool, and soon I was safely above it. Just after one o'clock I was twenty-one thousand feet above the sea-level. To my great joy I had topped the gale, and with every hundred feet of ascent the air grew stiller. On the other hand, it was very cold, and I was conscious of that peculiar nausea which goes with rarefaction of the air. For the first time I unscrewed the mouth of my oxygen bag and took an occasional whiff of the glorious gas. I could feel it running like a cordial through my veins, and I was exhilarated almost to the point of drunkenness. I shouted and sang as I soared upwards into the cold, still outer world.

'It is very clear to me that the insensibility which came upon Glaisher, and in a lesser degree

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1 **barograph** – a barometer that records changes of barometric pressure

2 **tourbillon** – whirlwind, turbulence (*French*)

upon Coxwell, when, in 1862, they ascended in a balloon to the height of thirty thousand feet, was due to the extreme speed with which a perpendicular ascent is made. Doing it at an easy gradient and accustoming oneself to the lessened barometric pressure by slow degrees, there are no such dreadful symptoms. At the same great height I found that even without my oxygen inhaler I could breathe without undue distress. It was bitterly cold, however, and my thermometer was at zero, Fahrenheit. At one-thirty I was nearly seven miles above the surface of the earth, and still ascending steadily. I found, however, that the rarefied air was giving markedly less support to my planes, and that my angle of ascent had to be considerably lowered in consequence. It was already clear that even with my light weight and strong engine-power there was a point in front of me where I should be held. To make matters worse, one of my sparking-plugs was in trouble again and there was intermittent misfiring in the engine. My heart was heavy with the fear of failure.

‘It was about that time that I had a most extraordinary experience. Something whizzed past me in a trail of smoke and exploded with a loud, hissing sound, sending forth a cloud of steam. For the instant I could not imagine what had happened. Then I remembered that the earth is forever being bombarded by meteor stones, and would be hardly inhabitable were they not in nearly every case turned to vapour in the outer layers of the atmosphere. Here is a new danger for the high-altitude man, for two others passed me when I was nearing the forty-thousand-foot mark. I cannot doubt that at the edge of the earth’s envelope the risk would be a very real one.

‘My barograph needle marked forty-one thousand three hundred when I became aware that I could go no farther. Physically, the strain was not as yet greater than I could bear but my machine had reached its limit. The attenuated air gave no firm support to the wings, and the least tilt developed into side-slip, while she seemed sluggish on her controls. Possibly, had the engine been at its best, another thousand feet might have been within our capacity, but it was still misfiring, and two out of the ten cylinders appeared to be out of action. If I had not already reached the zone for which I was searching then I should never see it upon this journey. But was it not possible that I had attained it? Soaring in circles like a monstrous hawk upon the forty-thousand-foot level I let the monoplane guide herself, and with my Mannheim<sup>1</sup> glass I made a careful observation of my surroundings. The heavens were perfectly clear; there was no indication of those dangers which I had imagined.

‘I have said that I was soaring in circles. It struck me suddenly that I would do well to take a wider sweep and open up a new air-tract. If the hunter entered an earth-jungle he would drive through it if he wished to find his game. My reasoning had led me to believe that the air-jungle which I had imagined lay somewhere over Wiltshire. This should be to the south and west of me. I took my bearings from the sun, for the compass was hopeless and no trace of earth was to be seen – nothing but the distant, silver cloud-plain. However, I got my direction as best I might and kept her head straight to the mark. I reckoned that my petrol supply would not last for more than another hour or so, but I could afford to use it to the last drop, since a single magnificent vol-plane could at any time take me to the earth.

‘Suddenly I was aware of something new. The air in front of me had lost its crystal clearness. It was full of long, ragged wisps of something which I can only compare to very fine cigarette smoke. It hung about in wreaths and coils, turning and twisting slowly in the sunlight. As the monoplane shot through it, I was aware of a faint taste of oil upon my lips, and there was a greasy scum upon the woodwork of the machine. Some infinitely fine organic matter appeared to be suspended in the atmosphere. There was no life there. It was inchoate and diffuse, extending for many square acres and then fringing off into the void. No, it was not life. But might it not be the remains of life? Above all, might it not be the food of life, of monstrous life, even as the humble grease of the ocean is the food for the mighty whale? The thought was in my mind when my eyes looked upwards and I saw the most wonderful vision that ever man has seen. Can I hope to convey it to you even as I saw it myself last Thursday?

‘Conceive a jelly-fish such as sails in our summer seas, bell-shaped and of enormous size –

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<sup>1</sup> **Mannheim** – a city in southwestern Germany on the Rhine River, famous for the manufacture of instruments and equipment

far larger, I should judge, than the dome of St. Paul's. It was of a light pink colour veined with a delicate green, but the whole huge fabric so tenuous that it was but a fairy outline against the dark blue sky. It pulsed with a delicate and regular rhythm. From it there depended two long, drooping, green tentacles, which swayed slowly backwards and forwards. This gorgeous vision passed gently with noiseless dignity over my head, as light and fragile as a soap-bubble, and drifted upon its stately way.

'I had half-turned my monoplane, that I might look after this beautiful creature, when, in a moment, I found myself amidst a perfect fleet of them, of all sizes, but none so large as the first. Some were quite small, but the majority about as big as an average balloon, and with much the same curvature at the top. There was in them a delicacy of texture and colouring which reminded me of the finest Venetian glass. Pale shades of pink and green were the prevailing tints, but all had a lovely iridescence where the sun shimmered through their dainty forms. Some hundreds of them drifted past me, a wonderful fairy squadron of strange unknown argosies of the sky – creatures whose forms and substance were so attuned to these pure heights that one could not conceive anything so delicate within actual sight or sound of earth.

'But soon my attention was drawn to a new phenomenon – the serpents of the outer air. These were long, thin, fantastic coils of vapour-like material, which turned and twisted with great speed, flying round and round at such a pace that the eyes could hardly follow them. Some of these ghost-like creatures were twenty or thirty feet long, but it was difficult to tell their girth, for their outline was so hazy that it seemed to fade away into the air around them. These air-snakes were of a very light grey or smoke colour, with some darker lines within, which gave the impression of a definite organism. One of them whisked past my very face, and I was conscious of a cold, clammy contact, but their composition was so unsubstantial that I could not connect them with any thought of physical danger, any more than the beautiful bell-like creatures which had preceded them. There was no more solidity in their frames than in the floating spume from a broken wave.

'But a more terrible experience was in store for me. Floating downwards from a great height there came a purplish patch of vapour, small as I saw it first, but rapidly enlarging as it approached me, until it appeared to be hundreds of square feet in size. Though fashioned of some transparent, jelly-like substance, it was none the less of much more definite outline and solid consistence than anything which I had seen before. There were more traces, too, of a physical organization, especially two vast, shadowy, circular plates upon either side, which may have been eyes, and a perfectly solid white projection between them which was as curved and cruel as the beak of a vulture.

'The whole aspect of this monster was formidable and threatening, and it kept changing its colour from a very light mauve to a dark, angry purple so thick that it cast a shadow as it drifted between my monoplane and the sun. On the upper curve of its huge body there were three great projections which I can only describe as enormous bubbles, and I was convinced as I looked at them that they were charged with some extremely light gas which served to buoy up the misshapen and semi-solid mass in the rarefied air. The creature moved swiftly along, keeping pace easily with the monoplane, and for twenty miles or more it formed my horrible escort, hovering over me like a bird of prey which is waiting to pounce. Its method of progression – done so swiftly that it was not easy to follow – was to throw out a long, glutinous streamer in front of it, which in turn seemed to draw forward the rest of the writhing body. So elastic and gelatinous was it that never for two successive minutes was it the same shape, and yet each change made it more threatening and loathsome than the last.

'I knew that it meant mischief. Every purple flush of its hideous body told me so. The vague, goggling eyes which were turned always upon me were cold and merciless in their viscid hatred. I dipped the nose of my monoplane downwards to escape it. As I did so, as quick as a flash there shot out a long tentacle from this mass of floating blubber, and it fell as light and sinuous as a whip-lash across the front of my machine. There was a loud hiss as it lay for a moment across the hot engine, and it whisked itself into the air again, while the huge, flat body drew itself together as if in sudden pain. I dipped to a vol-pique, but again a tentacle fell over the monoplane and was shorn off by the

propeller as easily as it might have cut through a smoke wreath. A long, gliding, sticky, serpent-like coil came from behind and caught me round the waist, dragging me out of the fuselage. I tore at it, my fingers sinking into the smooth, glue-like surface, and for an instant I disengaged myself, but only to be caught round the boot by another coil, which gave me a jerk that tilted me almost on to my back.

‘As I fell over I blazed off both barrels of my gun, though, indeed, it was like attacking an elephant with a pea-shooter to imagine that any human weapon could cripple that mighty bulk. And yet I aimed better than I knew, for, with a loud report, one of the great blisters upon the creature’s back exploded with the puncture of the buck-shot. It was very clear that my conjecture was right, and that these vast, clear bladders were distended with some lifting gas, for in an instant the huge, cloud-like body turned sideways, writhing desperately to find its balance, while the white beak snapped and gaped in horrible fury. But already I had shot away on the steepest glide that I dared to attempt, my engine still full on, the flying propeller and the force of gravity shooting me downwards like an aerolite<sup>1</sup>. Far behind me I saw a dull, purplish smudge growing swiftly smaller and merging into the blue sky behind it. I was safe out of the deadly jungle of the outer air.

‘Once out of danger I throttled my engine, for nothing tears a machine to pieces quicker than running on full power from a height. It was a glorious, spiral vol-plane from nearly eight miles of altitude – first, to the level of the silver cloud-bank, then to that of the storm-cloud beneath it, and finally, in beating rain, to the surface of the earth. I saw the Bristol Channel<sup>2</sup> beneath me as I broke from the clouds, but, having still some petrol in my tank, I got twenty miles inland before I found myself stranded in a field half a mile from the village of Ashcombe. There I got three tins of petrol from a passing motor-car, and at ten minutes past six that evening I alighted gently in my own home meadow at Devizes, after such a journey as no mortal upon earth has ever yet taken and lived to tell the tale. I have seen the beauty and I have seen the horror of the heights – and greater beauty or greater horror than that is not within the ken of man.

‘And now it is my plan to go once again before I give my results to the world. My reason for this is that I must surely have something to show by way of proof before I lay such a tale before my fellow-men. It is true that others will soon follow and will confirm what I have said, and yet I should wish to carry conviction from the first. Those lovely iridescent bubbles of the air should not be hard to capture. They drift slowly upon their way, and the swift monoplane could intercept their leisurely course. It is likely enough that they would dissolve in the heavier layers of the atmosphere, and that some small heap of amorphous jelly might be all that I should bring to earth with me. And yet something there would surely be by which I could substantiate my story. Yes, I will go, even if I run a risk by doing so. These purple horrors would not seem to be numerous. It is probable that I shall not see one. If I do I shall dive at once. At the worst there is always the shot-gun and my knowledge of...’

Here a page of the manuscript is unfortunately missing. On the next page is written, in large, straggling writing:

‘Forty-three thousand feet. I shall never see earth again. They are beneath me, three of them. God help me; it is a dreadful death to die!’

Such in its entirety is the Joyce-Armstrong Statement. Of the man nothing has since been seen. Pieces of his shattered monoplane have been picked up in the preserves of Mr. Budd-Lushington upon the borders of Kent and Sussex, within a few miles of the spot where the note-book was discovered. If the unfortunate aviator’s theory is correct that this air-jungle, as he called it, existed only over the south-west of England, then it would seem that he had fled from it at the full speed of his monoplane, but had been overtaken and devoured by these horrible creatures at some spot in the outer atmosphere above the place where the grim relics were found. The picture of that monoplane skimming down the sky, with the nameless terrors flying as swiftly beneath it and cutting it off always from the earth while they gradually closed in upon their victim, is one upon

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<sup>1</sup> **aerolite** – a stony meteorite

<sup>2</sup> **the Bristol Channel** – an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean separating England from Wales

which a man who valued his sanity would prefer not to dwell. There are many, as I am aware, who still jeer at the facts which I have here set down, but even they must admit that Joyce-Armstrong has disappeared, and I would commend to them his own words: 'This note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if YOU please.'

## The Tale (Joseph Conrad)

Outside the large single window the crepuscular<sup>1</sup> light was dying out slowly in a great square gleam without colour, framed rigidly in the gathering shades of the room.

It was a long room. The irresistible tide of the night ran into the most distant part of it, where the whispering of a man's voice, passionately interrupted and passionately renewed, seemed to plead against the answering murmurs of infinite sadness.

At last no answering murmur came. His movement when he rose slowly from his knees by the side of the deep, shadowy couch holding the shadowy suggestion of a reclining woman revealed him tall under the low ceiling, and sombre all over except for the crude discord of the white collar under the shape of his head and the faint, minute spark of a brass button here and there on his uniform.

He stood over her a moment, masculine and mysterious in his immobility, before he sat down on a chair nearby. He could see only the faint oval of her upturned face and, extended on her black dress, her pale hands, a moment before abandoned to his kisses and now as if too weary to move.

He dared not make a sound, shrinking as a man would do from the prosaic necessities of existence. As usual, it was the woman who had the courage. Her voice was heard first – almost conventional while her being vibrated yet with conflicting emotions.

'Tell me something,' she said.

The darkness hid his surprise and then his smile. Had he not just said to her everything worth saying in the world – and that not for the first time!

'What am I to tell you?' he asked, in a voice creditably steady. He was beginning to feel grateful to her for that something final in her tone which had eased the strain.

'Why not tell me a tale?'

'A tale!' He was really amazed.

'Yes. Why not?'

These words came with a slight petulance, the hint of a loved woman's capricious will, which is capricious only because it feels itself to be a law, embarrassing sometimes and always difficult to elude.

'Why not?' he repeated, with a slightly mocking accent, as though he had been asked to give her the moon. But now he was feeling a little angry with her for that feminine mobility that slips out of an emotion as easily as out of a splendid gown.

He heard her say, a little unsteadily with a sort of fluttering intonation which made him think suddenly of a butterfly's flight:

'You used to tell – your – your simple and – and professional – tales very well at one time. Or well enough to interest me. You had a – a sort of art – in the days – the days before the war.'

'Really?' he said, with involuntary gloom. 'But now, you see, the war is going on,' he continued in such a dead, equable tone that she felt a slight chill fall over her shoulders. And yet she persisted. For there's nothing more unswerving in the world than a woman's caprice.

'It could be a tale not of this world,' she explained.

'You want a tale of the other, the better world?' he asked, with a matter-of-fact surprise. 'You must evoke for that task those who have already gone there.'

'No. I don't mean that. I mean another – some other – world. In the universe – not in heaven.'

'I am relieved. But you forget that I have only five days' leave.'

'Yes. And I've also taken a five days' leave from – from my duties.'

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<sup>1</sup> **crepuscular** – seen during twilight

‘I like that word.’

‘What word?’

‘Duty.’

‘It is horrible – sometimes.’

‘Oh, that’s because you think it’s narrow. But it isn’t. It contains infinities, and – and so–’

‘What is this jargon?’

He disregarded the interjected scorn. ‘An infinity of absolution, for instance,’ he continued. ‘But as to this another world’ – who’s going to look for it and for the tale that is in it?’

‘You,’ she said, with a strange, almost rough, sweetness of assertion.

He made a shadowy movement of assent in his chair, the irony of which not even the gathered darkness could render mysterious.

‘As you will. In that world, then, there was once upon a time a Commanding Officer and a Northman<sup>1</sup>. Put in the capitals, please, because they had no other names. It was a world of seas and continents and islands–’

‘Like the earth,’ she murmured, bitterly.

‘Yes. What else could you expect from sending a man made of our common, tormented clay on a voyage of discovery? What else could he find? What else could you understand or care for, or feel the existence of even? There was comedy in it, and slaughter.’

‘Always like the earth,’ she murmured. ‘Always. And since I could find in the universe only what was deeply rooted in the fibres of my being there was love in it, too. But we won’t talk of that.’

‘No. We won’t,’ she said, in a neutral tone which concealed perfectly her relief – or her disappointment. Then after a pause she added: ‘It’s going to be a comic story.’

‘Well–’ he paused, too. ‘Yes. In a way. In a very grim way. It will be human, and, as you know, comedy is but a matter of the visual angle. And it won’t be a noisy story. All the long guns in it will be dumb – as dumb as so many telescopes.’

‘Ah, there are guns in it, then! And may I ask – where?’

‘Afloat. You remember that the world of which we speak had its seas. A war was going on in it. It was a funny work! and terribly in earnest. Its war was being carried on over the land, over the water, under the water, up in the air, and even under the ground. And many young men in it, mostly in wardrooms and mess-rooms, used to say to each other – pardon the unparliamentary word – they used to say, “It’s a damned bad war, but it’s better than no war at all.” Sounds flippant, doesn’t it.’

He heard a nervous, impatient sigh in the depths of the couch while he went on without a pause.

‘And yet there is more in it than meets the eye. I mean more wisdom. Flippancy, like comedy, is but a matter of visual first impression. That world was not very wise. But there was in it a certain amount of common working sagacity. That, however, was mostly worked by the neutrals in diverse ways, public and private, which had to be watched; watched by acute minds and also by actual sharp eyes. They had to be very sharp indeed, too, I assure you.’

‘I can imagine,’ she murmured, appreciatively.

‘What is there that you can’t imagine?’ he pronounced, soberly. ‘You have the world in you. But let us go back to our commanding officer, who, of course, commanded a ship of a sort. My tales if often professional (as you remarked just now) have never been technical. So I’ll just tell you that the ship was of a very ornamental sort once, with lots of grace and elegance and luxury about her. Yes, once! She was like a pretty woman who had suddenly put on a suit of sackcloth and stuck revolvers in her belt. But she floated lightly, she moved nimbly, she was quite good enough.’

‘That was the opinion of the commanding officer?’ said the voice from the couch.

‘It was. He used to be sent out with her along certain coasts to see – what he could see. Just that. And sometimes he had some preliminary information to help him, and sometimes he had not. And it was all one, really. It was about as useful as information trying to convey the locality and intentions of a cloud, of a phantom taking shape here and there and impossible to seize, would have

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1 **Northman** – 1) *hist.* a Viking, a Scandinavian seafaring warrior; 2) a Danish, Norwegian or Swede.



been.

‘It was in the early days of the war. What at first used to amaze the commanding officer was the unchanged face of the waters, with its familiar expression, neither more friendly nor more hostile. On fine days the sun strikes sparks upon the blue; here and there a peaceful smudge of smoke hangs in the distance, and it is impossible to believe that the familiar clear horizon traces the limit of one great circular ambush.

‘Yes, it is impossible to believe, till some day you see a ship not your own ship (that isn’t so impressive), but some ship in company, blow up all of a sudden and plop under almost before you know what has happened to her. Then you begin to believe. Henceforth you go out for the work to see – what you can see, and you keep on at it with the conviction that someday you will die from something you have not seen. One envies the soldiers at the end of the day, wiping the sweat and blood from their faces, counting the dead fallen to their hands, looking at the devastated fields, the torn earth that seems to suffer and bleed with them. One does, really. The final brutality of it – the taste of primitive passion – the ferocious frankness of the blow struck with one’s hand – the direct call and the straight response. Well, the sea gave you nothing of that, and seemed to pretend that there was nothing the matter with the world.’

She interrupted, stirring a little.

‘Oh, yes. Sincerity – frankness – passion – three words of your gospel. Don’t I know them!’

‘Think! Isn’t it ours – believed in common?’ he asked, anxiously, yet without expecting an answer, and went on at once: ‘Such were the feelings of the commanding officer. When the night came trailing over the sea, hiding what looked like the hypocrisy of an old friend, it was a relief. The night blinds you frankly – and there are circumstances when the sunlight may grow as odious to one as falsehood itself. Night is all right.

‘At night the commanding officer could let his thoughts get away – I won’t tell you where. Somewhere where there was no choice but between truth and death. But thick weather, though it blinded one, brought no such relief. Mist is deceitful, the dead luminosity of the fog is irritating. It seems that you ought to see.

‘One gloomy, nasty day the ship was steaming along her beat in sight of a rocky, dangerous coast that stood out intensely black like an India-ink<sup>1</sup> drawing on gray paper. Presently the second in command spoke to his chief. He thought he saw something on the water, to seaward. Small wreckage, perhaps.

“‘But there shouldn’t be any wreckage here, sir,” he remarked.

“‘No,” said the commanding officer. “The last reported submarined ships were sunk a long way to the westward. But one never knows. There may have been others since then not reported nor seen. Gone with all hands.”

‘That was how it began. The ship’s course was altered to pass the object close; for it was necessary to have a good look at what one could see. Close, but without touching; for it was not advisable to come in contact with objects of any form whatever floating casually about. Close, but without stopping or even diminishing speed; for in those times it was not prudent to linger on any particular spot, even for a moment. I may tell you at once that the object was not dangerous in itself. No use in describing it. It may have been nothing more remarkable than, say, a barrel of a certain shape and colour. But it was significant.

‘The smooth bow-wave hove it up as if for a closer inspection, and then the ship, brought again to her course, turned her back on it with indifference, while twenty pairs of eyes on her deck stared in all directions trying to see – what they could see.

‘The commanding officer and his second in command discussed the object with understanding. It appeared to them to be not so much a proof of the sagacity as of the activity of certain neutrals. This activity had in many cases taken the form of replenishing the stores of certain submarines at sea. This was generally believed, if not absolutely known. But the very nature of things in those early days pointed that way. The object, looked at closely and turned away from with apparent indifference, put it beyond doubt that something of the sort had been done somewhere

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<sup>1</sup> **India ink** – special black-colour pigment mixed with gum or glue, used for drawing or writing

in the neighbourhood.

‘The object in itself was more than suspect. But the fact of its being left in evidence roused other suspicions. Was it the result of some deep and devilish purpose? As to that all speculation soon appeared to be a vain thing. Finally the two officers came to the conclusion that it was left there most likely by accident, complicated possibly by some unforeseen necessity; such, perhaps, as the sudden need to get away quickly from the spot, or something of that kind.

‘Their discussion had been carried on in curt, weighty phrases, separated by long, thoughtful silences. And all the time their eyes roamed about the horizon in an everlasting, almost mechanical effort of vigilance. The younger man summed up grimly:

“‘Well, it’s evidence. That’s what this is. Evidence of what we were pretty certain of before. And plain, too.”

“‘And much good it will do to us,” retorted the commanding officer. “The parties are miles away; the submarine, devil only knows where, ready to kill; and the noble neutral slipping away to the eastward, ready to lie!”

‘The second in command laughed a little at the tone. But he guessed that the neutral wouldn’t even have to lie very much. Fellows like that, unless caught in the very act, felt themselves pretty safe. They could afford to chuckle. That fellow was probably chuckling to himself. It’s very possible he had been before at the game and didn’t care a rap for the bit of evidence left behind. It was a game in which practice made one bold and successful, too.

‘And again he laughed faintly. But his commanding officer was in revolt against the murderous stealthiness of methods and the atrocious callousness of complicities that seemed to taint the very source of men’s deep emotions and noblest activities; to corrupt their imagination which builds up the final conceptions of life and death. He suffered—’

The voice from the sofa interrupted the narrator.

‘How well I can understand that in him!’

He bent forward slightly.

‘Yes. I, too. Everything should be open in love and war. Open as the day, since both are the call of an ideal which it is so easy, so terribly easy, to degrade in the name of Victory.’

He paused; then went on: I don’t know that the commanding officer delved so deep as that into his feelings. But he did suffer from them – a sort of disenchanting sadness. It is possible, even, that he suspected himself of folly. Man is various. But he had no time for much introspection, because from the southwest a wall of fog had advanced upon his ship. Great convolutions of vapours flew over, swirling about masts and funnel, which looked as if they were beginning to melt. Then they vanished.

‘The ship was stopped, all sounds ceased, and the very fog became motionless, growing denser and as if solid in its amazing dumb immobility. The men at their stations lost sight of each other. Footsteps sounded stealthy; rare voices, impersonal and remote, died out without resonance. A blind white stillness took possession of the world.

‘It looked, too, as if it would last for days. I don’t mean to say that the fog did not vary a little in its density. Now and then it would thin out mysteriously, revealing to the men a more or less ghostly presentment of their ship. Several times the shadow of the coast itself swam darkly before their eyes through the fluctuating opaque brightness of the great white cloud clinging to the water.

‘Taking advantage of these moments, the ship had been moved cautiously nearer the shore. It was useless to remain out in such thick weather. Her officers knew every nook and cranny of the coast along their beat. They thought that she would be much better in a certain cove. It wasn’t a large place, just ample room for a ship to swing at her anchor. She would have an easier time of it till the fog lifted up.

‘Slowly, with infinite caution and patience, they crept closer and closer, seeing no more of the cliffs than an evanescent dark loom with a narrow border of angry foam at its foot. At the moment of anchoring the fog was so thick that for all they could see they might have been a thousand miles out in the open sea. Yet the shelter of the land could be felt. There was a peculiar quality in the stillness of the air. Very faint, very elusive, the wash of the ripple against the encircling land

reached their ears, with mysterious sudden pauses.

‘The anchor dropped, the leads were laid in. The commanding officer went below into his cabin. But he had not been there very long when a voice outside his door requested his presence on deck. He thought to himself: ‘What is it now?’ He felt some impatience at being called out again to face the wearisome fog.

‘He found that it had thinned again a little and had taken on a gloomy hue from the dark cliffs which had no form, no outline, but asserted themselves as a curtain of shadows all round the ship, except in one bright spot, which was the entrance from the open sea. Several officers were looking that way from the bridge. The second in command met him with the breathlessly whispered information that there was another ship in the cove.

‘She had been made out by several pairs of eyes only a couple of minutes before. She was lying at anchor very near the entrance – a mere vague blot on the fog’s brightness. And the commanding officer by staring in the direction pointed out to him by eager hands ended by distinguishing it at last himself. Indubitably a vessel of some sort.

“‘It’s a wonder we didn’t run slap into her when coming in,” observed the second in command.

“‘Send a boat on board before she vanishes,” said the commanding officer. He surmised that this was a coaster. It could hardly be anything else. But another thought came into his head suddenly. “It is a wonder,” he said to his second in command, who had rejoined him after sending the boat away.

‘By that time both of them had been struck by the fact that the ship so suddenly discovered had not manifested her presence by ringing her bell.

“‘We came in very quietly, that’s true,” concluded the younger officer. “But they must have heard our leadsmen at least. We couldn’t have passed her more than fifty yards off. The closest shave! They may even have made us out, since they were aware of something coming in. And the strange thing is that we never heard a sound from her. The fellows on board must have been holding their breath.”

“‘Aye,” said the commanding officer, thoughtfully.

‘In due course the boarding-boat returned, appearing suddenly alongside, as though she had burrowed her way under the fog. The officer in charge came up to make his report, but the commanding officer didn’t give him time to begin. He cried from a distance:

“‘Coaster, isn’t she?”

“‘No, sir. A stranger – a neutral,” was the answer.

“‘No. Really! Well, tell us all about it. What is she doing here?”

‘The young man stated then that he had been told a long and complicated story of engine troubles. But it was plausible enough from a strictly professional point of view and it had the usual features: disablement, dangerous drifting along the shore, weather more or less thick for days, fear of a gale, ultimately a resolve to go in and anchor anywhere on the coast, and so on. Fairly plausible.

“‘Engines still disabled?” inquired the commanding officer.

“‘No, sir. She has steam on them.”

‘The commanding officer took his second aside. “By Jove!” he said, “you were right! They were holding their breaths as we passed them. They were.”

‘But the second in command had his doubts now.

“‘A fog like this does muffle small sounds, sir,” he remarked. “And what could his object be, after all?”

“‘To sneak out unnoticed,” answered the commanding officer.

“‘Then why didn’t he? He might have done it, you know. Not exactly unnoticed, perhaps. I don’t suppose he could have slipped his cable without making some noise. Still, in a minute or so he would have been lost to view – clean gone before we had made him out fairly. Yet he didn’t.”

‘They looked at each other. The commanding officer shook his head. Such suspicions as the one which had entered his head are not defended easily. He did not even state it openly. The

boarding officer finished his report. The cargo of the ship was of a harmless and useful character. She was bound to an English port. Papers and everything in perfect order. Nothing suspicious to be detected anywhere.

‘Then passing to the men, he reported the crew on deck as the usual lot. Engineers of the well-known type, and very full of their achievement in repairing the engines. The mate surly. The master rather a fine specimen of a Northman, civil enough, but appeared to have been drinking. Seemed to be recovering from a regular bout of it.

“I told him I couldn’t give him permission to proceed. He said he wouldn’t dare to move his ship her own length out in such weather as this, permission or no permission. I left a man on board, though.”

“Quite right.”

‘The commanding officer, after communing with his suspicions for a time, called his second aside.

“What if she were the very ship which had been feeding some infernal submarine or other?” he said in an undertone.

‘The other started. Then, with conviction:

“She would get off scot-free. You couldn’t prove it, sir.”

“I want to look into it myself.”

“From the report we’ve heard I am afraid you couldn’t even make a case for reasonable suspicion, sir.”

“I’ll go on board all the same.”

‘He had made up his mind. Curiosity is the great motive power of hatred and love. What did he expect to find? He could not have told anybody – not even himself.

‘What he really expected to find there was the atmosphere, the atmosphere of gratuitous treachery, which in his view nothing could excuse; for he thought that even a passion of unrighteousness for its own sake could not excuse that. But could he detect it? Sniff it? Taste it? Receive some mysterious communication which would turn his invincible suspicions into a certitude strong enough to provoke action with all its risks?

‘The master met him on the after-deck<sup>1</sup>, looming up in the fog amongst the blurred shapes of the usual snip’s fittings. He was a robust Northman, bearded, and in the force of his age. A round leather cap fitted his head closely. His hands were rammed deep into the pockets of his short leather jacket. He kept them there while he explained that at sea he lived in the chart-room<sup>2</sup>, and led the way there, striding carelessly. Just before reaching the door under the bridge he staggered a little, recovered himself, flung it open, and stood aside, leaning his shoulder as if involuntarily against the side of the house, and staring vaguely into the fog-filled space. But he followed the commanding officer at once, flung the door to, snapped on the electric light, and hastened to thrust his hands back into his pockets, as though afraid of being seized by them either in friendship or in hostility.

‘The place was stuffy and hot. The usual chart-rack overhead was full, and the chart on the table was kept unrolled by an empty cup standing on a saucer half-full of some spilt dark liquid. A slightly nibbled biscuit reposed on the chronometer<sup>3</sup>-case. There were two settees, and one of them had been made up into a bed with a pillow and some blankets, which were now very much tumbled. The Northman let himself fall on it, his hands still in his pockets.

“Well, here I am,” he said, with a curious air of being surprised at the sound of his own voice.

‘The commanding officer from the other settee observed the handsome, flushed face. Drops of fog hung on the yellow beard and moustaches of the Northman. The much darker eyebrows ran together in a puzzled frown, and suddenly he jumped up.

“What I mean is that I don’t know where I am. I really don’t,” he burst out, with extreme earnestness. “Hang it all! I got turned around somehow. The fog has been after me for a week. More

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<sup>1</sup> **after-deck** – a deck at the stern

<sup>2</sup> **chart-room** – navigator’s room

<sup>3</sup> **chronometer** – a timekeeping device used for determining longitude at sea

than a week. And then my engines broke down. I will tell you how it was.”

‘He burst out into loquacity. It was not hurried, but it was insistent. It was not continuous for all that. It was broken by the most queer, thoughtful pauses. Each of these pauses lasted no more than a couple of seconds, and each had the profundity of an endless meditation. When he began again nothing betrayed in him the slightest consciousness of these intervals. There was the same fixed glance, the same unchanged earnestness of tone. He didn’t know. Indeed, more than one of these pauses occurred in the middle of a sentence.

‘The commanding officer listened to the tale. It struck him as more plausible than simple truth is in the habit of being. But that, perhaps, was prejudice. All the time the Northman was speaking the commanding officer had been aware of an inward voice, a grave murmur in the depth of his very own self, telling another tale, as if on purpose to keep alive in him his indignation and his anger with that baseness of greed or of mere outlook which lies often at the root of simple ideas.

‘It was the story that had been already told to the boarding officer an hour or so before. The commanding officer nodded slightly at the Northman from time to time. The latter came to an end and turned his eyes away. He added, as an afterthought:

“‘Wasn’t it enough to drive a man out of his mind with worry? And it’s my first voyage to this part, too. And the ship’s my own. Your officer has seen the papers. She isn’t much, as you can see for yourself. Just an old cargo-boat. Bare living for my family.”

‘He raised a big arm to point at a row of photographs plastering the bulkhead. The movement was ponderous, as if the arm had been made of lead. The commanding officer said, carelessly:

“‘You will be making a fortune yet for your family with this old ship.”

“‘Yes, if I don’t lose her,” said the Northman, gloomily.

“‘I mean – out of this war,” added the commanding officer.

‘The Northman stared at him in a curiously unseeing and at the same time interested manner, as only eyes of a particular blue shade can stare.

“‘And you wouldn’t be angry at it,” he said, “would you? You are too much of a gentleman. We didn’t bring this on you. And suppose we sat down and cried. What good would that be? Let those cry who made the trouble,” he concluded, with energy. “Time’s money, you say. Well – this time is money. Oh! isn’t it!”

‘The commanding officer tried to keep under the feeling of immense disgust. He said to himself that it was unreasonable. Men were like that – moral cannibals feeding on each other’s misfortunes. He said aloud:

“‘You have made it perfectly plain how it is that you are here. Your log-book confirms you very minutely. Of course, a log-book may be cooked. Nothing easier.”

‘The Northman never moved a muscle. He was gazing at the floor; he seemed not to have heard. He raised his head after a while.

“‘But you can’t suspect me of anything,” he muttered, negligently.

‘The commanding officer thought: “Why should he say this?”

‘Immediately afterwards the man before him added: “My cargo is for an English port.”

‘His voice had turned husky for the moment. The commanding officer reflected: “That’s true. There can be nothing. I can’t suspect him. Yet why was he lying with steam up in this fog – and then, hearing us come in, why didn’t he give some sign of life? Why? Could it be anything else but a guilty conscience? He could tell by the leadsmen that this was a man-of-war.”

‘Yes – why? The commanding officer went on thinking: “Suppose I ask him and then watch his face. He will betray himself in some way. It’s perfectly plain that the fellow has been drinking. Yes, he has been drinking; but he will have a lie ready all the same.” The commanding officer was one of those men who are made morally and almost physically uncomfortable by the mere thought of having to beat down a lie. He shrank from the act in scorn and disgust, which were invincible because more temperamental than moral.

‘So he went out on deck instead and had the crew mustered formally for his inspection. He found them very much what the report of the boarding officer had led him to expect. And from their answers to his questions he could discover no flaw in the log-book story.

‘He dismissed them. His impression of them was – a picked lot; have been promised a fistful of money each if this came off; all slightly anxious, but not frightened. Not a single one of them likely to give the show away. They don’t feel in danger of their life. They know England and English ways too well!

‘He felt alarmed at catching himself thinking as if his vaguest suspicions were turning into a certitude. For, indeed, there was no shadow of reason for his inferences. There was nothing to give away.

‘He returned to the chart-room. The Northman had lingered behind there; and something subtly different in his bearing, more bold in his blue, glassy stare, induced the commanding officer to conclude that the fellow had snatched at the opportunity to take another swig at the bottle he must have had concealed somewhere.

‘He noticed, too, that the Northman on meeting his eyes put on an elaborately surprised expression. At least, it seemed elaborated. Nothing could be trusted. And the Englishman felt himself with astonishing conviction faced by an enormous lie, solid like a wall, with no way round to get at the truth, whose ugly murderous face he seemed to see peeping over at him with a cynical grin.

“‘I dare say,” he began, suddenly, “you are wondering at my proceedings, though I am not detaining you, am I? You wouldn’t dare to move in this fog?”

“‘I don’t know where I am,” the Northman ejaculated, earnestly. “I really don’t.”

‘He looked around as if the very chart-room fittings were strange to him. The commanding officer asked him whether he had not seen any unusual objects floating about while he was at sea.

“‘Objects! What objects? We were groping blind in the fog for days.”

“‘We had a few clear intervals” said the commanding officer. “And I’ll tell you what we have seen and the conclusion I’ve come to about it.”

‘He told him in a few words. He heard the sound of a sharp breath indrawn through closed teeth. The Northman with his hand on the table stood absolutely motionless and dumb. He stood as if thunderstruck. Then he produced a fatuous smile.

‘Or at least so it appeared to the commanding officer. Was this significant, or of no meaning whatever? He didn’t know, he couldn’t tell. All the truth had departed out of the world as if drawn in, absorbed in this monstrous villainy this man was – or was not – guilty of.

“‘Shooting’s too good for people that conceive neutrality in this pretty way,” remarked the commanding officer, after a silence.

“‘Yes, yes, yes,” the Northman assented, hurriedly – then added an unexpected and dreamy-voiced “Perhaps.”

‘Was he pretending to be drunk, or only trying to appear sober? His glance was straight, but it was somewhat glazed. His lips outlined themselves firmly under his yellow moustache. But they twitched. Did they twitch? And why was he drooping like this in his attitude?

“‘There’s no perhaps about it,” pronounced the commanding officer sternly.

‘The Northman had straightened himself. And unexpectedly he looked stern, too.

“‘No. But what about the tempters? Better kill that lot off. There’s about four, five, six million of them,” he said, grimly; but in a moment changed into a whining key. “But I had better hold my tongue. You have some suspicions.”

“‘No, I’ve no suspicions,” declared the commanding officer.

‘He never faltered. At that moment he had the certitude. The air of the chart-room was thick with guilt and falsehood braving the discovery, defying simple right, common decency, all humanity of feeling, every scruple of conduct.

‘The Northman drew a long breath. “Well, we know that you English are gentlemen. But let us speak the truth. Why should we love you so very much? You haven’t done anything to be loved. We don’t love the other people, of course. They haven’t done anything for that either. A fellow comes along with a bag of gold... I haven’t been in Rotterdam<sup>1</sup> my last voyage for nothing.”

“‘You may be able to tell something interesting, then, to our people when you come into

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<sup>1</sup> **Rotterdam** – a city in the Netherlands and one of the major European ports, first mentioned in 1283

port,” interjected the officer.

“I might. But you keep some people in your pay at Rotterdam. Let them report. I am a neutral – am I not?... Have you ever seen a poor man on one side and a bag of gold on the other? Of course, I couldn’t be tempted. I haven’t the nerve for it. Really I haven’t. It’s nothing to me. I am just talking openly for once.”

“Yes. And I am listening to you,” said the commanding officer, quietly.

‘The Northman leaned forward over the table. “Now that I know you have no suspicions, I talk. You don’t know what a poor man is. I do. I am poor myself. This old ship, she isn’t much, and she is mortgaged, too. Bare living, no more. Of course, I wouldn’t have the nerve. But a man who has nerve! See. The stuff he takes aboard looks like any other cargo – packages, barrels, tins, copper tubes – what not. He doesn’t see it work. It isn’t real to him. But he sees the gold. That’s real. Of course, nothing could induce me. I suffer from an internal disease. I would either go crazy from anxiety – or – or – take to drink or something. The risk is too great. Why – ruin!”

“It should be death.” The commanding officer got up, after this curt declaration, which the other received with a hard stare oddly combined with an uncertain smile. The officer’s gorge rose at the atmosphere of murderous complicity which surrounded him, denser, more impenetrable, more acrid than the fog outside.

“It’s nothing to me,” murmured the Northman, swaying visibly.

“Of course not,” assented the commanding officer, with a great effort to keep his voice calm and low. The certitude was strong within him. “But I am going to clear all you fellows off this coast at once. And I will begin with you. You must leave in half an hour.”

‘By that time the officer was walking along the deck with the Northman at his elbow.

“What! In this fog?” the latter cried out, huskily.

“Yes, you will have to go in this fog.”

“But I don’t know where I am. I really don’t.”

‘The commanding officer turned round. A sort of fury possessed him. The eyes of the two men met. Those of the Northman expressed a profound amazement.

“Oh, you don’t know how to get out.” The commanding officer spoke with composure, but his heart was beating with anger and dread. “I will give you your course. Steer south-by-east-half-east for about four miles and then you will be clear to haul to the eastward for your port. The weather will clear up before very long.”

“Must I? What could induce me? I haven’t the nerve.”

“And yet you must go. Unless you want to—”

“I don’t want to,” panted the Northman. “I’ve enough of it.”

‘The commanding officer got over the side. The Northman remained still as if rooted to the deck. Before his boat reached his ship the commanding officer heard the steamer beginning to pick up her anchor. Then, shadowy in the fog, she steamed out on the given course.

“Yes,” he said to his officers, “I let him go.”

The narrator bent forward towards the couch, where no movement betrayed the presence of a living person.

‘Listen,’ he said, forcibly. ‘That course would lead the Northman straight on a deadly ledge of rock. And the commanding officer gave it to him. He steamed out – ran on it – and went down. So he had spoken the truth. He did not know where he was. But it proves nothing. Nothing either way. It may have been the only truth in all his story. And yet... He seems to have been driven out by a menacing stare – nothing more.’

He abandoned all pretence.

‘Yes, I gave that course to him. It seemed to me a supreme test. I believe – no, I don’t believe. I don’t know. At the time I was certain. They all went down; and I don’t know whether I have done stern retribution – or murder; whether I have added to the corpses that litter the bed of the unreadable sea the bodies of men completely innocent or basely guilty. I don’t know. I shall never know.’

He rose. The woman on the couch got up and threw her arms round his neck. Her eyes put

two gleams in the deep shadow of the room. She knew his passion for truth, his horror of deceit, his humanity.

‘Oh, my poor, poor—’

‘I shall never know,’ he repeated, sternly, disengaged himself, pressed her hands to his lips, and went out.

## The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky (Stephen Crane)

### I

The great pullman<sup>1</sup> was whirling onward with such dignity of motion that a glance from the window seemed simply to prove that the plains of Texas were pouring eastward. Vast flats of green grass, dull-hued spaces of mesquite and cactus, little groups of frame houses, woods of light and tender trees, all were sweeping into the east, sweeping over the horizon, a precipice.

A newly married pair had boarded this coach at San Antonio<sup>2</sup>. The man’s face was reddened from many days in the wind and sun, and a direct result of his new black clothes was that his brick-colored hands were constantly performing in a most conscious fashion. From time to time he looked down respectfully at his attire. He sat with a hand on each knee, like a man waiting in a barber’s shop. The glances he devoted to other passengers were furtive and shy.

The bride was not pretty, nor was she very young. She wore a dress of blue cashmere<sup>3</sup>, with small reservations of velvet here and there and with steel buttons abounding. She continually twisted her head to regard her puff sleeves, very stiff, straight, and high. They embarrassed her. It was quite apparent that she had cooked, and that she expected to cook, dutifully. The blushes caused by the careless scrutiny of some passengers as she had entered the car were strange to see upon this plain, under-class countenance, which was drawn in placid, almost emotionless lines.

They were evidently very happy. ‘Ever been in a parlor-car before?’ he asked, smiling with delight.

‘No,’ she answered, ‘I never was. It’s fine, ain’t it?’

‘Great! And then after a while we’ll go forward to the diner and get a big layout. Finest meal in the world. Charge a dollar.’

‘Oh, do they?’ cried the bride. ‘Charge a dollar? Why, that’s too much – for us – ain’t it, Jack?’

‘Not this trip, anyhow,’ he answered bravely. ‘We’re going to go the whole thing.’

Later, he explained to her about the trains. ‘You see, it’s a thousand miles from one end of Texas to the other, and this train runs right across it and never stops but four times.’ He had the pride of an owner. He pointed out to her the dazzling fittings of the coach, and in truth her eyes opened wider as she contemplated the sea-green figured velvet, the shining brass, silver, and glass, the wood that gleamed as darkly brilliant as the surface of a pool of oil. At one end a bronze figure sturdily held a support for a separated chamber, and at convenient places on the ceiling were frescoes in olive and silver.

To the minds of the pair, their surroundings reflected the glory of their marriage that morning in San Antonio. This was the environment of their new estate, and the man’s face in particular beamed with an elation that made him appear ridiculous to the negro porter. This individual at times surveyed them from afar with an amused and superior grin. On other occasions he bullied them with skill in ways that did not make it exactly plain to them that they were being bullied. He subtly used all the manners of the most unconquerable kind of snobbery. He oppressed them, but of this oppression they had small knowledge, and they speedily forgot that infrequently a number of

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<sup>1</sup> **pullman** – a sleeping car used on railroads, invented by George Pullman (1831–1897), an American industrialist and inventor

<sup>2</sup> **San Antonio** – a city in south-central Texas, founded in 1718 by Spanish explorers and named for St. Anthony of Padua

<sup>3</sup> **cashmere** – a fine woolen fabric first made in Kashmir, India



travelers covered them with stares of derisive enjoyment. Historically there was supposed to be something infinitely humorous in their situation.

‘We are due in Yellow Sky at 3:42,’ he said, looking tenderly into her eyes.

‘Oh, are we?’ she said, as if she had not been aware of it. To evince surprise at her husband’s statement was part of her wifely amiability. She took from a pocket a little silver watch, and as she held it before her and stared at it with a frown of attention, the new husband’s face shone.

‘I bought it in San Anton’ from a friend of mine,’ he told her gleefully.

‘It’s seventeen minutes past twelve,’ she said, looking up at him with a kind of shy and clumsy coquetry. A passenger, noting this play, grew excessively sardonic, and winked at himself in one of the numerous mirrors.

At last they went to the dining-car. Two rows of negro waiters, in glowing white suits, surveyed their entrance with the interest and also the equanimity of men who had been forewarned. The pair fell to the lot of a waiter who happened to feel pleasure in steering them through their meal. He viewed them with the manner of a fatherly pilot, his countenance radiant with benevolence. The patronage, entwined with the ordinary deference, was not plain to them. And yet, as they returned to their coach, they showed in their faces a sense of escape.

To the left, miles down a long purple slope, was a little ribbon of mist where moved the keening Rio Grande<sup>1</sup>. The train was approaching it at an angle, and the apex was Yellow Sky. Presently it was apparent that, as the distance from Yellow Sky grew shorter, the husband became commensurately restless. His brick-red hands were more insistent in their prominence. Occasionally he was even rather absent-minded and far-away when the bride leaned forward and addressed him.

As a matter of truth, Jack Potter was beginning to find the shadow of a deed weigh upon him like a leaden slab. He, the town marshal of Yellow Sky, a man known, liked, and feared in his corner, a prominent person, had gone to San Antonio to meet a girl he believed he loved, and there, after the usual prayers, had actually induced her to marry him, without consulting Yellow Sky for any part of the transaction. He was now bringing his bride before an innocent and unsuspecting community.

Of course, people in Yellow Sky married as it pleased them, in accordance with a general custom; but such was Potter’s thought of his duty to his friends, or of their idea of his duty, or of an unspoken form which does not control men in these matters, that he felt he was heinous. He had committed an extraordinary crime. Face to face with this girl in San Antonio, and spurred by his sharp impulse, he had gone headlong over all the social hedges. At San Antonio he was like a man hidden in the dark. A knife to sever any friendly duty, any form, was easy to his hand in that remote city. But the hour of Yellow Sky, the hour of daylight, was approaching.

He knew full well that his marriage was an important thing to his town. It could only be exceeded by the burning of the new hotel. His friends could not forgive him. Frequently he had reflected on the advisability of telling them by telegraph, but a new cowardice had been upon him. He feared to do it. And now the train was hurrying him toward a scene of amazement, glee, and reproach. He glanced out of the window at the line of haze swinging slowly in towards the train.

Yellow Sky had a kind of brass band, which played painfully, to the delight of the populace. He laughed without heart as he thought of it. If the citizens could dream of his prospective arrival with his bride, they would parade the band at the station and escort them, amid cheers and laughing congratulations, to his adobe home.

He resolved that he would use all the devices of speed and plains-craft in making the journey from the station to his house. Once within that safe citadel he could issue some sort of a vocal bulletin, and then not go among the citizens until they had time to wear off a little of their enthusiasm.

The bride looked anxiously at him. ‘What’s worrying you, Jack?’

He laughed again. ‘I’m not worrying, girl. I’m only thinking of Yellow Sky.’

She flushed in comprehension.

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<sup>1</sup> **the Rio Grande** – a river in Texas, US, and Mexico, one of the longest rivers in North America; it flows to the Gulf of Mexico.

A sense of mutual guilt invaded their minds and developed a finer tenderness. They looked at each other with eyes softly aglow. But Potter often laughed the same nervous laugh. The flush upon the bride's face seemed quite permanent.

The traitor to the feelings of Yellow Sky narrowly watched the speeding landscape. 'We're nearly there,' he said.

Presently the porter came and announced the proximity of Potter's home. He held a brush in his hand and, with all his airy superiority gone, he brushed Potter's new clothes as the latter slowly turned this way and that way. Potter fumbled out a coin and gave it to the porter, as he had seen others do. It was a heavy and muscle-bound business, as that of a man shoeing his first horse.

The porter took their bag, and as the train began to slow they moved forward to the hooded platform of the car. Presently the two engines and their long string of coaches rushed into the station of Yellow Sky.

'They have to take water here,' said Potter, from a constricted throat and in mournful cadence, as one announcing death. Before the train stopped, his eye had swept the length of the platform, and he was glad and astonished to see there was none upon it but the station-agent, who, with a slightly hurried and anxious air, was walking toward the water-tanks. When the train had halted, the porter alighted first and placed in position a little temporary step.

'Come on, girl,' said Potter hoarsely. As he helped her down they each laughed on a false note. He took the bag from the negro, and bade his wife cling to his arm. As they slunk rapidly away, his hang-dog glance perceived that they were unloading the two trunks, and also that the station-agent far ahead near the baggage-car had turned and was running toward him, making gestures. He laughed, and groaned as he laughed, when he noted the first effect of his marital bliss upon Yellow Sky. He gripped his wife's arm firmly to his side, and they fled. Behind them the porter stood chuckling fatuously.

## II

The California Express on the Southern Railway was due at Yellow Sky in twenty-one minutes. There were six men at the bar of the 'Weary Gentleman' saloon. One was a drummer who talked a great deal and rapidly; three were Texans who did not care to talk at that time; and two were Mexican sheep-herders who did not talk as a general practice in the 'Weary Gentleman' saloon. The barkeeper's dog lay on the board walk that crossed in front of the door. His head was on his paws, and he glanced drowsily here and there with the constant vigilance of a dog that is kicked on occasion. Across the sandy street were some vivid green grass plots, so wonderful in appearance amid the sands that burned near them in a blazing sun that they caused a doubt in the mind. They exactly resembled the grass mats used to represent lawns on the stage. At the cooler end of the railway station a man without a coat sat in a tilted chair and smoked his pipe. The fresh-cut bank of the Rio Grande circled near the town, and there could be seen beyond it a great, plum-colored plain of mesquite<sup>1</sup>.

Save for the busy drummer and his companions in the saloon, Yellow Sky was dozing. The new-comer leaned gracefully upon the bar, and recited many tales with the confidence of a bard who has come upon a new field.

'—and at the moment that the old man fell down stairs with the bureau in his arms, the old woman was coming up with two scuttles of coal, and, of course—'

The drummer's tale was interrupted by a young man who suddenly appeared in the open door. He cried: 'Scratchy Wilson's drunk, and has turned loose with both hands.' The two Mexicans at once set down their glasses and faded out of the rear entrance of the saloon.

The drummer, innocent and jocular, answered: 'All right, old man. S'pose he has. Come in and have a drink, anyhow.'

But the information had made such an obvious cleft in every skull in the room that the drummer was obliged to see its importance. All had become instantly solemn. 'Say,' said he,

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<sup>1</sup> **mesquite** — a deep rooted shrub or small tree in South America and in the southwest of the USA

mystified, 'what is this?' His three companions made the introductory gesture of eloquent speech, but the young man at the door forestalled them.

'It means, my friend,' he answered, as he came into the saloon, 'that for the next two hours this town won't be a health resort.'

The barkeeper went to the door and locked and barred it. Reaching out of the window, he pulled in heavy wooden shutters and barred them. Immediately a solemn, chapel-like gloom was upon the place. The drummer was looking from one to another.

'But, say,' he cried, 'what is this, anyhow? You don't mean there is going to be a gun-fight?'

'Don't know whether there'll be a fight or not,' answered one man grimly. 'But there'll be some shootin' – some good shootin'.'

The young man who had warned them waved his hand. 'Oh, there'll be a fight fast enough if anyone wants it. Anybody can get a fight out there in the street. There's a fight just waiting.'

The drummer seemed to be swayed between the interest of a foreigner and a perception of personal danger.

'What did you say his name was?' he asked.

'Scratchy Wilson,' they answered in chorus.

'And will he kill anybody? What are you going to do? Does this happen often? Does he rampage around like this once a week or so? Can he break in that door?'

'No, he can't break down that door,' replied the barkeeper. 'He's tried it three times. But when he comes you'd better lay down on the floor, stranger. He's dead sure to shoot at it, and a bullet may come through.'

Thereafter the drummer kept a strict eye upon the door. The time had not yet been called for him to hug the floor, but, as a minor precaution, he sidled near to the wall. 'Will he kill anybody?' he said again.

The men laughed low and scornfully at the question.

'He's out to shoot, and he's out for trouble. Don't see any good in experimentin' with him.'

'But what do you do in a case like this? What do you do?'

A man responded: 'Why, he and Jack Potter—'

'But,' in chorus, the other men interrupted, 'Jack Potter's in San Anton'.'

'Well, who is he? What's he got to do with it?'

'Oh, he's the town marshal. He goes out and fights Scratchy when he gets on one of these tears.'

'Wow,' said the drummer, mopping his brow. 'Nice job he's got.'

The voices had toned away to mere whisperings. The drummer wished to ask further questions which were born of an increasing anxiety and bewilderment; but when he attempted them, the men merely looked at him in irritation and motioned him to remain silent. A tense waiting hush was upon them. In the deep shadows of the room their eyes shone as they listened for sounds from the street. One man made three gestures at the barkeeper, and the latter, moving like a ghost, handed him a glass and a bottle. The man poured a full glass of whisky, and set down the bottle noiselessly. He gulped the whisky in a swallow, and turned again toward the door in immovable silence. The drummer saw that the barkeeper, without a sound, had taken a Winchester from beneath the bar. Later he saw this individual beckoning to him, so he tiptoed across the room.

'You better come with me back of the bar.'

'No, thanks,' said the drummer, perspiring. 'I'd rather be where I can make a break for the back door.'

Whereupon the man of bottles made a kindly but peremptory gesture. The drummer obeyed it, and finding himself seated on a box with his head below the level of the bar, balm was laid upon his soul at sight of various zinc and copper fittings that bore a resemblance to armor-plate. The barkeeper took a seat comfortably upon an adjacent box.

'You see,' he whispered, 'this here Scratchy Wilson is a wonder with a gun – a perfect wonder – and when he goes on the war trail, we hunt our holes – naturally. He's about the last one of the old gang that used to hang out along the river here. He's a terror when he's drunk. When he's

sober he's all right – kind of simple – wouldn't hurt a fly – nicest fellow in town. But when he's drunk – whoo!

There were periods of stillness. 'I wish Jack Potter was back from San Anton', said the barkeeper. 'He shot Wilson up once – in the leg – and he would sail in and pull out the kinks in this thing.'

Presently they heard from a distance the sound of a shot, followed by three wild yowls. It instantly removed a bond from the men in the darkened saloon. There was a shuffling of feet. They looked at each other. 'Here he comes,' they said.

### III

A man in a maroon-colored<sup>1</sup> flannel shirt, which had been purchased for purposes of decoration and made, principally, by some Jewish women on the east side of New York, rounded a corner and walked into the middle of the main street of Yellow Sky. In either hand the man held a long, heavy, blue-black revolver. Often he yelled, and these cries rang through a semblance of a deserted village, shrilly flying over the roofs in a volume that seemed to have no relation to the ordinary vocal strength of a man. It was as if the surrounding stillness formed the arch of a tomb over him. These cries of ferocious challenge rang against walls of silence. And his boots had red tops with gilded imprints, of the kind beloved in winter by little sledding boys on the hillsides of New England.

The man's face flamed in a rage begot of whisky. His eyes, rolling and yet keen for ambush, hunted the still doorways and windows. He walked with the creeping movement of the midnight cat. As it occurred to him, he roared menacing information. The long revolvers in his hands were as easy as straws; they were moved with an electric swiftness. The little fingers of each hand played sometimes in a musician's way. Plain from the low collar of the shirt, the cords of his neck straightened and sank, straightened and sank, as passion moved him. The only sounds were his terrible invitations. The calm adobes preserved their demeanor at the passing of this small thing in the middle of the street.

There was no offer of fight; no offer of fight. The man called to the sky. There were no attractions. He bellowed and fumed and swayed his revolvers here and everywhere.

The dog of the barkeeper of the 'Weary Gentleman' saloon had not appreciated the advance of events. He yet lay dozing in front of his master's door. At sight of the dog, the man paused and raised his revolver humorously. At sight of the man, the dog sprang up and walked diagonally away, with a sullen head, and growling. The man yelled, and the dog broke into a gallop. As it was about to enter an alley, there was a loud noise, a whistling, and something spat the ground directly before it. The dog screamed, and, wheeling in terror, galloped headlong in a new direction. Again there was a noise, a whistling, and sand was kicked viciously before it. Fear-stricken, the dog turned and flurried like an animal in a pen. The man stood laughing, his weapons at his hips.

Ultimately the man was attracted by the closed door of the 'Weary Gentleman' saloon. He went to it, and hammering with a revolver, demanded drink.

The door remaining imperturbable, he picked a bit of paper from the walk and nailed it to the framework with a knife. He then turned his back contemptuously upon this popular resort, and walking to the opposite side of the street, and spinning there on his heel quickly and lithely, fired at the bit of paper. He missed it by a half inch. He swore at himself, and went away. Later, he comfortably fusilladed the windows of his most intimate friend. The man was playing with this town. It was a toy for him.

But still there was no offer of fight. The name of Jack Potter, his ancient antagonist, entered his mind, and he concluded that it would be a glad thing if he should go to Potter's house and by bombardment induce him to come out and fight. He moved in the direction of his desire, chanting

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<sup>1</sup> maroon-colored – brownish-red

Apache<sup>1</sup> scalp-music<sup>2</sup>.

When he arrived at it, Potter's house presented the same still front as had the other adobes. Taking up a strategic position, the man howled a challenge. But this house regarded him as might a great stone god. It gave no sign. After a decent wait, the man howled further challenges, mingling with them wonderful epithets.

Presently there came the spectacle of a man churning himself into deepest rage over the immobility of a house. He fumed at it as the winter wind attacks a prairie cabin in the North. To the distance there should have gone the sound of a tumult like the fighting of 200 Mexicans. As necessity bade him, he paused for breath or to reload his revolvers.

## IV

Potter and his bride walked sheepishly and with speed. Sometimes they laughed together shamefacedly and low.

'Next corner, dear,' he said finally.

They put forth the efforts of a pair walking bowed against a strong wind. Potter was about to raise a finger to point the first appearance of the new home when, as they circled the corner, they came face to face with a man in a maroon-colored shirt who was feverishly pushing cartridges into a large revolver. Upon the instant the man dropped his revolver to the ground, and, like lightning, whipped another from its holster. The second weapon was aimed at the bridegroom's chest.

There was silence. Potter's mouth seemed to be merely a grave for his tongue. He exhibited an instinct to at once loosen his arm from the woman's grip, and he dropped the bag to the sand. As for the bride, her face had gone as yellow as old cloth. She was a slave to hideous rites gazing at the apparitional snake.

The two men faced each other at a distance of three paces. He of the revolver smiled with a new and quiet ferocity.

'Tried to sneak up on me,' he said. 'Tried to sneak up on me!' His eyes grew more baleful. As Potter made a slight movement, the man thrust his revolver venomously forward. 'No, don't you do it, Jack Potter. Don't you move a finger toward a gun just yet. Don't you move an eyelash. The time has come for me to settle with you, and I'm goin' to do it my own way and loaf along with no interferin'. So if you don't want a gun bent on you, just mind what I tell you.'

Potter looked at his enemy. 'I ain't got a gun on me, Scratchy,' he said. 'Honest, I ain't.' He was stiffening and steadying, but yet somewhere at the back of his mind a vision of the Pullman floated, the sea-green figured velvet, the shining brass, silver, and glass, the wood that gleamed as darkly brilliant as the surface of a pool of oil – all the glory of the marriage, the environment of the new estate. 'You know I fight when it comes to fighting, Scratchy Wilson, but I ain't got a gun on me. You'll have to do all the shootin' yourself.'

His enemy's face went livid. He stepped forward and lashed his weapon to and fro before Potter's chest. 'Don't you tell me you ain't got no gun on you, you whelp. Don't tell me no lie like that. There ain't a man in Texas ever seen you without no gun. Don't take me for no kid.' His eyes blazed with light, and his throat worked like a pump.

'I ain't takin' you for no kid,' answered Potter. His heels had not moved an inch backward. 'I'm takin' you for a – fool. I tell you I ain't got a gun, and I ain't. If you're goin' to shoot me up, you better begin now. You'll never get a chance like this again.'

So much enforced reasoning had told on Wilson's rage. He was calmer. 'If you ain't got a gun, why ain't you got a gun?' he sneered. 'Been to Sunday-school?'

'I ain't got a gun because I've just come from San Anton' with my wife. I'm married,' said Potter. 'And if I'd thought there was going to be any galoots like you prowling around when I brought my wife home, I'd had a gun, and don't you forget it.'

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1 **Apache** – North American Indians who used to live in what is now southeastern Arizona and Colorado, southwestern New Mexico and western Texas

2 **scalp-music** – war music

‘Married!’ said Scratchy, not at all comprehending.

‘Yes, married. I’m married,’ said Potter distinctly.

‘Married?’ said Scratchy. Seemingly for the first time he saw the drooping, drowning woman at the other man’s side. ‘No!’ he said. He was like a creature allowed a glimpse of another world. He moved a pace backward, and his arm with the revolver dropped to his side. ‘Is this the lady?’ he asked.

‘Yes, this is the lady,’ answered Potter.

There was another period of silence.

‘Well,’ said Wilson at last, slowly, ‘I s’pose it’s all off now.’

‘It’s all off if you say so, Scratchy. You know I didn’t make the trouble.’ Potter lifted his valise.

‘Well, I ’low it’s off, Jack,’ said Wilson. He was looking at the ground. ‘Married!’ He was not a student of chivalry; it was merely that in the presence of this foreign condition he was a simple child of the earlier plains. He picked up his starboard revolver, and placing both weapons in their holsters, he went away. His feet made funnel-shaped tracks in the heavy sand.

## The Upper Berth (Francis Marion Crawford)

### Chapter I

Somebody asked for the cigars. We had talked long, and the conversation as beginning to languish; the tobacco smoke had got into the heavy curtains, the wine had got into those brains which were liable to become heavy, and it was already perfectly evident that, unless somebody did something to rouse our oppressed spirits, the meeting would soon come to its natural conclusion, and we, the guests, would speedily go home to bed, and most certainly to sleep.

No one had said anything very remarkable; it may be that no one had anything very remarkable to say. Jones had given us every particular of his last hunting adventure in Yorkshire. Mr. Tompkins, of Boston, had explained at elaborate length those working principles, by the due and careful maintenance of which the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fé Railroad<sup>1</sup> not only extended its territory, increased its departmental influence, and transported live stock without starving them to death before the day of actual delivery, but, also, had for years succeeded in deceiving those passengers who bought its tickets into the fallacious belief that the corporation aforesaid was really able to transport human life without destroying it.

Signor Tombola had endeavoured to persuade us, by arguments which we took no trouble to oppose, that the unity of his country in no way resembled the average modern torpedo, carefully planned, constructed with all the skill of the greatest European arsenals, but, when constructed, destined to be directed by feeble hands into a region where it must undoubtedly explode, unseen, unfared, and unheard, into the illimitable wastes of political chaos.

It is unnecessary to go into further details. The conversation had assumed proportions which would have bored Prometheus<sup>2</sup> on his rock, which would have driven Tantalus<sup>3</sup> to distraction, and which would have impelled Ixion<sup>4</sup> to seek relaxation in the simple but instructive dialogues of Herr Ollendorff, rather than submit to the greater evil of listening to our talk. We had sat at table for hours; we were bored, we were tired, and nobody showed signs of moving.

Somebody called for cigars. We all instinctively looked towards the speaker. Brisbane was a

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<sup>1</sup> **Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé Railroad** – one of the largest railway companies in the United States, founded in 1859

<sup>2</sup> **Prometheus** – in Greek religion, the god of fire and one of the Titans; the legend said that Zeus nailed him to the rock and sent an eagle to eat his liver as punishment for stealing fire and giving it to people.

<sup>3</sup> **Prometheus** – in Greek religion, the god of fire and one of the Titans; the legend said that Zeus nailed him to the rock and sent an eagle to eat his liver as punishment for stealing fire and giving it to people.

<sup>4</sup> **Ixion** – in Greek mythology, Zeus, to punish Ixion for murdering his father-in-law, bound him on a wheel which rolled without stopping

man of five-and-thirty years of age, and remarkable for those gifts which chiefly attract the attention of men. He was a strong man. The external proportions of his figure presented nothing extraordinary to the common eye, though his size was above the average. He was a little over six feet in height, and moderately broad in the shoulder; he did not appear to be stout, but, on the other hand, he was certainly not thin; his small head was supported by a strong and sinewy neck; his broad, muscular hands appeared to possess a peculiar skill in breaking walnuts without the assistance of the ordinary cracker, and, seeing him in profile, one could not help remarking the extraordinary breadth of his sleeves, and the unusual thickness of his chest. He was one of those men who are commonly spoken of among men as deceptive; that is to say, that though he looked exceedingly strong he was in reality very much stronger than he looked. Of his features I need say little. His head was small, his hair is thin, his eyes are blue, his nose is large, he has a small moustache, and a square jaw. Everybody knows Brisbane, and when he asked for a cigar everybody looked at him.

‘It is a very singular thing,’ said Brisbane.

Everybody stopped talking. Brisbane’s voice was not loud, but possessed a peculiar quality of penetrating general conversation, and cutting it like a knife. Everybody listened. Brisbane, perceiving that he had attracted their general attention, lit his cigar with great equanimity.

‘It is very singular,’ he continued, ‘that thing about ghosts. People are always asking whether anybody has seen a ghost. I have.’

‘Bosh! What, you? You don’t mean to say so, Brisbane? Well, for a man of his intelligence!’

A chorus of exclamations greeted Brisbane’s remarkable statement. Everybody called for cigars, and Stubbs, the butler, suddenly appeared from the depths of nowhere with a fresh bottle of dry champagne. The situation was saved; Brisbane was going to tell a story.

I am an old sailor, said Brisbane, and as I have to cross the Atlantic pretty often, I have my favourites. Most men have their favourites. I have seen a man wait in a Broadway bar for three-quarters of an hour for a particular car which he liked. I believe the bar-keeper made at least one-third of his living by that man’s preference. I have a habit of waiting for certain ships when I am obliged to cross that duck-pond. It may be a prejudice, but I was never cheated out of a good passage but once in my life. I remember it very well; it was a warm morning in June, and the Custom House officials, who were hanging about waiting for a steamer already on her way up from the Quarantine, presented a peculiarly hazy and thoughtful appearance. I had not much luggage – I never have. I mingled with the crowd of passengers, porters, and officious individuals in blue coats and brass buttons, who seemed to spring up like mushrooms from the deck of a moored steamer to obtrude their unnecessary services upon the independent passenger. I have often noticed with a certain interest the spontaneous evolution of these fellows. They are not there when you arrive; five minutes after the pilot has called ‘Go ahead!’ they, or at least their blue coats and brass buttons, have disappeared from deck and gangway as completely as though they had been consigned to that locker which tradition ascribes to Davy Jones. But, at the moment of starting, they are there, clean shaved, blue coated, and ravenous for fees. I hastened on board. The Kamtschatka was one of my favourite ships. I say was, because she emphatically no longer is. I cannot conceive of any inducement which could entice me to make another voyage in her. Yes, I know what you are going to say. She is uncommonly clean in the run aft, she has enough bluffing off in the bows to keep her dry, and the lower berths are most of them double. She has a lot of advantages, but I won’t cross in her again. Excuse the digression. I got on board. I hailed a steward, whose red nose and redder whiskers were equally familiar to me.

‘One hundred and five, lower berth,’ said I, in the businesslike tone peculiar to men who think no more of crossing the Atlantic than taking a whisky cocktail at down-town Delmonico’s.

The steward took my portmanteau, greatcoat, and rug. I shall never forget the expression on his face. Not that he turned pale. It is maintained by the most eminent divines that even miracles cannot change the course of nature. I have no hesitation in saying that he did not turn pale; but, from his expression, I judged that he was either about to shed tears, to sneeze, or to drop my portmanteau. As the latter contained two bottles of particularly fine old sherry presented to me for

my voyage by my old friend Snigginson van Pickyns, I felt extremely nervous. But the steward did none of these things.

‘Well, I’m d – d!’ said he in a low voice, and led the way.

I supposed my Hermes<sup>1</sup>, as he led me to the lower regions, had had a little grog, but I said nothing, and followed him. One hundred and five was on the port side, well aft. There was nothing remarkable about the state-room. The lower berth, like most of those upon the Kamtschatka, was double. There was plenty of room; there was the usual washing apparatus, calculated to convey an idea of luxury to the mind of a North American Indian; there were the usual inefficient racks of brown wood, in which it is more easy to hand a large-sized umbrella than the common tooth-brush of commerce. Upon the uninviting mattresses were carefully bolted together those blankets which a great modern humorist has aptly compared to cold buckwheat cakes. The question of towels was left entirely to the imagination. The glass decanters were filled with a transparent liquid faintly tinged with brown, but from which an odour less faint, but not more pleasing, ascended to the nostrils, like a far-off sea-sick reminiscence of oily machinery. Sad-coloured curtains half-closed the upper berth. The hazy June daylight shed a faint illumination upon the desolate little scene. Ugh! how I hate that state-room!

The steward deposited my traps and looked at me, as though he wanted to get away – probably in search of more passengers and more fees. It is always a good plan to start in favour with those functionaries, and I accordingly gave him certain coins there and then.

‘I’ll try and make yer comfortable all I can,’ he remarked, as he put the coins in his pocket. Nevertheless, there was a doubtful intonation in his voice which surprised me. Possibly his scale of fees had gone up, and he was not satisfied; but on the whole I was inclined to think that, as he himself would have expressed it, he was “the better for a glass”. I was wrong, however, and did the man injustice.

## Chapter II

Nothing especially worthy of mention occurred during that day. We left the pier punctually, and it was very pleasant to be fairly under way, for the weather was warm and sultry, and the motion of the steamer produced a refreshing breeze. Everybody knows what the first day at sea is like. People pace the decks and stare at each other, and occasionally meet acquaintances whom they did not know to be on board. There is the usual uncertainty as to whether the food will be good, bad, or indifferent, until the first two meals have put the matter beyond a doubt; there is the usual uncertainty about the weather, until the ship is fairly off Fire Island. The tables are crowded at first, and then suddenly thinned. Pale-faced people spring from their seats and precipitate themselves towards the door, and each old sailor breathes more freely as his sea-sick neighbour rushes from his side, leaving him plenty of elbow-room and an unlimited command over the mustard.

One passage across the Atlantic is very much like another, and we who cross very often do not make the voyage for the sake of novelty. Whales and icebergs are indeed always objects of interest, but, after all, one whale is very much like another whale, and one rarely sees an iceberg at close quarters. To the majority of us the most delightful moment of the day on board an ocean steamer is when we have taken our last turn on deck, have smoked our last cigar, and having succeeded in tiring ourselves, feel at liberty to turn in with a clear conscience. On that first night of the voyage I felt particularly lazy, and went to bed in one hundred and five rather earlier than I usually do. As I turned in, I was amazed to see that I was to have a companion. A portmanteau, very like my own, lay in the opposite corner, and in the upper berth had been deposited a neatly-folded rug, with a stick and umbrella. I had hoped to be alone, and I was disappointed; but I wondered who my room-mate was to be, and I determined to have a look at him.

Before I had been long in bed he entered. He was, as far as I could see, a very tall man, very thin, very pale, with sandy hair and whiskers and colourless grey eyes. He had about him, I thought,

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<sup>1</sup> **Hermes** – in Greek mythology, the son of Zeus, and the god of cattle and sheep; he was also a dream god and the messenger of the gods.



an air of rather dubious fashion; the sort of man you might see in Wall Street, without being able precisely to say what he was doing there – the sort of man who frequents the Café Anglais, who always seems to be alone and who drinks champagne; you might meet him on a racecourse, but he would never appear to be doing anything there either. A little over-dressed – a little odd. There are three or four of his kind on every ocean steamer. I made up my mind that I did not care to make his acquaintance, and I went to sleep saying to myself that I would study his habits in order to avoid him. If he rose early, I would rise late; if he went to bed late, I would go to bed early. I did not care to know him. If you once know people of that kind they are always turning up. Poor fellow! I need not have taken the trouble to come to so many decisions about him, for I never saw him again after that first night in one hundred and five.

I was sleeping soundly when I was suddenly waked by a loud noise. To judge from the sound, my room-mate must have sprung with a single leap from the upper berth to the floor. I heard him fumbling with the latch and bolt of the door, which opened almost immediately, and then I heard his footsteps as he ran at full speed down the passage, leaving the door open behind him. The ship was rolling a little, and I expected to hear him stumble or fall, but he ran as though he were running for his life. The door swung on its hinges with the motion of the vessel, and the sound annoyed me. I got up and shut it, and groped my way back to my berth in the darkness. I went to sleep again; but I have no idea how long I slept.

When I awoke it was still quite dark, but I felt a disagreeable sensation of cold, and it seemed to me that the air was damp. You know the peculiar smell of a cabin which has been wet with sea-water. I covered myself up as well as I could and dozed off again, framing complaints to be made the next day, and selecting the most powerful epithets in the language. I could hear my room-mate turn over in the upper berth. He had probably returned while I was asleep. Once I thought I heard him groan, and I argued that he was sea-sick. That is particularly unpleasant when one is below. Nevertheless I dozed off and slept till early daylight.

The ship was rolling heavily, much more than on the previous evening, and the grey light which came in through the porthole changed in tint with every movement according as the angle of the vessel's side turned the glass seawards or skywards. It was very cold – unaccountably so for the month of June. I turned my head and looked at the porthole, and saw to my surprise that it was wide open and hooked back. I believe I swore audibly. Then I got up and shut it. As I turned back I glanced at the upper berth. The curtains were drawn close together; my companion had probably felt cold as well as I. It struck me that I had slept enough. The state-room was uncomfortable, though, strange to say, I could not smell the dampness which had annoyed me in the night. My room-mate was still asleep – excellent opportunity for avoiding him, so I dressed at once and went on deck. The day was warm and cloudy, with an oily smell on the water. It was seven o'clock as I came out – much later than I had imagined. I came across the doctor, who was taking his first sniff of the morning air. He was a young man from the West of Ireland – a tremendous fellow, with black hair and blue eyes, already inclined to be stout; he had a happy-go-lucky, healthy look about him which was rather attractive.

'Fine morning,' I remarked, by way of introduction.

'Well,' said he, eyeing me with an air of ready interest, 'it's a fine morning and it's not a fine morning. I don't think it's much of a morning.'

'Well, no – it is not so very fine,' said I.

'It's just what I call fuggly weather,' replied the doctor.

'It was very cold last night, I thought,' I remarked. 'However, when I looked about, I found that the porthole was wide open. I had not noticed it when I went to bed. And the state-room was damp, too.'

'Damp!' said he. 'Whereabouts are you?'

'One hundred and five—'

To my surprise the doctor started visibly, and stared at me.

'What is the matter?' I asked.

'Oh – nothing,' he answered; 'only everybody has complained of that state-room for the last

three trips.'

'I shall complain too,' I said. 'It has certainly not been properly aired. It is a shame!'

'I don't believe it can be helped,' answered the doctor. 'I believe there is something – well, it is not my business to frighten passengers.'

'You need not be afraid of frightening me,' I replied. 'I can stand any amount of damp. If I should get a bad cold I will come to you.'

I offered the doctor a cigar, which he took and examined very critically.

'It is not so much the damp,' he remarked. 'However, I dare say you will get on very well. Have you a room-mate?'

'Yes; a deuce of a fellow, who bolts out in the middle of the night, and leaves the door open.'

Again the doctor glanced curiously at me. Then he lit the cigar and looked grave.

'Did he come back?' he asked presently.

'Yes. I was asleep, but I waked up, and heard him moving. Then I felt cold and went to sleep again. This morning I found the porthole open.'

'Look here,' said the doctor quietly, 'I don't care much for this ship. I don't care a rap for her reputation. I tell you what I will do. I have a good-sized place up here. I will share it with you, though I don't know you from Adam.'

I was very much surprised at the proposition. I could not imagine why he should take such a sudden interest in my welfare. However, his manner as he spoke of the ship was peculiar.

'You are very good, doctor,' I said. 'But, really, I believe even now the cabin could be aired, or cleaned out, or something. Why do you not care for the ship?'

'We are not superstitious in our profession, sir,' replied the doctor, 'but the sea makes people so. I don't want to prejudice you, and I don't want to frighten you, but if you will take my advice you will move in here. I would as soon see you overboard,' he added earnestly, 'as know that you or any other man was to sleep in one hundred and five.'

'Good gracious! Why?' I asked.

'Just because on the last three trips the people who have slept there actually have gone overboard,' he answered gravely.

The intelligence was startling and exceedingly unpleasant, I confess. I looked hard at the doctor to see whether he was making game of me, but he looked perfectly serious. I thanked him warmly for his offer, but told him I intended to be the exception to the rule by which everyone who slept in that particular state-room went overboard. He did not say much, but looked as grave as ever, and hinted that, before we got across, I should probably reconsider his proposal. In the course of time we went to breakfast, at which only an inconsiderable number of passengers assembled. I noticed that one or two of the officers who breakfasted with us looked grave. After breakfast I went into my state-room in order to get a book. The curtains of the upper berth were still closely drawn. Not a word was to be heard. My room-mate was probably still asleep.

As I came out I met the steward whose business it was to look after me. He whispered that the captain wanted to see me, and then scuttled away down the passage as if very anxious to avoid any questions. I went toward the captain's cabin, and found him waiting for me.

'Sir,' said he, 'I want to ask a favour of you.'

I answered that I would do anything to oblige him.

'Your room-mate had disappeared,' he said. 'He is known to have turned in early last night. Did you notice anything extraordinary in his manner?'

The question coming, as it did, in exact confirmation of the fears the doctor had expressed half an hour earlier, staggered me.

'You don't mean to say he has gone overboard?' I asked.

'I fear he has,' answered the captain.

'This is the most extraordinary thing–' I began.

'Why?' he asked.

'He is the fourth, then?' I exclaimed. In answer to another question from the captain, I explained, without mentioning the doctor, that I had heard the story concerning one hundred and

five. He seemed very much annoyed at hearing that I knew of it. I told him what had occurred in the night.

‘What you say,’ he replied, ‘coincides almost exactly with what was told me by the room-mates of two of the other three. They bolt out of bed and run down the passage. Two of them were seen to go overboard by the watch; we stopped and lowered boats, but they were not found. Nobody, however, saw or heard the man who was lost last night – if he is really lost. The steward, who is a superstitious fellow, perhaps, and expected something to go wrong, went to look for him, this morning, and found his berth empty, but his clothes lying about, just as he had left them. The steward was the only man on board who knew him by sight, and he has been searching everywhere for him. He has disappeared! Now, sir, I want to beg you not to mention the circumstance to any of the passengers; I don’t want the ship to get a bad name, and nothing hangs about an ocean-goer like stories of suicides. You shall have your choice of any one of the officers’ cabins you like, including my own, for the rest of the passage. Is that a fair bargain?’

‘Very,’ said I; ‘and I am much obliged to you. But since I am alone, and have the state-room to myself, I would rather not move. If the steward will take out that unfortunate man’s things, I would as leave stay where I am. I will not say anything about the matter, and I think I can promise you that I will not follow my room-mate.’

The captain tried to dissuade me from my intention, but I preferred having a state-room alone to being the chum of any officer on board. I do not know whether I acted foolishly, but if I had taken his advice I should have had nothing more to tell. There would have remained the disagreeable coincidence of several suicides occurring among men who had slept in the same cabin, but that would have been all.

That was not the end of the matter, however, by any means. I obstinately made up my mind that I would not be disturbed by such tales, and I even went so far as to argue the question with the captain. There was something wrong about the state-room, I said. It was rather damp. The porthole had been left open last night. My room-mate might have been ill when he came on board, and he might have become delirious after he went to bed. He might even now be hiding somewhere on board, and might be found later. The place ought to be aired and the fastening on the port looked to. If the captain would give me leave, I would see that what I thought necessary were done immediately.

‘Of course you have a right to stay where you are if you please,’ he replied, rather petulantly; ‘but I wish you would turn out and let me lock the place up, and be done with it.’

I did not see it in the same light, and left the captain, after promising to be silent concerning the disappearance of my companion. The latter had had no acquaintances on board, and was not missed in the course of the day. Towards evening I met the doctor again, and he asked me whether I had changed my mind. I told him I had not.

‘Then you will before long,’ he said, very gravely.

### **Chapter III**

We played whist in the evening, and I went to bed late. I will confess now that I felt a disagreeable sensation when I entered my state-room. I could not help thinking of the tall man I had seen on the previous night, who was now dead, drowned, tossing about in the long swell, two or three hundred miles astern. His face rose very distinctly before me as I undressed, and I even went so far as to draw back the curtains of the upper berth, as though to persuade myself that he was actually gone. I also bolted the door of the state-room. Suddenly I became aware that the porthole was open, and fastened back. This was more than I could stand. I hastily threw on my dressing-gown and went in search of Robert, the steward of my passage. I was very angry, I remember, and when I found him I dragged him roughly to the door of one hundred and five, and pushed him towards the open porthole.

‘What the deuce do you mean, you scoundrel, by leaving that port open every night? Don’t you know it is against the regulations? Don’t you know that if the ship heeled and the water began

to come in, ten men could not shut it? I will report you to the captain, you blackguard, for endangering the ship!’

I was exceedingly wroth. The man trembled and turned pale, and then began to shut the round glass plate with the heavy brass fittings.

‘Why don’t you answer me?’ I said roughly.

‘If you please, sir,’ faltered Robert, ‘there’s nobody on board as can keep this ‘ere port shut at night. You can try it yourself, sir. I ain’t a-going to stop hany longer on board o’ this vessel, sir; I ain’t, indeed. But if I was you, sir, I’d just clear out and go and sleep with the surgeon, or something, I would. Look ‘ere, sir, is that fastened what you may call securely, or not, sir? Try it, sir, see if it will move a hinch.’

I tried the port, and found it perfectly tight.

‘Well, sir,’ continued Robert triumphantly, ‘I wager my reputation as a A1 steward that in ‘arf an hour it will be open again; fasteneed back, too, sir, that’s the horful thing – fastened back!’

I examined the great screw and the looped nut that ran on it.

‘If I find it open in the night, Robert, I will give you a sovereign. It is not possible. You may go.’

‘Soverin’ did you say, sir? Very good, sir. Thank ye, sir. Good-night, sir. Pleasant reepose, sir, and all manner of hinchantin’ dreams, sir.’

Robert scuttled away, delighted at being released. Of course, I thought he was trying to account for his negligence by a silly story, intended to frighten me, and I disbelieved him. The consequence was that he got his sovereign, and I spent a very peculiarly unpleasant night.

I went to bed, and five minutes after I had rolled myself up in my blankets the inexorable Robert extinguished the light that burned steadily behind the ground-glass pane near the door. I lay quite still in the dark trying to go to sleep, but I soon found that impossible. It had been some satisfaction to be angry with the steward, and the diversion had banished that unpleasant sensation I had at first experienced when I thought of the drowned man who had been my chum; but I was no longer sleepy, and I lay awake for some time, occasionally glancing at the porthole, which I could just see from where I lay, and which, in the darkness, looked like a faintly-luminous soup-plate suspended in blackness. I believe I must have lain there for an hour, and, as I remember, I was just dozing into sleep when I was roused by a draught of cold air, and by distinctly feeling the spray of the sea blown upon my face. I started to my feet, and not having allowed in the dark for the motion of the ship, I was instantly thrown violently across the state-room upon the couch which was placed beneath the port-hole. I recovered myself immediately, however, and climbed upon my knees. The port-hole was again wide open and fastened back!

Now these things are facts. I was wide awake when I got up, and I should certainly have been waked by the fall had I still been dozing. Moreover, I bruised my elbows and knees badly, and the bruises were there on the following morning to testify to the fact, if I myself had doubted it. The porthole was wide open and fastened back – a thing so unaccountable that I remember very well feeling astonishment rather than fear when I discovered it. I at once closed the plate again, and screwed down the loop nut with all my strength. It was very dark in the state-room. I reflected that the port had certainly been opened within an hour after Robert had at first shut it in my presence, and I determined to watch it, and see whether it would open again. Those brass fittings are very heavy and by no means easy to move; I could not believe that the clamp had been turned by the shaking of the screw. I stood peering out through the thick glass at the alternate white and grey streaks of the sea that foamed beneath the ship’s side. I must have remained there a quarter of an hour.

Suddenly, as I stood, I distinctly heard something moving behind me in one of the berths, and a moment afterwards, just as I turned instinctively to look – though I could, of course, see nothing in the darkness – I heard a very faint groan. I sprang across the state-room, and tore the curtains of the upper berth aside, thrusting in my hands to discover if there were any one there. There was some one.

I remember that the sensation as I put my hands forward was as though I were plunging them

into the air of a damp cellar, and from behind the curtains came a gust of wind that smelled horribly of stagnant sea-water. I laid hold of something that had the shape of a man's arm, but was smooth, and wet, and icy cold. But suddenly, as I pulled, the creature sprang violently forward against me, a clammy oozy mass, as it seemed to me, heavy and wet, yet endowed with a sort of supernatural strength. I reeled across the state-room, and in an instant the door opened and the thing rushed out. I had not had time to be frightened, and quickly recovering myself, I sprang through the door and gave chase at the top of my speed, but I was too late. Ten yards before me I could see – I am sure I saw it – a dark shadow moving in the dimly lighted passage, quickly as the shadow of a fast horse thrown before a dog-cart by the lamp on a dark night. But in a moment it had disappeared, and I found myself holding on to the polished rail that ran along the bulkhead where the passage turned towards the companion. My hair stood on end, and the cold perspiration rolled down my face. I am not ashamed of it in the least: I was very badly frightened.

Still I doubted my senses, and pulled myself together. It was absurd, I thought. The Welsh rare-bit I had eaten had disagreed with me. I had been in a nightmare. I made my way back to my state-room, and entered it with an effort. The whole place smelled of stagnant sea-water, as it had when I had waked on the previous evening. It required my utmost strength to go in, and grope among my things for a box of wax lights. As I lighted a railway reading lantern which I always carry in case I want to read after the lamps are out, I perceived that the porthole was again open, and a sort of creeping horror began to take possession of me which I never felt before, nor wish to feel again. But I got a light and proceeded to examine the upper berth, expecting to find it drenched with sea-water.

But I was disappointed. The bed had been slept in, and the smell of the sea was strong; but the bedding was as dry as a bone. I fancied that Robert had not had the courage to make the bed after the accident of the previous night – it had all been a hideous dream. I drew the curtains back as far as I could and examined the place very carefully. It was perfectly dry. But the porthole was open again. With a sort of dull bewilderment of horror I closed it and screwed it down, and thrusting my heavy stick through the brass loop, wrenched it with all my might, till the thick metal began to bend under the pressure. Then I hooked my reading lantern into the red velvet at the head of the couch, and sat down to recover my senses if I could. I sat there all night, unable to think of rest – hardly able to think at all. But the porthole remained closed, and I did not believe it would now open again without the application of a considerable force.

The morning dawned at last, and I dressed myself slowly, thinking over all that had happened in the night. It was a beautiful day and I went on deck, glad to get out into the early, pure sunshine, and to smell the breeze from the blue water, so different from the noisome, stagnant odour of my state-room. Instinctively I turned aft, towards the surgeon's cabin. There he stood, with a pipe in his mouth, taking his morning airing precisely as on the preceding day.

'Good-morning,' said he quietly, but looking at me with evident curiosity.

'Doctor, you were quite right,' said I. 'There is something wrong about that place.'

'I thought you would change your mind,' he answered, rather triumphantly. 'You have had a bad night, eh? Shall I make you a pick-me-up? I have a capital recipe.'

'No, thanks,' I cried. 'But I would like to tell you what happened.'

I then tried to explain as clearly as possible precisely what had occurred, not omitting to state that I had been scared as I had never been scared in my whole life before. I dwelt particularly on the phenomenon of the porthole, which was a fact to which I could testify, even if the rest had been an illusion. I had closed it twice in the night, and the second time I had actually bent the brass in wrenching it with my stick. I believe I insisted a good deal on this point.

'You seem to think I am likely to doubt the story,' said the doctor, smiling at my detailed account of the state of the porthole. 'I do not doubt in the least. I renew my invitation to you. Bring your traps here, and take half my cabin.'

'Come and take half of mine for one night,' I said. 'Help me to get at the bottom of this thing.'

'You will get to the bottom of something else if you try,' answered the doctor.

‘What?’ I asked.

‘The bottom of the sea. I am going to leave this ship. It is not canny.’

‘Then you will not help me to find out—’

‘Not I,’ said the doctor quickly. ‘It is my business to keep my wits about me – not to go fiddling about with ghosts and things.’

‘Do you really believe it is a ghost?’ I enquired, rather contemptuously. But as I spoke I remembered very well the horrible sensation of the supernatural which had got possession of me during the night. The doctor turned sharply on me –

‘Have you any reasonable explanation of these things to offer?’ he asked. ‘No; you have not. Well, you say you will find an explanation. I say that you won’t, sir, simply because there is not any.’

‘But, my dear sir,’ I retorted, ‘do you, a man of science, mean to tell me that such things cannot be explained?’

‘I do,’ he answered stoutly. ‘And, if they could, I would not be concerned in the explanation.’

I did not care to spend another night alone in the state-room, and yet I was obstinately determined to get at the root of the disturbances. I do not believe there are many men who would have slept there alone, after passing two such nights. But I made up my mind to try it, if I could not get anyone to share a watch with me. The doctor was evidently not inclined for such an experiment. He said he was a surgeon, and that in case any accident occurred on board he must be always in readiness. He could not afford to have his nerves unsettled. Perhaps he was quite right, but I am inclined to think that his precaution was prompted by his inclination. On enquiry, he informed me that there was no one on board who would be likely to join me in my investigations, and after a little more conversation I left him. A little later I met the captain, and told him my story. I said that, if no one would spend the night with me, I would ask leave to have the light burning all night, and would try it alone.

‘Look here,’ said he, ‘I will tell you what I will do. I will share your watch myself, and we will see what happens. It is my belief that we can find out between us. There may be some fellow skulking on board, who steals a passage by frightening the passengers. It is just possible that there may be something queer in the carpentering of that berth.’

I suggested taking the ship’s carpenter below and examining the place; but I was overjoyed at the captain’s offer to spend the night with me. He accordingly sent for the workman and ordered him to do anything I required. We went below at once. I had all the bedding cleared out of the upper berth, and we examined the place thoroughly to see if there was a board loose anywhere, or a panel which could be opened or pushed aside. We tried the planks everywhere, tapped the flooring, unscrewed the fittings of the lower berth and took it to pieces – in short, there was not a square inch of the state-room which was not searched and tested. Everything was in perfect order, and we put everything back in its place. As we were finishing our work, Robert came to the door and looked in.

‘Well, sir – find anything, sir?’ he asked, with a ghastly grin.

‘You were right about the porthole, Robert,’ I said, and I gave him the promised sovereign. The carpenter did his work silently and skilfully, following my directions. When he had done he spoke.

‘I’m a plain man, sir,’ he said. ‘But it’s my belief you had better just turn out your things, and let me run half a dozen four-inch screws through the door of this cabin. There’s no good never came o’ this cabin yet, sir, and that’s all about it. There’s been four lives lost out o’ here to my own remembrance, and that is four trips. Better give it up, sir – better give it up!’

‘I will try it for one night more,’ I said.

‘Better give it up, sir – better give it up! It’s a precious bad job,’ repeated the workman, putting his tools in his bag and leaving the cabin.

But my spirits had risen considerably at the prospect of having the captain’s company, and I made up my mind not to be prevented from going to the end of this strange business. I abstained from Welsh rare-bits and grog that evening, and did not even join in the customary game of whist. I wanted to be quite sure of my nerves, and my vanity made me anxious to make a good figure in the

captain's eyes.

## Chapter IV

The captain was one of those splendidly tough and cheerful specimens of seafaring humanity whose combined courage, hardihood, and calmness in difficulty leads them naturally into high positions of trust. He was not the man to be led away by an idle tale, and the mere fact that he was willing to join me in the investigation was proof that he thought there was something seriously wrong, which could not be accounted for on ordinary theories, nor laughed down as a common superstition. To some extent, too, his reputation was at stake, as well as the reputation of the ship. It is no light thing to lose passengers overboard, and he knew it.

About ten o'clock that evening, as I was smoking a last cigar, he came up to me, and drew me aside from the beat of the other passengers who were patrolling the deck in the warm darkness.

'This is a serious matter, Mr. Brisbane,' he said. 'We must make up our minds either way – to be disappointed or to have a pretty rough time of it. You see I cannot afford to laugh at the affair, and I will ask you to sign your name to a statement of whatever occurs. If nothing happens tonight we will try it again tomorrow and next day. Are you ready?'

So we went below, and entered the state-room. As we went in I could see Robert the steward, who stood a little further down the passage, watching us, with his usual grin, as though certain that something dreadful was about to happen. The captain closed the door behind us and bolted it.

'Supposing we put your portmanteau before the door,' he suggested. 'One of us can sit on it. Nothing can get out then. Is the port screwed down?'

I found it as I had left it in the morning. Indeed, without using a lever, as I had done, no one could have opened it. I drew back the curtains of the upper berth so that I could see well into it. By the captain's advice I lighted my reading lantern, and placed it so that it shone upon the white sheets above. He insisted upon sitting on the portmanteau, declaring that he wished to be able to swear that he had sat before the door.

Then he requested me to search the state-room thoroughly, an operation very soon accomplished, as it consisted merely in looking beneath the lower berth and under the couch below the porthole. The spaces were quite empty.

'It is impossible for any human being to get in,' I said, 'or for any human being to open the port.'

'Very good,' said the captain calmly. 'If we see anything now, it must be either imagination or something supernatural.'

I sat down on the edge of the lower berth.

'The first time it happened,' said the captain, crossing his legs and leaning back against the door, 'was in March. The passenger who slept here, in the upper berth, turned out have been a lunatic – at all events, he was known to have been a little touched, and he had taken his passage without the knowledge of his friends. He rushed out in the middle of the night, and threw himself overboard, before the officer who had the watch could stop him. We stopped and lowered a boat; it was a quiet night, just before that heavy weather came on; but we could not find him. Of course his suicide was afterwards accounted for on the ground of his insanity.'

'I suppose that often happens?' I remarked, rather absently.

'Not often – no,' said the captain; 'never before in my experience, though I have heard of it happening on board of other ships. Well, as I was saying, that occurred in March. On the very next trip – What are you looking at?' he asked, stopping suddenly in his narration.

I believe I gave no answer. My eyes were riveted upon the porthole. It seemed to me that the brass loop-nut was beginning to turn very slowly upon the screw – so slowly, however, that I was not sure it moved at all. I watched it intently, fixing its position in my mind, and trying to ascertain whether it changed. Seeing where I was looking, the captain looked too.

'It moves!' he exclaimed, in a tone of conviction. 'No, it does not,' he added, after a minute.

'If it were the jarring of the screw,' said I, 'it would have opened during the day; but I found it

this evening jammed tight as I left it this morning.'

I rose and tried the nut. It was certainly loosened, for by an effort I could move it with my hands.

'The queer thing,' said the captain, 'is that the second man who was lost is supposed to have got through that very port. We had a terrible time over it. It was in the middle of the night, and the weather was very heavy; there was an alarm that one of the ports was open and the sea running in. I came below and found everything flooded, the water pouring in every time she rolled, and the whole port swinging from the top bolts – not the porthole in the middle. Well, we managed to shut it, but the water did some damage. Ever since that the place smells of sea-water from time to time. We supposed the passenger had thrown himself out, though the Lord only knows how he did it. The steward kept telling me that he cannot keep anything shut here. Upon my word – I can smell it now, cannot you?' he enquired, sniffing the air suspiciously.

'Yes – distinctly,' I said, and I shuddered as that same odour of stagnant sea-water grew stronger in the cabin. 'Now, to smell like this, the place must be damp,' I continued, 'and yet when I examined it with the carpenter this morning everything was perfectly dry. It is most extraordinary – hallo!'

My reading lantern, which had been placed in the upper berth, was suddenly extinguished. There was still a good deal of light from the pane of ground glass near the door, behind which loomed the regulation lamp. The ship rolled heavily, and the curtain of the upper berth swung far out into the state-room and back again. I rose quickly from my seat on the edge of the bed, and the captain at the same moment started to his feet with a loud cry of surprise. I had turned with the intention of taking down the lantern to examine it, when I heard his exclamation, and immediately afterwards his call for help. I sprang towards him. He was wrestling with all his might with the brass loop of the port. It seemed to turn against his hands in spite of all his efforts. I caught up my cane, a heavy oak stick I always used to carry, and thrust it through the ring and bore on it with all my strength. But the strong wood snapped suddenly and I fell upon the couch. When I rose again the port was wide open, and the captain was standing with his back against the door, pale to the lips.

'There is something in that berth!' he cried, in a strange voice, his eyes almost starting from his head. 'Hold the door, while I look – it shall not escape us, whatever it is!'

But instead of taking his place, I sprang upon the lower bed, and seized something which lay in the upper berth.

It was something ghostly, horrible beyond words, and it moved in my grip. It was like the body of a man long drowned, and yet it moved, and had the strength of ten men living; but I gripped it with all my might – the slippery, oozy, horrible thing – the dead white eyes seemed to stare at me out of the dusk; the putrid odour of rank sea-water was about it, and its shiny hair hung in foul wet curls over its dead face. I wrestled with the dead thing; it thrust itself upon me and forced me back and nearly broke my arms; it wound its corpse's arms about my neck, the living death, and overpowered me, so that I, at last, cried aloud and fell, and left my hold.

As I fell the thing sprang across me, and seemed to throw itself upon the captain. When I last saw him on his feet his face was white and his lips set. It seemed to me that he struck a violent blow at the dead being, and then he, too, fell forward upon his face, with an inarticulate cry of horror.

The thing paused an instant, seeming to hover over his prostrate body, and I could have screamed again for very fright, but I had no voice left. The thing vanished suddenly, and it seemed to my disturbed senses that it made its exit through the open port, though how that was possible, considering the smallness of the aperture, is more than anyone can tell. I lay a long time on the floor, and the captain lay beside me. At last I partially recovered my senses and moved, and instantly I knew that my arm was broken – the small bone of my left forearm near the wrist.

I got upon my feet somehow, and with my remaining hand I tried to raise the captain. He groaned and moved, and at last came to himself. He was not hurt, but he seemed badly stunned.

Well, do you want to hear any more? There is nothing more. That is the end of my story. The carpenter carried out his scheme of running half a dozen four-inch screws through the door of one hundred and five; and if ever you take a passage in the Kamtschatka, you may ask for a berth in that



state-room. You will be told that it is engaged – yes – it is engaged by that dead thing.

I finished the trip in the surgeon's cabin. He doctored my broken arm, and advised me not to 'fiddle about with ghosts and things' any more. The captain was very silent, and never sailed again in that ship, though it is still running. And I will not sail in her either. It was a very disagreeable experience, and I was very badly frightened, which is a thing I do not like. That is all. That is how I saw a ghost – if it was a ghost. It was dead, anyhow.

## **The Lamplighter (Charles Dickens)**

'If you talk of Murphy and Francis Moore, gentlemen,' said the lamplighter who was in the chair, 'I mean to say that neither of 'em ever had any more to do with the stars than Tom Grig had.'

'And what had HE to do with 'em?' asked the lamplighter who officiated as vice.

'Nothing at all,' replied the other; 'just exactly nothing at all.'

'Do you mean to say you don't believe in Murphy, then?' demanded the lamplighter who had opened the discussion.

'I mean to say I believe in Tom Grig,' replied the chairman. 'Whether I believe in Murphy, or not, is a matter between me and my conscience; and whether Murphy believes in himself, or not, is a matter between him and his conscience. Gentlemen, I drink your healths.'

The lamplighter who did the company this honour, was seated in the chimney-corner of a certain tavern, which has been, time out of mind, the Lamplighters' House of Call. He sat in the midst of a circle of lamplighters, and was the cacique, or chief of the tribe.

If any of our readers have had the good fortune to behold a lamplighter's funeral, they will not be surprised to learn that lamplighters are a strange and primitive people; that they rigidly adhere to old ceremonies and customs which have been handed down among them from father to son since the first public lamp was lighted out of doors; that they intermarry, and betroth their children in infancy; that they enter into no plots or conspiracies (for who ever heard of a traitorous lamplighter?); that they commit no crimes against the laws of their country (there being no instance of a murderous or burglarious lamplighter); that they are, in short, notwithstanding their apparently volatile and restless character, a highly moral and reflective people: having among themselves as many traditional observances as the Jews, and being, as a body, if not as old as the hills, at least as old as the streets. It is an article of their creed that the first faint glimmering of true civilisation shone in the first street-light maintained at the public expense. They trace their existence and high position in the public esteem, in a direct line to the heathen mythology; and hold that the history of Prometheus himself is but a pleasant fable, whereof the true hero is a lamplighter.

'Gentlemen,' said the lamplighter in the chair, 'I drink your healths.'

'And perhaps, Sir,' said the vice, holding up his glass, and rising a little way off his seat and sitting down again, in token that he recognised and returned the compliment, 'perhaps you will add to that condescension by telling us who Tom Grig was, and how he came to be connected in your mind with Francis Moore, Physician.'

'Hear, hear, hear!' cried the lamplighters generally.

'Tom Grig, gentlemen,' said the chairman, 'was one of us; and it happened to him, as it don't often happen to a public character in our line, that he had his what-you-may-call-it cast.'

'His head?' said the vice.

'No,' replied the chairman, 'not his head.'

'His face, perhaps?' said the vice. 'No, not his face.' 'His legs?' 'No, not his legs.' Nor yet his arms, nor his hands, nor his feet, nor his chest, all of which were severally suggested.

'His nativity, perhaps?'

'That's it,' said the chairman, awakening from his thoughtful attitude at the suggestion. 'His nativity. That's what Tom had cast, gentlemen.'

'In plaster?' asked the vice.

'I don't rightly know how it's done,' returned the chairman. 'But I suppose it was.'

And there he stopped as if that were all he had to say; whereupon there arose a murmur among the company, which at length resolved itself into a request, conveyed through the vice, that he would go on. This being exactly what the chairman wanted, he mused for a little time, performed that agreeable ceremony which is popularly termed wetting one's whistle, and went on thus:

'Tom Grig, gentlemen, was, as I have said, one of us; and I may go further, and say he was an ornament to us, and such a one as only the good old times of oil and cotton could have produced. Tom's family, gentlemen, were all lamplighters.'

'Not the ladies, I hope?' asked the vice.

'They had talent enough for it, Sir,' rejoined the chairman, 'and would have been, but for the prejudices of society. Let women have their rights, Sir, and the females of Tom's family would have been every one of 'em in office. But that emancipation hasn't come yet, and hadn't then, and consequently they confined themselves to the bosoms of their families, cooked the dinners, mended the clothes, minded the children, comforted their husbands, and attended to the house-keeping generally. It's a hard thing upon the women, gentlemen, that they are limited to such a sphere of action as this; very hard.'

'I happen to know all about Tom, gentlemen, from the circumstance of his uncle by his mother's side, having been my particular friend. His (that's Tom's uncle's) fate was a melancholy one. Gas was the death of him. When it was first talked of, he laughed. He wasn't angry; he laughed at the credulity of human nature. "They might as well talk," he says, "of laying on an everlasting succession of glow-worms;" and then he laughed again, partly at his joke, and partly at poor humanity.'

'In course of time, however, the thing got ground, the experiment was made, and they lighted up Pall Mall<sup>1</sup>. Tom's uncle went to see it. I've heard that he fell off his ladder fourteen times that night, from weakness, and that he would certainly have gone on falling till he killed himself, if his last tumble hadn't been into a wheelbarrow which was going his way, and humanely took him home. "I foresee in this," says Tom's uncle faintly, and taking to his bed as he spoke – "I foresee in this," he says, "the breaking up of our profession. There's no more going the rounds to trim by daylight, no more dribbling down of the oil on the hats and bonnets of ladies and gentlemen when one feels in spirits. Any low fellow can light a gas-lamp. And it's all up." In this state of mind, he petitioned the government for – I want a word again, gentlemen – what do you call that which they give to people when it's found out, at last, that they've never been of any use, and have been paid too much for doing nothing?'

'Compensation?' suggested the vice.

'That's it,' said the chairman. 'Compensation. They didn't give it him, though, and then he got very fond of his country all at once, and went about saying that gas was a death-blow to his native land, and that it was a plot of the radicals to ruin the country and destroy the oil and cotton trade for ever, and that the whales would go and kill themselves privately, out of sheer spite and vexation at not being caught. At last he got right-down cracked; called his tobacco-pipe a gas-pipe; thought his tears were lamp-oil; and went on with all manner of nonsense of that sort, till one night he hung himself on a lamp-iron in Saint Martin's Lane, and there was an end of HIM.'

'Tom loved him, gentlemen, but he survived it. He shed a tear over his grave, got very drunk, spoke a funeral oration that night in the watch-house, and was fined five shillings for it, in the morning. Some men are none the worse for this sort of thing. Tom was one of 'em. He went that very afternoon on a new beat: as clear in his head, and as free from fever as Father Mathew himself.'

'Tom's new beat, gentlemen, was – I can't exactly say where, for that he'd never tell; but I know it was in a quiet part of town, where there were some queer old houses. I have always had it in my head that it must have been somewhere near Canonbury Tower in Islington, but that's a matter of opinion. Wherever it was, he went upon it, with a bran-new ladder, a white hat, a brown holland jacket and trousers, a blue neck-kerchief, and a sprig of full-blown double wall-flower in his button-hole. Tom was always genteel in his appearance, and I have heard from the best judges, that if he had left his ladder at home that afternoon, you might have took him for a lord.'

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<sup>1</sup> **Pall Mall** – a broad road in central London between Trafalgar Square and St. James Park

‘He was always merry, was Tom, and such a singer, that if there was any encouragement for native talent, he’d have been at the opera. He was on his ladder, lighting his first lamp, and singing to himself in a manner more easily to be conceived than described, when he hears the clock strike five, and suddenly sees an old gentleman with a telescope in his hand, throw up a window and look at him very hard.

‘Tom didn’t know what could be passing in this old gentleman’s mind. He thought it likely enough that he might be saying within himself, “Here’s a new lamplighter – a good-looking young fellow – shall I stand something to drink?” Thinking this possible, he keeps quite still, pretending to be very particular about the wick, and looks at the old gentleman sideways, seeming to take no notice of him.

‘Gentlemen, he was one of the strangest and most mysterious-looking files that ever Tom clapped his eyes on. He was dressed all slovenly and untidy, in a great gown of a kind of bed-furniture pattern, with a cap of the same on his head; and a long old flapped waistcoat; with no braces, no strings, very few buttons – in short, with hardly any of those artificial contrivances that hold society together. Tom knew by these signs, and by his not being shaved, and by his not being over-clean, and by a sort of wisdom not quite awake, in his face, that he was a scientific old gentleman. He often told me that if he could have conceived the possibility of the whole Royal Society being boiled down into one man, he should have said the old gentleman’s body was that Body.

‘The old gentleman claps the telescope to his eye, looks all round, sees nobody else in sight, stares at Tom again, and cries out very loud:

“‘Hal-loa!”

“‘Halloa, Sir,” says Tom from the ladder; “and halloa again, if you come to that.”

“‘Here’s an extraordinary fulfilment,” says the old gentleman, “of a prediction of the planets.”

“‘Is there?” says Tom. “I’m very glad to hear it.”

“‘Young man,” says the old gentleman, “you don’t know me.”

“‘Sir,” says Tom, “I have not that honour; but I shall be happy to drink your health, notwithstanding.”

“‘I read,” cries the old gentleman, without taking any notice of this politeness on Tom’s part – “I read what’s going to happen, in the stars.”

‘Tom thanked him for the information, and begged to know if anything particular was going to happen in the stars, in the course of a week or so; but the old gentleman, correcting him, explained that he read in the stars what was going to happen on dry land, and that he was acquainted with all the celestial bodies.

“‘I hope they’re all well, Sir,” says Tom, – “everybody.”

“‘Hush!” cries the old gentleman. “I have consulted the book of Fate with rare and wonderful success. I am versed in the great sciences of astrology and astronomy. In my house here, I have every description of apparatus for observing the course and motion of the planets. Six months ago, I derived from this source, the knowledge that precisely as the clock struck five this afternoon a stranger would present himself – the destined husband of my young and lovely niece – in reality of illustrious and high descent, but whose birth would be enveloped in uncertainty and mystery. Don’t tell me yours isn’t,” says the old gentleman, who was in such a hurry to speak that he couldn’t get the words out fast enough, “for I know better.”

‘Gentlemen, Tom was so astonished when he heard him say this, that he could hardly keep his footing on the ladder, and found it necessary to hold on by the lamp-post. There WAS a mystery about his birth. His mother had always admitted it. Tom had never known who was his father, and some people had gone so far as to say that even SHE was in doubt.

‘While he was in this state of amazement, the old gentleman leaves the window, bursts out of the house-door, shakes the ladder, and Tom, like a ripe pumpkin, comes sliding down into his arms.

“‘Let me embrace you,” he says, folding his arms about him, and nearly lighting up his old bed-furniture gown at Tom’s link. “You’re a man of noble aspect. Everything combines to prove the accuracy of my observations. You have had mysterious promptings within you,” he says; “I

know you have had whisperings of greatness, eh?" he says.

"I think I have," says Tom – Tom was one of those who can persuade themselves to anything they like – "I've often thought I wasn't the small beer I was taken for."

"You were right," cries the old gentleman, hugging him again. "Come in. My niece awaits us."

"Is the young lady tolerable good-looking, Sir?" says Tom, hanging fire rather, as he thought of her playing the piano, and knowing French, and being up to all manner of accomplishments.

"She's beautiful!" cries the old gentleman, who was in such a terrible bustle that he was all in a perspiration. "She has a graceful carriage, an exquisite shape, a sweet voice, a countenance beaming with animation and expression; and the eye," he says, rubbing his hands, "of a startled fawn."

Tom supposed this might mean, what was called among his circle of acquaintance, "a game eye;" and, with a view to this defect, inquired whether the young lady had any cash.

"She has five thousand pounds," cries the old gentleman. "But what of that? what of that? A word in your ear. I'm in search of the philosopher's stone. I have very nearly found it – not quite. It turns everything to gold; that's its property."

Tom naturally thought it must have a deal of property; and said that when the old gentleman did get it, he hoped he'd be careful to keep it in the family.

"Certainly," he says, "of course. Five thousand pounds! What's five thousand pounds to us? What's five million?" he says. "What's five thousand million? Money will be nothing to us. We shall never be able to spend it fast enough."

"We'll try what we can do, Sir," says Tom.

"We will," says the old gentleman. "Your name?"

"Grig," says Tom.

The old gentleman embraced him again, very tight; and without speaking another word, dragged him into the house in such an excited manner, that it was as much as Tom could do to take his link and ladder with him, and put them down in the passage.

Gentlemen, if Tom hadn't been always remarkable for his love of truth, I think you would still have believed him when he said that all this was like a dream. There is no better way for a man to find out whether he is really asleep or awake, than calling for something to eat. If he's in a dream, gentlemen, he'll find something wanting in flavour, depend upon it.

Tom explained his doubts to the old gentleman, and said that if there was any cold meat in the house, it would ease his mind very much to test himself at once. The old gentleman ordered up a venison pie, a small ham, and a bottle of very old Madeira<sup>1</sup>. At the first mouthful of pie and the first glass of wine, Tom smacks his lips and cries out, 'I'm awake – wide awake;' and to prove that he was so, gentlemen, he made an end of 'em both.

When Tom had finished his meal (which he never spoke of afterwards without tears in his eyes), the old gentleman hugs him again, and says, "Noble stranger! let us visit my young and lovely niece." Tom, who was a little elevated with the wine, replies, "The noble stranger is agreeable!" At which words the old gentleman took him by the hand, and led him to the parlour; crying as he opened the door, "Here is Mr. Grig, the favourite of the planets!"

I will not attempt a description of female beauty, gentlemen, for every one of us has a model of his own that suits his own taste best. In this parlour that I'm speaking of, there were two young ladies; and if every gentleman present, will imagine two models of his own in their places, and will be kind enough to polish 'em up to the very highest pitch of perfection, he will then have a faint conception of their uncommon radiance.

Besides these two young ladies, there was their waiting-woman, that under any other circumstances Tom would have looked upon as a Venus<sup>2</sup>; and besides her, there was a tall, thin, dismal-faced young gentleman, half man and half boy, dressed in a childish suit of clothes very much too short in the legs and arms; and looking, according to Tom's comparison, like one of the

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<sup>1</sup> **Madeira** – a fortified wine, originally from the Portuguese island of Madeira

<sup>2</sup> **Venus** – in Roman mythology, the goddess of love

wax juveniles from a tailor's door, grown up and run to seed. Now, this youngster stamped his foot upon the ground and looked very fierce at Tom, and Tom looked fierce at him – for to tell the truth, gentlemen, Tom more than half suspected that when they entered the room he was kissing one of the young ladies; and for anything Tom knew, you observe, it might be HIS young lady – which was not pleasant.

“Sir,” says Tom, “before we proceed any further, will you have the goodness to inform me who this young Salamander”<sup>1</sup> – Tom called him that for aggravation, you perceive, gentlemen – “who this young Salamander may be?”

“That, Mr. Grig,” says the old gentleman, “is my little boy. He was christened Galileo Isaac Newton<sup>2</sup> Flamstead. Don't mind him. He's a mere child.”

“And a very fine child too,” says Tom – still aggravating, you'll observe – “of his age, and as good as fine, I have no doubt. How do you do, my man?” with which kind and patronising expressions, Tom reached up to pat him on the head, and quoted two lines about little boys, from Doctor Watts's Hymns, which he had learnt at a Sunday School.

‘It was very easy to see, gentlemen, by this youngster's frowning and by the waiting-maid's tossing her head and turning up her nose, and by the young ladies turning their backs and talking together at the other end of the room, that nobody but the old gentleman took very kindly to the noble stranger. Indeed, Tom plainly heard the waiting-woman say of her master, that so far from being able to read the stars as he pretended, she didn't believe he knew his letters in 'em, or at best that he had got further than words in one syllable; but Tom, not minding this (for he was in spirits after the Madeira), looks with an agreeable air towards the young ladies, and, kissing his hand to both, says to the old gentleman, “Which is which?”

“This,” says the old gentleman, leading out the handsomest, if one of 'em could possibly be said to be handsomer than the other – “this is my niece, Miss Fanny Barker.”

“If you'll permit me, Miss,” says Tom, “being a noble stranger and a favourite of the planets, I will conduct myself as such.” With these words, he kisses the young lady in a very affable way, turns to the old gentleman, slaps him on the back, and says, “When's it to come off, my buck?”

‘The young lady coloured so deep, and her lip trembled so much, gentlemen, that Tom really thought she was going to cry. But she kept her feelings down, and turning to the old gentleman, says, “Dear uncle, though you have the absolute disposal of my hand and fortune, and though you mean well in disposing of 'em thus, I ask you whether you don't think this is a mistake? Don't you think, dear uncle,” she says, “that the stars must be in error? Is it not possible that the comet may have put 'em out?”

“The stars,” says the old gentleman, “couldn't make a mistake if they tried, Emma,” he says to the other young lady.

“Yes, papa,” says she.

“The same day that makes your cousin Mrs. Grig will unite you to the gifted Mooney. No remonstrance – no tears. Now, Mr. Grig, let me conduct you to that hallowed ground, that philosophical retreat, where my friend and partner, the gifted Mooney of whom I have just now spoken, is even now pursuing those discoveries which shall enrich us with the precious metal, and make us masters of the world. Come, Mr. Grig,” he says.

“With all my heart, Sir,” replies Tom; “and luck to the gifted Mooney, say I – not so much on his account as for our worthy selves!” With this sentiment, Tom kissed his hand to the ladies again, and followed him out; having the gratification to perceive, as he looked back, that they were all hanging on by the arms and legs of Galileo Isaac Newton Flamstead, to prevent him from following the noble stranger, and tearing him to pieces.

‘Gentlemen, Tom's father-in-law that was to be, took him by the hand, and having lighted a little lamp, led him across a paved court-yard at the back of the house, into a very large, dark,

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<sup>1</sup> **Salamander** – an amphibian, a small lizard-like animal; it was once supposed that salamanders could live in fire.

<sup>2</sup> **Galileo Isaac Newton** – the character of the story was christened after *Galileo* (1564–1642), a great Italian philosopher, astronomer and mathematician, and *Isaac Newton* (1642–1727), an English physicist and mathematician, one of the greatest figures of the scientific revolution of the 17th century.

gloomy room: filled with all manner of bottles, globes, books, telescopes, crocodiles, alligators, and other scientific instruments of every kind. In the centre of this room was a stove or furnace, with what Tom called a pot, but which in my opinion was a crucible, in full boil. In one corner was a sort of ladder leading through the roof; and up this ladder the old gentleman pointed, as he said in a whisper:

““The observatory. Mr. Mooney is even now watching for the precise time at which we are to come into all the riches of the earth. It will be necessary for he and I, alone in that silent place, to cast your nativity before the hour arrives. Put the day and minute of your birth on this piece of paper, and leave the rest to me.”

““You don’t mean to say,” says Tom, doing as he was told and giving him back the paper, “that I’m to wait here long, do you? It’s a precious dismal place.”

““Hush!” says the old gentleman. “It’s hallowed ground. Farewell!”

““Stop a minute,” says Tom. “What a hurry you’re in! What’s in that large bottle yonder?”

““It’s a child with three heads,” says the old gentleman; “and everything else in proportion.”

““Why don’t you throw him away?” says Tom. “What do you keep such unpleasant things here for?”

““Throw him away!” cries the old gentleman. “We use him constantly in astrology. He’s a charm.”

““I shouldn’t have thought it,” says Tom, “from his appearance. MUST you go, I say?”

‘The old gentleman makes him no answer, but climbs up the ladder in a greater bustle than ever. Tom looked after his legs till there was nothing of him left, and then sat down to wait; feeling (so he used to say) as comfortable as if he was going to be made a freemason, and they were heating the pokers.

‘Tom waited so long, gentlemen, that he began to think it must be getting on for midnight at least, and felt more dismal and lonely than ever he had done in all his life. He tried every means of whiling away the time, but it never had seemed to move so slow. First, he took a nearer view of the child with three heads, and thought what a comfort it must have been to his parents. Then he looked up a long telescope which was pointed out of the window, but saw nothing particular, in consequence of the stopper being on at the other end. Then he came to a skeleton in a glass case, labelled, “Skeleton of a Gentleman – prepared by Mr. Mooney,” – which made him hope that Mr. Mooney might not be in the habit of preparing gentlemen that way without their own consent. A hundred times, at least, he looked into the pot where they were boiling the philosopher’s stone down to the proper consistency, and wondered whether it was nearly done. “When it is,” thinks Tom, “I’ll send out for six-penn’orth of sprats, and turn ’em into gold fish for a first experiment.” Besides which, he made up his mind, gentlemen, to have a country-house and a park; and to plant a bit of it with a double row of gas-lamps a mile long, and go out every night with a French-polished mahogany ladder, and two servants in livery behind him, to light ’em for his own pleasure.

‘At length and at last, the old gentleman’s legs appeared upon the steps leading through the roof, and he came slowly down: bringing along with him, the gifted Mooney. This Mooney, gentlemen, was even more scientific in appearance than his friend; and had, as Tom often declared upon his word and honour, the dirtiest face we can possibly know of, in this imperfect state of existence.

‘Gentlemen, you are all aware that if a scientific man isn’t absent in his mind, he’s of no good at all. Mr. Mooney was so absent, that when the old gentleman said to him, “Shake hands with Mr. Grig,” he put out his leg. “Here’s a mind, Mr. Grig!” cries the old gentleman in a rapture. “Here’s philosophy! Here’s rumination! Don’t disturb him,” he says, “for this is amazing!”

‘Tom had no wish to disturb him, having nothing particular to say; but he was so uncommonly amazing, that the old gentleman got impatient, and determined to give him an electric shock to bring him to – “for you must know, Mr. Grig,” he says, “that we always keep a strongly charged battery, ready for that purpose.” These means being resorted to, gentlemen, the gifted Mooney revived with a loud roar, and he no sooner came to himself than both he and the old gentleman looked at Tom with compassion, and shed tears abundantly.

“My dear friend,” says the old gentleman to the Gifted, “prepare him.”

“I say,” cries Tom, falling back, “none of that, you know. No preparing by Mr. Mooney if you please.”

“Alas!” replies the old gentleman, “you don’t understand us. My friend, inform him of his fate. – I can’t.”

The Gifted mustered up his voice, after many efforts, and informed Tom that his nativity had been carefully cast, and he would expire at exactly thirty-five minutes, twenty-seven seconds, and five– sixths of a second past nine o’clock, a.m., on that day two months.

‘Gentlemen, I leave you to judge what were Tom’s feelings at this announcement, on the eve of matrimony and endless riches. “I think,” he says in a trembling voice, “there must be a mistake in the working of that sum. Will you do me the favour to cast it up again?” – “There is no mistake,” replies the old gentleman, “it is confirmed by Francis Moore, Physician. Here is the prediction for to-morrow two months.” And he showed him the page, where sure enough were these words – “The decease of a great person may be looked for, about this time.”

“Which,” says the old gentleman, “is clearly you, Mr. Grig.”

“Too clearly,” cries Tom, sinking into a chair, and giving one hand to the old gentleman, and one to the Gifted. “The orb of day has set on Thomas Grig forever!”

‘At this affecting remark, the Gifted shed tears again, and the other two mingled their tears with his, in a kind – if I may use the expression – of Mooney and Co.’s entire. But the old gentleman recovering first, observed that this was only a reason for hastening the marriage, in order that Tom’s distinguished race might be transmitted to posterity; and requesting the Gifted to console Mr. Grig during his temporary absence, he withdrew to settle the preliminaries with his niece immediately.

‘And now, gentlemen, a very extraordinary and remarkable occurrence took place; for as Tom sat in a melancholy way in one chair, and the Gifted sat in a melancholy way in another, a couple of doors were thrown violently open, the two young ladies rushed in, and one knelt down in a loving attitude at Tom’s feet, and the other at the Gifted’s. So far, perhaps, as Tom was concerned – as he used to say – you will say there was nothing strange in this: but you will be of a different opinion when you understand that Tom’s young lady was kneeling to the Gifted, and the Gifted’s young lady was kneeling to Tom.

“Holloa! stop a minute!” cries Tom; “here’s a mistake. I need condoling with by sympathising woman, under my afflicting circumstances; but we’re out in the figure. Change partners, Mooney.”

“Monster!” cries Tom’s young lady, clinging to the Gifted.

“Miss!” says Tom. “Is THAT your manners?”

“I abjure thee!” cries Tom’s young lady. “I renounce thee. I never will be thine. Thou,” she says to the Gifted, “art the object of my first and all-engrossing passion. Wrapt in thy sublime visions, thou hast not perceived my love; but, driven to despair, I now shake off the woman and avow it. Oh, cruel, cruel man!” With which reproach she laid her head upon the Gifted’s breast, and put her arms about him in the tenderest manner possible, gentlemen.

“And I,” says the other young lady, in a sort of ecstasy, that made Tom start – “I hereby abjure my chosen husband too. Hear me, Goblin!” – this was to the Gifted – “Hear me! I hold thee in the deepest detestation. The maddening interview of this one night has filled my soul with love – but not for thee. It is for thee, for thee, young man,” she cries to Tom. “As Monk Lewis finely observes, Thomas, Thomas, I am thine, Thomas, Thomas, thou art mine: thine for ever, mine for ever!” with which words, she became very tender likewise.

‘Tom and the Gifted, gentlemen, as you may believe, looked at each other in a very awkward manner, and with thoughts not at all complimentary to the two young ladies. As to the Gifted, I have heard Tom say often, that he was certain he was in a fit, and had it inwardly.

“Speak to me! Oh, speak to me!” cries Tom’s young lady to the Gifted.

“I don’t want to speak to anybody,” he says, finding his voice at last, and trying to push her away. “I think I had better go. I’m – I’m frightened,” he says, looking about as if he had lost

something.

“Not one look of love!” she cries. “Hear me while I declare—”

“I don’t know how to look a look of love,” he says, all in a maze. “Don’t declare anything. I don’t want to hear anybody.”

“That’s right!” cries the old gentleman (who it seems had been listening). “That’s right! Don’t hear her. Emma shall marry you to-morrow, my friend, whether she likes it or not, and SHE shall marry Mr. Grig.”

“Gentlemen, these words were no sooner out of his mouth than Galileo Isaac Newton Flamstead (who it seems had been listening too) darts in, and spinning round and round, like a young giant’s top, cries, “Let her. Let her. I’m fierce; I’m furious. I give her leave. I’ll never marry anybody after this – never. It isn’t safe. She is the falsest of the false,” he cries, tearing his hair and gnashing his teeth; “and I’ll live and die a bachelor!”

“The little boy,” observed the Gifted gravely, “albeit of tender years, has spoken wisdom. I have been led to the contemplation of womankind, and will not adventure on the troubled waters of matrimony.”

“What!” says the old gentleman, “not marry my daughter! Won’t you, Mooney? Not if I make her? Won’t you? Won’t you?”

“No,” says Mooney, “I won’t. And if anybody asks me anymore, I’ll run away, and never come back again.”

“Mr. Grig,” says the old gentleman, “the stars must be obeyed. You have not changed your mind because of a little girlish folly – eh, Mr. Grig?”

Tom, gentlemen, had had his eyes about him, and was pretty sure that all this was a device and trick of the waiting-maid, to put him off his inclination. He had seen her hiding and skipping about the two doors, and had observed that a very little whispering from her pacified the Salamander directly. “So,” thinks Tom, “this is a plot – but it won’t fit.”

“Eh, Mr. Grig?” says the old gentleman.

“Why, Sir,” says Tom, pointing to the crucible, “if the soup’s nearly ready—”

“Another hour beholds the consummation of our labours,” returned the old gentleman.

“Very good,” says Tom, with a mournful air. “It’s only for two months, but I may as well be the richest man in the world even for that time. I’m not particular, I’ll take her, Sir. I’ll take her.”

The old gentleman was in a rapture to find Tom still in the same mind, and drawing the young lady towards him by little and little, was joining their hands by main force, when all of a sudden, gentlemen, the crucible blows up, with a great crash; everybody screams; the room is filled with smoke; and Tom, not knowing what may happen next, throws himself into a Fancy attitude, and says, “Come on, if you’re a man!” without addressing himself to anybody in particular.

“The labours of fifteen years!” says the old gentleman, clasping his hands and looking down upon the Gifted, who was saving the pieces, “are destroyed in an instant!” – And I am told, gentlemen, by-the-bye, that this same philosopher’s stone would have been discovered a hundred times at least, to speak within bounds, if it wasn’t for the one unfortunate circumstance that the apparatus always blows up, when it’s on the very point of succeeding.

Tom turns pale when he hears the old gentleman expressing himself to this unpleasant effect, and stammers out that if it’s quite agreeable to all parties, he would like to know exactly what has happened, and what change has really taken place in the prospects of that company.

“We have failed for the present, Mr. Grig,” says the old gentleman, wiping his forehead. “And I regret it the more, because I have in fact invested my niece’s five thousand pounds in this glorious speculation. But don’t be cast down,” he says, anxiously – “in another fifteen years, Mr. Grig—”

“Oh!” cries Tom, letting the young lady’s hand fall. “Were the stars very positive about this union, Sir?”

“They were,” says the old gentleman.

“I’m sorry to hear it,” Tom makes answer, “for it’s no go, Sir.”

“No what!” cries the old gentleman.



“Go, Sir,” says Tom, fiercely. “I forbid the banns.” And with these words – which are the very words he used – he sat himself down in a chair, and, laying his head upon the table, thought with a secret grief of what was to come to pass on that day two months.

Tom always said, gentlemen, that that waiting-maid was the artfullest minx he had ever seen; and he left it in writing in this country when he went to colonize abroad, that he was certain in his own mind she and the Salamander had blown up the philosopher’s stone on purpose, and to cut him out of his property. I believe Tom was in the right, gentlemen; but whether or no, she comes forward at this point, and says, “May I speak, Sir?” and the old gentleman answering, “Yes, you may,” she goes on to say that “the stars are no doubt quite right in every respect, but Tom is not the man.” And she says, “Don’t you remember, Sir, that when the clock struck five this afternoon, you gave Master Galileo a rap on the head with your telescope, and told him to get out of the way?” “Yes, I do,” says the old gentleman. “Then,” says the waiting-maid, “I say he’s the man, and the prophecy is fulfilled.” The old gentleman staggers at this, as if somebody had hit him a blow on the chest, and cries, “He! why he’s a boy!” Upon that, gentlemen, the Salamander cries out that he’ll be twenty-one next Lady-day; and complains that his father has always been so busy with the sun round which the earth revolves, that he has never taken any notice of the son that revolves round him; and that he hasn’t had a new suit of clothes since he was fourteen; and that he wasn’t even taken out of nankeen frocks and trousers till he was quite unpleasant in ’em; and touches on a good many more family matters to the same purpose. To make short of a long story, gentlemen, they all talk together, and cry together, and remind the old gentleman that as to the noble family, his own grandfather would have been lord mayor if he hadn’t died at a dinner the year before; and they show him by all kinds of arguments that if the cousins are married, the prediction comes true every way. At last, the old gentleman being quite convinced, gives in; and joins their hands; and leaves his daughter to marry anybody she likes; and they are all well pleased; and the Gifted as well as any of them.

In the middle of this little family party, gentlemen, sits Tom all the while, as miserable as you like. But, when everything else is arranged, the old gentleman’s daughter says, that their strange conduct was a little device of the waiting-maid’s to disgust the lovers he had chosen for ’em, and will he forgive her? and if he will, perhaps he might even find her a husband – and when she says that, she looks uncommon hard at Tom. Then the waiting-maid says that, oh dear! she couldn’t abear Mr. Grig should think she wanted him to marry her; and that she had even gone so far as to refuse the last lamplighter, who was now a literary character (having set up as a bill-sticker); and that she hoped Mr. Grig would not suppose she was on her last legs by any means, for the baker was very strong in his attentions at that moment, and as to the butcher, he was frantic. And I don’t know how much more she might have said, gentlemen (for, as you know, this kind of young women are rare ones to talk), if the old gentleman hadn’t cut in suddenly, and asked Tom if he’d have her, with ten pounds to recompense him for his loss of time and disappointment, and as a kind of bribe to keep the story secret.

“It don’t much matter, Sir,” says Tom, “I ain’t long for this world. Eight weeks of marriage, especially with this young woman, might reconcile me to my fate. I think,” he says, “I could go off easy after that.” With which he embraces her with a very dismal face, and groans in a way that might move a heart of stone – even of philosopher’s stone.

“Egad,” says the old gentleman, “that reminds me – this bustle put it out of my head – there was a figure wrong. He’ll live to a green old age – eighty-seven at least!”

“How much, Sir?” cries Tom.

“Eighty-seven!” says the old gentleman.

Without another word, Tom flings himself on the old gentleman’s neck; throws up his hat; cuts a caper; defies the waiting-maid; and refers her to the butcher.

“You won’t marry her!” says the old gentleman, angrily.

“And live after it!” says Tom. “I’d sooner marry a mermaid with a small-tooth comb and looking-glass.”

“Then take the consequences,” says the other.

‘With those words – I beg your kind attention here, gentlemen, for it’s worth your notice – the old gentleman wetted the forefinger of his right hand in some of the liquor from the crucible that was spilt on the floor, and drew a small triangle on Tom’s forehead. The room swam before his eyes, and he found himself in the watch-house.’

‘Found himself WHERE?’ cried the vice, on behalf of the company generally.

‘In the watch-house,’ said the chairman. ‘It was late at night, and he found himself in the very watch-house from which he had been let out that morning.’

‘Did he go home?’ asked the vice.

‘The watch-house people rather objected to that,’ said the chairman; ‘so he stopped there that night, and went before the magistrate in the morning. “Why, you’re here again, are you?” says the magistrate, adding insult to injury; “we’ll trouble you for five shillings more, if you can conveniently spare the money.” Tom told him he had been enchanted, but it was of no use. He told the contractors the same, but they wouldn’t believe him. It was very hard upon him, gentlemen, as he often said, for was it likely he’d go and invent such a tale? They shook their heads and told him he’d say anything but his prayers – as indeed he would; there’s no doubt about that. It was the only imputation on his moral character that ever I heard of.’

## **The Dancing Academy (Charles Dickens)**

Of all the dancing academies that ever were established, there never was one more popular in its immediate vicinity than Signor Billsmethi’s, of the ‘King’s Theatre’. It was not in Spring-gardens, or Newman-street, or Berners-street, or Gower-street, or Charlotte-street, or Percy-street, or any other of the numerous streets which have been devoted time out of mind to professional people, dispensaries, and boarding-houses; it was not in the West-end at all – it rather approximated to the eastern portion of London, being situated in the populous and improving neighbourhood of Gray’s-inn-lane. It was not a dear dancing academy – four-and-sixpence a quarter is decidedly cheap upon the whole. It was VERY select, the number of pupils being strictly limited to seventy-five, and a quarter’s payment in advance being rigidly exacted. There was public tuition and private tuition – an assembly-room and a parlour. Signor Billsmethi’s family were always thrown in with the parlour, and included in parlour price; that is to say, a private pupil had Signor Billsmethi’s parlour to dance IN, and Signor Billsmethi’s family to dance WITH; and when he had been sufficiently broken in the parlour, he began to run in couples in the assembly-room.

Such was the dancing academy of Signor Billsmethi, when Mr. Augustus Cooper, of Fetter-lane, first saw an unstamped advertisement walking leisurely down Holborn-hill<sup>1</sup>, announcing to the world that Signor Billsmethi, of the King’s Theatre, intended opening for the season with a Grand Ball.

Now, Mr. Augustus Cooper was in the oil and colour line – just of age, with a little money, a little business, and a little mother, who, having managed her husband and HIS business in his lifetime, took to managing her son and HIS business after his decease; and so, somehow or other, he had been cooped up in the little back parlour behind the shop on week-days, and in a little deal box without a lid (called by courtesy a pew) at Bethel Chapel, on Sundays, and had seen no more of the world than if he had been an infant all his days; whereas Young White, at the gas-fitter’s over the way, three years younger than him, had been flaring away like winkin’ – going to the theatre – supping at harmonic meetings – eating oysters by the barrel – drinking stout by the gallon – even out all night, and coming home as cool in the morning as if nothing had happened. So Mr. Augustus Cooper made up his mind that he would not stand it any longer, and had that very morning expressed to his mother a firm determination to be ‘blowed,’ in the event of his not being instantly provided with a street-door key. And he was walking down Holborn-hill, thinking about all these things, and wondering how he could manage to get introduced into genteel society for the first time, when his eyes rested on Signor Billsmethi’s announcement, which it immediately struck him was just the very thing he wanted; for he should not only be able to select a genteel circle of

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<sup>1</sup> **Holborn-hill** – Holborn is an area in central London west to the city.

acquaintance at once, out of the five-and-seventy pupils at four-and-sixpence a quarter, but should qualify himself at the same time to go through a hornpipe in private society, with perfect ease to himself and great delight to his friends. So, he stopped the unstamped advertisement – an animated sandwich, composed of a boy between two boards – and having procured a very small card with the Signor's address indented thereon, walked straight at once to the Signor's house – and very fast he walked too, for fear the list should be filled up, and the five-and-seventy completed, before he got there. The Signor was at home, and, what was still more gratifying, he was an Englishman! Such a nice man – and so polite! The list was not full, but it was a most extraordinary circumstance that there was only just one vacancy, and even that one would have been filled up, that very morning, only Signor Billsmethi was dissatisfied with the reference, and, being very much afraid that the lady wasn't select, wouldn't take her.

'And very much delighted I am, Mr. Cooper,' said Signor Billsmethi, 'that I did NOT take her. I assure you, Mr. Cooper – I don't say it to flatter you, for I know you're above it – that I consider myself extremely fortunate in having a gentleman of your manners and appearance, sir.'

'I am very glad of it too, sir,' said Augustus Cooper.

'And I hope we shall be better acquainted, sir,' said Signor Billsmethi.

'And I'm sure I hope we shall too, sir,' responded Augustus Cooper. Just then, the door opened, and in came a young lady, with her hair curled in a crop all over her head, and her shoes tied in sandals all over her ankles.

'Don't run away, my dear,' said Signor Billsmethi; for the young lady didn't know Mr. Cooper was there when she ran in, and was going to run out again in her modesty, all in confusion-like. 'Don't run away, my dear,' said Signor Billsmethi, 'this is Mr. Cooper – Mr. Cooper, of Fetter-lane. Mr. Cooper, my daughter, sir – Miss Billsmethi, sir, who I hope will have the pleasure of dancing many a quadrille<sup>1</sup>, minuet<sup>2</sup>, gavotte<sup>3</sup>, country-dance, fandango<sup>4</sup>, double-hornpipe, and farinagholkajingo<sup>5</sup> with you, sir. She dances them all, sir; and so shall you, sir, before you're a quarter older, sir.'

And Signor Billsmethi slapped Mr. Augustus Cooper on the back, as if he had known him a dozen years, – so friendly; – and Mr. Cooper bowed to the young lady, and the young lady curtsied to him, and Signor Billsmethi said they were as handsome a pair as ever he'd wish to see; upon which the young lady exclaimed, 'Lor, pa!' and blushed as red as Mr. Cooper himself – you might have thought they were both standing under a red lamp at a chemist's shop; and before Mr. Cooper went away it was settled that he should join the family circle that very night – taking them just as they were – no ceremony nor nonsense of that kind – and learn his positions in order that he might lose no time, and be able to come out at the forthcoming ball.

Well; Mr. Augustus Cooper went away to one of the cheap shoemakers' shops in Holborn, where gentlemen's dress-pumps are seven-and-sixpence, and men's strong walking just nothing at all, and bought a pair of the regular seven-and-sixpenny, long-quartered, town-mades, in which he astonished himself quite as much as his mother, and sallied forth to Signor Billsmethi's. There were four other private pupils in the parlour: two ladies and two gentlemen. Such nice people! Not a bit of pride about them. One of the ladies in particular, who was in training for a Columbine, was remarkably affable; and she and Miss Billsmethi took such an interest in Mr. Augustus Cooper, and joked, and smiled, and looked so bewitching, that he got quite at home, and learnt his steps in no time. After the practising was over, Signor Billsmethi, and Miss Billsmethi, and Master Billsmethi, and a young lady, and the two ladies, and the two gentlemen, danced a quadrille – none of your slipping and sliding about, but regular warm work, flying into corners, and diving among chairs, and shooting out at the door, – something like dancing! Signor Billsmethi in particular, notwithstanding his having a little fiddle to play all the time, was out on the landing every figure, and Master Billsmethi, when everybody else was breathless, danced a hornpipe, with a cane in his

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1 **quadrille** – a dance for four couples in square formation, popular in the 18th–19th centuries

2 **minuet** – an aristocratic couple dance of the 17th–18th centuries

3 **gavotte** – a lively kissing dance that came into fashion in England and France in the 17th–18th centuries

4 **fandango** – a Spanish courtship dance of Moorish origin, popular in Europe in the 17th century

5 **farinagholkajingo** – a dance and the corresponding word invented by the author

hand, and a cheese-plate on his head, to the unqualified admiration of the whole company. Then, Signor Billsmethi insisted, as they were so happy, that they should all stay to supper, and proposed sending Master Billsmethi for the beer and spirits, whereupon the two gentlemen swore, 'strike 'em vulgar if they'd stand that;' and were just going to quarrel who should pay for it, when Mr. Augustus Cooper said he would, if they'd have the kindness to allow him – and they HAD the kindness to allow him; and Master Billsmethi brought the beer in a can, and the rum in a quart pot. They had a regular night of it; and Miss Billsmethi squeezed Mr. Augustus Cooper's hand under the table; and Mr. Augustus Cooper returned the squeeze, and returned home too, at something to six o'clock in the morning, when he was put to bed by main force by the apprentice, after repeatedly expressing an uncontrollable desire to pitch his revered parent out of the second-floor window, and to throttle the apprentice with his own neck-handkerchief.

Weeks had worn on, and the seven-and-sixpenny town-mades had nearly worn out, when the night arrived for the grand dress-ball at which the whole of the five-and-seventy pupils were to meet together, for the first time that season, and to take out some portion of their respective four-and-sixpences in lamp-oil and fiddlers. Mr. Augustus Cooper had ordered a new coat for the occasion – a two-pound-tenner from Turnstile. It was his first appearance in public; and, after a grand Sicilian shawl-dance by fourteen young ladies in character, he was to open the quadrille department with Miss Billsmethi herself, with whom he had become quite intimate since his first introduction. It WAS a night! Everything was admirably arranged. The sandwich-boy took the hats and bonnets at the street-door; there was a turn-up bedstead in the back parlour, on which Miss Billsmethi made tea and coffee for such of the gentlemen as chose to pay for it, and such of the ladies as the gentlemen treated; red port-wine negus<sup>1</sup> and lemonade were handed round at eighteen-pence a head; and in pursuance of a previous engagement with the public-house at the corner of the street, an extra potboy was laid on for the occasion. In short, nothing could exceed the arrangements, except the company. Such ladies! Such pink silk stockings! Such artificial flowers! Such a number of cabs! No sooner had one cab set down a couple of ladies, than another cab drove up and set down another couple of ladies, and they all knew: not only one another, but the majority of the gentlemen into the bargain, which made it all as pleasant and lively as could be. Signor Billsmethi, in black tights, with a large blue bow in his buttonhole, introduced the ladies to such of the gentlemen as were strangers: and the ladies talked away – and laughed they did – it was delightful to see them.

As to the shawl-dance, it was the most exciting thing that ever was beheld; there was such a whisking, and rustling, and fanning, and getting ladies into a tangle with artificial flowers, and then disentangling them again! And as to Mr. Augustus Cooper's share in the quadrille, he got through it admirably. He was missing from his partner, now and then, certainly, and discovered on such occasions to be either dancing with laudable perseverance in another set, or sliding about in perspective, without any definite object; but, generally speaking, they managed to shove him through the figure, until he turned up in the right place. Be this as it may, when he had finished, a great many ladies and gentlemen came up and complimented him very much, and said they had never seen a beginner do anything like it before; and Mr. Augustus Cooper was perfectly satisfied with himself, and everybody else into the bargain; and 'stood' considerable quantities of spirits-and-water, negus, and compounds, for the use and behoof of two or three dozen very particular friends, selected from the select circle of five – and-seventy pupils.

Now, whether it was the strength of the compounds, or the beauty of the ladies, or what not, it did so happen that Mr. Augustus Cooper encouraged, rather than repelled, the very flattering attentions of a young lady in brown gauze over white calico who had appeared particularly struck with him from the first; and when the encouragements had been prolonged for some time, Miss Billsmethi betrayed her spite and jealousy thereat by calling the young lady in brown gauze a 'creeter,' which induced the young lady in brown gauze to retort, in certain sentences containing a taunt founded on the payment of four-and-sixpence a quarter, which reference Mr. Augustus Cooper, being then and there in a state of considerable bewilderment, expressed his entire

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<sup>1</sup> **negus** – a drink of hot sweetened wine, lemon juice, water, etc.

concurrence in. Miss Billsmethi, thus renounced, forthwith began screaming in the loudest key of her voice, at the rate of fourteen screams a minute; and being unsuccessful, in an onslaught on the eyes and face, first of the lady in gauze and then of Mr. Augustus Cooper, called distractedly on the other three-and-seventy pupils to furnish her with oxalic acid for her own private drinking; and, the call not being honoured, made another rush at Mr. Cooper, and then had her stay-lace cut, and was carried off to bed. Mr. Augustus Cooper, not being remarkable for quickness of apprehension, was at a loss to understand what all this meant, until Signor Billsmethi explained it in a most satisfactory manner, by stating to the pupils, that Mr. Augustus Cooper had made and confirmed divers promises of marriage to his daughter on divers occasions, and had now basely deserted her; on which, the indignation of the pupils became universal; and as several chivalrous gentlemen inquired rather pressingly of Mr. Augustus Cooper, whether he required anything for his own use, or, in other words, whether he 'wanted anything for himself,' he deemed it prudent to make a precipitate retreat. And the upshot of the matter was, that a lawyer's letter came next day, and an action was commenced next week; and that Mr. Augustus Cooper, after walking twice to the Serpentine<sup>1</sup> for the purpose of drowning himself, and coming twice back without doing it, made a confidante of his mother, who compromised the matter with twenty pounds from the till: which made twenty pounds four shillings and sixpence paid to Signor Billsmethi, exclusive of treats and pumps. And Mr. Augustus Cooper went back and lived with his mother, and there he lives to this day; and as he has lost his ambition for society, and never goes into the world, he will never see this account of himself, and will never be any the wiser.

## Bernice Bobs Her Hair (Francis Scott Fitzgerald)

### I

After dark on Saturday night one could stand on the first tee of the golf-coupe and see the country-club windows as a yellow expanse over a very black and wavy ocean. The waves of this ocean, so to speak, were the heads of many curious eddies, a few of the more ingenious chauffeurs, the golf professional's deaf sister – and there were usually several stray, diffident waves who might have rolled inside had they so desired. This was the gallery.

The balcony was inside. It consisted of the circle of wicker chairs that lined the wall of the combination clubroom and ballroom. At these Saturday-night dances it was largely feminine; a great babel<sup>2</sup> of middle-aged ladies with sharp eyes and icy hearts behind lorgnettes<sup>3</sup> and large bosoms. The main function of the balcony was critical, it occasionally showed grudging admiration, but never approval, for it is well known among ladies over thirty-five that when the younger set dance in the summer-time it is with the very worst intentions in the world, and if they are not bombarded with stony eyes stray couples will dance weird barbaric interludes in the corners, and the more popular, more dangerous, girls will sometimes be kissed in the parked limousines of unsuspecting dowagers.

But, after all, this critical circle is not close enough to the stage to see the actors' faces and catch the subtler byplay. It can only frown and lean, ask questions and make satisfactory deductions from its set of postulates, such as the one which states that every young man with a large income leads the life of a hunted partridge. It never really appreciates the drama of the shifting, semi-cruel world of adolescence. No; boxes, orchestra-circle, principals, and chorus be represented by the medley of faces and voices that sway to the plaintive African rhythm of Dyer's dance orchestra.

From sixteen-year-old Otis Ormonde, who has two more years at Hill School, to G. Reece Stoddard, over whose bureau at home hangs a Harvard<sup>4</sup> law diploma; from little Madeleine Hogue, whose hair still feels strange and uncomfortable on top of her head, to Bessie MacRae, who has

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1 **the Serpentine** – a part of a large curved lake in Hyde Park used for boating in summer and skating in winter

2 **babel** – a noisy and confused company

3 **lorgnette** – a pair of eye-glasses on a long handle

4 **Harvard** – the USA oldest higher educational institution, founded in 1636

been the life of the party a little too long – more than ten years – the medley is not only the centre of the stage but contains the only people capable of getting an unobstructed view of it.

With a flourish and a bang the music stops. The couples exchange artificial, effortless smiles, facetiously repeat ‘*la -de-da -da dum-dum* ,’ and then the clatter of young feminine voices soars over the burst of clapping.

A few disappointed stags caught in mid-floor as they had been about to cut in subsided listlessly back to the walls, because this was not like the riotous Christmas dances – these slimmer hops were considered just pleasantly warm and exciting, where even the younger marrieds rose and performed ancient waltzes and terrifying fox trots to the tolerant amusement of their younger brothers and sisters.

Warren McIntyre, who casually attended Yale, being one of the unfortunate stags, felt in his dinner-coat pocket for a cigarette and strolled out onto the wide, semi-dark veranda, where couples were scattered at tables, filling the lantern-hung night with vague words and hazy laughter. He nodded here and there at the less absorbed and as he passed each couple some half-forgotten fragment of a story played in his mind, for it was not a large city and everyone was Who’s Who to everyone else’s past. There, for example, were Jim Strain and Ethel Demorest, who had been privately engaged for three years. Everyone knew that as soon as Jim managed to hold a job for more than two months she would marry him. Yet how bored they both looked, and how wearily Ethel regarded Jim sometimes, as if she wondered why she had trained the vines of her affection on such a wind-shaken poplar.

Warren was nineteen and rather pitying with those of his friends who hadn’t gone East to college. But, like most boys, he bragged tremendously about the girls of his city when he was away from it. There was Genevieve Ormonde, who regularly made the rounds of dances, house-parties, and football games at Princeton<sup>1</sup>, Yale<sup>2</sup>, Williams<sup>3</sup>, and Cornell<sup>4</sup>; there was black-eyed Roberta Dillon, who was quite as famous to her own generation as Hiram Johnson or Ty Cobb; and, of course, there was Marjorie Harvey, who besides having a fairylike face and a dazzling, bewildering tongue was already justly celebrated for having turned five cart-wheels in succession during the last pump-and-slipper dance at New Haven<sup>5</sup>.

Warren, who had grown up across the street from Marjorie, had long been ‘crazy about her’. Sometimes she seemed to reciprocate his feeling with a faint gratitude, but she had tried him by her infallible test and informed him gravely that she did not love him. Her test was that when she was away from him she forgot him and had affairs with other boys. Warren found this discouraging, especially as Marjorie had been making little trips all summer, and for the first two or three days after each arrival home he saw great heaps of mail on the Harveys’ hall table addressed to her in various masculine handwritings. To make matters worse, all during the month of August she had been visited by her cousin Bernice from Eau Claire, and it seemed impossible to see her alone. It was always necessary to hunt round and find someone to take care of Bernice. As August waned this was becoming more and more difficult.

Much as Warren worshipped Marjorie he had to admit that Cousin Bernice was sorta dopeless. She was pretty, with dark hair and high color, but she was no fun on a party. Every Saturday night he danced a long arduous duty dance with her to please Marjorie, but he had never been anything but bored in her company.

‘Warren’ – a soft voice at his elbow broke in upon his thoughts, and he turned to see Marjorie, flushed and radiant as usual. She laid a hand on his shoulder and a glow settled almost imperceptibly over him.

‘Warren,’ she whispered ‘do something for me – dance with Bernice. She’s been stuck with little Otis Ormonde for almost an hour.’

Warren’s glow faded.

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1 **Princeton** – the fourth oldest university in the USA, founded in New Jersey in 1746

2 **Yale** – a private university in New Heaven, the third oldest in the US, founded in 1701

3 **Williams** – Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee, US

4 **Cornell** – a university in Ithaca, a city in southcentral New York state, founded in 1862

5 **New Haven** – a city in south-central Connecticut, founded in 1638

‘Why – sure,’ he answered half-heartedly.

‘You don’t mind, do you? I’ll see that you don’t get stuck.’

‘Sall right.’

Marjorie smiled – that smile that was thanks enough.

‘You’re an angel, and I’m obliged loads.’

With a sigh the angel glanced round the veranda, but Bernice and Otis were not in sight. He wandered back inside, and there in front of the women’s dressing-room he found Otis in the centre of a group of young men who were convulsed with laughter. Otis was brandishing a piece of timber he had picked up, and discoursing volubly.

‘She’s gone in to fix her hair,’ he announced wildly. ‘I’m waiting to dance another hour with her.’

Their laughter was renewed.

‘Why don’t some of you cut in?’ cried Otis resentfully. ‘She likes more variety.’

‘Why, Otis,’ suggested a friend ‘you’ve just barely got used to her.’

‘Why the two-by-four, Otis?’ inquired Warren, smiling.

‘The two-by-four? Oh, this? This is a club. When she comes out I’ll hit her on the head and knock her in again.’

Warren collapsed on a settee and howled with glee.

‘Never mind, Otis,’ he articulated finally. ‘I’m relieving you this time.’

Otis simulated a sudden fainting attack and handed the stick to Warren.

‘If you need it, old man,’ he said hoarsely.

No matter how beautiful or brilliant a girl may be, the reputation of not being frequently cut in on makes her position at a dance unfortunate. Perhaps boys prefer her company to that of the butterflies with whom they dance a dozen times an but, youth in this jazz-nourished generation is temperamentally restless, and the idea of fox-trotting more than one full fox trot with the same girl is distasteful, not to say odious. When it comes to several dances and the intermissions between she can be quite sure that a young man, once relieved, will never tread on her wayward toes again.

Warren danced the next full dance with Bernice, and finally, thankful for the intermission, he led her to a table on the veranda. There was a moment’s silence while she did unimpressive things with her fan.

‘It’s hotter here than in Eau Claire,’ she said.

Warren stifled a sigh and nodded. It might be for all he knew or cared. He wondered idly whether she was a poor conversationalist because she got no attention or got no attention because she was a poor conversationalist.

‘You going to be here much longer?’ he asked and then turned rather red. She might suspect his reasons for asking.

‘Another week,’ she answered, and stared at him as if to lunge at his next remark when it left his lips.

Warren fidgeted. Then with a sudden charitable impulse he decided to try part of his line on her. He turned and looked at her eyes.

‘You’ve got an awfully kissable mouth,’ he began quietly.

This was a remark that he sometimes made to girls at college proms when they were talking in just such half dark as this. Bernice distinctly jumped. She turned an ungraceful red and became clumsy with her fan. No one had ever made such a remark to her before.

‘Fresh!’ – the word had slipped out before she realized it, and she bit her lip. Too late she decided to be amused, and offered him a flustered smile

Warren was annoyed. Though not accustomed to have that remark taken seriously, still it usually provoked a laugh or a paragraph of sentimental banter. And he hated to be called fresh, except in a joking way. His charitable impulse died and he switched the topic.

‘Jim Strain and Ethel Demorest sitting out as usual,’ he commented.

This was more in Bernice’s line, but a faint regret mingled with her relief as the subject changed. Men did not talk to her about kissable mouths, but she knew that they talked in some such

way to other girls.

‘Oh, yes,’ she said, and laughed. ‘I hear they’ve been mooning around for years without a red penny. Isn’t it silly?’

Warren’s disgust increased. Jim Strain was a close friend of his brother’s, and anyway he considered it bad form to sneer at people for not having money. But Bernice had had no intention of sneering. She was merely nervous.

## II

When Marjorie and Bernice reached home at half after midnight they said good night at the top of the stairs. Though cousins, they were not intimates. As a matter of fact Marjorie had no female intimates – she considered girls stupid. Bernice on the contrary all through this parent-arranged visit had rather longed to exchange those confidences flavored with giggles and tears that she considered an indispensable factor in all feminine intercourse. But in this respect she found Marjorie rather cold; felt somehow the same difficulty in talking to her that she had in talking to men. Marjorie never giggled, was never frightened, seldom embarrassed, and in fact had very few of the qualities which Bernice considered appropriately and blessedly feminine.

As Bernice busied herself with tooth-brush and paste this night she wondered for the hundredth time why she never had any attention when she was away from home. That her family were the wealthiest in Eau Claire; that her mother entertained tremendously, gave little diners for her daughter before all dances and bought her a car of her own to drive round in, never occurred to her as factors in her home-town social success. Like most girls she had been brought up on the warm milk prepared by Annie Fellows Johnston and on novels in which the female was beloved because of certain mysterious womanly qualities always mentioned but never displayed.

Bernice felt a vague pain that she was not at present engaged in being popular. She did not know that had it not been for Marjorie’s campaigning she would have danced the entire evening with one man; but she knew that even in Eau Claire other girls with less position and less pulchritude were given a much bigger rush. She attributed this to something subtly unscrupulous in those girls. It had never worried her, and if it had her mother would have assured her that the other girls cheapened themselves and that men really respected girls like Bernice.

She turned out the light in her bathroom, and on an impulse decided to go in and chat for a moment with her aunt Josephine, whose light was still on. Her soft slippers bore her noiselessly down the carpeted hall, but hearing voices inside she stopped near the partly opened door. Then she caught her own name, and without any definite intention of eavesdropping lingered – and the thread of the conversation going on inside pierced her consciousness sharply as if it had been drawn through with a needle.

‘She’s absolutely hopeless!’ It was Marjorie’s voice. ‘Oh, I know what you’re going to say! So many people have told you how pretty and sweet she is, and how she can cook! What of it? She has a bum time. Men don’t like her.’

‘What’s a little cheap popularity?’

Mrs. Harvey sounded annoyed.

‘It’s everything when you’re eighteen,’ said Marjorie emphatically. ‘I’ve done my best. I’ve been polite and I’ve made men dance with her, but they just won’t stand being bored. When I think of that gorgeous coloring wasted on such a ninny, and think what Martha Carey could do with it – oh!’

‘There’s no courtesy these days.’

Mrs. Harvey’s voice implied that modern situations were too much for her. When she was a girl all young ladies who belonged to nice families had glorious times.

‘Well,’ said Marjorie, ‘no girl can permanently bolster up a lame-duck visitor, because these days it’s every girl for herself. I’ve even tried to drop hints about clothes and things, and she’s been furious – given me the funniest looks. She’s sensitive enough to know she’s not getting away with much, but I’ll bet she consoles herself by thinking that she’s very virtuous and that I’m too gay and



fickle and will come to a bad end. All unpopular girls think that way. Sour grapes! Sarah Hopkins refers to Genevieve and Roberta and me as gardenia girls! I'll bet she'd give ten years of her life and her European education to be a gardenia girl and have three or four men in love with her and be cut in on every few feet at dances.'

'It seems to me,' interrupted Mrs. Harvey rather wearily, 'that you ought to be able to do something for Bernice. I know she's not very vivacious.'

Marjorie groaned.

'Vivacious! Good grief! I've never heard her say anything to a boy except that it's hot or the floor's crowded or that she's going to school in New York next year. Sometimes she asks them what kind of car they have and tells them the kind she has. Thrilling!'

There was a short silence and then Mrs. Harvey took up her refrain:

'All I know is that other girls not half so sweet and attractive get partners. Martha Carey, for instance, is stout and loud, and her mother is distinctly common. Roberta Dillon is so thin this year that she looks as though Arizona were the place for her. She's dancing herself to death.'

'But, mother,' objected Marjorie impatiently, 'Martha is cheerful and awfully witty and an awfully slick girl, and Roberta's a marvellous dancer. She's been popular for ages!'

Mrs. Harvey yawned.

'I think it's that crazy Indian blood in Bernice,' continued Marjorie. 'Maybe she's a reversion to type. Indian women all just sat round and never said anything.'

'Go to bed, you silly child,' laughed Mrs. Harvey. 'I wouldn't have told you that if I'd thought you were going to remember it. And I think most of your ideas are perfectly idiotic,' she finished sleepily.

There was another silence, while Marjorie considered whether or not convincing her mother was worth the trouble. People over forty can seldom be permanently convinced of anything. At eighteen our convictions are hills from which we look; at forty-five they are caves in which we hide.

Having decided this, Marjorie said good night. When she came out into the hall it was quite empty.

### III

While Marjorie was breakfasting late next day Bernice came into the room with a rather formal good morning, sat down opposite, stared intently over and slightly moistened her lips.

'What's on your mind?' inquired Marjorie, rather puzzled.

Bernice paused before she threw her hand-grenade.

'I heard what you said about me to your mother last night.'

Marjorie was startled, but she showed only a faintly heightened color and her voice was quite even when she spoke.

'Where were you?'

'In the hall. I didn't mean to listen – at first.'

After an involuntary look of contempt Marjorie dropped her eyes and became very interested in balancing a stray corn-flake on her finger.

'I guess I'd better go back to Eau Claire – if I'm such a nuisance.' Bernice's lower lip was trembling violently and she continued on a wavering note: 'I've tried to be nice, and – and I've been first neglected and then insulted. No one ever visited me and got such treatment.'

Marjorie was silent.

'But I'm in the way, I see. I'm a drag on you. Your friends don't like me.' She paused, and then remembered another one of her grievances. 'Of course I was furious last week when you tried to hint to me that that dress was unbecoming. Don't you think I know how to dress myself?'

'No,' murmured Marjorie less than half-aloud.

'What?'

'I didn't hint anything,' said Marjorie succinctly. 'I said, as I remember, that it was better to

wear a becoming dress three times straight than to alternate it with two frights.'

'Do you think that was a very nice thing to say?'

'I wasn't trying to be nice.' Then after a pause: 'When do you want to go?'

Bernice drew in her breath sharply.

'Oh!' It was a little half-cry.

Marjorie looked up in surprise.

'Didn't you say you were going?'

'Yes, but—'

'Oh, you were only bluffing!'

They stared at each other across the breakfast-table for a moment. Misty waves were passing before Bernice's eyes, while Marjorie's face wore that rather hard expression that she used when slightly intoxicated undergraduate's were making love to her.

'So you were bluffing,' she repeated as if it were what she might have expected.

Bernice admitted it by bursting into tears. Marjorie's eyes showed boredom.

'You're my cousin,' sobbed Bernice. 'I'm v-v-visiting you. I was to stay a month, and if I go home my mother will know and she'll wah-wonder—'

Marjorie waited until the shower of broken words collapsed into little sniffles.

'I'll give you my month's allowance,' she said coldly, 'and you can spend this last week anywhere you want. There's a very nice hotel—'

Bernice's sobs rose to a flute note, and rising of a sudden she fled from the room.

An hour later, while Marjorie was in the library absorbed in composing one of those non-committal marvelously elusive letters that only a young girl can write, Bernice reappeared, very red-eyed, and consciously calm. She cast no glance at Marjorie but took a book at random from the shelf and sat down as if to read. Marjorie seemed absorbed in her letter and continued writing. When the clock showed noon Bernice closed her book with a snap.

'I suppose I'd better get my railroad ticket.'

This was not the beginning of the speech she had rehearsed up-stairs, but as Marjorie was not getting her cues — wasn't urging her to be reasonable; it's an mistake — it was the best opening she could muster.

'Just wait till I finish this letter,' said Marjorie without looking round. 'I want to get it off in the next mail.'

After another minute, during which her pen scratched busily, she turned round and relaxed with an air of 'at your service.' Again Bernice had to speak.

'Do you want me to go home?'

'Well,' said Marjorie, considering, 'I suppose if you're not having a good time you'd better go. No use being miserable.'

'Don't you think common kindness—'

'Oh, please don't quote "Little Women"! ' cried Marjorie impatiently. 'That's out of style.'

'You think so?'

'Heavens, yes! What modern girl could live like those inane females?'

'They were the models for our mothers.'

Marjorie laughed.

'Yes, they were — not! Besides, our mothers were all very well in their way, but they know very little about their daughters' problems.'

Bernice drew herself up.

'Please don't talk about my mother.'

Marjorie laughed.

'I don't think I mentioned her.'

Bernice felt that she was being led away from her subject.

'Do you think you've treated me very well?'

'I've done my best. You're rather hard material to work with.'

The lids of Bernice's eyes reddened.

‘I think you’re hard and selfish, and you haven’t a feminine quality in you.’

‘Oh, my Lord!’ cried Marjorie in desperation ‘You little nut! Girls like you are responsible for all the tiresome colorless marriages; all those ghastly inefficiencies that pass as feminine qualities. What a blow it must be when a man with imagination marries the beautiful bundle of clothes that he’s been building ideals round, and finds that she’s just a weak, whining, cowardly mass of affectations!’

Bernice’s mouth had slipped half open.

‘The womanly woman!’ continued Marjorie. ‘Her whole early life is occupied in whining criticisms of girls like me who really do have a good time.’

Bernice’s jaw descended farther as Marjorie’s voice rose.

‘There’s some excuse for an ugly girl whining. If I’d been irretrievably ugly I’d never have forgiven my parents for bringing me into the world. But you’re starting life without any handicap—’ Marjorie’s little fist clinched, ‘If you expect me to weep with you you’ll be disappointed. Go or stay, just as you like.’ And picking up her letters she left the room.

Bernice claimed a headache and failed to appear at luncheon. They had a *matinée* date for the afternoon, but the headache persisting, Marjorie made explanation to a not very downcast boy. But when she returned late in the afternoon she found Bernice with a strangely set face waiting for her in her bedroom.

‘I’ve decided,’ began Bernice without preliminaries, ‘that maybe you’re right about things – possibly not. But if you’ll tell me why your friends aren’t – aren’t interested in me I’ll see if I can do what you want me to.’

Marjorie was at the mirror shaking down her hair.

‘Do you mean it?’

‘Yes.’

‘Without reservations? Will you do exactly what I say?’

‘Well, I—’

‘Well nothing! Will you do exactly as I say?’

‘If they’re sensible things.’

‘They’re not! You’re no case for sensible things.’

‘Are you going to make – to recommend—’

‘Yes, everything. If I tell you to take boxing-lessons you’ll have to do it. Write home and tell your mother you’re going’ to stay another two weeks.

‘If you’ll tell me—’

‘All right – I’ll just give you a few examples now. First you have no ease of manner. Why? Because you’re never sure about your personal appearance. When a girl feels that she’s perfectly groomed and dressed she can forget that part of her. That’s charm. The more parts of yourself you can afford to forget the more charm you have.’

‘Don’t I look all right?’

‘No; for instance you never take care of your eyebrows. They’re black and lustrous, but by leaving them straggly they’re a blemish. They’d be beautiful if you’d take care of them in one-tenth the time you take doing nothing. You’re going to brush them so that they’ll grow straight.’

Bernice raised the brows in question.

‘Do you mean to say that men notice eyebrows?’

‘Yes – subconsciously. And when you go home you ought to have your teeth straightened a little. It’s almost imperceptible, still—’

‘But I thought,’ interrupted Bernice in bewilderment, ‘that you despised little dainty feminine things like that.’

‘I hate dainty minds,’ answered Marjorie. ‘But a girl has to be dainty in person. If she looks like a million dollars she can talk about Russia, ping-pong, or the League of Nations<sup>1</sup> and get away with it.’

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<sup>1</sup> **the League of Nations** – the organization for international cooperation, the predecessor of the United Nations Organization, created in 1919 and disbanded in 1946

‘What else?’

‘Oh, I’m just beginning! There’s your dancing.’

‘Don’t I dance all right?’

‘No, you don’t – you lean on a man; yes, you do – ever so slightly. I noticed it when we were dancing together yesterday. And you dance standing up straight instead of bending over a little. Probably some old lady on the side-line once told you that you looked so dignified that way. But except with a very small girl it’s much harder on the man, and he’s the one that counts.’

‘Go on.’ Bernice’s brain was reeling.

‘Well, you’ve got to learn to be nice to men who are sad birds. You look as if you’d been insulted whenever you’re thrown with any except the most popular boys. Why, Bernice, I’m cut in on every few feet – and who does most of it? Why, those very sad birds. No girl can afford to neglect them. They’re the big part of any crowd. Young boys too shy to talk are the very best conversational practice. Clumsy boys are the best dancing practice. If you can follow them and yet look graceful you can follow a baby tank across a barb-wire sky-scraper.’

Bernice sighed profoundly, but Marjorie was not through.

‘If you go to a dance and really amuse, say, three sad birds that dance with you; if you talk so well to them that they forget they’re stuck with you, you’ve done something. They’ll come back next time, and gradually so many sad birds will dance with you that the attractive boys will see there’s no danger of being stuck – then they’ll dance with you.’

‘Yes,’ agreed Bernice faintly. ‘I think I begin to see.’

‘And finally,’ concluded Marjorie, ‘poise and charm will just come. You’ll wake up some morning knowing you’ve attained it and men will know it too.’

Bernice rose.

‘It’s been awfully kind of you – but nobody’s ever talked to me like this before, and I feel sort of startled.’

Marjorie made no answer but gazed pensively at her own image in the mirror.

‘You’re a peach to help me,’ continued Bernice.

Still Marjorie did not answer, and Bernice thought she had seemed too grateful.

‘I know you don’t like sentiment,’ she said timidly.

Marjorie turned to her quickly.

‘Oh, I wasn’t thinking about that. I was considering whether we hadn’t better bob your hair.’

Bernice collapsed backward upon the bed.

## IV

On the following Wednesday evening there was a dinner-dance at the country club. When the guests strolled in Bernice found her place-card with a slight feeling of irritation. Though at her right sat G. Reece Stoddard, a most desirable and distinguished young bachelor, the all-important left held only Charley Paulson. Charley lacked height, beauty, and social shrewdness, and in her new enlightenment Bernice decided that his only qualification to be her partner was that he had never been stuck with her. But this feeling of irritation left with the last of the soup-plates, and Marjorie’s specific instruction came to her. Swallowing her pride she turned to Charley Paulson and plunged.

‘Do you think I ought to bob my hair, Mr. Charley Paulson?’

Charley looked up in surprise.

‘Why?’

‘Because I’m considering it. It’s such a sure and easy way of attracting attention.’

Charley smiled pleasantly. He could not know this had been rehearsed. He replied that he didn’t know much about bobbed hair. But Bernice was there to tell him.

‘I want to be a society vampire, you see,’ she announced coolly, and went on to inform him that bobbed hair was the necessary prelude. She added that she wanted to ask his advice, because she had heard he was so critical about girls.

Charley, who knew as much about the psychology of women as he did of the mental states of

Buddhist contemplatives, felt vaguely flattered.

‘So I’ve decided,’ she continued, her voice rising slightly, ‘that early next week I’m going down to the Sevier Hotel barber-shop, sit in the first chair, and get my hair bobbed.’ She faltered noticing that the people near her had paused in their conversation and were listening; but after a confused second Marjorie’s coaching told, and she finished her paragraph to the vicinity at large. ‘Of course I’m charging admission, but if you’ll all come down and encourage me I’ll issue passes for the inside seats.’

There was a ripple of appreciative laughter, and under cover of it G. Reece Stoddard leaned over quickly and said close to her ear: ‘I’ll take a box right now.’

She met his eyes and smiled as if he had said something surprisingly brilliant.

‘Do you believe in bobbed hair?’ asked G. Reece in the same undertone.

‘I think it’s unmoral,’ affirmed Bernice gravely. ‘But, of course, you’ve either got to amuse people or feed ’em or shock ’em.’ Marjorie had culled this from Oscar Wilde. It was greeted with a ripple of laughter from the men and a series of quick, intent looks from the girls. And then as though she had said nothing of wit or moment Bernice turned again to Charley and spoke confidentially in his ear.

‘I want to ask you your opinion of several people. I imagine you’re a wonderful judge of character.’

Charley thrilled faintly – paid her a subtle compliment by overturning her water.

Two hours later, while Warren McIntyre was standing passively in the stag line abstractedly watching the dancers and wondering whither and with whom Marjorie had disappeared, an unrelated perception began to creep slowly upon him – a perception that Bernice, cousin to Marjorie, had been cut in on several times in the past five minutes. He closed his eyes, opened them and looked again. Several minutes back she had been dancing with a visiting boy, a matter easily accounted for; a visiting boy would know no better. But now she was dancing with someone else, and there was Charley Paulson headed for her with enthusiastic determination in his eye. Funny – Charley seldom danced with more than three girls an evening.

Warren was distinctly surprised when – the exchange having been effected – the man relieved proved to be none other than G. Reece Stoddard himself. And G. Reece seemed not at all jubilant at being relieved. Next time Bernice danced near, Warren regarded her intently. Yes, she was pretty, distinctly pretty; and to-night her face seemed really vivacious. She had that look that no woman, however histrionically prescient, can successfully counterfeit – she looked as if she were having a good time. He liked the way she had her hair arranged, wondered if it was brilliantine that made it glisten so. And that dress was becoming – a dark red that set off her shadowy eyes and high coloring. He remembered that he had thought her pretty when she first came to town, before he had realized that she was dull. Too bad she was dull – dull girls unbearable – certainly pretty though.

His thoughts zigzagged back to Marjorie. This disappearance would be like other disappearances. When she reappeared he would demand where she had been – would be told emphatically that it was none of his business. What a pity she was so sure of him! She basked in the knowledge that no other girl in town interested him; she defied him to fall in love with Genevieve or Roberta.

Warren sighed. The way to Marjorie’s affections was a labyrinth indeed. He looked up. Bernice was again dancing with the visiting boy. Half unconsciously he took a step out from the stag line in her direction, and hesitated. Then he said to himself that it was charity. He walked toward her – collided suddenly with G. Reece Stoddard.

‘Pardon me,’ said Warren.

But G. Reece had not stopped to apologize. He had again cut in on Bernice.

That night at one o’clock Marjorie, with one hand on the electric-light switch in the hall, turned to take a last look at Bernice’s sparkling eyes.

‘So it worked?’

‘Oh, Marjorie, yes!’ cried Bernice.

‘I saw you were having a gay time.’

'I did! The only trouble was that about midnight I ran short of talk. I had to repeat myself – with different men of course. I hope they won't compare notes.'

'Men don't,' said Marjorie, yawning, 'and it wouldn't matter if they did – they'd think you were even trickier.'

She snapped out the light, and as they started up the stairs Bernice grasped the banister thankfully. For the first time in her life she had been danced tired.

'You see,' said Marjorie at the top of the stairs, 'one man sees another man cut in and he thinks there must be something there. Well, we'll fix up some new stuff to-morrow. Good night.'

'Good night.'

As Bernice took down her hair she passed the evening before her in review. She had followed instructions exactly. Even when Charley Paulson cut in for the eighth time she had simulated delight and had apparently been both interested and flattered. She had not talked about the weather or Eau Claire or automobiles or her school, but had confined her conversation to me, you, and us.

But a few minutes before she fell asleep a rebellious thought was churning drowsily in her brain – after all, it was she who had done it. Marjorie, to be sure, had given her conversation, but then Marjorie got much of her conversation out of things she read. Bernice had bought the red dress, though she had never valued it highly before Marjorie dug it out of her trunk – and her own voice had said the words, her own lips had smiled, her own feet had danced. Marjorie nice girl – vain, though – nice evening – nice boys – like Warren – Warren – Warren – what's his name – Warren –

She fell asleep.

## V

To Bernice the next week was a revelation. With the feeling that people really enjoyed looking at her and listening to her came the foundation of self-confidence. Of course there were numerous mistakes at first. She did not know, for instance, that Draycott Deyo was studying for the ministry; she was unaware that he had cut in on her because he thought she was a quiet, reserved girl. Had she known these things she would not have treated him to the line which began 'Hello, Shell Shock!' and continued with the bathtub story – 'It takes a frightful lot of energy to fix my hair in the summer – there's so much of it – so I always fix it first and powder my face and put on my hat; then I get into the bathtub, and dress afterward. Don't you think that's the best plan?'

Though Draycott Deyo was in the throes of difficulties concerning baptism by immersion and might possibly have seen a connection, it must be admitted that he did not. He considered feminine bathing an immoral subject, and gave her some of his ideas on the depravity of modern society.

But to offset that unfortunate occurrence Bernice had several signal success to her credit. Little Otis Ormonde pleaded off from a trip East and elected instead to follow her with a puppylike devotion, to the amusement of his crowd and to the irritation of G. Reece Stoddard, several of whose afternoon calls Otis completely ruined by the disgusting tenderness of the glances he bent on Bernice. He even told her the story of the two-by-four and the dressing-room to show her how fruitfully mistaken he and everyone else had been in their first judgment of her. Bernice laughed off that incident with a slight sinking sensation.

Of all Bernice's conversation perhaps the best known and most universally approved was the line about the bobbing of her hair.

'Oh, Bernice, when you goin' to get the hair bobbed?'

'Day after to-morrow maybe,' she would reply, laughing. 'Will you come and see me? Because I'm counting on you, you know.'

'Will we? You know! But you better hurry up.'

Bernice, whose tonsorial intentions were strictly dishonorable, would laugh again.

'Pretty soon now. You'd be surprised.'

But perhaps the most significant symbol of her success was the gray car of the hypercritical Warren McIntyre, parked daily in front of the Harvey house. At first the parlor-maid was distinctly

startled when he asked for Bernice instead of Marjorie; after a week of it she told the cook that Miss Bernice had gotta holda Miss Marjorie's best fella.

And Miss Bernice had. Perhaps it began with Warren's desire to rouse jealousy in Marjorie; perhaps it was the familiar though unrecognized strain of Marjorie in Bernice's conversation; perhaps it was both of these and something of sincere attraction besides. But somehow the collective mind of the younger set knew within a week that Marjorie's most reliable beau had made an amazing face-about and was giving an indisputable rush to Marjorie's guest. The question of the moment was how Marjorie would take it. Warren called Bernice on the 'phone twice a day, sent her notes, and they were frequently seen together in his roadster, obviously engrossed in one of those tense, significant conversation as to whether or not he was sincere.

Marjorie on being twitted only laughed. She said she was mighty glad that Warren had at last found someone who appreciated him. So the younger set laughed, too, and guessed that Marjorie didn't care and let it go at that.

One afternoon when there were only three days left of her visit Bernice was waiting in the hall for Warren, with whom she was going to a bridge party. She was in rather a blissful mood, and when Marjorie – also bound for the party – appeared beside her and began casually to adjust her hat in the mirror, Bernice was utterly unprepared for anything in the nature of a clash. Marjorie did her work very coldly and succinctly in three sentences.

'You may as well get Warren out of your head,' she said coldly.

'What?' Bernice was utterly astounded.

'You may as well stop making a fool of yourself over Warren McIntyre. He doesn't care a snap of his fingers about you.'

For a tense moment they regarded each other – Marjorie scornful, aloof; Bernice astounded, half-angry, half-afraid. Then two cars drove up in front of the house and there was a riotous honking. Both of them gasped faintly, turned, and side by side hurried out.

All through the bridge party Bernice strove in vain to master a rising uneasiness. She had offended Marjorie, the sphinx of sphinxes. With the most wholesome and innocent intentions in the world she had stolen Marjorie's property. She felt suddenly and horribly guilty. After the bridge game, when they sat in an informal circle and the conversation became general, the storm gradually broke. Little Otis Ormonde inadvertently precipitated it.

'When you going back to kindergarten, Otis?' someone had asked.

'Me? Day Bernice gets her hair bobbed.'

'Then your education's over,' said Marjorie quickly. 'That's only a bluff of hers. I should think you'd have realized.'

'That a fact?' demanded Otis, giving Bernice a reproachful glance.

Bernice's ears burned as she tried to think up an effectual comeback. In the face of this direct attack her imagination was paralyzed.

'There's a lot of bluffs in the world,' continued Marjorie quite pleasantly. 'I should think you'd be young enough to know that, Otis.'

'Well,' said Otis, 'maybe so. But gee! With a line like Bernice's--'

'Really?' yawned Marjorie. 'What's her latest bon mot?'

No one seemed to know. In fact, Bernice, having trifled with her muse's beau, had said nothing memorable of late.

'Was that really all a line?' asked Roberta curiously.

Bernice hesitated. She felt that wit in some form was demanded of her, but under her cousin's suddenly frigid eyes she was completely incapacitated.

'I don't know,' she stalled.

'Splush!' said Marjorie. 'Admit it!'

Bernice saw that Warren's eyes had left a ukulele he had been tinkering with and were fixed on her questioningly.

'Oh, I don't know!' she repeated steadily. Her cheeks were glowing.

'Splush!' remarked Marjorie again.

‘Come through, Bernice,’ urged Otis. ‘Tell her where to get off.’

Bernice looked round again – she seemed unable to get away from Warren’s eyes.

‘I like bobbed hair,’ she said hurriedly, as if he had asked her a question, ‘and I intend to bob mine.’

‘When?’ demanded Marjorie.

‘Any time.’

‘No time like the present,’ suggested Roberta.

Otis jumped to his feet.

‘Good stuff!’ he cried. ‘We’ll have a summer bobbing party. Sevier Hotel barber-shop, I think you said.’

In an instant all were on their feet. Bernice’s heart throbbed violently.

‘What?’ she gasped.

Out of the group came Marjorie’s voice, very clear and contemptuous.

‘Don’t worry – she’ll back out!’

‘Come on, Bernice!’ cried Otis, starting toward the door.

Four eyes – Warren’s and Marjorie’s – stared at her, challenged her, defied her. For another second she wavered wildly.

‘All right,’ she said swiftly ‘I don’t care if I do.’

An eternity of minutes later, riding down-town through the late afternoon beside Warren, the others following in Roberta’s car close behind, Bernice had all the sensations of Marie Antoinette<sup>1</sup> bound for the guillotine<sup>2</sup> in a tumbrel. Vaguely she wondered why she did not cry out that it was all a mistake. It was all she could do to keep from clutching her hair with both hands to protect it from the suddenly hostile world. Yet she did neither. Even the thought of her mother was no deterrent now. This was the test supreme of her sportsmanship; her right to walk unchallenged in the starry heaven of popular girls.

Warren was moodily silent, and when they came to the hotel he drew up at the curb and nodded to Bernice to precede him out. Roberta’s car emptied a laughing crowd into the shop, which presented two bold plate-glass windows to the street.

Bernice stood on the curb and looked at the sign, Sevier Barber-Shop. It was a guillotine indeed, and the hangman was the first barber, who, attired in a white coat and smoking a cigarette, leaned non-chalantly against the first chair. He must have heard of her; he must have been waiting all week, smoking eternal cigarettes beside that portentous, too-often-mentioned first chair. Would they blind-fold her? No, but they would tie a white cloth round her neck lest any of her blood – nonsense – hair – should get on her clothes.

‘All right, Bernice,’ said Warren quickly.

With her chin in the air she crossed the sidewalk, pushed open the swinging screen-door, and giving not a glance to the uproarious, riotous row that occupied the waiting bench, went up to the fat barber.

‘I want you to bob my hair.’

The first barber’s mouth slid somewhat open. His cigarette dropped to the floor.

‘Huh?’

‘My hair – bob it!’

Refusing further preliminaries, Bernice took her seat on high. A man in the chair next to her turned on his side and gave her a glance, half lather, half amazement. One barber started and spoiled little Willy Schuneman’s monthly haircut. Mr. O’Reilly in the last chair grunted and swore musically in ancient Gaelic as a razor bit into his cheek. Two bootblacks became wide-eyed and rushed for her feet. No, Bernice didn’t care for a shine.

Outside a passer-by stopped and stared; a couple joined him; half a dozen small boys’ nose sprang into life, flattened against the glass; and snatches of conversation borne on the summer breeze drifted in through the screen-door.

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1 **Marie Antoinette** (1755–1793) – the queen of France, wife of Louis XVI, executed during the French Revolution

2 **guillotine** – a beheading instrument invented in 1792 during the French Revolution



'Lookada long hair on a kid!'

'Where'd yuh get 'at stuff? 'At's a bearded lady he just finished shavin'.'

But Bernice saw nothing, heard nothing. Her only living sense told her that this man in the white coat had removed one tortoise-shell comb and then another; that his fingers were fumbling clumsily with unfamiliar hairpins; that this hair, this wonderful hair of hers, was going – she would never again feel its long voluptuous pull as it hung in a dark-brown glory down her back. For a second she was near breaking down, and then the picture before her swam mechanically into her vision – Marjorie's mouth curling in a faint ironic smile as if to say:

'Give up and get down! You tried to buck me and I called your bluff. You see you haven't got a prayer.'

And some last energy rose up in Bernice, for she clinched her hands under the white cloth, and there was a curious narrowing of her eyes that Marjorie remarked on to someone long afterward.

Twenty minutes later the barber swung her round to face the mirror, and she flinched at the full extent of the damage that had been wrought. Her hair was not curls and now it lay in lank lifeless blocks on both sides of her suddenly pale face. It was ugly as sin – she had known it would be ugly as sin. Her face's chief charm had been a Madonna-like simplicity. Now that was gone and she was – well frightfully mediocre – not stagy; only ridiculous, like a Greenwich Villager<sup>1</sup> who had left her spectacles at home.

As she climbed down from the chair she tried to smile – failed miserably. She saw two of the girls exchange glances; noticed Marjorie's mouth curved in attenuated mockery – and that Warren's eyes were suddenly very cold.

'You see,' – her words fell into an awkward pause – 'I've done it.'

'Yes, you've – done it,' admitted Warren.

'Do you like it?'

There was a half-hearted 'Sure' from two or three voices, another awkward pause, and then Marjorie turned swiftly and with serpentlike intensity to Warren.

'Would you mind running me down to the cleaners?' she asked. 'I've simply got to get a dress there before supper. Roberta's driving right home and she can take the others.'

Warren stared abstractedly at some infinite speck out the window. Then for an instant his eyes rested coldly on Bernice before they turned to Marjorie.

'Be glad to,' he said slowly.

## VI

Bernice did not fully realize the outrageous trap that had been set for her until she met her aunt's amazed glance just before dinner.

'Why Bernice!'

'I've bobbed it, Aunt Josephine.'

'Why, child!'

'Do you like it?'

'Why Bernice!'

'I suppose I've shocked you.'

'No, but what'll Mrs. Deyo think tomorrow night? Bernice, you should have waited until after the Deyo's dance – you should have waited if you wanted to do that.'

'It was sudden, Aunt Josephine. Anyway, why does it matter to Mrs. Deyo particularly?'

'Why child,' cried Mrs. Harvey, 'in her paper on "The Foibles of the Younger Generation" that she read at the last meeting of the Thursday Club she devoted fifteen minutes to bobbed hair. It's her pet abomination. And the dance is for you and Marjorie!'

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<sup>1</sup> **Greenwich Villager** – resident of Greenwich Village, an exclusive residential area in Lower Manhattan in New York City; in the first half of the 20th century it became the place where intellectuals, writers, artists and bohemians used to meet.

'I'm sorry.'

'Oh, Bernice, what'll your mother say? She'll think I let you do it.'

'I'm sorry.'

Dinner was an agony. She had made a hasty attempt with a curling-iron, and burned her finger and much hair. She could see that her aunt was both worried and grieved, and her uncle kept saying, 'Well, I'll be darned!' over and over in a hurt and faintly hostile tone. And Marjorie sat very quietly, intrenched behind a faint smile, a faintly mocking smile.

Somehow she got through the evening. Three boys called; Marjorie disappeared with one of them, and Bernice made a listless unsuccessful attempt to entertain the two others – sighed thankfully as she climbed the stairs to her room at half past ten. What a day!

When she had undressed for the night the door opened and Marjorie came in.

'Bernice,' she said 'I'm awfully sorry about the Deyo dance. I'll give you my word of honor I'd forgotten all about it.'

'Sall right,' said Bernice shortly. Standing before the mirror she passed her comb slowly through her short hair.

'I'll take you down-town to-morrow,' continued Marjorie, 'and the hairdresser'll fix it so you'll look slick. I didn't imagine you'd go through with it. I'm really mighty sorry.'

'Oh, 'sall right!'

'Still it's your last night, so I suppose it won't matter much.'

Then Bernice winced as Marjorie tossed her own hair over her shoulders and began to twist it slowly into two long blond braids until in her cream-colored negligée she looked like a delicate painting of some Saxon princess. Fascinated, Bernice watched the braids grow. Heavy and luxurious they were moving under the supple fingers like restive snakes – and to Bernice remained this relic and the curling-iron and a to-morrow full of eyes. She could see G. Reece Stoddard, who liked her, assuming his Harvard manner and telling his dinner partner that Bernice shouldn't have been allowed to go to the movies so much; she could see Draycott Deyo exchanging glances with his mother and then being conscientiously charitable to her. But then perhaps by to-morrow Mrs. Deyo would have heard the news; would send round an icy little note requesting that she fail to appear – and behind her back they would all laugh and know that Marjorie had made a fool of her; that her chance at beauty had been sacrificed to the jealous whim of a selfish girl. She sat down suddenly before the mirror, biting the inside of her cheek.

'I like it,' she said with an effort. 'I think it'll be becoming.'

Marjorie smiled.

'It looks all right. For heaven's sake, don't let it worry you!'

'I won't.'

'Good night Bernice.'

But as the door closed something snapped within Bernice. She sprang dynamically to her feet, clinching her hands, then swiftly and noiseless crossed over to her bed and from underneath it dragged out her suitcase. Into it she tossed toilet articles and a change of clothing, Then she turned to her trunk and quickly dumped in two drawerfulls of lingerie and stammer dresses. She moved quietly but deadly efficiency, and in three-quarters of an hour her trunk was locked and strapped and she was fully dressed in a becoming new travelling suit that Marjorie had helped her pick out.

Sitting down at her desk she wrote a short note to Mrs. Harvey, in which she briefly outlined her reasons for going. She sealed it, addressed it, and laid it on her pillow. She glanced at her watch. The train left at one, and she knew that if she walked down to the Marborough Hotel two blocks away she could easily get a taxicab.

Suddenly she drew in her breath sharply and an expression flashed into her eyes that a practiced character reader might have connected vaguely with the set look she had worn in the barber's chair – somehow a development of it. It was quite a new look for Bernice – and it carried consequences.

She went stealthily to the bureau, picked up an article that lay there, and turning out all the lights stood quietly until her eyes became accustomed to the darkness. Softly she pushed open the

door to Marjorie's room. She heard the quiet, even breathing of an untroubled conscience asleep.

She was by the bedside now, very deliberate and calm. She acted swiftly. Bending over she found one of the braids of Marjorie's hair, followed it up with her hand to the point nearest the head, and then holding it a little slack so that the sleeper would feel no pull, she reached down with the shears and severed it. With the pigtail in her hand she held her breath. Marjorie had muttered something in her sleep. Bernice deftly amputated the other braid, paused for an instant, and then flitted swiftly and silently back to her own room.

Down-stairs she opened the big front door, closed it carefully behind her, and feeling oddly happy and exuberant stepped off the porch into the moonlight, swinging her heavy grip like a shopping-bag. After a minute's brisk walk she discovered that her left hand still held the two blond braids. She laughed unexpectedly – had to shut her mouth hard to keep from emitting an absolute peal. She was passing Warren's house now, and on the impulse she set down her baggage, and swinging the braids like piece of rope flung them at the wooden porch, where they landed with a slight thud. She laughed again, no longer restraining herself.

'Huh,' she giggled wildly. 'Scalp the selfish thing!'

Then picking up her staircase she set off at a half-run down the moonlit street.

## **The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (Francis Scott Fitzgerald)**

### **1**

As long ago as 1860 it was the proper thing to be born at home. At present, so I am told, the high gods of medicine have decreed that the first cries of the young shall be uttered upon the anesthetic air of a hospital, preferably a fashionable one. So young Mr. and Mrs. Roger Button were fifty years ahead of style when they decided, one day in the summer of 1860, that their first baby should be born in a hospital. Whether this anachronism<sup>1</sup> had any bearing upon the astonishing history I am about to set down will never be known.

I shall tell you what occurred, and let you judge for yourself.

The Roger Buttons held an enviable position, both social and financial, in ante-bellum Baltimore<sup>2</sup>. They were related to the This Family and the That Family, which, as every Southerner knew, entitled them to membership in that enormous peerage which largely populated the Confederacy<sup>3</sup>. This was their first experience with the charming old custom of having babies – Mr. Button was naturally nervous. He hoped it would be a boy so that he could be sent to Yale College in Connecticut, at which institution Mr. Button himself had been known for four years by the somewhat obvious nickname of 'Cuff.'

On the September morning consecrated to the enormous event he arose nervously at six o'clock, dressed himself, adjusted an impeccable stock, and hurried forth through the streets of Baltimore to the hospital, to determine whether the darkness of the night had borne in new life upon its bosom.

When he was approximately a hundred yards from the Maryland Private Hospital for Ladies and Gentlemen he saw Doctor Keene, the family physician, descending the front steps, rubbing his hands together with a washing movement – as all doctors are required to do by the unwritten ethics of their profession.

Mr. Roger Button, the president of Roger Button & Co., Wholesale Hardware, began to run toward Doctor Keene with much less dignity than was expected from a Southern gentleman of that picturesque period. 'Doctor Keene!' he called. 'Oh, Doctor Keene!'

The doctor heard him, faced around, and stood waiting, a curious expression settling on his

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1 **anachronism** – 1) smth. or smb. out of date; 2) mistake in chronological relation.

2 **Baltimore** – a city in north-central Maryland, US, founded in 1729

3 **the Confederacy** – 11 Southern states that seceded from the Union in 1860–1861 and formed the Confederate States of America; the secession caused the American Civil War of 1861–1865.

harsh, medicinal face as Mr. Button drew near.

‘What happened?’ demanded Mr. Button, as he came up in a gasping rush. ‘What was it? How is she? A boy? Who is it? What—’

‘Talk sense!’ said Doctor Keene sharply. He appeared somewhat irritated.

‘Is the child born?’ begged Mr. Button.

Doctor Keene frowned. ‘Why, yes, I suppose so – after a fashion.’ Again he threw a curious glance at Mr. Button.

‘Is my wife all right?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is it a boy or a girl?’

‘Here now!’ cried Doctor Keene in a perfect passion of irritation, ‘I’ll ask you to go and see for yourself. Outrageous!’ He snapped the last word out in almost one syllable, then he turned away muttering: ‘Do you imagine a case like this will help my professional reputation? One more would ruin me – ruin anybody.’

‘What’s the matter?’ demanded Mr. Button appalled. ‘Triplets?’

‘No, not triplets!’ answered the doctor cuttingly. ‘What’s more, you can go and see for yourself. And get another doctor. I brought you into the world, young man, and I’ve been physician to your family for forty years, but I’m through with you! I don’t want to see you or any of your relatives ever again! Good-bye!’

Then he turned sharply, and without another word climbed into his phaeton, which was waiting at the curbstone, and drove severely away.

Mr. Button stood there upon the sidewalk, stupefied and trembling from head to foot. What horrible mishap had occurred? He had suddenly lost all desire to go into the Maryland Private Hospital for Ladies and Gentlemen – it was with the greatest difficulty that, a moment later, he forced himself to mount the steps and enter the front door.

A nurse was sitting behind a desk in the opaque gloom of the hall. Swallowing his shame, Mr. Button approached her.

‘Good-morning,’ she remarked, looking up at him pleasantly.

‘Good-morning. I—I am Mr. Button.’

At this a look of utter terror spread itself over girl’s face. She rose to her feet and seemed about to fly from the hall, restraining herself only with the most apparent difficulty.

‘I want to see my child,’ said Mr. Button.

The nurse gave a little scream. ‘Oh – of course!’ she cried hysterically. ‘Upstairs. Right upstairs. Go – *up!*’

She pointed the direction, and Mr. Button, bathed in cool perspiration, turned falteringly, and began to mount to the second floor. In the upper hall he addressed another nurse who approached him, basin in hand. ‘I’m Mr. Button,’ he managed to articulate. ‘I want to see my—’

Clank! The basin clattered to the floor and rolled in the direction of the stairs. Clank! Clank! It began a methodical decent as if sharing in the general terror which this gentleman provoked.

‘I want to see my child!’ Mr. Button almost shrieked. He was on the verge of collapse.

Clank! The basin reached the first floor. The nurse regained control of herself, and threw Mr. Button a look of hearty contempt.

‘All *right*, Mr. Button,’ she agreed in a hushed voice. ‘Very *well!* But if you *knew* what a state it’s put us all in this morning! It’s perfectly outrageous! The hospital will never have a ghost of a reputation after—’

‘Hurry!’ he cried hoarsely. ‘I can’t stand this!’

‘Come this way, then, Mr. Button.’

He dragged himself after her. At the end of a long hall they reached a room from which proceeded a variety of howls – indeed, a room which, in later parlance, would have been known as the ‘crying-room.’ They entered.

Ranged around the walls were half a dozen white-enameled rolling cribs, each with a tag tied at the head.

‘Well,’ gasped Mr. Button, ‘which is mine?’

‘There!’ said the nurse.

Mr. Button’s eyes followed her pointing finger, and this is what he saw. Wrapped in a voluminous white blanket, and partly crammed into one of the cribs, there sat an old man apparently about seventy years of age. His sparse hair was almost white, and from his chin dripped a long smoke-coloured beard, which waved absurdly back and forth, fanned by the breeze coming in at the window. He looked up at Mr. Button with dim, faded eyes in which lurked a puzzled question.

‘Am I mad?’ thundered Mr. Button, his terror resolving into rage. ‘Is this some ghastly hospital joke?’

‘It doesn’t seem like a joke to us,’ replied the nurse severely. ‘And I don’t know whether you’re mad or not – but that is most certainly your child.’

The cool perspiration redoubled on Mr. Button’s forehead. He closed his eyes, and then, opening them, looked again. There was no mistake – he was gazing at a man of threescore and ten – a *baby* of threescore and ten, a baby whose feet hung over the sides of the crib in which it was reposing.

The old man looked placidly from one to the other for a moment, and then suddenly spoke in a cracked and ancient voice. ‘Are you my father?’ he demanded.

Mr. Button and the nurse started violently.

‘Because if you are,’ went on the old man querulously, ‘I wish you’d get me out of this place – or, at least, get them to put a comfortable rocker in here.’

‘Where in God’s name did you come from? Who are you?’ burst out Mr. Button frantically.

‘I can’t tell you *exactly* who I am,’ replied the querulous whine, ‘because I’ve only been born a few hours – but my last name is certainly Button.’

‘You lie! You’re an impostor!’

The old man turned wearily to the nurse. ‘Nice way to welcome a new-born child,’ he complained in a weak voice. ‘Tell him he’s wrong, why don’t you?’

‘You’re wrong. Mr. Button,’ said the nurse severely. ‘This is your child, and you’ll have to make the best of it. We’re going to ask you to take him home with you as soon as possible – some time to-day.’

‘Home?’ repeated Mr. Button incredulously.

‘Yes, we can’t have him here. We really can’t, you know?’

‘I’m right glad of it,’ whined the old man. ‘This is a fine place to keep a youngster of quiet tastes. With all this yelling and howling, I haven’t been able to get a wink of sleep. I asked for something to eat’ – here his voice rose to a shrill note of protest – ‘and they brought me a bottle of milk!’

Mr. Button sank down upon a chair near his son and concealed his face in his hands. ‘My heavens!’ he murmured, in an ecstasy of horror. ‘What will people say? What must I do?’

‘You’ll have to take him home,’ insisted the nurse – ‘immediately!’

A grotesque picture formed itself with dreadful clarity before the eyes of the tortured man – a picture of himself walking through the crowded streets of the city with this appalling apparition stalking by his side. ‘I can’t. I can’t,’ he moaned.

People would stop to speak to him, and what was he going to say? He would have to introduce this – this septuagenarian<sup>1</sup>: ‘This is my son, born early this morning.’ And then the old man would gather his blanket around him and they would plod on, past the bustling stores, the slave market – for a dark instant Mr. Button wished passionately that his son was black – past the luxurious houses of the residential district, past the home for the aged....

‘Come! Pull yourself together,’ commanded the nurse.

‘See here,’ the old man announced suddenly, ‘if you think I’m going to walk home in this blanket, you’re entirely mistaken.’

‘Babies always have blankets.’

With a malicious crackle the old man held up a small white swaddling garment. ‘Look!’ he

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<sup>1</sup> **septuagenarian** – a person from 70 to 79 years of age

quavered. 'This is what they had ready for me.'

'Babies always wear those,' said the nurse primly.

'Well,' said the old man, 'this baby's not going to wear anything in about two minutes. This blanket itches. They might at least have given me a sheet.'

'Keep it on! Keep it on!' said Mr. Button hurriedly. He turned to the nurse. 'What'll I do?'

'Go down town and buy your son some clothes.'

Mr. Button's son's voice followed him down into the hall: 'And a cane, father. I want to have a cane.'

Mr. Button banged the outer door savagely....

## 2

'Good-morning,' Mr. Button said nervously, to the clerk in the Chesapeake Dry Goods Company. 'I want to buy some clothes for my child.'

'How old is your child, sir?'

'About six hours,' answered Mr. Button, without due consideration.

'Babies' supply department in the rear.'

'Why, I don't think – I'm not sure that's what I want. It's – he's an unusually large-size child. Exceptionally – ah – large.'

'They have the largest child's sizes.'

'Where is the boys' department?' inquired Mr. Button, shifting his ground desperately. He felt that the clerk must surely scent his shameful secret.

'Right here.'

'Well–' He hesitated. The notion of dressing his son in men's clothes was repugnant to him. If, say, he could only find a very large boy's suit, he might cut off that long and awful beard, dye the white hair brown, and thus manage to conceal the worst, and to retain something of his own self-respect – not to mention his position in Baltimore society.

But a frantic inspection of the boys' department revealed no suits to fit the new-born Button. He blamed the store, of course – in such cases it is the thing to blame the store.

'How old did you say that boy of yours was?' demanded the clerk curiously.

'He's – sixteen.'

'Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought you said six *hours*. You'll find the youths' department in the next aisle.'

Mr. Button turned miserably away. Then he stopped, brightened, and pointed his finger toward a dressed dummy in the window display. 'There!' he exclaimed. 'I'll take that suit, out there on the dummy.'

The clerk stared. 'Why,' he protested, 'that's not a child's suit. At least it *is*, but it's for fancy dress. You could wear it yourself!'

'Wrap it up,' insisted his customer nervously. 'That's what I want.'

The astonished clerk obeyed.

Back at the hospital Mr. Button entered the nursery and almost threw the package at his son. 'Here's your clothes,' he snapped out.

The old man untied the package and viewed the contents with a quizzical eye.

'They look sort of funny to me,' he complained, 'I don't want to be made a monkey of–'

'You've made a monkey of me!' retorted Mr. Button fiercely. 'Never you mind how funny you look. Put them on – or I'll – or I'll *spank* you.' He swallowed uneasily at the penultimate word, feeling nevertheless that it was the proper thing to say.

'All right, father' – this with a grotesque simulation of filial respect – 'you've lived longer; you know best. Just as you say.'

As before, the sound of the word 'father' caused Mr. Button to start violently.

'And hurry.'

'I'm hurrying, father.'

When his son was dressed Mr. Button regarded him with depression. The costume consisted of dotted socks, pink pants, and a belted blouse with a wide white collar. Over the latter waved the long whitish beard, drooping almost to the waist. The effect was not good.

‘Wait!’

Mr. Button seized a hospital shears and with three quick snaps amputated a large section of the beard. But even with this improvement the ensemble fell far short of perfection. The remaining brush of scraggly hair, the watery eyes, the ancient teeth, seemed oddly out of tone with the gaiety of the costume. Mr. Button, however, was obdurate – he held out his hand. ‘Come along!’ he said sternly.

His son took the hand trustingly. ‘What are you going to call me, dad?’ he quavered as they walked from the nursery – ‘just “baby” for a while? till you think of a better name?’

Mr. Button grunted. ‘I don’t know,’ he answered harshly. ‘I think we’ll call you Methuselah<sup>1</sup>.’

### 3

Even after the new addition to the Button family had had his hair cut short and then dyed to a sparse unnatural black, had had his face shaved so close that it glistened, and had been attired in small-boy clothes made to order by a flabbergasted tailor, it was impossible for Button to ignore the fact that his son was a poor excuse for a first family baby. Despite his aged stoop, Benjamin Button – for it was by this name they called him instead of by the appropriate but invidious Methuselah – was five feet eight inches tall. His clothes did not conceal this, nor did the clipping and dyeing of his eyebrows disguise the fact that the eyes under – were faded and watery and tired. In fact, the baby-nurse who had been engaged in advance left the house after one look, in a state of considerable indignation.

But Mr. Button persisted in his unwavering purpose. Benjamin was a baby, and a baby he should remain. At first he declared that if Benjamin didn’t like warm milk he could go without food altogether, but he was finally prevailed upon to allow his son bread and butter, and even oatmeal by way of a compromise. One day he brought home a rattle and, giving it to Benjamin, insisted in no uncertain terms that he should ‘play with it,’ whereupon the old man took it with a weary expression and could be heard jingling it obediently at intervals throughout the day.

There can be no doubt, though, that the rattle bored him, and that he found other and more soothing amusements when he was left alone. For instance, Mr. Button discovered one day that during the preceding week he had smoked more cigars than ever before – a phenomenon, which was explained a few days later when, entering the nursery unexpectedly, he found the room full of faint blue haze and Benjamin, with a guilty expression on his face, trying to conceal the butt of a dark Havana<sup>2</sup>. This, of course, called for a severe spanking, but Mr. Button found that he could not bring himself to administer it. He merely warned his son that he would ‘stunt his growth.’

Nevertheless he persisted in his attitude. He brought home lead soldiers, he brought toy trains, he brought large pleasant animals made of cotton, and, to perfect the illusion which he was creating – for himself at least – he passionately demanded of the clerk in the toy-store whether ‘the paint would come off the pink duck if the baby put it in his mouth.’ But, despite all his father’s efforts, Benjamin refused to be interested. He would steal down the back stairs and return to the nursery with a volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica, over which he would pore through an afternoon, while his cotton cows and his Noah’s ark were left neglected on the floor. Against such a stubbornness Mr. Button’s efforts were of little avail.

The sensation created in Baltimore was, at first, prodigious. What the mishap would have cost the Buttons and their kinsfolk socially cannot be determined, for the outbreak of the Civil War drew the city’s attention to other things. A few people who were unfailingly polite racked their brains for compliments to give to the parents – and finally hit upon the ingenious device of declaring that the baby resembled his grandfather, a fact which, due to the standard state of decay common to all men

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<sup>1</sup> **Methuselah** – the Old Testament patriarch; he was 969 years old, and was considered the longest-lived man.

<sup>2</sup> **Havana** – a famous cigar

of seventy, could not be denied. Mr. and Mrs. Roger Button were not pleased, and Benjamin's grandfather was furiously insulted.

Benjamin, once he left the hospital, took life as he found it. Several small boys were brought to see him, and he spent a stiff-jointed afternoon trying to work up an interest in tops and marbles – he even managed, quite accidentally, to break a kitchen window with a stone from a sling shot, a feat which secretly delighted his father.

Thereafter Benjamin contrived to break something every day, but he did these things only because they were expected of him, and because he was by nature obliging.

When his grandfather's initial antagonism wore off, Benjamin and that gentleman took enormous pleasure in one another's company. They would sit for hours, these two, so far apart in age and experience, and, like old cronies, discuss with tireless monotony the slow events of the day. Benjamin felt more at ease in his grandfather's presence than in his parents' – they seemed always somewhat in awe of him and, despite the dictatorial authority they exercised over him, frequently addressed him as 'Mr.'

He was as puzzled as anyone else at the apparently advanced age of his mind and body at birth. He read up on it in the medical journal, but found that no such case had been previously recorded. At his father's urging he made an honest attempt to play with other boys, and frequently he joined in the milder games – football shook him up too much, and he feared that in case of a fracture his ancient bones would refuse to knit.

When he was five he was sent to kindergarten, where he initiated into the art of pasting green paper on orange paper, of weaving coloured maps and manufacturing eternal cardboard necklaces. He was inclined to drowse off to sleep in the middle of these tasks, a habit which both irritated and frightened his young teacher. To his relief she complained to his parents, and he was removed from the school. The Roger Buttons told their friends that they felt he was too young.

By the time he was twelve years old his parents had grown used to him. Indeed, so strong is the force of custom that they no longer felt that he was different from any other child – except when some curious anomaly reminded them of the fact. But one day a few weeks after his twelfth birthday, while looking in the mirror, Benjamin made, or thought he made, an astonishing discovery. Did his eyes deceive him, or had his hair turned in the dozen years of his life from white to iron-gray under its concealing dye? Was the network of wrinkles on his face becoming less pronounced? Was his skin healthier and firmer, with even a touch of ruddy winter colour? He could not tell. He knew that he no longer stooped, and that his physical condition had improved since the early days of his life.

'Can it be –?' he thought to himself, or, rather, scarcely dared to think.

He went to his father. 'I am grown,' he announced determinedly. 'I want to put on long trousers.'

His father hesitated. 'Well,' he said finally, 'I don't know. Fourteen is the age for putting on long trousers – and you are only twelve.'

'But you'll have to admit,' protested Benjamin, 'that I'm big for my age.'

His father looked at him with illusory speculation. 'Oh, I'm not so sure of that,' he said. 'I was as big as you when I was twelve.'

This was not true – it was all part of Roger Button's silent agreement with himself to believe in his son's normality.

Finally a compromise was reached. Benjamin was to continue to dye his hair. He was to make a better attempt to play with boys of his own age. He was not to wear his spectacles or carry a cane in the street. In return for these concessions he was allowed his first suit of long trousers....

#### 4

Of the life of Benjamin Button between his twelfth and twenty-first year I intend to say little. Suffice to record that they were years of normal ungrowth. When Benjamin was eighteen he was erect as a man of fifty; he had more hair and it was of a dark gray; his step was firm, his voice had



lost its cracked quaver and descended to a healthy baritone. So his father sent him up to Connecticut to take examinations for entrance to Yale College. Benjamin passed his examination and became a member of the freshman class.

On the third day following his matriculation he received a notification from Mr. Hart, the college registrar, to call at his office and arrange his schedule. Benjamin, glancing in the mirror, decided that his hair needed a new application of its brown dye, but an anxious inspection of his bureau drawer disclosed that the dye bottle was not there. Then he remembered – he had emptied it the day before and thrown it away.

He was in a dilemma. He was due at the registrar's in five minutes. There seemed to be no help for it – he must go as he was. He did.

'Good-morning,' said the registrar politely. 'You've come to inquire about your son.'

'Why, as a matter of fact, my name's Button--' began Benjamin, but Mr. Hart cut him off.

'I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Button. I'm expecting your son here any minute.'

'That's me!' burst out Benjamin. 'I'm a freshman.'

'What!'

'I'm a freshman.'

'Surely you're joking.'

'Not at all.'

The registrar frowned and glanced at a card before him. 'Why, I have Mr. Benjamin Button's age down here as eighteen.'

'That's my age,' asserted Benjamin, flushing slightly.

The registrar eyed him wearily. 'Now surely, Mr. Button, you don't expect me to believe that.'

Benjamin smiled wearily. 'I am eighteen,' he repeated.

The registrar pointed sternly to the door. 'Get out,' he said. 'Get out of college and get out of town. You are a dangerous lunatic.'

'I am eighteen.'

Mr. Hart opened the door. 'The idea!' he shouted. 'A man of your age trying to enter here as a freshman. Eighteen years old, are you? Well, I'll give you eighteen minutes to get out of town.'

Benjamin Button walked with dignity from the room, and half a dozen undergraduates, who were waiting in the hall, followed him curiously with their eyes. When he had gone a little way he turned around, faced the infuriated registrar, who was still standing in the door-way, and repeated in a firm voice: 'I am eighteen years old.'

To a chorus of titters which went up from the group of undergraduates, Benjamin walked away.

But he was not fated to escape so easily. On his melancholy walk to the railroad station he found that he was being followed by a group, then by a swarm, and finally by a dense mass of undergraduates. The word had gone around that a lunatic had passed the entrance examinations for Yale and attempted to palm himself off as a youth of eighteen. A fever of excitement permeated the college. Men ran hatless out of classes, the football team abandoned its practice and joined the mob, professors' wives with bonnets awry and bustles out of position, ran shouting after the procession, from which proceeded a continual succession of remarks aimed at the tender sensibilities of Benjamin Button.

'He must be the Wandering Jew!<sup>1</sup>'

'He ought to go to prep school at his age!'

'Look at the infant prodigy!'

'He thought this was the old men's home.'

'Go up to Harvard!'

Benjamin increased his gait, and soon he was running. He would show them! He *would* go to Harvard, and then they would regret these ill-considered taunts!

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1 **the Wandering Jew** – a legendary character doomed to live until the end of the world in punishment for taunting Jesus Christ on his way to the Crucifixion

Safely on board the train for Baltimore, he put his head from the window. 'You'll regret this!' he shouted.

'Ha-ha!' the undergraduates laughed. 'Ha-ha-ha!' It was the biggest mistake that Yale College had ever made....

## 5

In 1880 Benjamin Button was twenty years old, and he signalised his birthday by going to work for his father in Roger Button & Co., Wholesale Hardware. It was in that same year that he began 'going out socially' – that is, his father insisted on taking him to several fashionable dances. Roger Button was now fifty, and he and his son were more and more companionable – in fact, since Benjamin had ceased to dye his hair (which was still grayish) they appeared about the same age, and could have passed for brothers.

One night in August they got into the phaeton attired in their full-dress suits and drove out to a dance at the Shevlins' country house, situated just outside of Baltimore. It was a gorgeous evening. A full moon drenched the road to the lustreless colour of platinum, and late-blooming harvest flowers breathed into the motionless air aromas that were like low, half-heard laughter. The open country, carpeted for rods around with bright wheat, was translucent as in the day. It was almost impossible not to be affected by the sheer beauty of the sky – almost.

'There's a great future in the dry-goods business,' Roger Button was saying. He was not a spiritual man – his aesthetic sense was rudimentary.

'Old fellows like me can't learn new tricks,' he observed profoundly. 'It's you youngsters with energy and vitality that have the great future before you.'

Far up the road the lights of the Shevlins' country house drifted into view, and presently there was a sighing sound that crept persistently toward them – it might have been the fine plaint of violins or the rustle of the silver wheat under the moon.

They pulled up behind a handsome brougham whose passengers were disembarking at the door. A lady got out, then an elderly gentleman, then another young lady, beautiful as sin. Benjamin started; an almost chemical change seemed to dissolve and recompose the very elements of his body. A rigour passed over him, blood rose into his cheeks, his forehead, and there was a steady thumping in his ears. It was first love.

The girl was slender and frail, with hair that was ashen under the moon and honey-coloured under the sputtering gas-lamps of the porch. Over her shoulders was thrown a Spanish mantilla<sup>1</sup> of softest yellow, butterflyed in black; her feet were glittering buttons at the hem of her bustled dress.

Roger Button leaned over to his son. 'That,' he said, 'is young Hildegarde Moncrief, the daughter of General Moncrief.'

Benjamin nodded coldly. 'Pretty little thing,' he said indifferently. But when the negro boy had led the buggy away, he added: 'Dad, you might introduce me to her.'

They approached a group, of which Miss Moncrief was the centre. Reared in the old tradition, she curtsied low before Benjamin. Yes, he might have a dance. He thanked her and walked away – staggered away.

The interval until the time for his turn should arrive dragged itself out interminably. He stood close to the wall, silent, inscrutable, watching with murderous eyes the young bloods of Baltimore as they eddied around Hildegarde Moncrief, passionate admiration in their faces. How obnoxious they seemed to Benjamin; how intolerably rosy! Their curling brown whiskers aroused in him a feeling equivalent to indigestion.

But when his own time came, and he drifted with her out upon the changing floor to the music of the latest waltz from Paris, his jealousies and anxieties melted from him like a mantle of snow. Blind with enchantment, he felt that life was just beginning.

'You and your brother got here just as we did, didn't you?' asked Hildegarde, looking up at him with eyes that were like bright blue enamel.

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<sup>1</sup> **mantilla** – a large veil or scarf worn to cover the hair and shoulders

Benjamin hesitated. If she took him for his father's brother, would it be best to enlighten her? He remembered his experience at Yale, so he decided against it. It would be rude to contradict a lady; it would be criminal to mar this exquisite occasion with the grotesque story of his origin. Later, perhaps. So he nodded, smiled, listened, was happy.

'I like men of your age,' Hildegard told him. 'Young boys are so idiotic. They tell me how much champagne they drink at college, and how much money they lose playing cards. Men of your age know how to appreciate women.'

Benjamin felt himself on the verge of a proposal – with an effort he choked back the impulse.

'You're just the romantic age,' she continued – 'fifty. Twenty-five is too wordly-wise; thirty is apt to be pale from overwork; forty is the age of long stories that take a whole cigar to tell; sixty is – oh, sixty is too near seventy; but fifty is the mellow age. I love fifty.'

Fifty seemed to Benjamin a glorious age. He longed passionately to be fifty.

'I've always said,' went on Hildegard, 'that I'd rather marry a man of fifty and be taken care of than many a man of thirty and take care of *him*.'

For Benjamin the rest of the evening was bathed in a honey-coloured mist. Hildegard gave him two more dances, and they discovered that they were marvellously in accord on all the questions of the day. She was to go driving with him on the following Sunday, and then they would discuss all these questions further.

Going home in the phaeton just before the crack of dawn, when the first bees were humming and the fading moon glimmered in the cool dew, Benjamin knew vaguely that his father was discussing wholesale hardware.

'... And what do you think should merit our biggest attention after hammers and nails?' the elder Button was saying.

'Love,' replied Benjamin absent-mindedly.

'Lugs?' exclaimed Roger Button, 'Why, I've just covered the question of lugs.'

Benjamin regarded him with dazed eyes just as the eastern sky was suddenly cracked with light, and an oriole yawned piercingly in the quickening trees...

## 6

When, six months later, the engagement of Miss Hildegard Moncrief to Mr. Benjamin Button was made known (I say 'made known,' for General Moncrief declared he would rather fall upon his sword than announce it), the excitement in Baltimore society reached a feverish pitch. The almost forgotten story of Benjamin's birth was remembered and sent out upon the winds of scandal in picaresque and incredible forms. It was said that Benjamin was really the father of Roger Button, that he was his brother who had been in prison for forty years, that he was John Wilkes Booth in disguise – and, finally, that he had two small conical horns sprouting from his head.

The Sunday supplements of the New York papers played up the case with fascinating sketches which showed the head of Benjamin Button attached to a fish, to a snake, and, finally, to a body of solid brass. He became known, journalistically, as the Mystery Man of Maryland. But the true story, as is usually the case, had a very small circulation.

However, everyone agreed with General Moncrief that it was 'criminal' for a lovely girl who could have married any beau in Baltimore to throw herself into the arms of a man who was assuredly fifty. In vain Mr. Roger Button published his son's birth certificate in large type in the *Baltimore Blaze*. No one believed it. You had only to look at Benjamin and see.

On the part of the two people most concerned there was no wavering. So many of the stories about her fiancé were false that Hildegard refused stubbornly to believe even the true one. In vain General Moncrief pointed out to her the high mortality among men of fifty – or, at least, among men who looked fifty; in vain he told her of the instability of the wholesale hardware business. Hildegard had chosen to marry for mellowness, and marry she did....

## 7

In one particular, at least, the friends of Hildegarde Moncrief were mistaken. The wholesale hardware business prospered amazingly. In the fifteen years between Benjamin Button's marriage in 1880 and his father's retirement in 1895, the family fortune was doubled – and this was due largely to the younger member of the firm.

Needless to say, Baltimore eventually received the couple to its bosom. Even old General Moncrief became reconciled to his son-in-law when Benjamin gave him the money to bring out his 'History of the Civil War' in twenty volumes, which had been refused by nine prominent publishers.

In Benjamin himself fifteen years had wrought many changes. It seemed to him that the blood flowed with new vigour through his veins. It began to be a pleasure to rise in the morning, to walk with an active step along the busy, sunny street, to work untiringly with his shipments of hammers and his cargoes of nails. It was in 1890 that he executed his famous business coup: he brought up the suggestion that *all nails used in nailing up the boxes in which nails are shipped are the property of the shipper*, a proposal which became a statute, was approved by Chief Justice Fossile, and saved Roger Button and Company, Wholesale Hardware, more than *six hundred nails every year*.

In addition, Benjamin discovered that he was becoming more and more attracted by the gay side of life. It was typical of his growing enthusiasm for pleasure that he was the first man in the city of Baltimore to own and run an automobile. Meeting him on the street, his contemporaries would stare enviously at the picture he made of health and vitality.

'He seems to grow younger every year,' they would remark. And if old Roger Button, now sixty-five years old, had failed at first to give a proper welcome to his son he atoned at last by bestowing on him what amounted to adulation.

And here we come to an unpleasant subject which it will be well to pass over as quickly as possible. There was only one thing that worried Benjamin Button; his wife had ceased to attract him.

At that time Hildegarde was a woman of thirty-five, with a son, Roscoe, fourteen years old. In the early days of their marriage Benjamin had worshipped her. But, as the years passed, her honey-coloured hair became an unexciting brown, the blue enamel of her eyes assumed the aspect of cheap crockery – moreover, and, most of all, she had become too settled in her ways, too placid, too content, too anemic in her excitements, and too sober in her taste. As a bride it been she who had 'dragged' Benjamin to dances and dinners – now conditions were reversed. She went out socially with him, but without enthusiasm, devoured already by that eternal inertia which comes to live with each of us one day and stays with us to the end.

Benjamin's discontent waxed stronger. At the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898 his home had for him so little charm that he decided to join the army. With his business influence he obtained a commission as captain, and proved so adaptable to the work that he was made a major, and finally a lieutenant-colonel just in time to participate in the celebrated charge up San Juan Hill<sup>1</sup>. He was slightly wounded, and received a medal.

Benjamin had become so attached to the activity and excitement of army life that he regretted to give it up, but his business required attention, so he resigned his commission and came home. He was met at the station by a brass band and escorted to his house.

## 8

Hildegarde, waving a large silk flag, greeted him on the porch, and even as he kissed her he felt with a sinking of the heart that these three years had taken their toll. She was a woman of forty now, with a faint skirmish line of gray hairs in her head. The sight depressed him.

Up in his room he saw his reflection in the familiar mirror – he went closer and examined his own face with anxiety, comparing it after a moment with a photograph of himself in uniform taken

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<sup>1</sup> **San Juan Hill** – the highest point of San Juan Ridge where one of the battles of the American-Spanish War took place in 1898

just before the war.

‘Good Lord!’ he said aloud. The process was continuing. There was no doubt of it – he looked now like a man of thirty. Instead of being delighted, he was uneasy – he was growing younger. He had hitherto hoped that once he reached a bodily age equivalent to his age in years, the grotesque phenomenon which had marked his birth would cease to function. He shuddered. His destiny seemed to him awful, incredible.

When he came downstairs Hildegard was waiting for him. She appeared annoyed, and he wondered if she had at last discovered that there was something amiss. It was with an effort to relieve the tension between them that he broached the matter at dinner in what he considered a delicate way.

‘Well,’ he remarked lightly, ‘everybody says I look younger than ever.’

Hildegard regarded him with scorn. She sniffed. ‘Do you think it’s anything to boast about?’

‘I’m not boasting,’ he asserted uncomfortably.

She sniffed again. ‘The idea,’ she said, and after a moment: ‘I should think you’d have enough pride to stop it.’

‘How can I?’ he demanded.

‘I’m not going to argue with you,’ she retorted. ‘But there’s a right way of doing things and a wrong way. If you’ve made up your mind to be different from everybody else, I don’t suppose I can stop you, but I really don’t think it’s very considerate.’

‘But, Hildegard, I can’t help it.’

‘You can too. You’re simply stubborn. You think you don’t want to be like anyone else. You always have been that way, and you always will be. But just think how it would be if everyone else looked at things as you do – what would the world be like?’

As this was an inane and unanswerable argument Benjamin made no reply, and from that time on a chasm began to widen between them. He wondered what possible fascination she had ever exercised over him.

To add to the breach, he found, as the new century gathered headway, that his thirst for gaiety grew stronger. Never a party of any kind in the city of Baltimore but he was there, dancing with the prettiest of the young married women, chatting with the most popular of the debutantes, and finding their company charming, while his wife, a dowager of evil omen, sat among the chaperons, now in haughty disapproval, and now following him with solemn, puzzled, and reproachful eyes.

‘Look!’ people would remark. ‘What a pity! A young fellow that age tied to a woman of forty-five. He must be twenty years younger than his wife.’ They had forgotten – as people inevitably forget – that back in 1880 their mammas and papas had also remarked about this same ill-matched pair.

Benjamin’s growing unhappiness at home was compensated for by his many new interests. He took up golf and made a great success of it. He went in for dancing: in 1906 he was an expert at ‘The Boston,’ and in 1908 he was considered proficient at the ‘Maxixe,’ while in 1909 his ‘Castle Walk’ was the envy of every young man in town.

His social activities, of course, interfered to some extent with his business, but then he had worked hard at wholesale hardware for twenty-five years and felt that he could soon hand it on to his son, Roscoe, who had recently graduated from Harvard.

He and his son were, in fact, often mistaken for each other. This pleased Benjamin – he soon forgot the insidious fear which had come over him on his return from the Spanish-American War, and grew to take a naïve pleasure in his appearance. There was only one fly in the delicious ointment – he hated to appear in public with his wife. Hildegard was almost fifty, and the sight of her made him feel absurd....

## 9

One September day in 1910 – a few years after Roger Button & Co., Wholesale Hardware, had been handed over to young Roscoe Button – a man, apparently about twenty years old, entered

himself as a freshman at Harvard University in Cambridge. He did not make the mistake of announcing that he would never see fifty again, nor did he mention the fact that his son had been graduated from the same institution ten years before.

He was admitted, and almost immediately attained a prominent position in the class, partly because he seemed a little older than the other freshmen, whose average age was about eighteen.

But his success was largely due to the fact that in the football game with Yale he played so brilliantly, with so much dash and with such a cold, remorseless anger that he scored seven touchdowns and fourteen field goals for Harvard, and caused one entire eleven of Yale men to be carried singly from the field, unconscious. He was the most celebrated man in college.

Strange to say, in his third or junior year he was scarcely able to 'make' the team. The coaches said that he had lost weight, and it seemed to the more observant among them that he was not quite as tall as before. He made no touchdowns – indeed, he was retained on the team chiefly in hope that his enormous reputation would bring terror and disorganisation to the Yale team.

In his senior year he did not make the team at all. He had grown so slight and frail that one day he was taken by some sophomores for a freshman, an incident which humiliated him terribly. He became known as something of a prodigy – a senior who was surely no more than sixteen – and he was often shocked at the worldliness of some of his classmates. His studies seemed harder to him – he felt that they were too advanced. He had heard his classmates speak of St. Midas's, the famous preparatory school, at which so many of them had prepared for college, and he determined after his graduation to enter himself at St. Midas's, where the sheltered life among boys his own size would be more congenial to him.

Upon his graduation in 1914 he went home to Baltimore with his Harvard diploma in his pocket. Hildegard was now residing in Italy, so Benjamin went to live with his son, Roscoe. But though he was welcomed in a general way there was obviously no heartiness in Roscoe's feeling toward him – there was even perceptible a tendency on his son's part to think that Benjamin, as he moped about the house in adolescent mooniness, was somewhat in the way. Roscoe was married now and prominent in Baltimore life, and he wanted no scandal to creep out in connection with his family.

Benjamin, no longer *persona grata*<sup>1</sup> with the debutantes and younger college set, found himself left much done, except for the companionship of three or four fifteen-year-old boys in the neighbourhood. His idea of going to St. Midas's school recurred to him.

'Say,' he said to Roscoe one day, 'I've told you over and over that I want to go to prep school.'

'Well, go, then,' replied Roscoe shortly. The matter was distasteful to him, and he wished to avoid a discussion.

'I can't go alone,' said Benjamin helplessly. 'You'll have to enter me and take me up there.'

'I haven't got time,' declared Roscoe abruptly. His eyes narrowed and he looked uneasily at his father. 'As a matter of fact,' he added, 'you'd better not go on with this business much longer. You better pull up short. You better – you better' – he paused and his face crimsoned as he sought for words – 'you better turn right around and start back the other way. This has gone too far to be a joke. It isn't funny any longer. You – you behave yourself!'

Benjamin looked at him, on the verge of tears.

'And another thing,' continued Roscoe, 'when visitors are in the house I want you to call me "Uncle" – not "Roscoe," but "Uncle," do you understand? It looks absurd for a boy of fifteen to call me by my first name. Perhaps you'd better call me "Uncle" *all* the time, so you'll get used to it.'

With a harsh look at his father, Roscoe turned away....

## 10

At the termination of this interview, Benjamin wandered dismally upstairs and stared at himself in the mirror. He had not shaved for three months, but he could find nothing on his face but

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<sup>1</sup> *persona grata* – a person who is acceptable

a faint white down with which it seemed unnecessary to meddle. When he had first come home from Harvard, Roscoe had approached him with the proposition that he should wear eye-glasses and imitation whiskers glued to his cheeks, and it had seemed for a moment that the farce of his early years was to be repeated. But whiskers had itched and made him ashamed. He wept and Roscoe had reluctantly relented.

Benjamin opened a book of boys' stories, 'The Boy Scouts in Bimini Bay,' and began to read. But he found himself thinking persistently about the war. America had joined the Allied cause during the preceding month, and Benjamin wanted to enlist, but, alas, sixteen was the minimum age, and he did not look that old. His true age, which was fifty-seven, would have disqualified him, anyway.

There was a knock at his door, and the butler appeared with a letter bearing a large official legend in the corner and addressed to Mr. Benjamin Button. Benjamin tore it open eagerly, and read the enclosure with delight. It informed him that many reserve officers who had served in the Spanish-American War were being called back into service with a higher rank, and it enclosed his commission as brigadier-general in the United States army with orders to report immediately.

Benjamin jumped to his feet fairly quivering with enthusiasm. This was what he had wanted. He seized his cap, and ten minutes later he had entered a large tailoring establishment on Charles Street, and asked in his uncertain treble to be measured for a uniform.

'Want to play soldier, sonny?' demanded a clerk casually.

Benjamin flushed. 'Say! Never mind what I want!' he retorted angrily. 'My name's Button and I live on Mt. Vernon Place, so you know I'm good for it.'

'Well,' admitted the clerk hesitantly, 'if you're not, I guess your daddy is, all right.'

Benjamin was measured, and a week later his uniform was completed. He had difficulty in obtaining the proper general's insignia because the dealer kept insisting to Benjamin that a nice Y.W.C.A.<sup>1</sup> badge would look just as well and be much more fun to play with.

Saying nothing to Roscoe, he left the house one night and proceeded by train to Camp Mosby, in South Carolina, where he was to command an infantry brigade. On a sultry April day he approached the entrance to the camp, paid off the taxicab which had brought him from the station, and turned to the sentry on guard.

'Get someone to handle my luggage!' he said briskly.

The sentry eyed him reproachfully. 'Say,' he remarked, 'where you goin' with the general's duds, sonny?'

Benjamin, veteran of the Spanish-American War, whirled upon him with fire in his eye, but with, alas, a changing treble voice.

'Come to attention!' he tried to thunder; he paused for breath – then suddenly he saw the sentry snap his heels together and bring his rifle to the present. Benjamin concealed a smile of gratification, but when he glanced around his smile faded. It was not he who had inspired obedience, but an imposing artillery colonel who was approaching on horseback.

'Colonel!' called Benjamin shrilly.

The colonel came up, drew rein, and looked coolly down at him with a twinkle in his eyes. 'Whose little boy are you?' he demanded kindly.

'I'll soon darn well show you whose little boy I am!' retorted Benjamin in a ferocious voice. 'Get down off that horse!'

The colonel roared with laughter.

'You want him, eh, general?'

'Here!' cried Benjamin desperately. 'Read this.' And he thrust his commission toward the colonel.

The colonel read it, his eyes popping from their sockets.

'Where'd you get this?' he demanded, slipping the document into his own pocket.

'I got it from the Government, as you'll soon find out!'

'You come along with me,' said the colonel with a peculiar look. 'We'll go up to headquarters

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<sup>1</sup> Y. W. C. A. – Young Women's Christian Association

and talk this over. Come along.'

The colonel turned and began walking his horse in the direction of headquarters. There was nothing for Benjamin to do but follow with as much dignity as possible – meanwhile promising himself a stern revenge.

But this revenge did not materialize. Two days later, however, his son Roscoe materialized from Baltimore, hot and cross from a hasty trip, and escorted the weeping general, *sans*<sup>1</sup> uniform, back to his home.

## 11

In 1920 Roscoe Button's first child was born. During the attendant festivities, however, no one thought it 'the thing' to mention, that the little grubby boy, apparently about ten years of age who played around the house with lead soldiers and a miniature circus, was the new baby's own grandfather.

No one disliked the little boy whose fresh, cheerful face was crossed with just a hint of sadness, but to Roscoe Button his presence was a source of torment. In the idiom of his generation Roscoe did not consider the matter 'efficient.' It seemed to him that his father, in refusing to look sixty, had not behaved like a 'red-blooded he-man' – this was Roscoe's favourite expression – but in a curious and perverse manner. Indeed, to think about the matter for as much as a half an hour drove him to the edge of insanity. Roscoe believed that 'live wires' should keep young, but carrying it out on such a scale was – was – was inefficient. And there Roscoe rested.

Five years later Roscoe's little boy had grown old enough to play childish games with little Benjamin under the supervision of the same nurse. Roscoe took them both to kindergarten on the same day, and Benjamin found that playing with little strips of coloured paper, making mats and chains and curious and beautiful designs, was the most fascinating game in the world. Once he was bad and had to stand in the corner – then he cried – but for the most part there were gay hours in the cheerful room, with the sunlight coming in the windows and Miss Bailey's kind hand resting for a moment now and then in his tousled hair.

Roscoe's son moved up into the first grade after a year, but Benjamin stayed on in the kindergarten. He was very happy. Sometimes when other tots talked about what they would do when they grew up a shadow would cross his little face as if in a dim, childish way he realized that those were things in which he was never to share.

The days flowed on in monotonous content. He went back a third year to the kindergarten, but he was too little now to understand what the bright shining strips of paper were for. He cried because the other boys were bigger than he, and he was afraid of them. The teacher talked to him, but though he tried to understand he could not understand at all.

He was taken from the kindergarten. His nurse, Nana, in her starched gingham<sup>2</sup> dress, became the centre of his tiny world. On bright days they walked in the park; Nana would point at a great gray monster and say 'elephant,' and Benjamin would say it after her, and when he was being undressed for bed that night he would say it over and over aloud to her: 'Elyphant, elyphant, elyphant.' Sometimes Nana let him jump on the bed, which was fun, because if you sat down exactly right it would bounce you up on your feet again, and if you said 'Ah' for a long time while you jumped you got a very pleasing broken vocal effect.

He loved to take a big cane from the hat-rack and go around hitting chairs and tables with it and saying: 'Fight, fight, fight.' When there were people there the old ladies would cluck at him, which interested him, and the young ladies would try to kiss him, which he submitted to with mild boredom. And when the long day was done at five o'clock he would go upstairs with Nana and be fed on oatmeal and nice soft mushy foods with a spoon.

There were no troublesome memories in his childish sleep; no token came to him of his brave days at college, of the glittering years when he flustered the hearts of many girls. There were only

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1 *sans* = without (*French*)

2 *gingham* – a strong, plain-woven cotton fabric



the white, safe walls of his crib and Nana and a man who came to see him sometimes, and a great big orange ball that Nana pointed at just before his twilight bed hour and called 'sun.' When the sun went his eyes were sleepy – there were no dreams, no dreams to haunt him.

The past – the wild charge at the head of his men up San Juan Hill; the first years of his marriage when he worked late into the summer dusk down in the busy city for young Hildegard whom he loved; the days before that when he sat smoking far into the night in the gloomy old Button house on Monroe Street with his grandfather – all these had faded like unsubstantial dreams from his mind as though they had never been. He did not remember.

He did not remember clearly whether the milk was warm or cool at his last feeding or how the days passed – there was only his crib and Nana's familiar presence. And then he remembered nothing. When he was hungry he cried – that was all. Through the noons and nights he breathed and over him there were soft mumblings and murmurings that he scarcely heard, and faintly differentiated smells, and light and darkness.

Then it was all dark, and his white crib and the dim faces that moved above him, and the warm sweet aroma of the milk, faded out altogether from his mind.

## The Old Nurse's Story (Elizabeth Gaskell)

You know, my dears, that your mother was an orphan, and an only child; and I dare say you have heard that your grand-father was a clergyman up in Westmoreland<sup>1</sup>, where I come from. I was just a girl in the village school, when, one day, your grandmother came in to ask the mistress if there was any scholar there who would do for a nurse-maid; and mighty proud I was, I can tell ye, when the mistress called me up, and spoke to my being a good girl at my needle, and a steady, honest girl, and one whose parents were very respectable, though they might be poor I thought I should like nothing better than to serve the pretty, young lady, who was blushing as deep as I was, as she spoke of the coming baby, and what I should have to do with it. However, I see you don't care so much for this part of my story, as for what you think is to come, so I'll tell you at once. I was engaged and settled at the parsonage before Miss Rosamond (that was the baby, who is now your mother) was born. To be sure, I had little enough to do with her when she came, for she was never out of her mother's arms, and slept by her all night long; and proud enough was I sometimes when missis trusted her to me. There never was such a baby before or since, though you've all of you been fine enough in your turns; but for sweet, winning ways, you've none of you come up to your mother. She took after her mother, who was a real lady born; a Miss Furnivall, a granddaughter of Lord Furnivall's, in Northumberland<sup>2</sup>. I believe she had neither brother nor Sister, and had been brought up in my lord's family till she had married your grandfather, who was just a curate, son to a shopkeeper in Carlisle<sup>3</sup> – but a clever, fine gentleman as ever was – and one who was a right-down hard worker in his parish, which was very wide, and scattered all abroad over the Westmoreland Fells. When your mother, little Miss Rosamond, was about four or five years old, both her parents died in a fortnight – one after the other. Ah! that was a sad time. My pretty young mistress and me was looking for another baby, when my master came home from one of his long rides, wet, and tired, and took the fever he died of; and then she never held up her head again, but lived just to see her dead baby, and have it laid on her breast before she sighed away her life. My mistress had asked me, on her death-bed, never to leave Miss Rosamond; but if she had never spoken a word, I would have gone with the little child to the end of the world.

The next thing, and before we had well stilled our sobs, the executors and guardians came to settle the affairs. They were my poor young mistress's own cousin, Lord Furnivall, and Mr. Esthwaite, my master's brother, a shopkeeper in Manchester; not so well to do then, as he was

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<sup>1</sup> **Westmoreland** – a historic county in northwestern England

<sup>2</sup> **Northumberland** – a historic county on the North Sea in northeastern England, to the south of Scotland

<sup>3</sup> **Carlisle** – a city and district in Cumberland in northwestern England, on the Scottish border; Cumberland is a historic county along the western coast of England.

afterwards, and with a large family rising about him. Well! I don't know if it were their settling, or because of a letter my mistress wrote on her death-bed to her cousin, my lord; but somehow it was settled that Miss Rosamond and me were to go to Furnivall Manor House, in Northumberland, and my lord spoke as if it had been her mother's wish that she should live with his family, and as if he had no objections, for that one or two more or less could make no difference in so grand a household. So, though that was not the way in which I should have wished the coming of my bright and pretty pet to have been looked at – who was like a sunbeam in any family, be it never so grand – I was well pleased that all the folks in the Dale should stare and admire, when they heard I was going to be young lady's maid at my Lord Furnivall's at Furnivall Manor.

But I made a mistake in thinking we were to go and live where my lord did. It turned out that the family had left Furnivall Manor House fifty years or more. I could not hear that my poor young mistress had ever been there, though she had been brought up in the family; and I was sorry for that, for I should have liked Miss Rosamond's youth to have passed where her mother's had been.

My lord's gentleman, from whom I asked as many questions as I durst, said that the Manor House was at the foot of the Cumberland Fells<sup>1</sup>, and a very grand place; that an old Miss Furnivall, a great-aunt of my lord's, lived there, with only a few servants; but that it was a very healthy place, and my lord had thought that it would suit Miss Rosamond very well for a few years, and that her being there might perhaps amuse his old aunt.

I was bidden by my lord to have Miss Rosamond's things ready by a certain day. He was a stern proud man, as they say all the Lords Furnivall were; and he never spoke a word more than was necessary. Folk did say he had loved my young mistress; but that, because she knew that his father would object, she would never listen to him, and married Esthwaite; but I don't know. He never married at any rate. But he never took much notice of Miss Rosamond; which I thought he might have done if he had cared for her dead mother. He sent his gentleman with us to the Manor House, telling him to join him at Newcastle<sup>2</sup> that same evening; so there was no great length of time for him to make us known to all the strangers before he, too, shook us off; and we were left, two lonely young things (I was not eighteen), in the great old Manor House. It seems like yesterday that we drove there. We had left our own dear parsonage very early, and we had both cried as if our hearts would break, though we were travelling in my lord's carriage, which I thought so much of once. And now It was long past noon on a September day, and we stopped to change horses for the last time at a little, smoky town, all full of colliers and miners. Miss Rosamond had fallen asleep, but Mr. Henry told me to waken her, that she might see the park and the Manor House as we drove up. I thought it rather a pity; but I did what he bade me, for fear he should complain of me to my lord. We had left all signs of a town, or even a village, and were then inside the gates of a large, wild park – not like the parks here in the south, but with rocks, and the noise of running water, and gnarled thorn-trees, and old oaks, all white and peeled with age.

The road went up about two miles, and then we saw a great and stately house, with many trees close around it, so close that in some places their branches dragged against the walls when the wind blew; and some hung broken down; for no one seemed to take much charge of the place; – to lop the wood, or to keep the moss-covered carriage-way in order. Only in front of the house all was clear. The great oval drive was without a weed; and neither tree nor creeper was allowed to grow over the long, many-windowed front; at both sides of which a wing projected, which were each the ends of other side fronts; for the house, although it was so desolate, was even grander than I expected. Behind it rose the Fells, which seemed unenclosed and bare enough; and on the left hand of the house, as you stood facing it, was a little, old-fashioned flower-garden, as I found out afterwards. A door opened out upon it from the west front; it had been scooped out of the thick dark wood for some old Lady Furnivall; but the branches of the great forest trees had grown and overshadowed it again, and there were very few flowers that would live there at that time. When we drove up to the great front entrance, and went into the hall I thought we should be lost – it was so

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<sup>1</sup> **the Cumberland Fells** – a part of the Cumbrian Mountains

<sup>2</sup> **Newcastle** – a city in the historic county of Northumberland; the new castle from which the town got its name was built in 1080.

large, and vast, and grand. There was a chandelier all of bronze, hung down from the middle of the ceiling; and I had never seen one before, and looked at it all in amaze. Then, at one end of the hall, was a great fireplace, as large as the sides of the houses in my country, with massy andirons and dogs to hold the wood; and by it were heavy, old-fashioned sofas. At the opposite end of the hall, to the left as you went in – on the western side – was an organ built into the wall, and so large that it filled up the best part of that end. Beyond it, on the same side, was a door; and opposite, on each side of the fire-place, were also doors leading to the east front; but those I never went through as long as I stayed in the house, so I can't tell you what lay beyond.

The afternoon was closing in and the hall, which had no fire lighted in it, looked dark and gloomy, but we did not stay there a moment. The old servant, who had opened the door for us bowed to Mr. Henry, and took us in through the door at the further side of the great organ, and led us through several smaller halls and passages into the west drawing-room, where he said that Miss Furnivall was sitting. Poor little Miss Rosamond held very tight to me, as if she were scared and lost in that great place, and as for myself, I was not much better. The west drawing-room was very cheerful-looking, with a warm fire in it, and plenty of good, comfortable furniture about. Miss Furnivall was an old lady not far from eighty, I should think, but I do not know. She was thin and tall, and had a face as full of fine wrinkles as if they had been drawn all over it with a needle's point. Her eyes were very watchful to make up, I suppose, for her being so deaf as to be obliged to use a trumpet. Sitting with her, working at the same great piece of tapestry, was Mrs. Stark, her maid and companion, and almost as old as she was. She had lived with Miss Furnivall ever since they both were young, and now she seemed more like a friend than a servant; she looked so cold, and grey, and stony, as if she had never loved or cared for any one; and I don't suppose she did care for any one, except her mistress; and, owing to the great deafness of the latter, Mrs. Stark treated her very much as if she were a child. Mr. Henry gave some message from my lord, and then he bowed good-bye to us all, – taking no notice of my sweet little Miss Rosamond's outstretched hand – and left us standing there, being looked at by the two old ladies through their spectacles.

I was right glad when they rung for the old footman who had shown us in at first, and told him to take us to our rooms. So we went out of that great drawing-room, and into another sitting-room, and out of that, and then up a great flight of stairs, and along a broad gallery – which was something like a library, having books all down one side, and windows and writing-tables all down the other – till we came to our rooms, which I was not sorry to hear were just over the kitchens; for I began to think I should be lost in that wilderness of a house. There was an old nursery, that had been used for all the little lords and ladies long ago, with a pleasant fire burning in the grate, and the kettle boiling on the hob, and tea things spread out on the table; and out of that room was the night-nursery, with a little crib for Miss Rosamond close to my bed. And old James called up Dorothy, his wife, to bid us welcome; and both he and she were so hospitable and kind, that by and by Miss Rosamond and me felt quite at home; and by the time tea was over, she was sitting on Dorothy's knee, and chattering away as fast as her little tongue could go. I soon found out that Dorothy was from Westmoreland, and that bound her and me together, as it were; and I would never wish to meet with kinder people than were old James and his wife. James had lived pretty nearly all his life in my lord's family, and thought there was no one so grand as they. He even looked down a little on his wife; because, till he had married her, she had never lived in any but a farmer's household. But he was very fond of her, as well he might be. They had one servant under them, to do all the rough work. Agnes they called her; and she and me, and James and Dorothy, with Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark, made up the family; always remembering my sweet little Miss Rosamond! I used to wonder what they had done before she came, they thought so much of her now. Kitchen and drawing-room, it was all the same. The hard, sad Miss Furnivall, and the cold Mrs. Stark, looked pleased when she came fluttering in like a bird, playing and pranking hither and thither, with a continual murmur, and pretty prattle of gladness. I am sure, they were sorry many a time when she flitted away into the kitchen, though they were too proud to ask her to stay with them, and were a little surprised at her taste; though to be sure, as Mrs. Stark said, it was not to be wondered at, remembering what stock her father had come of. The great, old rambling house was a famous place for little Miss Rosamond. She made

expeditions all over it, with me at her heels; all, except the east wing, which was never opened, and whither we never thought of going. But in the western and northern part was many a pleasant room; full of things that were curiosities to us, though they might not have been to people who had seen more. The windows were darkened by the sweeping boughs of the trees, and the ivy which had overgrown them: but, in the green gloom, we could manage to see old China jars and carved ivory boxes, and great, heavy books, and, above all, the old pictures!

Once, I remember, my darling would have Dorothy go with us to tell us who they all were; for they were all portraits of some of my lord's family, though Dorothy could not tell us the names of every one. We had gone through most of the rooms, when we came to the old state drawing-room over the hall, and there was a picture of Miss Furnivall; or, as she was called in those days, Miss Grace, for she was the younger sister. Such a beauty she must have been! but with such a set, proud look, and such scorn looking out of her handsome eyes, with her eyebrows just a little raised, as if she wondered how anyone could have the impertinence to look at her; and her lip curled at us, as we stood there gazing. She had a dress on, the like of which I had never seen before, but it was all the fashion when she was young: a hat of some soft, white stuff like beaver, pulled a little over her brows, and a beautiful plume of feathers sweeping round it on one side; and her gown of blue satin was open in front to a quilted, white stomacher.

'Well, to be sure!' said I, when I had gazed my fill. 'Flesh is grass, they do say; but who would have thought that Miss Furnivall had been such an out-and-out beauty, to see her now?'

'Yes,' said Dorothy. 'Folks change sadly. But if what my master's father used to say was true, Miss Furnivall, the elder sister, was handsomer than Miss Grace. Her picture is here somewhere; but, if I show it you, you must never let on, even to James, that you have seen it. Can the little lady hold her tongue, think you?' asked she.

I was not so sure, for she was such a little, sweet, bold, open-spoken child, so I set her to hide herself; and then I helped Dorothy to turn a great picture, that leaned with its face towards the wall, and was not hung up as the others were. To be sure, it beat Miss Grace for beauty; and, I think, for scornful pride, too, though in that matter it might be hard to choose. I could have looked at it an hour, but Dorothy seemed half frightened at having shown it to me, and hurried it back again, and bade me run and find Miss Rosamond, for that there were some ugly places about the house, where she should like ill for the child to go. I was a brave, high-spirited girl, and thought little of what the old woman said, for I liked hide-and-seek as well as any child in the parish; so off I ran to find my little one.

As winter drew on, and the days grew shorter, I was sometimes almost certain that I heard a noise as if someone was playing on the great organ in the hall. I did not hear it every evening; but, certainly, I did very often; usually when I was sitting with Miss Rosamond, after I had put her to bed, and keeping quite still and silent in the bed-room. Then I used to hear it booming and swelling away in the distance. The first night, when I went down to my supper, I asked Dorothy who had been playing music, and James said very shortly that I was a gowk<sup>1</sup> to take the wind soughing among the trees for music: but I saw Dorothy look at him very fearfully, and Agnes, the kitchen-maid, said something beneath her breath, and went quite white. I saw they did not like my question, so I held my peace till I was with Dorothy alone, when I knew I could get a good deal out of her. So, the next day, I watched my time, and I coaxed and asked her who it was that played the organ; for I knew that it was the organ and not the wind well enough, for all I had kept silence before James. But Dorothy had had her lesson I'll warrant, and never a word could I get from her. So then I tried Agnes, though I had always held my head rather above her, as I was even to James and Dorothy, and she was little better than their servant. So she said I must never, never tell; and if I ever told, I was never to say she had told me; but it was a very strange noise, and she had heard it many a time, but most of all on winter nights, and before storms; and folks did say, it was the old lord playing on the great organ in the hall, just as he used to do when he was alive; but who the old lord was, or why he played, and why he played on stormy winter evenings in particular, she either could not or would not tell me. Well! I told you I had a brave heart; and I thought it was rather

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<sup>1</sup> gowk = a fool

pleasant to have that grand music rolling about the house, let who would be the player; for now it rose above the great gusts of wind, and wailed and triumphed just like a living creature, and then it fell to a softness most complete; only it was always music, and tunes, so it was nonsense to call it the wind I thought at first, that it might be Miss Furnivall who played, unknown to Agnes; but, one day when I was in the hall by myself, I opened the organ and peeped all about it and around it, as I had done to the organ in Crosthwaite Church once before, and I saw it was all broken and destroyed inside, though it looked so brave and fine; and then, though it was noon-day, my flesh began to creep a little, and I shut it up, and run away pretty quickly to my own bright nursery; and I did not like hearing the music for some time after that, any more than James and Dorothy did. All this time Miss Rosamond was making herself more and more beloved. The old ladies liked her to dine with them at their early dinner; James stood behind Miss Furnivall's chair, and I behind Miss Rosamond's all in state; and, after dinner, she would play about in a corner of the great drawing-room, as still as any mouse, while Miss Furnivall slept, and I had my dinner in the kitchen. But she was glad enough to come to me in the nursery afterwards; for, as she said, Miss Furnivall was so sad, and Mrs. Stark so dull; but she and I were merry enough; and, by-and-by, I got not to care for that weird rolling music, which did one no harm, if we did not know where it came from.

That winter was very cold. In the middle of October the frosts began, and lasted many, many weeks. I remember, one day at dinner, Miss Furnivall lifted up her sad, heavy eyes, and said to Mrs. Stark, 'I am afraid we shall have a terrible winter,' in a strange kind of meaning way. But Mrs. Stark pretended not to hear, and talked very loud of something else. My little lady and I did not care for the frost; not we! As long as it was dry we climbed up the steep brows, behind the house, and went up on the Fells, which were bleak, and bare enough, and there we ran races in the fresh, sharp air; and once we came down by a new path that took us past the two old, gnarled holly-trees, which grew about half-way down by the east side of the house. But the days grew shorter, and shorter; and the old lord, if it was he, played away more, and more stormily and sadly on the great organ. One Sunday afternoon, – it must have been towards the end of November – I asked Dorothy to take charge of little Missey when she came out of the drawing-room, after Miss Furnivall had had her nap; for it was too cold to take her with me to church, and yet I wanted to go. And Dorothy was glad enough to promise, and was so fond of the child that all seemed well; and Agnes and I set off very briskly, though the sky hung heavy and black over the white earth, as if the night had never fully gone away; and the air, though still, was very biting and keen.

'We shall have a fall of snow,' said Agnes to me. And sure enough, even while we were in church, it came down thick, in great, large flakes, so thick it almost darkened the windows. It had stopped snowing before we came out, but it lay soft, thick and deep beneath our feet, as we tramped home. Before we got to the hall the moon rose, and I think it was lighter then, – what with the moon, and what with the white dazzling snow – than it had been when we went to church, between two and three o'clock. I have not told you that Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark never went to church: they used to read the prayers together, in their quiet, gloomy way; they seemed to feel the Sunday very long without their tapestry-work to be busy at. So when I went to Dorothy in the kitchen, to fetch Miss Rosamond and take her up-stairs with me, I did not much wonder when the old woman told me that the ladies had kept the child with them, and that she had never come to the kitchen, as I had bidden her, when she was tired of behaving pretty in the drawing-room. So I took off my things and went to find her, and bring her to her supper in the nursery. But when I went into the best drawing-room, there sate the two old ladies, very still and quiet, dropping out a word now and then, but looking as if nothing so bright and merry as Miss Rosamond had ever been near them. Still I thought she might be hiding from me; it was one of her pretty ways; and that she had persuaded them to look as if they knew nothing about her; so I went softly peeping under this sofa, and behind that chair, making believe I was sadly frightened at not finding her.

'What's the matter, Hester?' said Mrs. Stark sharply. I don't know if Miss Furnivall had seen me, for, as I told you, she was very deaf, and she sate quite still, idly staring into the fire, with her hopeless face. 'I'm only looking for my little Rosy-Posy,' replied I, still thinking that the child was there, and near me, though I could not see her.

‘Miss Rosamond is not here,’ said Mrs. Stark. ‘She went away more than an hour ago to find Dorothy.’ And she too turned and went on looking into the fire.

My heart sank at this, and I began to wish I had never left my darling. I went back to Dorothy and told her. James was gone out for the day, but she and me and Agnes took lights and went up into the nursery first, and then we roamed over the great large house, calling and entreating Miss Rosamond to come out of her hiding place, and not frighten us to death in that way. But there was no answer; no sound.

‘Oh!’ said I at last. ‘Can she have got into the east wing and hidden there?’

But Dorothy said it was not possible, for that she herself had never been in there; that the doors were always locked, and my lord’s steward had the keys, she believed; at any rate, neither she nor James had ever seen them: so, I said I would go back, and see if, after all, she was not hidden in the drawing-room, unknown to the old ladies; and if I found her there, I said, I would whip her well for the fright she had given me; but I never meant to do it. Well, I went back to the west drawing-room, and I told Mrs. Stark we could not find her anywhere, and asked for leave to look all about the furniture there, for I thought now, that she might have fallen asleep in some warm, hidden comer; but no! we looked, Miss Furnivall got up and looked, trembling all over, and she was nowhere there; then we set off again, everyone in the house, and looked in all the places we had searched before, but we could not find her. Miss Furnivall shivered and shook so much, that Mrs. Stark took her back into the warm drawing-room; but not before they had made me promise to bring her to them when she was found. Well-a-day! I began to think she never would be found, when I bethought me to look out into the great front court, all covered with snow. I was up-stairs when I looked out; but, it was such dear moonlight, I could see quite plain two little footprints, which might be traced from the hall door, and round the comer of the east wing. I don’t know how I got down, but I tugged open the great, stiff hall door; and, throwing the skirt of my gown over head for a cloak, I ran out. I turned the east comer, and there a black shadow fell on the snow; but when I came again into the moonlight, there were the little footmarks going up – up to the Fells. It was bitter cold; so cold that the air almost took the skin off my face as I ran, but I ran on, crying to think how my poor little darling must be perished, and frightened. I was within sight of the holly-trees, when I saw a shepherd coming down the hill, bearing something in his arms wrapped in his *maud*<sup>1</sup>. He shouted to me, and asked me if I had lost a *bairn*<sup>2</sup>; and, when I could not speak for crying, he bore towards me, and I saw my wee *bairnie*<sup>3</sup> lying still, and white, and stiff, in his arms, as if she had been dead. He told me he had been up the Fells to gather in his sheep, before the deep cold of night came on, and that under the holly-trees (black marks on the hill-side, where no other bush was for miles around) he had found my little lady – my lamb – my queen – my darling – stiff, and cold, in the terrible sleep which is frost-begotten. Oh! the joy, and the tears, of having her in my arms once again! for I would not let him carry her; but took her, *maud* and all, into my own arms, and held her near my own warm neck, and heart, and felt the life stealing slowly back again into her little, gentle limbs. But she was still insensible when we reached the hall, and I had no breath for speech. We went in by the kitchen door.

‘Bring the warming-pan,’ said I; and I carried her up-stairs and began undressing her by the nursery fire, which Agnes had kept up. I called my little lammie all the sweet and playful names I could think of, – even while my eyes were blinded by my tears; and at last, oh! at length she opened her large, blue eyes. Then I put her into her warm bed, and sent Dorothy down to tell Miss Furnivall that all was well; and I made up my mind to sit by my darling’s bedside the live-long night. She fell away into a soft sleep as soon as her pretty head had touched the pillow, and I watched by her till morning light; when she wakened up bright and clear – or so I thought at first – and, my dears, so I think now.

She said, that she had fancied that she should like to go to Dorothy, for that both the old ladies were asleep, and it was very dull in the drawing-room; and that, as she was going through the west

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1 **maud** – a grey Scottish plaid, tartan

2 **bairn** = a child (*Scottish* )

3 **bairnie** = babe, kid (*Scottish* )

lobby, she saw the snow through the high window falling – falling – soft and steady; but she wanted to see it lying pretty and white on the ground; so she made her way into the great hall; and then, going to the window, she saw it bright and soft upon the drive; but while she stood there, she saw a little girl, not as old as she was, ‘but so pretty,’ said my darling, ‘and this little girl beckoned to me to come out; and oh, she was so pretty and so sweet, I could not choose but go.’ And then this other little girl had taken her by the hand, and side by side the two had gone round the east corner.

‘Now, you are a naughty little girl, and telling stories,’ said I. ‘What would your good mamma, that is in heaven, and never told a story in her life, say to her little Rosamond, if she heard her – and I dare say she does – telling stories!’

‘Indeed, Hester,’ sobbed out my child, ‘I’m telling you true. Indeed I am.’

‘Don’t tell me!’ said I, very stern. ‘I tracked you by your foot-marks through the snow; there were only yours to be seen: and if you had had a little girl to go hand-in-hand with you up the hill, don’t you think the foot-prints would have gone along with yours?’

‘I can’t help it, dear, dear Hester,’ said she, crying, ‘if they did not; I never looked at her feet, but she held my hand fast and tight in her little one, and it was very, very cold. She took me up the Fell-path, up to the holly trees; and there I saw a lady weeping and crying; but when she saw me, she hushed her weeping, and smiled very proud and grand, and took me on her knee, and began to lull me to sleep; and that’s all, Hester – but that is true; and my dear mamma knows it is,’ said she, crying. So I thought the child was in a fever, and pretended to believe her, as she went over her story – over and over again, and always the same. At last Dorothy knocked at the door with Miss Rosamond’s breakfast; and she told me the old ladies were down in the eating parlour, and that they wanted to speak to me. They had both been into the night-nursery the evening before, but it was after Miss Rosamond was asleep; so they had only looked at her – not asked me any questions.

‘I shall catch it,’ thought I to myself, as I went along the north gallery. ‘And yet,’ I thought, taking courage, ‘it was in their charge I left her; and it’s they that’s to blame for letting her steal away unknown and unwatched.’ So I went in boldly, and told my story. I told it all to Miss Furnivall, shouting it close to her ear; but when I came to the mention of the other little girl out in the snow, coaxing and tempting her out, and her up to the grand and beautiful lady by the holly-tree, she threw her arms up – her old and withered arms – and cried aloud, ‘Oh! Heaven, forgive! Have mercy!’

Mrs. Stark took hold of her; roughly enough, I thought; but she was past Mrs. Stark’s management, and spoke to me, in a kind of wild warning and authority.

‘Hester! keep her from that child! It will lure her to her death! That evil child! Tell her it is a wicked, naughty child’ Then, Mrs. Stark hurried me out of the room; where, indeed, I was glad enough to go; but Miss Furnivall kept shrieking out, ‘Oh! have mercy! Wilt Thou never forgive! It is many a long year ago—’

I was very uneasy in my mind after that. I durst never leave Miss Rosamond, night or day, for fear lest she might slip off again, after some fancy or other; and all the more, because I thought I could make out that Miss Furnivall was crazy, from their odd ways about her; and I was afraid lest something of the same kind (which might be in the family, you know) hung over my darling. And the great frost never ceased all this time; and, whenever it was a more stormy night than usual, between the gusts, and through the wind, we heard the old lord playing on the great organ. But, old lord, or not, wherever Miss Rosamond went, there I followed; for my love for her, pretty, helpless orphan, was stronger than my fear for the grand and terrible sound. Besides, it rested with me to keep her cheerful and merry, as beseemed her age. So we played together, and wandered together, here and there, and everywhere; for I never dared to lose sight of her again in that large and rambling house. And so it happened, that one afternoon, not long before Christmas day, we were playing together on the billiard-table in the great hall (not that we knew the right way of playing, but she liked to roll the smooth ivory balls with her pretty hands, and I liked to do whatever she did); and, by-and-by, without our noticing it, it grew dusk indoors, though it was still light in the open air, and I was thinking of taking her back into the nursery, when, all of sudden, she cried out, –

‘Look, Hester! look! there is my poor little girl out in the snow!’

I turned towards the long, narrow windows, and there, sure 'Snow!' enough, I saw a little girl, less than my Miss Rosamond dressed all unfit to be out-of-doors such a bitter night – crying, and beating against the window-panes, as if she wanted to be let in. She seemed to sob and wail, till Miss Rosamond could bear it no longer, and was flying to the door to open it, when, all of a sudden, and close upon us, the great organ pealed out so loud and thundering, it fairly made me tremble; and all the more, when I remembered me that, even in the stillness of that dead-cold weather, I had heard no sound of little battering hands upon the window-glass, although the Phantom Child had seemed to put forth all its force; and, although I had seen it wail and cry, no faintest touch of sound had fallen upon my ears. whether I remembered all this at the very moment, I do not know; the great organ sound had so stunned me into terror; but this I know, I caught up Miss Rosamond before she got the hall-door opened, and clutched her, and carried her away, kicking and screaming, into the large, bright kitchen, where Dorothy and Agnes were busy with their mince-pies.

'What is the matter with my sweet one?' cried Dorothy, as I bore in Miss Rosamond, who was sobbing as if her heart would break.

'She won't let me open the door for my little girl to come in; and she'll die if she is out on the Fells all night. Cruel, naughty Hester,' she said, slapping me; but she might have struck harder, for I had seen a look of ghastly terror on Dorothy's face, which made my very blood run cold.

'Shut the back kitchen door fast, and bolt it well,' said she to Agnes. She said no more; she gave me raisins and almonds to quiet Miss Rosamond: but she sobbed about the little girl in the snow, and would not touch any of the good things. I was thankful when she cried herself to sleep in bed. Then I stole down to the kitchen, and told Dorothy I had made up my mind I would carry my darling back to my father's house in Applethwaite; where, if we lived humbly, we lived at peace. I said I had been frightened enough with the old lord's organ-playing; but now that I had seen for myself this little, moaning child, all decked out as no child in the neighbourhood could be, beating and battering to get in, yet always without any sound or noise – with the dark wound on its right shoulder; and that Miss Rosamond had known it again for the phantom that had nearly lured her to her death (which Dorothy knew was true); I would stand it no longer.

I saw Dorothy change colour once or twice. When I had done, she told me she did not think I could take Miss Rosamond with me, for that she was my lord's ward, and I had no right over her; and she asked me, would I leave the child that I was so fond of, just for sounds and sights that could do me no harm; and that they had all had to get used to in their turns? I was all in a hot, trembling passion; and I said it was very well for her to talk, that knew what these sights and noises betokened, and that had, perhaps, had something to do with the Spectre-Child<sup>1</sup> while it was alive. And I taunted her so, that she told me all she knew, at last; and then I wished I had never been told, for it only made me more afraid than ever.

She said she had heard the tale from old neighbours that were alive when she was first married; when folks used to come to the hall sometimes, before it had got such a bad name on the country side: it might not be true, or it might, what she had been told.

The old lord was Miss Furnivall's father – Miss Grace, as Dorothy called her, for Miss Maude was the elder, and Miss Furnivall by rights. The old lord was eaten up with pride. Such a proud man was never seen or heard of; and his daughters were like him. No one was good enough to wed them, although they had choice enough; for they were the great beauties of their day, as I had seen by their portraits, where they hung in the state drawing-room. But, as the old saying is, 'Pride will have a fall'; and these two haughty beauties fell in love with the same man, and he no better than a foreign musician, whom their father had down from London to play music with him at the Manor House. For, above all things, next to his pride, the old lord loved music. He could play on nearly every instrument that ever was heard of: and it was a strange thing it did not soften him; but he was a fierce, dour, old man, and had broken his poor wife's heart with his cruelty, they said. He was mad after music, and would pay any money for it. So he got this foreigner to come; who made such beautiful music, that they said the very birds on the trees stopped their singing to listen. And, by degrees, this foreign gentleman got such a hold over the old lord, that nothing would serve him but

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<sup>1</sup> Spectre(-)Child = a ghost of a child



that he must come every year; and it was he that had the great organ brought from Holland, and built up in the hall, where it stood now. He taught the old lord to play on it; hut many and many a time, when Lord Furnivall was thinking of nothing but his fine organ, and his finer music, the dark foreigner was walking abroad in the woods with one of the young ladies; now Miss Maude, and then Miss Grace.

Miss Maude won the day and carried off the prize, such as it was; and he and she were married, all unknown to any one; and before he made his next yearly visit, she had been confined of a little girl at a farm-house on the Moors, while her father and Miss Grace thought she was away at Doncaster Races<sup>1</sup>. But though she was a wife and a mother, she was not a bit softened, but as haughty and as passionate as ever; and perhaps more so, for she was jealous of Miss Grace, to whom her foreign husband paid a deal of court – by way of blinding her – as he told his wife. But Miss Grace triumphed over Miss Maude, and Miss Maude grew fiercer and fiercer, both with her husband and with her sister; and the former who could easily shake off what was disagreeable, and hide himself in foreign countries – went away a month before his usual time that summer, and half-threatened that he would never come back again. Meanwhile, the little girl was left at the farm-house, and her mother used to have her horse saddled and gallop wildly over the hills to see her once every week, at the very least – for where she loved, she loved; and where she hated, she hated. And the old lord went on playing – playing on his organ; and the servants thought the sweet music he made had soothed down his awful temper, of which (Dorothy said) some terrible tales could be told. He grew infirm too, and had to walk with a crutch; and his son – that was the present Lord Furnivall's father – was with the army in America, and the other son at sea; so Miss Maude had it pretty much her own way, and she and Miss Grace grew colder and bitterer to each other every day; till at last they hardly ever spoke, except when the old lord was by. The foreign musician came again the next summer, but it was for the last time; for they led him such a life with their jealousy and their passions, that he grew weary, and went away, and never was heard of again. And Miss Maude, who had always meant to have her marriage acknowledged when her father should be dead, was left now a deserted wife – whom nobody knew to have been married – with a child that she dared not own, although she loved it to distraction; living with a father whom she feared, and a sister whom she hated. When the next summer passed over and the dark foreigner never came, both Miss Maude and Miss Grace grew gloomy and sad; they had a haggard look about them, though they looked handsome as ever. But by-and-by Miss Maude brightened; for her father grew more and more infirm, and more than ever carried away by his music; and she and Miss Grace lived almost entirely apart, having separate rooms, the one on the west side, Miss Maude on the east – those very rooms which were now shut up. So she thought she might have her little girl with her, and no one need ever know except those who dared not speak about it, and were bound to believe that it was, as she said, a cottager's child she had taken a fancy to. All this Dorothy said, was pretty well known; but what came afterwards no one knew, except Miss Grace, and Mrs. Stark, who was even then her maid, and much more of a friend to her than ever her sister had been. But the servants supposed, from words that were dropped, that Miss Maude had triumphed over Miss Grace, and told her that all the time the dark foreigner had been mocking her with pretended love – he was her own husband; the colour left Miss Grace's cheek and lips that very day for ever, and she was heard to say many a time that sooner or later she would have her revenge; and Mrs. Stark was forever spying about the east rooms.

One fearful night, just after the New Year had come in, when the snow was lying thick and deep, and the flakes were still falling – fast enough to blind anyone who might be out and abroad – there was a great and violent noise heard, and the old lord's voice above all, cursing and swearing awfully, – and the cries of a little child, – and the proud defiance of a fierce woman, – and the sound of a blow, – and a dead stillness, – and moans and wailing's dying away on the hill-side! Then the old lord summoned all his servants, and told them, with terrible oaths, and words more terrible, that his daughter had disgraced herself, and that he had turned her out of doors, – her, and her child, –

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<sup>1</sup> **Doncaster Races** – the Saint Leger horse race is held annually in September in Doncaster, a town in the county of South Yorkshire in north-central England.

and that if ever they gave her help, – or food, – or shelter, – he prayed that they might never enter Heaven. And, all the while, Miss Grace stood by him, white and still as any stone; and when he had ended she heaved a great sigh, as much as to say her work was done, and her end was accomplished. But the old lord never touched his organ again, and died within the year; and no wonder! for, on the morrow of that wild and fearful night, the shepherds, coming down the Fell-side, found Miss Maude sitting, all crazy and smiling, under the holly-trees, nursing a dead child, – with a terrible mark on its right shoulder. ‘But that was not what killed it,’ said; ‘it was the frost and the cold; – every wild creature was in its hole, and every beast in its fold, – while the child and its mother were turned out to wander on the Fells! And now you know all! and I wonder if you are less frightened now?’

I was more frightened than ever; but I said I was not. I wished Miss Rosamond and myself well out of that dreadful house for ever; but I would not leave her, and I dared not take her away. But oh! how I watched her, and guarded her! We bolted the doors, and shut the window-shutters fast, an hour or more before dark, rather than leave them open five minutes too late. But my little lady still heard the weird child crying and mourning; and not all we could do or say, could keep her from wanting to go to her, and let her in from the cruel wind and the snow. All this time, I kept away from Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark, as much as ever I could; for I feared them – I knew no good could be about them, with their grey hard faces, and their dreamy eyes, looking back into the ghastly years that were gone. But, even in my fear, I had a kind of pity – for Miss Furnivall, at least. Those gone down to the pit can hardly have a more hopeless look than that which was ever on her face. At last I even got so sorry for her – who never said a word but what was quite forced from her – that I prayed for her; and I taught Miss Rosamond to pray for one who had done a deadly sin; but often when she came to those words, she would listen, and start up from her knees, and say, ‘I hear my little girl plainting<sup>1</sup> and crying very sad – Oh! let her in, or she will die!’

One night – just after New Year’s Day had come at last, and the long winter had taken a turn, as I hoped – I heard the west drawing-room bell ring three times, which was the signal for me. I would not leave Miss Rosamond alone, for all she was asleep – for the old lord had been playing wilder than ever – and I feared lest my darling should waken to hear the spectre child; see her I knew she could not. I had fastened the windows too well for that. So, I took her out of her bed and wrapped her up in such outer clothes as were most handy, and carried her down to the drawing-room, where the old ladies sate at their tapestry work as usual. They looked up when I came in, and Mrs. Stark asked, quite astounded, ‘Why did I bring Miss Rosamond there, out of her warm bed?’ I had begun to whisper, ‘Because I was afraid of her being tempted out while I was away, by the wild child in the snow,’ when she stopped me short (with a glance at Miss Furnivall), and said Miss Furnivall wanted me to undo some work she had done wrong, and which neither of them could see to unpick. So, I laid my pretty dear on the sofa, and sate down on a stool by them, and hardened my heart against them, as I heard the wind rising and howling.

Miss Rosamond slept on sound, for all the wind blew so; and Miss Furnivall said never a word, nor looked round when the gusts shook the windows. All at once she started up to her full height, and put up one hand, as if to bid us listen.

‘I hear voices!’ said she. ‘I hear terrible screams – I hear my father’s voice!’

Just at that moment, my darling wakened with a sudden start: ‘My little girl is crying, oh, how she is crying!’ and she tried to get up and go to her, but she got her feet entangled in the blanket, and I caught her up; for my flesh had begun to creep at these noises, which they heard while we could catch no sound. In a minute or two the noises came, and gathered fast, and filled our ears; we, too, heard voices and screams, and no longer heard the winter’s wind that raged abroad. Mrs. Stark looked at me, and I at her, but we dared not speak. Suddenly Miss Furnivall went towards the door, out into the ante-room, through the west lobby, and opened the door into the great hall. Mrs. Stark followed, and I durst not be left, though my heart almost stopped beating for fear. I wrapped my darling tight in my arms, and went out with them. In the hall the screams were louder than ever; they sounded to come from the east wing – nearer and nearer – close on the other side of the

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<sup>1</sup> **plainting** – *poet.* weeping bitterly, sobbing, moaning

locked-up doors – close behind them. Then I noticed that the great bronze chandelier seemed all alight, though the hall was dim, and that a fire was blazing in the vast hearth-place, though it gave no heat; and I shuddered up with terror, and folded my darling closer to me. But as I did so, the east door shook, and she, suddenly struggling to get free from me, cried, ‘Hester! I must go! My little girl is there; I hear her; she is coming! Hester, I must go!’

I held her tight with all my strength; with a set will, I held her. If I had died, my hands would have grasped her still, I was so resolved in my mind. Miss Furnivall stood listening, and paid no regard to my darling, who had got down to the ground, and whom I, upon my knees now, was holding with both my arms clasped round her neck; she still striving and crying to get free.

All at once, the east door gave way with a thundering crash, as if torn open in a violent passion, and there came into that broad and mysterious light, the figure of a tall, old man, with grey hair and gleaming eyes. He drove before him, with many a relentless gesture of abhorrence, a stern and beautiful woman, with a little child clinging to her dress.

‘Oh Hester! Hester!’ cried Miss Rosamond. ‘It’s the lady! the lady below the holly-trees; and my little girl is with her. Hester! Hester! let me go to her; they are drawing me to them. I feel them – I feel them. I must go!’

Again she was almost convulsed by her efforts to get away; but I held her tighter and tighter, till I feared I should do her a hurt; but rather that than let her go towards those terrible phantoms. They passed along towards the great hall-door, where the winds howled and ravened for their prey; but before they reached that, the lady turned; and I could see that she defied the old man with a fierce and proud defiance; but then she quailed – and then she threw her arms wildly and piteously to save her child – her little child – from a blow from his uplifted crutch.

And Miss Rosamond was torn as by a power stronger than mine, and writhed in my arms, and sobbed (for by this time the poor darling was growing faint).

‘They want me to go with them on to the Fells – they are drawing me to them. Oh, my little girl! I would come, but cruel, wicked Hester holds me very tight.’ But when she saw the uplifted crutch she swooned away, and I thanked God for it. Just at this moment – when the tall, old man, his hair streaming as in the blast of a furnace, was going to strike the little, shrinking child – Miss Furnivall, the old woman by my side, cried out, ‘Oh, father! father! spare the little, innocent child!’ But just then I saw – we all saw – another phantom shape itself, and grow clear out of the blue and misty light that filled the hall; we had not seen her till now, for it was another lady who stood by the old man, with a look of relentless hate and triumphant scorn. That figure was very beautiful to look upon, with a soft, white hat drawn down over the proud brows, and a red and curling lip. It was dressed in an open robe of blue satin. I had seen that figure before. It was the likeness of Miss Furnivall in her youth; and the terrible phantoms moved on, regardless of old Miss Furnivall’s wild entreaty, and the uplifted crutch fell on the right shoulder of the little child, and the younger sister looked on, stony and deadly serene. But at that moment, the dim lights, and the fire that gave no heat, went out of themselves, and Miss Furnivall lay at our feet stricken down by the palsy – death-stricken.

Yes! she was carried to her bed that night never to rise again. She lay with her face to the wall, muttering low, but muttering always: Alas! alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age! what is done in youth can never be undone in age!

## **The Yellow Wall Paper (Charlotte Perkins Gilman)**

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity, – but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and *perhaps* – (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) – *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see, he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression, – a slight hysterical tendency, – what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites, – whichever it is, – and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to 'work' until I am well again.

Personally I disagree with their ideas.

Personally I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal – having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus – but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden – large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid; but I don't care – there is something strange about the house – I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a *draught*, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself, – before him, at least, – and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty, old-fashioned chintz hangings! but John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. 'Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear,' said he, 'and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time.' So we took the nursery, at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playground and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off – the paper – in

great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate, and provoke study, and when you follow the lame, uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide – plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions.

The color is repellant, almost revolting; a smouldering, unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away, – he hates to have me write a word.

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him.

Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!

Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able – to dress and entertain, and order things.

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!

And yet I *cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wall paper!

At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

He said that after the wall paper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

'You know the place is doing you good,' he said, 'and really, dear, I don't care to renovate the house just for a three months' rental.'

'Then do let us go downstairs,' I said, 'there are such pretty rooms there.'

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down cellar if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain.

But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.

It is as airy and comfortable a room as any one need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I'm really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.

Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees.

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fire-works in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside-down.

I got positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have! I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wall paper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother – they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed, which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

But I don't mind it a bit – only the paper.

There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing.

She is a perfect, an enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows.

There is one that commands the road, a lovely, shaded, winding road, and one that just looks off over the country. A lovely country, too, full of great elms and velvet meadows.

This wall paper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.

But in the places where it isn't faded, and where the sun is just so, I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to sulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.

There's sister on the stairs!

Well, the Fourth of July<sup>1</sup> is over! The people are all gone and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we just had mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.

But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall.

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<sup>1</sup> **the Fourth of July** – Independence Day, an annual national holiday in the United States; it commemorates the Declaration of Independence adopted on July 4, 1776.

But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I don't feel as if it was worthwhile to turn my hand over for anything, and I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases, and Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want her to.

So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal.

I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wall paper. Perhaps *because* of the wall paper.

It dwells in my mind so!

I lie here on this great immovable bed – it is nailed down, I believe – and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say, at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion.

I know a little of the principles of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way, each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes – a kind of 'debased Romanesque' with delirium tremens<sup>1</sup> – go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the room where it is almost intact, and there, when the cross-lights fade and the low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation, after all, – the interminable grotesques seem to form around a common centre and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap, I guess.

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way – it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I mustn't lose my strength, and has me take cod-liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wished he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness, I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the

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<sup>1</sup> **delirium tremens** – a mental disturbance with disorientation and hallucinations in cases of alcoholism

bed, and sat by me and read to me till he tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let my silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wall paper.

If we had not used it that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here, after all. I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them anymore, – I am too wise, – but I keep watch of it all the same.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder – I begin to think – I wish John would take me away from here!

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night.

It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around, just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wall paper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move, and when I came back John was awake.

'What is it, little girl?' he said. 'Don't go walking about like that – you'll get cold.'

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

'Why, darling!' said he, 'our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how to leave before.'

'The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better. I feel really much easier about you.'

'I don't weigh a bit more,' said I, 'nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening, when you are here, but it is worse in the morning, when you are away.'

'Bless her little heart!' said he with a big hug; 'she shall be as sick as she pleases. But now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning.'

'And you won't go away?' I asked gloomily.

'Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really, dear, you are better!'

'Better in body, perhaps' – I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

'My darling,' said he, 'I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?'



So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn't, – I lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing.

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well under way in following, it turns a back somersault, and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions, – why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes.

When the sun shoots in through the east window – I always watch for that first long, straight ray – it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it.

That is why I watch it always.

By moonlight – the moon shines in all night when there is a moon – I wouldn't know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, – that dim sub-pattern, – but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can.

Indeed, he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit, I am convinced, for, you see, I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake, – oh, no!

The fact is, I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis, that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times *looking at the paper!* And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, and looked quite angry – asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful!

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wall paper.

I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was *because* of the wall paper – he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away.

I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough.

I'm feeling ever so much better! I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch developments; but I sleep a good deal in the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and perplexing.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously.

It is the strangest yellow, that wall paper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw – not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things.

But there is something else about that paper – the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not the smell is here.

It creeps all over the house.

I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it – there is that smell!

Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like.

It is not bad – at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.

In this damp weather it is awful. I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house – to reach the smell.

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the *color* of the paper – a yellow smell!

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs around the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even *smooch*, as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round – round and round and round – it makes me dizzy!

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern *does* move – and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern – it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside-down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad.

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

And I'll tell you why – privately – I've seen her!

I can see her out of every one of my windows!

It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I see her in that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden.

I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.

And John is so queer, now, that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at one time.

And though I always see her she *may* be able to creep faster than I can turn!

I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind.

If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night, for all I'm so quiet!

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are secretly affected by it.

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't see through him!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John is to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me – the sly thing! but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight, and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me I declared I would finish it today!

We go away to-morrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing.

She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but I must not get tired.

How she betrayed herself that time!

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me – not *alive*!

She tried to get me out of the room – it was too patent! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could; and not to wake me even for dinner – I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but that great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs to-night, and take the boat home to-morrow.

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I must get to work.  
 I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.  
 I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.  
 I want to astonish him.  
 I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!  
 But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!  
 This bed will *not* move!  
 I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner – but it hurt my teeth.  
 Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!  
 I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.  
 Besides, I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.  
 I don't like to *look* out of the windows even – there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.  
 I wonder if they all come out of that wall paper, as I did?  
 But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope – you don't get *me* out in the road there!  
 I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!  
 It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!  
 I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.  
 For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.  
 But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.  
 Why, there's John at the door!  
 It is no use, young man, you can't open it!  
 How he does call and pound!  
 Now he's crying for an axe.  
 It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!  
 'John, dear!' said I in the gentlest voice, 'the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!'

That silenced him for a few moments.  
 Then he said – very quietly indeed, 'Open the door, my darling!'

'I can't,' said I. 'The key is down by the front door, under a plantain leaf!'

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it, of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

'What is the matter?' he cried. 'For God's sake, what are you doing?'

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

'I've got out at last,' said I, 'in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!'

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

### **An Imaginative Woman (Thomas Hardy)**

When William Marchmill had finished his inquiries for lodgings at the well-known watering-place of Solentsea in Upper Wessex<sup>1</sup>, he returned to the hotel to find his wife. She, with

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<sup>1</sup> **Wessex** – one of the historical Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of medieval England

the children, had rambled along the shore, and Marchmill followed in the direction indicated by the military-looking hall-porter.

‘By Jove, how far you’ve gone! I am quite out of breath,’ Marchmill said, rather impatiently, when he came up with his wife, who was reading as she walked, the three children being considerably further ahead with the nurse.

Mrs. Marchmill started out of the reverie into which the book had thrown her. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘you’ve been such a long time. I was tired of staying in that dreary hotel. But I am sorry if you have wanted me, Will?’

‘Well I have had trouble to suit myself. When you see the airy and comfortable rooms heard of, you find they are stuffy and uncomfortable. Will you come and see if what I’ve fixed on will do? There is not much room, I am afraid; but I can light on nothing better. The town is rather full.’

The pair left the children and nurse to continue their ramble, and went back together.

In age well-balanced, in personal appearance fairly matched, and in domestic requirements conformable, in temper this couple differed, though even here they did not often clash, he being equable, if not lymphatic, and she decidedly nervous and sanguine. It was to their tastes and fancies, those smallest, greatest particulars, that no common denominator could be applied. Marchmill considered his wife’s likes and inclinations somewhat silly; she considered his sordid and material. The husband’s business was that of a gunmaker in a thriving city northwards, and his soul was in that business always; the lady was best characterized by that superannuated phrase of elegance ‘a votary of the muse.’ An impressionable, palpitating creature was Ella, shrinking humanely from detailed knowledge of her husband’s trade whenever she reflected that everything he manufactured had for its purpose the destruction of life. She could only recover her equanimity by assuring herself that some, at least, of his weapons were sooner or later used for the extermination of horrid vermin and animals almost as cruel to their inferiors in species as human beings were to theirs.

She had never antecedently regarded this occupation of his as any objection to having him for a husband. Indeed, the necessity of getting life-leased at all cost, a cardinal virtue which all good mothers teach, kept her from thinking of it at all till she had closed with William, had passed the honeymoon, and reached the reflecting stage. Then, like a person who has stumbled upon some object in the dark, she wondered what she had got; mentally walked round it, estimated it; whether it were rare or common; contained gold, silver, or lead; were a clog or a pedestal, everything to her or nothing.

She came to some vague conclusions, and since then had kept her heart alive by pitying her proprietor’s obtuseness and want of refinement, pitying herself, and letting off her delicate and ethereal emotions in imaginative occupations, daydreams, and night-sighs, which perhaps would not much have disturbed William if he had known of them.

Her figure was small, elegant, and slight in build, tripping, or rather bounding, in movement. She was dark-eyed, and had that marvelously bright and liquid sparkle in each pupil which characterizes persons of Ella’s cast of soul, and is too often a cause of heartache to the possessor’s male friends, ultimately sometimes to herself. Her husband was a tall, long-featured man, with a brown beard; he had a pondering regard; and was, it must be added, usually kind and tolerant to her. He spoke in squarely shaped sentences, and was supremely satisfied with a condition of sublunary things which made weapons a necessity.

Husband and wife walked till they had reached the house they were in search of, which stood in a terrace facing the sea, and was fronted by a small garden of windproof and salt-proof evergreens, stone steps leading up to the porch. It had its number in the row, but, being rather larger than the rest, was in addition sedulously distinguished as Coburg House by its landlady, though everybody else called it ‘Thirteen, New Parade.’ The spot was bright and lively now; but in winter it became necessary to place sandbags against the door, and to stuff up the keyhole against the wind and rain, which had worn the paint so thin that the priming and knotting showed through.

The householder, who had been watching for the gentleman’s return, met them in the passage, and showed the rooms. She informed them that she was a professional man’s widow, left in needy circumstances by the rather sudden death of her husband, and she spoke anxiously of the

conveniences of the establishment.

Mrs. Marchmill said that she liked the situation and the house; but, it being small, there would not be accommodation enough, unless she could have all the rooms.

The landlady mused with an air of disappointment. She wanted the visitors to be her tenants very badly, she said, with obvious honesty. But unfortunately two of the rooms were occupied permanently by a bachelor gentleman. He did not pay season prices, it was true; but as he kept on his apartments all the year round, and was all extremely nice and interesting young man, who gave no trouble, she did not like to turn him out for a month's 'let,' even at a high figure. 'Perhaps, however,' she added, 'he might offer to go for a time.'

They would not hear of this, and went back to the hotel, intending to proceed to the agent's to inquire further. Hardly had they sat down to tea when the landlady called. Her gentleman, she said, had been so obliging as to offer to give up his rooms three or four weeks rather than drive the newcomers away.

'It is very kind, but we won't inconvenience him in that way,' said the Marchmills.

'O, it won't inconvenience him, I assure you!' said the landlady eloquently. 'You see, he's a different sort of young man from most – dreamy, solitary, rather melancholy – and he cares more to be here when the south-westerly gales are beating against the door, and the sea washes over the Parade, and there's not a soul in the place, than he does now in the season. He'd just as soon be where, in fact, he's going temporarily to a little cottage on the Island opposite, for a change.' She hoped therefore that they would come.

The Marchmill family accordingly took possession of the house next day, and it seemed to suit them very well. After luncheon Mr. Marchmill strolled out toward the pier, and Mrs. Marchmill, having despatched the children to their outdoor amusements on the sands, settled herself in more completely, examining this and that article, and testing the reflecting powers of the mirror in the wardrobe door.

In the small back sitting room, which had been the young bachelor's, she found furniture of a more personal nature than in the rest. Shabby books, of correct rather than rare editions, were piled up in a queerly reserved manner in corners, as if the previous occupant had not conceived the possibility that any incoming person of the season's bringing could care to look inside them. The landlady hovered on the threshold to rectify anything that Mrs. Marchmill might not find to her satisfaction.

'I'll make this my own little room,' said the latter, 'because the books are here. By the way, the person who has left seems to have a good many. He won't mind my reading some of them, Mrs. Hooper, I hope?'

'O, dear no, ma'am. Yes, he has a good many. You see, he is in the literary line himself somewhat. He is a poet – yes, really a poet – and he has a little income of his own, which is enough to write verses on, but not enough for cutting a figure, even if he cared to.'

'A Poet! O, I did not know that.'

Mrs. Marchmill opened one of the books, and saw the owner's name written on the title-page. 'Dear me!' she continued; 'I know his name very well – Robert Trewe – of course I do; and his writings! And it is his rooms we have taken, and him we have turned out of his home?'

Ella Marchmill, sitting down alone a few minutes later, thought with interested surprise of Robert Trewe. Her own latter history will best explain that interest. Herself the only daughter of a struggling man of letters, she had during the last year or two taken to writing poems, in an endeavor to find a congenial channel in which let flow her painfully embayed emotions, whose former limpidity and sparkle seemed departing in the stagnation caused by the routine of a practical household and the gloom of bearing children to a commonplace father. These poems, subscribed with masculine pseudonym, had appeared in various obscure magazines, and in two cases in rather prominent ones. In the second of the latter the page which bore her effusion at the bottom, in smallish print, bore at the top, in large print, a few verses on the same subject by this very man, Robert Trewe. Both of them, had, in fact, been struck by a tragic incident reported in the daily papers, and had used it simultaneously as an inspiration, the editor remarking in a note upon the

coincidence, and that the excellence of both poems prompted him to give them together.

After that event Ella, otherwise 'John Ivy,' had watched with much attention the appearance anywhere in print of verse bearing the signature of Robert Trewe, who, with a man's unsusceptibility on the question of sex, had never once thought of passing himself off as a woman. To be sure, Mrs. Marchmill had satisfied herself with a sort of reason for doing the contrary in her case; since nobody might believe in her inspiration if they found that the sentiments came from a pushing tradesman's wife, from the mother of three children by a matter-of-fact small-arms manufacturer.

Trewe's verse contrasted with that of the rank and file of recent minor poets in being impassioned rather than ingenious, luxuriant rather than finished. Neither symbolist<sup>1</sup> nor decadent<sup>2</sup>, he was a pessimist in so far as that character applies to a man who looks at the worst contingencies as well as the best in the human condition. Being little attracted by excellences of form and rhythm apart from content, he sometimes, when feeling outran his artistic speed, perpetrated sonnets in the loosely rhymed Elizabethan fashion<sup>3</sup>, which every right-minded reviewer said he ought not to have done.

With sad and hopeless envy Ella Marchmill had often and often scanned the rival poet's work, so much stronger as it always was than her own feeble lines. She had imitated him, and her inability to touch his level would send her into fits of despondency. Months passed away thus, till she observed from the publishers' list that Trewe had collected his fugitive pieces into a volume, which was duly issued, and was much or little praised according to chance, and had a sale quite sufficient to pay for the printing.

This step onward had suggested to John Ivy the idea of collecting her pieces also, or at any rate of making up a book of her rhymes by adding many in manuscript to the few that had seen the light, for she had been able to get no great number into print. A ruinous charge was made for costs of publication; a few reviews noticed her poor little volume; but nobody talked of it, nobody bought it, and it fell dead in a fortnight – if it had ever been alive.

The author's thoughts were diverted to another groove just then by the discovery that she was going to have a third child, and the collapse of her poetical venture had perhaps less effect upon her mind than it might have done if she had been domestically unoccupied. Her husband had paid the publisher's bill with the doctor's, and there it all had ended for the time. But, though less than a poet of her century, Ella was more than a mere multiplier of her kind, and latterly she had begun to feel the old afflatus once more. And now by an odd conjunction she found herself in the rooms of Robert Trewe.

She thoughtfully rose from her chair and searched the apartment with the interest of a fellow-tradesman. Yes, the volume of his own verse was among the rest. Though quite familiar with its contents, she read it here as if it spoke aloud to her, then called up Mrs. Hooper, the landlady, for some trivial service, and inquired again about the young man.

'Well, I'm sure you'd be interested in him, ma'am, if you could see him, only he's so shy that I don't suppose you will.' Mrs. Hooper seemed nothing loth to minister to her tenant's curiosity about her predecessor. 'Lived here long? Yes, nearly two years. He keeps on his rooms even when he's not here: the soft air of this place suits his chest, and he likes to be able to come back at any time. He is mostly writing or reading, and doesn't see many people, though, for the matter of that, he is such a good, kind young fellow that folks would only be too glad to be friendly with him if they knew him. You don't meet kind-hearted people every day.'

'Ah, he's kind-hearted. . and good.'

'Yes; he'll oblige me in anything if I ask him. "Mr. Trewe," I say to him sometimes, "you are rather out of spirits." "Well, I am, Mrs. Hooper," he'll say, "though I don't know how you should find it out." "Why not take a little change?" I ask. Then in a day or two he'll say that he will take a

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1 **symbolist** – a representative of symbolism, a literary and artistic movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; symbolists expressed their emotional experience through subtle symbolized language.

2 **decadent** – a representative of decadence, a period of decline in literature and art at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries

3 **Elizabethan fashion** – fashion and style of the time of Elizabeth I (1533–1603), Queen of England

trip to Paris, or Norway, or somewhere; and I assure you he comes back all the better for it.'

'Ah, indeed! His is a sensitive nature, no doubt.'

'Yes. Still he's odd in some things. Once when he had finished a poem of his composition late at night he walked up and down the room rehearsing it; and the floors being so thin – jerry-built houses, you know, though I say it myself – he kept me awake up above him till I wished him further. . But we get on very well.'

This was but the beginning of a series of conversations about the rising poet as the days went on. On one of these occasions Mrs. Hooper drew Ella's attention to what she had not noticed before: minute scribbles in pencil on the wallpaper behind the curtains at the head of the bed.

'O! let me look,' said Mrs. Marchmill, unable to conceal a rush of tender curiosity as she bent her pretty face close to the wall.

'These,' said Mrs. Hooper, with the manner of a woman who knew things, 'are the very beginnings and first thoughts of his verses. He has tried to rub most of them out, but you can read them still. My belief is that he wakes up in the night, you know, with some rhyme in his head, and jots it down there on the wall lest he should forget it by the morning. Some of these very lines you see here I have seen afterwards in print in the magazines. Some are newer; indeed, I have not seen that one before. It must have been done only a few days ago.'

'O, yes! . ' Ella Marchmill flushed without knowing why, and suddenly wished her companion would go away, now that the information was imparted. An indescribable consciousness of personal interest rather than literary made her anxious to read the inscription alone; and she accordingly waited till she could do so, with a sense that a great store of emotion would be enjoyed in the act.

Perhaps because the sea was choppy outside the Island, Ella's husband found it much pleasanter to go sailing and steaming about without his wife, who was a bad sailor, than with her. He did not disdain to go thus alone on board the steamboats of the cheap-trippers, where there was dancing by moonlight, and where the couples would come suddenly down with a lurch into each other's arms; for, as he blandly told her, the company was too mixed for him to take her amid such scenes. Thus, while this thriving manufacturer got a great deal of change and sea-air out of his sojourn here, the life, external at least, of Ella was monotonous enough, and mainly consisted in passing a certain number of hours each day in bathing and walking up and down a stretch of shore. But the poetic impulse having again waxed strong, she was possessed by an inner flame which left her hardly conscious of what was proceeding around her.

She had read till she knew by heart Trewe's last little volume of verses, and spent a great deal of time in vainly attempting to rival some of them, till, in her failure, she burst into tears. The personal element in the magnetic attraction exercised by this circumambient, unapproachable master of hers was so much stronger than the intellectual and abstract that she could not understand it. To be sure, she was surrounded noon and night by his customary environment, which literally whispered of him to her at every moment; but he was a man she had never seen, and that all that moved her was the instinct to specialize a waiting emotion on the first fit thing that came to hand did not, of course, suggest itself to Ella.

In the natural way of passion under the too practical conditions which civilization has devised for its fruition, her husband's love for her had not survived, except in the form of fitful friendship, any more than, or even so much as, her own for him; and, being a woman of very living ardors, that required sustenance of some sort, they were beginning to feed on this chancing material, which was, indeed, of a quality far better than chance usually offers.

One day the children had been playing hide-and-seek in a closet, whence, in their excitement they pulled out some clothing. Mrs. Hooper explained that it belonged to Mr. Trewe, and hung it up in the closet again. Possessed of her fantasy, Ella went later in the afternoon, when nobody was in that part of the house, opened the closet, unhitched one of the articles, a mackintosh, and put it on, with the waterproof cap belonging to it.

'The mantle of Elijah!' she said. 'Would it might inspire me to rival him, glorious genius that he is!'



Her eyes always grew wet when she thought like that, and she turned to look at herself in the glass. His heart had beat inside that coat, and his brain had worked under that hat at levels of thought she would never reach. The consciousness of her weakness beside him made her feel quite sick. Before she had got the things off her the door opened, and her husband entered the room.

‘What the devil—’

She blushed, and removed them. ‘I found them in the closet here,’ she said, ‘and put them on in a freak. What have I else to do? You are always away!’

‘Always away? Well. .’

That evening she had a further talk with the landlady, who might herself have nourished a half-tender regard for the poet, so ready was she to discourse ardently about him. ‘You are interested in Mr. Trewe, I know, ma’am,’ she said; ‘and he has just sent to say that he is going to call tomorrow afternoon to look up some books of his that he wants, if I’ll be in, and he may select them from your room?’

‘O, yes!’

‘You could very well meet Mr. Trewe then, if you’d like to be in the way!’

She promised with secret delight, and went to bed musing of him.

Next morning her husband observed: ‘I’ve been thinking of what you said, Ella: that I have gone about a good deal and left you without much to amuse you. Perhaps it’s true. Today, as there’s not much sea, I’ll take you with me on board the yacht.’

For the first time in her experience of such an offer Ella was not glad. But she accepted it for the moment. The time for setting out drew near, and she went to get ready. She stood reflecting. The longing to see the poet she was now distinctly in love with overpowered all other considerations.

‘I don’t want to go,’ she said to herself. ‘I can’t bear to be away! And I won’t go.’

She told her husband that she had changed her mind about wishing to sail. He was indifferent, and went his way. For the rest of the day the house was quiet, the children having gone out upon the sands. The blinds waved in the sunshine to the soft, steady stroke of the sea beyond the wall; and the notes of the Green Silesian band, a troop of foreign gentlemen hired for the season, had drawn almost all the residents and promenaders away from the vicinity of Coburg House. A knock was audible at the door.

Mrs. Marchmill did not hear any servant go to answer it, and she became impatient. The books were in the room where she sat; but nobody came up. She rang the bell. ‘There is some person waiting at the door,’ she said.

‘O, no, ma’am’ He’s gone long ago. I answered it,’ the servant replied, and Mrs. Hooper came in herself.

‘So dissappointing!’ she said. ‘Mr. Trewe not coming after all!’

‘But I heard him knock, I fancy!’

‘No; that was somebody inquiring for lodgings who came to the wrong house. I tell you that Mr. Trewe sent a note just before lunch to say I needn’t get any tea for him, as he should not require the books, and wouldn’t come to select them.’

Ella was miserable, and for a long time could not even reread his mournful ballad on ‘Severed Lives,’ so aching was her erratic little heart, and so tearful her eyes. When the children came in with wet stockings, and ran up to her to tell her of their adventures, she could not feel that she cared about them half as much as usual.

‘Mrs. Hooper, have you a photograph of – the gentleman who lived here?’ She was getting to be curiously shy in mentioning his name.

‘Why, yes. It’s in the ornamental frame on the mantelpiece in your own bedroom, ma’am.’

‘No; the Royal Duke and Duchess are in that.’

‘Yes, so they are; but he’s behind them. He belongs rightly to that frame, which I bought on purpose; but as he went away he said: ‘Cover me up from those strangers that are coming, for God’s sake. I don’t want them staring at me, and I am sure they won’t want me staring at them.’ So I slipped in the Duke and Duchess temporarily in front of him, as they had no frame, and Royalties are more suitable for letting furnished than a private young man. If you take ’em out you’ll see him

under. Lord, ma'am, he wouldn't mind if he knew it! He didn't think the next tenant would be such an attractive lady as you, or he wouldn't have thought of hiding himself, perhaps.'

'Is he handsome?' she asked timidly.

'I call him so. Some, perhaps, wouldn't.'

'Should I?' she asked, with eagerness.

'I think you would, though some would say he's more striking than handsome; a large-eyed thoughtful fellow, you know, with a very electric flash in his eye when he looks round quickly, such as you'd expect a poet to be who doesn't get his living by it.'

'How old is he?'

'Several years older than yourself, ma'am; about thirty-one or two, I think.'

Ella was a matter of fact, a few months over thirty herself; but she did not look nearly so much. Though so immature in nature, she was entering on that tract of life in which emotional women begin to suspect that last love may be stronger than first love; and she would soon, alas, enter on the still more melancholy tract when at least the vainer ones of her sex shrink from receiving a male visitor otherwise than with their backs to the window or the blinds half down. She reflected on Mrs. Hooper's remark, and said no more about age.

Just then a telegram was brought up. It came from her husband, who had gone down the Channel as far as Budmouth with his friends in the yacht, and would not be able to get back till next day.

After her light dinner Ella idled about the shore with the children till dusk, thinking of the yet uncovered photograph in her room, with a serene sense of in which this something ecstatic to come. For, with the subtle luxuriousness of fancy in which this young woman was an adept, on learning that her husband was to be absent that night she had refrained from incontinently rushing upstairs and, opening the picture-frame, preferring to reserve the inspection till she could be alone, and a more romantic tinge be imparted to the occasion by silence, candles, solemn sea and stars outside, than was afforded by the garish afternoon sunlight.

The children had been sent to bed, and Ella soon followed, though it was not yet ten o'clock. To gratify her passionate curiosity she now made her preparations, first getting rid of superfluous garments and putting on her dressing-gown, then arranging a chair in front of the table and reading several pages of Trewe's tenderest utterances. Next she fetched the portrait-frame to the light, opened the back, took out the likeness, and set it up before her.

It was a striking countenance to look upon. The poet wore a luxuriant black moustache and imperial, and a slouched hat which shaded the forehead. The large dark eyes described by the landlady showed an unlimited capacity for misery, they looked out from beneath well-shaped brows as if they were reading the universe in the microcosm of the confronter's face, and were not altogether overjoyed at what the spectacle portended.

Ella murmured in her lowest, richest, tenderest tone: 'And it's you who've so cruelly eclipsed me these many times!'

As she gazed long at the portrait she fell into thought, till her eyes filled with tears, and she touched the cardboard with her lips. Then she laughed with a nervous lightness, and wiped her eyes.

She thought how wicked she was, a woman having a husband and three children, to let her mind stray to a stranger in this unconscionable manner. No, he was not a stranger! She knew his thoughts and feelings as well as she knew her own; they were, in fact, the self-same thoughts and feelings as hers, which her husband distinctly lacked; perhaps luckily for himself, considering that he had to provide for family expenses.

'He's nearer my real self, he's more intimate with the real me than Will is, after all, even though I've never seen him,' she said.

She laid his book and picture on the table at the bedside, and when she was reclining on the pillow she re-read those of Robert Trewe's verses which she had marked from time to time as most touching and true. Putting these aside she set up the photograph on its edge upon the coverlet, and contemplated it as she lay. Then she scanned again by the light of the candle the half-obliterated pencillings on the wallpaper beside her head. There they were – phrases, couplets, bouts-rimes,

beginnings and middles of lines, ideas in the rough, like Shelley's scraps, and the least of them so intense, so sweet, so palpitating, that it seemed as if his very breath, warm and loving, fanned her cheeks from those walls, walls that had surrounded his head times and times as they surrounded her own now. He must often have put up his hand so – with the pencil in it. Yes, the writing was sideways, as it would be if executed by one who extended his arm thus.

These inscribed shapes of the poet's world,  
'Forms more real than living man,  
Nurslings of immortality,'

were, no doubt, the thoughts and spirit-strivings which had come to him in the dead of night, when he could let himself go and have no fear of the frost of criticism. No doubt they had often been written up hastily by the light of the moon, the rays of the lamp, in the blue-gray dawn, in full daylight perhaps never. And now her hair was dragging where his arm had lain when he secured the fugitive fancies; she was sleeping on a poet's lips, immersed in the very essence of him, permeated by his spirit as by an ether.

While she was dreaming the minutes away thus, a footstep came upon the stairs, and in a moment she heard her husband's heavy step on the landing immediately without.

'Ell, where are you?'

What possessed her she could not have described, but, with an instinctive objection to let her husband know what she had been doing, she slipped the photograph under the pillow just as he flung open the door with the air of a man who had dined not badly.

'O, I beg pardon,' said William Marchmill. 'Have you a headache? I am afraid I have disturbed you.'

'No, I've not got a headache,' said she. 'How is it you've come?'

'Well, we found we could get back in very good time after all, and I didn't want to make another day of it, because of going somewhere else tomorrow.'

'Shall I come down again?'

'O, no. I'm as tired as a dog. I've had a good feed, and I shall turn in straight off. I want to get out at six o'clock tomorrow if I can. . I shan't disturb you by my getting up; it will be long before you are awake.' And he came forward into the room.

While her eyes followed his movements, Ella softly pushed the photograph further out of sight.

'Sure you're not ill?' he asked, bending over her.

'No, only wicked!'

'Never mind that.' And he stooped and kissed her. 'I wanted to be with you tonight.'

Next morning Marchmill was called at six o'clock; and in waking and yawning he heard him muttering to himself. 'What the deuce is this that's been crackling under me so?' Imagining her asleep he searched round him and withdrew something. Through her half-opened eyes she perceived it to be Mr. Trewe.

'Well, I'm damned!' her husband exclaimed.

'What, dear?' said she.

'O, you are awake? Ha! ha!'

'What do you mean?'

'Some bloke's photograph – a friend of our landlady's, I suppose. I wonder how it came here; whisked off the mantelpiece by accident perhaps when they were making the bed.'

'I was looking at it yesterday, and it must have dropped in then.'

'O, he's a friend of yours? Bless his picturesque heart!'

Ella's loyalty to the object of her admiration could not endure to hear him ridiculed. 'He's a clever man!' she said, with a tremor in her gentle voice which she herself felt to be absurdly uncalled for. 'He is a rising poet – the gentleman who occupied two of these rooms before we came, though I've never seen him.'

‘How do you know, if you’ve never seen him?’

‘Mrs. Hooper told me when she showed me the photograph.’

‘O, well, I must up and be off. I shall be home rather early. Sorry I can’t take you today dear. Mind the children don’t go getting drowned.’

That day Mrs. Marchmill inquired if Mr. Trewe were likely to call at any other time.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Hooper. ‘He’s coming this day week to stay with a friend near here till you leave. He’ll be sure to call.’

Marchmill did return quite early in the afternoon; and, opening some letters which had arrived in his absence, declared suddenly that he and his family would have to leave a week earlier than they had expected to do – in short, in three days.

‘Surely we can stay a week longer?’ she pleaded. ‘I like it here.’

‘I don’t. It is getting rather slow.’

‘Then you might leave me and the children!’

‘How perverse you are, Ell! What’s the use? And have to come to fetch you! No: we’ll all return together; and we’ll make out our time in North Wales or Brighton a little later on. Besides, you’ve three days longer yet.’

It seemed to be her doom not to meet the man for whose rival talent she had a despairing admiration, and to whose person she was now absolutely attached. Yet she determined to make a last effort; and having gathered from her landlady that Trewe was living in a lonely spot not far from the fashionable town on the Island opposite, she crossed over in the packet from the neighboring pier the following afternoon.

What a useless journey it was! Ella knew but vaguely where the house stood, and when she fancied she had found it, and ventured to inquire of a pedestrian if he lived there, the answer returned by the man was that he did not know. And if he did live there, how could she call upon him? Some women might have the assurance to do it, but she had not. How crazy he would think her. She might have asked him to call upon her, perhaps; but she had not the courage for that, either. She lingered mournfully about the picturesque seaside eminence till it was time to return to the town and enter the steamer for recrossing, reaching home for dinner without having been greatly missed.

At the last moment, unexpectedly enough, her husband said that he should have no objection to letting her and the children stay on till the end of the week, since she wished to do so, if she felt herself able to get home without him. She concealed the pleasure this extension of time gave her; and Marchmill went off the next morning alone.

But the week passed, and Trewe did not call.

On Saturday morning the remaining members of the Marchmill family departed from the place which had been productive of so much fervor in her. The dreary, dreary train; the sun shining in moted beams upon the hot cushions; the dusty permanent way; the mean rows of wire – these things were her accompaniment: while out of the window the deep blue sea-levels disappeared from her gaze, and with them her poet’s home. Heavy-hearted, she tried to read, and wept instead.

Mr. Marchmill was in a thriving way of business, and he and his family lived in a large new house, which stood in rather extensive grounds a few miles outside the midland city wherein he carried on his trade. Ella’s life was lonely here, as the suburban life is apt to be, particularly at certain seasons; and she had ample time to indulge her taste for lyric and elegiac composition. She had hardly got back when she encountered a piece by Robert Trewe in the new number of her favorite magazine, which must have been written almost immediately before her visit to Solentsea, for it contained the very couplet she had seen penciled on the wallpaper by the bed, and Mrs. Hooper had declared to be recent. Ella could resist no longer, but seizing a pen impulsively, wrote to him as a brother-poet, using the name of John Ivy, congratulating him in her letter on his triumphant executions in meter and rhythm of thoughts that moved his soul, as compared with her own brow-beaten efforts in the same pathetic trade.

To this address there came a response in a few days, little as she had dared to hope for it – a civil and brief note, in which the young poet stated that, though he was not well acquainted with

Mr. Ivy's verse, he recalled the name as being one he had seen attached to some very promising pieces; that he was glad to gain Mr. Ivy's acquaintance by letter, and should certainly look with much interest for his productions in the future.

There must have been something juvenile or timid in her own epistle, as one ostensibly coming from a man, she declared to herself; for Trewe quite adopted the tone of an elder and superior in this reply. But what did it matter? He had replied; he had written to her with his own hand from that very room she knew so well, for he was now back again in his quarters.

The correspondence thus begun was continued for two months or more, Ella Marchmill sending him from time to time some that she considered to be the best her pieces, which he very kindly accepted, though he did not say he sedulously read them, nor did he send her any of his own in return. Ella would have been more hurt at this than she was if she had not known that Trewe labored under the impression that she was one of his own sex.

Yet the situation was unsatisfactory. A flattering little voice told her that, were he only to see her, matters would be otherwise. No doubt she would have helped on this by making a frank confession of womanhood, to begin with, if something had not appeared, to her delight, to render it unnecessary. A friend of her husband's, the editor of the most important newspaper in their city and county, who was dining with them one day, observed during their conversation about the poet that his (the editor's) brother the landscape-painter was a friend of Mr. Trewe's, and that the two men were at that very moment in Wales together.

Ella was slightly acquainted with the editor's brother. The next morning down she sat and wrote, inviting him to stay at her house for a short time on his way back, and to bring with him, if practicable, his companion Mr. Trewe, whose acquaintance she was anxious to make. The answer arrived after some few days. Her correspondent and his friend Trewe would have much satisfaction in accepting her invitation on their way southward, which would be on such and such a day in the following week.

Ella was blithe and buoyant. Her scheme had succeeded; her beloved though as yet unseen was coming. 'Behold, he standeth behind our wall; he looked forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice,' she thought ecstatically. 'And, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.'

But it was necessary to consider the details of lodging and feeding him. This she did most solicitously, and awaited the pregnant day and hour.

It was about five in the afternoon when she heard a ring at the door and the editor's brother's voice in the hall. Poetess as she was, or as she thought herself, she had not been too sublime that day to dress with infinite trouble in a fashionable robe of rich material, having a faint resemblance to the chiton of the Greeks, a style just then in vogue among ladies of an artistic and romantic turn, which had been obtained by Ella of her Bond Street<sup>1</sup> dressmaker when she was last in London. Her visitor entered the drawing room. She looked toward his rear; nobody else came through the door. Where, in the name of the God of Love, was Robert Trewe?

'O, I'm sorry,' said the painter, after their introductory words had been spoken. 'Trewe is a curious fellow, you know, Mrs. Marchmill. He said he'd come; then he said he couldn't. He's rather dusty. We've been doing a few miles with knapsacks, you know; and he wanted to get on home.'

'He – he's not coming?'

'He's not; and he asked me to make his apologies.'

'When did you p-p-part from him?' she asked, her nether lip starting off quivering so much that it was like a tremolo-stop opened in her speech. She longed to run away from this dreadful bore and cry her eyes out.

'Just now, in the turnpike road yonder there.'

'What! he has actually gone past my gates?'

'Yes. When we got to them – handsome gates they are, too, the finest bit of modern wrought-iron work I have seen – when we came to them we stopped, talking there a little while, and

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<sup>1</sup> **Bond Street** – a street in central London famous for its expensive shops

then he wished me goodbye and went on. The truth is, he's a little bit depressed just now, and doesn't want to see anybody. He's a very good fellow, and a warm friend, but a little uncertain and gloomy sometimes; he thinks too much of things. His poetry is rather too erotic and passionate, you know, for some tastes; and he has just come in for a terrible slating from the – Review that was published yesterday; he saw a copy of it at the station by accident. Perhaps you've read it?

'No.'

'So much the better. O, it is not worth thinking of; just one of those articles written to order, to please the narrow-minded set of subscribers upon whom the circulation depends. But he's upset by it. He says it is the misrepresentation that hurts him so; that, though he can stand a fair attack, he can't stand lies that he's powerless to refute and stop from spreading. That's just Trewe's weak point. He lives so much by himself that these things affect him much more than they would if he were in the bustle of fashionable or commercial life. So he wouldn't come here, making the excuse that it all looked so new and monied – if you'll pardon–'

'But – he must have known – there was sympathy here! Has he never said anything about getting letters from this address?'

'Yes, yes, he has, from John Ivy – perhaps a relative of yours, he thought, visiting here at the time?'

'Did he – like Ivy, did he say?'

'Well, I don't know that he took any great interest in Ivy.'

'Or in his poems?'

'Or in his poems – so far as I know, that is.'

Robert Trewe took no interest in her house, in her poems, or in their writer. As soon as she could get away she went into the nursery and tried to let off her emotion by unnecessarily kissing the children, till she had a sudden sense of disgust at being reminded how plain-looking they were, like their father.

The obtuse and single-minded landscape-painter never once perceived from her conversation that it was only Trewe she wanted, and not himself. He made the best of his visit, seeming to enjoy the society of Ella's husband, who also took a great fancy to him, and showed him everywhere about the neighborhood, neither of them noticing Ella's mood.

The painter had been gone only a day or two when, while sitting upstairs alone one morning, she glanced over the London paper just arrived, and read the following paragraph: –

'SUICIDE OF A POET' Mr. Robert Trewe, who has been favorably known for some years as one of our rising lyrists, committed suicide at his lodgings at Solentsea on Saturday evening last by shooting himself in the right temple with a revolver. Readers hardly need to be reminded that Mr. Trewe recently attracted the attention of a much wider public than had hitherto known him, by his new volume of verse, mostly of an impassioned kind, entitled 'Lyrics to a Woman Unknown,' which has been already favorably noticed in these pages for the extraordinary gamut of feeling it traverses, and which has been made the subject of a severe, if not ferocious, criticism in the – Review. It is supposed, though not certainly known, that the article may have partially conduced to the sad act, as a copy of the review in question was found on his writing-table; and he has been observed to be in a somewhat depressed state of mind since the critique appeared.'

Then came the report of the inquest, at which the following letter was read, it having been addressed to a friend at a distance: –

'Dear –, Before these lines reach your hands I shall be delivered from the inconveniences of seeing, hearing, and knowing more of the things around me. I will not trouble you by giving my reasons for the step I have taken, though I can assure you they were sound and logical. Perhaps had I been blessed with a mother, or a sister, or a female friend of another sort tenderly devoted to me, I might have thought it worthwhile to continue my present existence. I have long dreamt of such an unattainable creature, as you know; and she, this undiscoverable, elusive one, inspired my last volume; the imaginary woman alone, for, in spite of what has been said in some quarters, there is no real woman behind the title. She has continued to the last unrevealed, unmet, unwon. I think it desirable to mention this in order that no blame may attach to any real woman as having been the

cause of my decease by cruel or cavalier treatment of me. Tell my landlady that I am sorry to have caused her this unpleasantness; but my occupancy of the rooms will soon be forgotten. There are ample funds in my name at the bank to pay all expenses. R. TREWE.'

Ella sat for a while as if stunned, then rushed into the adjoining chamber and flung herself upon her face on the bed.

Her grief and distraction shook her to pieces; and she lay in this frenzy of sorrow for more than an hour. Broken words came every now and then from her quivering lips: 'O, if he had only known of me – known of me – me! . . . O, if I had only once met him – only once; and put my hand upon his hot forehead – kissed him – let him know how I loved him – that I would have suffered shame and scorn, would have lived and died, for him! Perhaps it would have saved his dear life! . . . But no – it was not allowed! God is a jealous God; and that happiness was not for him and me!'

All possibilities were over; the meeting was stultified. Yet it was almost visible to her in her fantasy even now, though it could never be substantiated –

'The hour which might have been, yet might not be,  
Which man's and woman's heart conceived and bore,  
Yet whereof life was barren.'

She wrote to the landlady at Solentsea in the third person, in as subdued a style as she could command, enclosing a postal order for a sovereign, and informing Mrs. Hooper that Mrs. Marchmill had seen in the papers the sad account of the poet's death, and having been, as Mrs. Hooper was aware, much interested in Mr. Trewe during her stay at Coburg House, she would be obliged if Mrs. Hooper could obtain a small portion of his hair before his coffin was closed down, and send it her as a memorial of him, as also the photograph that was in the frame.

By the return-post a letter arrived containing what had been requested. Ella wept over the portrait and secured it in her private drawer; the lock of hair she tied with white ribbon and put in her bosom, whence she drew it and kissed it every now and then in some unobserved nook.

'What's the matter?' said her husband, looking up from his newspaper on one of these occasions. 'Crying over something? A lock of hair? Whose is it?'

'He's dead!' she murmured.

'Who?'

'I don't want to tell you, Will, just now, unless you insist!' she said, a sob hanging heavy in her voice.

'O, all right.'

'Do you mind my refusing? I will tell you someday.'

'It doesn't matter in the least, of course.'

He walked away whistling a few bars of no tune in particular; and when he had got down to his factory in the city the subject came into Marchmill's head again.

He, too, was aware that a suicide had taken place recently at the house they had occupied at Solentsea. Having seen the volume of poems in his wife's hand of late, and heard fragments of the landlady's conversation about Trewe when they were her tenants, he all at once said to himself, 'Why of course it's he! How the devil did she get to know him? What sly animals women are!'

Then he placidly dismissed the matter, and went on with his daily affairs. By this time Ella at home had come to a determination. Mrs. Hooper, in sending the hair and photograph, had informed her of the day of the funeral; and as the morning and noon wore on an overpowering wish to know where they were laying him took possession of the sympathetic woman. Caring very little now what her husband or anyone else might think of her eccentricities, she wrote Marchmill a brief note, stating that she was called away for the afternoon and evening, but would return on the following morning. This she left on his desk, and having given the same information to the servants, went out of the house on foot.

When Mr. Marchmill reached home early in the afternoon the servants looked anxious. The nurse took him privately aside, and hinted that her mistress's sadness during the past few days had

been such that she feared she had gone out to drown herself. Marchmill reflected. Upon the whole he thought that she had not done that. Without saying whither he was bound he also started off, telling them not to sit up for him. He drove to the railway-station, and took a ticket for Solentsea.

It was dark when he reached the place, though he had come by a fast train, and he knew that if his wife had preceded him thither it could only have been by a slower train, arriving not a great while before his own. The season at Solentsea was now past: the parade was gloomy, and the flies were few and cheap. He asked the way to the Cemetery, and soon reached it. The gate was locked, but the keeper let him in, declaring, however, that there was nobody within the precincts. Although it was not late, the autumnal darkness had now become intense; and he found some difficulty in keeping to the serpentine path which led to the quarter where, as the man had told him, the one or two interments for the day had taken place. He stepped upon the grass, and, stumbling over some pegs, stooped now and then to discern if possible a figure against the sky. He could see none; but lighting on a spot where the soil was trodden, beheld a crouching object beside a newly made grave. She heard him, and sprang up.

‘Ell, how silly this is!’ he said indignantly. ‘Running away from home – I never heard such a thing! Of course I am not jealous of this unfortunate man; but it is too ridiculous that you, a married woman with three children and a fourth coming, should go losing your head like this over a dead lover! . . Do you know you were locked in? You might not have been able to get out all night.’

She did not answer.

‘I hope it didn’t go far between you and him, for your own sake.’

‘Don’t insult me, Will.’

‘Mind, I won’t have any more of this sort of thing; do you hear?’

‘Very well,’ she said.

He drew her arm within his own, and conducted her out of the Cemetery. It was impossible to get back that night; and not wishing to be recognized in their present sorry condition he took her to a miserable little coffee-house close to the station, whence they departed early in the morning, traveling almost without speaking, under the sense that it was one of those dreary situations occurring in married life which words could not mend, and reaching their own door at noon.

The months passed, and neither of the twain ever ventured to start a conversation upon this episode. Ella seemed to be only too frequently in a sad and listless mood, which might almost have been called pining. The time was approaching when she would have to undergo the stress of childbirth for a fourth time, and that apparently not tend to raise her spirits.

‘I don’t think I shall get over it this time!’ she said one day. ‘Pooh! what childish foreboding! Why shouldn’t it be as well now as ever?’

She shook her head. ‘I feel almost sure I am going to die; and I should be glad, if it were not for Nelly, and Frank, and Tiny.’

‘And me!’

‘You’ll soon find somebody to fill my place,’ she murmured, with a sad smile. ‘And you’ll have a perfect right to; I assure you of that.’

‘Ell, you are not thinking still about that – poetical friend of yours?’

She neither admitted nor denied the charge. ‘I am not going to get over my illness this time,’ she reiterated. ‘Something tells me I shan’t.’

This view of things was rather a bad beginning, as it usually is; and, in fact, six weeks later, in the month of May, she was lying in her room, pulseless and bloodless, with hardly strength enough left to follow up one feeble breath with another, the infant for whose unnecessary life she was slowly parting with her own being fat and well. Just before her death she spoke to Marchmill softly:

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‘Will, I want to confess to you the entire circumstances of that – about you know what – that time we visited Solentsea. I can’t tell what possessed me – how I could forget you so, my husband! But I had got into a morbid state: I thought you had been unkind; that you had neglected me; that you weren’t up to my intellectual level, while he was, and far above it. I wanted a fuller appreciator, perhaps, rather than another lover–’



She could get no further then for very exhaustion; and she went off in sudden collapse a few hours later, without having said anything more to her husband on the subject of her love for the poet. William Marchmill, in truth, like most husbands of several years' standing, was little disturbed by retrospective jealousies, and had not shown the least anxiety to press her for confessions concerning a man dead and gone beyond any power of inconveniencing him more.

But when she had been buried a couple of years it chanced one day that, in turning over some forgotten papers that he wished to destroy before his second wife entered the house, he lighted on a lock of hair in an envelope, with the photograph of the deceased poet, a date being written on the back in his late wife's hand. It was that of the time they spent at Solentsea.

Marchmill looked long and musingly at the hair and portrait, for something struck him. Fetching the little boy who had been the death of his mother, now a noisy toddler, he took him on his knee, held the lock of hair against the child's head, and set up the photograph on the table behind, so that he could closely compare the features each countenance presented. By a known but inexplicable trick of Nature there were undoubtedly strong traces of resemblance to the man Ella had never seen; the dreamy and peculiar expression of the poet's face sat, as the transmitted idea, upon the child's, and the hair was of the same hue.

'I'm damned if I didn't think so!' murmured Marchmill. 'Then she did play me false with that fellow at the lodgings! Let me see: the dates – the second week in August. . the third week in May. . Yes. . yes. . Get away, you poor little brat! You are nothing to me!'

### **The Grave by the Hand-post (Thomas Hardy)**

I never pass through Chalk-Newton without turning to regard the neighbouring upland, at a point where a lane crosses the lone straight highway dividing this from the next parish; a sight which does not fail to recall the event that once happened there; and, though it may seem superfluous, at this date, to disinter more memories of village history, the whispers of that spot may claim to be preserved.

It was on a dark, yet mild and exceptionally dry evening at Christmas-time (according to the testimony of William Dewy of Mellstock, Michael Mail, and others), that the choir of Chalk-Newton – a large parish situate about half-way between the towns of Ivel and Casterbridge<sup>1</sup>, and now a railway station – left their homes just before midnight to repeat their annual harmonies under the windows of the local population. The band of instrumentalists and singers was one of the largest in the county; and, unlike the smaller and finer Mellstock string-band, which eschewed all but the catgut, it included brass and reed performers at full Sunday services, and reached all across the west gallery.'

On this night there were two or three violins, two 'cellos, a tenor viol, double bass, hautboy, clarionets, serpent, and seven singers. It was, however, not the choir's labours, but what its members chanced to witness, that particularly marked the occasion.

They had pursued their rounds for many years without meeting with any incident of an unusual kind, but to-night, according to the assertions of several, there prevailed, to begin with, an exceptionally solemn and thoughtful mood among two or three of the oldest in the band, as if they were thinking they might be joined by the phantoms of dead friends who had been of their number in earlier years, and now were mute in the churchyard under flattening mounds – friends who had shown greater zest for melody in their time than was shown in this; or that some past voice of a semi-transparent figure might quaver from some bedroom-window its acknowledgment of their nocturnal greeting, instead of a familiar living neighbour. Whether this were fact or fancy, the younger members of the choir met together with their customary thoughtlessness and buoyancy. When they had gathered by the stone stump of the cross in the middle of the village, near the White Horse Inn, which they made their starting point, someone observed that they were full early, that it was not yet twelve o'clock. The local waits of those days mostly refrained from sounding a note before Christmas morning had astronomically arrived, and not caring to return to their beer, they

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<sup>1</sup> **Ivel, Casterbridge** – fictional cities in Dorset invented by Thomas Hardy (1840–1928)

decided to begin with some outlying cottages in Sidlinch Lane, where the people had no clocks, and would not know whether it were night or morning. In that direction they accordingly went; and as they ascended to higher ground their attention was attracted by a light beyond the houses, quite at the top of the lane.

The road from Chalk-Newton to Broad Sidlinch is about two miles long and in the middle of its course, where it passes over the ridge dividing the two villages, it crosses at right angles, as has been stated, the lonely monotonous old highway known as Long Ash Lane, which runs, straight as a surveyor's line, many miles north and south of this spot, on the foundation of a Roman road, and has often been mentioned in these narratives. Though now quite deserted and grass-grown, at the beginning of the century it was well kept and frequented by traffic. The glimmering light appeared to come from the precise point where the roads intersected.

'I think I know what that mid mean!' one of the group remarked.

They stood a few moments, discussing the probability of the light having origin in an event of which rumours had reached them, and resolved to go up the hill.

Approaching the high land their conjectures were strengthened. Long Ash Lane cut athwart them, right and left; and they saw that at the junction of the four ways, under the hand-post, a grave was dug, into which, as the choir drew nigh, a corpse had just been thrown by the four Sidlinch men employed for the purpose. The cart and horse which had brought the body thither stood silently by.

The singers and musicians from Chalk-Newton halted, and looked on while the gravediggers shovelled in and trod down the earth, till, the hole being filled, the latter threw their spades into the cart, and prepared to depart.

'Who mid ye be a-burying there?' asked Lot Swanhills in a raised voice. 'Not the sergeant?'

The Sidlinch men had been so deeply engrossed in their task that they had not noticed the lanterns of the Chalk-Newton choir till now.

'What – be you the Newton carol-singers?' returned the representatives of Sidlinch.

'Ay, sure. Can it be that it is old Sergeant Holway you've a-buried there?'

''Tis so. You've heard about it, then?'

The choir knew no particulars – only that he had shot himself in his apple-closet on the previous Sunday. 'Nobody seem'th to know what 'a did it for, 'a b'lieve? Leastwise, we don't know at Chalk-Newton,' continued Lot.

'O yes. It all came out at the inquest.'

The singers drew close, and the Sidlinch men, pausing to rest after their labours, told the story. 'It was all owing to that son of his, poor old man. It broke his heart.'

'But the son is a soldier, surely; now with his regiment in the East Indies?'

'Ay. And it have been rough with the army over there lately. 'Twas a pity his father persuaded him to go. But Luke shouldn't have twyted the sergeant o't, since 'a did it for the best.'

The circumstances, in brief, were these: The sergeant who had come to this lamentable end, father of the young soldier who had gone with his regiment to the East, had been singularly comfortable in his military experiences, these having ended long before the outbreak of the great war with France. On his discharge, after duly serving his time, he had returned to his native village, and married, and taken kindly to domestic life. But the war in which England next involved herself had cost him many frettings that age and infirmity prevented him from being ever again an active unit of the army. When his only son grew to young manhood, and the question arose of his going out in life, the lad expressed his wish to be a mechanic. But his father advised enthusiastically for the army.

'Trade is coming to nothing in these days,' he said. 'And if the war with the French lasts, as it will, trade will be still worse. The army, Luke – that's the thing for 'ee. 'Twas the making of me, and 'twill be the making of you. I hadn't half such a chance as you'll have in these splendid hotter times.'

Luke demurred, for he was a home-keeping, peace-loving youth. But, putting respectful trust in his father's judgment, he at length gave way, and enlisted in the – d Foot. In the course of a few weeks he was sent out to India to his regiment, which had distinguished itself in the East under

General Wellesley<sup>1</sup>.

But Luke was unlucky. News came home indirectly that he lay sick out there; and then on one recent day when his father was out walking, the old man had received tidings that a letter awaited him at Casterbridge. The sergeant sent a special messenger the whole nine miles, and the letter was paid for and brought home; but though, as he had guessed, it came from Luke, its contents were of an unexpected tenor.

The letter had been written during a time of deep depression. Luke said that his life was a burden and a slavery, and bitterly reproached his father for advising him to embark on a career for which he felt unsuited. He found himself suffering fatigues and illnesses without gaining glory, and engaged in a cause which he did not understand or appreciate. If it had not been for his father's bad advice he, Luke, would now have been working comfortably at a trade in the village that he had never wished to leave.

After reading the letter the sergeant advanced a few steps till he was quite out of sight of everybody, and then sat down on the bank by the wayside.

When he arose half-an-hour later he looked withered and broken, and from that day his natural spirits left him. Wounded to the quick by his son's sarcastic stings, he indulged in liquor more and more frequently. His wife had died some years before this date, and the sergeant lived alone in the house which had been hers. One morning in the December under notice the report of a gun had been heard on his premises, and on entering the neighbours found him in a dying state. He had shot himself with an old firelock that he used for scaring birds; and from what he had said the day before, and the arrangements he had made for his decease, there was no doubt that his end had been deliberately planned, as a consequence of the despondency into which he had been thrown by his son's letter. The coroner's<sup>2</sup> jury returned a verdict of *felo de se*<sup>3</sup>.

'Here's his son's letter,' said one of the Sidlinch men. 'Twas found in his father's pocket. You can see by the state o't how many times he read it over. Howsomever, the Lord's will be done, since it must, whether or no.'

The grave was filled up and levelled, no mound being shaped over it. The Sidlinch men then bade the Chalk-Newton choir good-night, and departed with the cart in which they had brought the sergeant's body to the hill. When their tread had died away from the ear, and the wind swept over the isolated grave with its customary siffle of indifference, Lot Swanhills turned and spoke to old Richard Toller, the hautboy player.

'Tis hard upon a man, and he a wold sojer, to serve en so, Richard. Not that the sergeant was ever in a battle bigger than would go into a half-acre paddock, that's true. Still, his soul ought to hae as good a chance as another man's, all the same, hey?'

Richard replied that he was quite of the same opinion. 'What d'ye say to lifting up a carrel over his grave, as 'tis Christmas, and no hurry to begin down in parish, and 'twouldn't take up ten minutes, and not a soul up here to say us nay, or know anything about it?'

Lot nodded assent. 'The man ought to hae his chances,' he repeated.

'Ye may as well spet upon his grave, for all the good we shall do en by what we lift up, now he's got so far,' said Notton, the clarionet man and professed sceptic of the choir. 'But I'm agreed if the rest be.'

They thereupon placed themselves in a semicircle by the newly stirred earth, and roused the dull air with the well-known Number Sixteen of their collection, which Lot gave out as being the one he thought best suited to the occasion and the mood

He comes the pri-soners to re-lease,  
In Sa-tan's bon-dage held.

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<sup>1</sup> **General Wellesley** – Arthur Wellesley, 1st duke of Wellington (1769–1852), the commander-in-chief of the British Army during the Napoleonic Wars and later prime minister of Great Britain

<sup>2</sup> **coroner** – an official who is to inquire into any death that seems unnatural

<sup>3</sup> **felo-de-se** = suicide

‘Jown it – we’ve never played to a dead man afore,’ said Ezra Cattstock, when, having concluded the last verse, they stood reflecting for a breath or two. ‘But it do seem more merciful than to go away and leave en, as they t’other fellers have done.’

‘Now back along to Newton, and by the time we get over right the pa’son’s ’twill be half after twelve,’ said the leader.

They had not, however, done more than gather up their instruments when the wind brought to their notice the noise of a vehicle rapidly driven up the same lane from Sidlinch which the gravediggers had lately retraced. To avoid being run over when moving on, they waited till the benighted traveller, whoever he might be, should pass them where they stood in the wider area of the Cross.

In half a minute the light of the lanterns fell upon a hired fly, drawn by a steaming and jaded horse. It reached the hand-post, when a voice from the inside cried, ‘Stop here!’ The driver pulled rein. The carriage door was opened from within, and there leapt out a private soldier in the uniform of some line regiment. He looked around, and was apparently surprised to see the musicians standing there.

‘Have you buried a man here?’ he asked.

‘No. We bain’t Sidlinch folk, thank God; we be Newton choir. Though a man is just buried here, that’s true; and we’ve raised a carrel over the poor mortal’s natomy. What – do my eyes see before me young Luke Holway, that went wi’ his regiment to the East Indies, or do I see his spirit straight from the battlefield? Be you the son that wrote the letter–’

‘Don’t – don’t ask me. The funeral is over, then?’

‘There wer no funeral, in a Christen manner of speaking. But’s buried, sure enough. You must have met the men going back in the empty cart.’

‘Like a dog in a ditch, and all through me!’

He remained silent, looking at the grave, and they could not help pitying him. ‘My friends,’ he said, ‘I understand better now. You have, I suppose, in neighbourly charity, sung peace to his soul? I thank you, from my heart, for your kind pity. Yes; I am Sergeant Holway’s miserable son – I’m the son who has brought about his father’s death, as truly as if I had done it with my own hand!’

‘No, no. Don’t ye take on so, young man. He’d been naturally low for a good while, off and on, so we hear.’

‘We were out in the East when I wrote to him. Everything had seemed to go wrong with me. Just after my letter had gone we were ordered home. That’s how it is you see me here. As soon as we got into barracks at Casterbridge I heard o’ this. . Damn me! I’ll dare to follow my father, and make away with myself, too. It is the only thing left to do!’

‘Don’t ye be rash, Luke Holway, I say again; but try to make amends by your future life. And maybe your father will smile a smile down from heaven upon ’ee for ’t.’

He shook his head. ‘I don’t know about that!’ he answered bitterly.

‘Try and be worthy of your father at his best. ’Tis not too late.’

‘D’ye think not? I fancy it is!. . Well, I’ll turn it over. Thank you for your good counsel. I’ll live for one thing, at any rate. I’ll move father’s body to a decent Christian churchyard, if I do it with my own hands. I can’t save his life, but I can give him an honourable grave. He shan’t lie in this accursed place!’

‘Ay, as our pa’son says, ’tis a barbarous custom they keep up at Sidlinch, and ought to be done away wi’. The man a’ old soldier, too. You see, our pa’son is not like yours at Sidlinch.’

‘He says it is barbarous, does he? So it is!’ cried the soldier. ‘Now hearken, my friends.’ Then he proceeded to inquire if they would increase his indebtedness to them by undertaking the removal, privately, of the body of the suicide to the churchyard, not of Sidlinch, a parish he now hated, but of Chalk-Newton. He would give them all he possessed to do it.

Lot asked Ezra Cattstock what he thought of it.

Cattstock, the ’cello player, who was also the sexton, demurred, and advised the young soldier to sound the rector about it first. ‘Mid be he would object, and yet ’a mid’nt. The pa’son o’ Sidlinch is a hard man, I own ye, and ’a said if folk will kill theirselves in hot blood they must take the

consequences. But ours don't think like that at all, and might allow it.'

'What's his name?'

'The honourable and reverent Mr. Oldham, brother to Lord Wessex. But you needn't be afeard o' en on that account. He'll talk to 'ee like a common man, if so be you haven't had enough drink to gie 'ee bad breath.'

'O, the same as formerly. I'll ask him. Thank you. And that duty done—'

'What then?'

'There's war in Spain. I hear our next move is there. I'll try to show myself to be what my father wished me. I don't suppose I shall – but I'll try in my feeble way. That much I swear – here over his body. So help me God.'

Luke smacked his palm against the white hand-post with such force that it shook. 'Yes, there's war in Spain; and another chance for me to be worthy of father.'

So the matter ended that night. That the private acted in one thing as he had vowed to do soon became apparent, for during the Christmas week the rector came into the churchyard when Cattstock was there, and asked him to find a spot that would be suitable for the purpose of such an interment, adding that he had slightly known the late sergeant, and was not aware of any law which forbade him to assent to the removal, the letter of the rule having been observed. But as he did not wish to seem moved by opposition to his neighbour at Sidlinch, he had stipulated that the act of charity should be carried out at night, and as privately as possible, and that the grave should be in an obscure part of the enclosure. 'You had better see the young man about it at once,' added the rector.

But before Ezra had done anything Luke came down to his house. His furlough had been cut short, owing to new developments of the war in the Peninsula, and being obliged to go back to his regiment immediately, he was compelled to leave the exhumation and reinterment to his friends. Everything was paid for, and he implored them all to see it carried out forthwith.

With this the soldier left. The next day Ezra, on thinking the matter over, again went across to the rectory, struck with sudden misgiving. He had remembered that the sergeant had been buried without a coffin, and he was not sure that a stake had not been driven through him. The business would be more troublesome than they had at first supposed.

'Yes, indeed!' murmured the rector. 'I am afraid it is not feasible after all.'

The next event was the arrival of a headstone by carrier from the nearest town; to be left at Mr. Ezra Cattstock's; all expenses paid. The sexton and the carrier deposited the stone in the former's outhouse; and Ezra, left alone, put on his spectacles and read the brief and simple inscription –

HERE LYETH THE BODY OF SAMUEL HOLWAY, LATE  
SERGEANT IN HIS MAJESTY'S – D REGIMENT OF  
FOOT, WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE DECEMBER THE 20TH,  
180–. ERECTED BY L. H.

'I AM NOT WORTHY TO BE CALLED THY SON.'

Ezra again called at the riverside rectory. 'The stone is come, sir. But I'm afeard we can't do it nohow.'

'I should like to oblige him,' said the gentlemanly old incumbent. 'And I would forego all fees willingly. Still, if you and the others don't think you can carry it out, I am in doubt what to say.'

'Well, sir; I've made inquiry of a Sidlinch woman as to his burial, and what I thought seems true. They buried en wi' a new six-foot hurdle-saul drough's body, from the sheep-pen up in North Ewelease though they won't own to it now. And the question is, is the moving worthwhile, considering the awkwardness?'

'Have you heard anything more of the young man?'

Ezra had only heard that he had embarked that week for Spain with the rest of the regiment. 'And if he's as desperate as 'a seemed, we shall never see him here in England again.'

'It is an awkward case,' said the rector.

Ezra talked it over with the choir; one of whom suggested that the stone might be erected at

the crossroads. This was regarded as impracticable. Another said that it might be set up in the churchyard without removing the body; but this was seen to be dishonest. So nothing was done.

The headstone remained in Ezra's outhouse till, growing tired of seeing it there, he put it away among the bushes at the bottom of his garden. The subject was sometimes revived among them, but it always ended with: 'Considering how 'a was buried, we can hardly make a job o't.'

There was always the consciousness that Luke would never come back, an impression strengthened by the disasters which were rumoured to have befallen the army in Spain. This tended to make their inertness permanent. The headstone grew green as it lay on its back under Ezra's bushes; then a tree by the river was blown down, and, falling across the stone, cracked it in three pieces. Ultimately the pieces became buried in the leaves and mould.

Luke had not been born a Chalk-Newton man, and he had no relations left in Sidlinch, so that no tidings of him reached either village throughout the war. But after Waterloo and the fall of Napoleon<sup>1</sup> there arrived at Sidlinch one day an English sergeant-major covered with stripes and, as it turned out, rich in glory. Foreign service had so totally changed Luke Holway that it was not until he told his name that the inhabitants recognized him as the sergeant's only son.

He had served with unswerving effectiveness through the Peninsular campaigns under Wellington; had fought at Busaco, Fuentes d'Onore, Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, Salamanca, Vittoria, Quatre Bras, and Waterloo; and had now returned to enjoy a more than earned pension and repose in his native district.

He hardly stayed in Sidlinch longer than to take a meal on his arrival. The same evening he started on foot over the hill to Chalk-Newton, passing the hand-post, and saying as he glanced at the spot, 'Thank God: he's not there!' Nightfall was approaching when he reached the latter village; but he made straight for the churchyard. On his entering it there remained light enough to discern the headstones by, and these he narrowly scanned. But though he searched the front part by the road, and the back part by the river, what he sought he could not find – the grave of Sergeant Holway, and a memorial bearing the inscription: 'I AM NOT WORTHY TO BE CALLED THY SON.'

He left the churchyard and made inquiries. The honourable and reverend old rector was dead, and so were many of the choir; but by degrees the sergeant-major learnt that his father still lay at the cross-roads in Long Ash Lane.

Luke pursued his way moodily homewards, to do which, in the natural course, he would be compelled to repass the spot, there being no other road between the two villages. But he could not now go by that place, vociferous with reproaches in his father's tones; and he got over the hedge and wandered deviously through the ploughed fields to avoid the scene. Through many a fight and fatigue Luke had been sustained by the thought that he was restoring the family honour and making noble amends. Yet his father lay still in degradation. It was rather a sentiment than a fact that his father's body had been made to suffer for his own misdeeds; but to his super-sensitiveness it seemed that his efforts to retrieve his character and to propitiate the shade of the insulted one had ended in failure.

He endeavoured, however, to shake off his lethargy, and, not liking the associations of Sidlinch, hired a small cottage at Chalk-Newton which had long been empty. Here he lived alone, becoming quite a hermit, and allowing no woman to enter the house.

The Christmas after taking up his abode herein he was sitting in the chimney corner by himself, when he heard faint notes in the distance, and soon a melody burst forth immediately outside his own window, it came from the carol-singers, as usual; and though many of the old hands, Ezra and Lot included, had gone to their rest, the same old carols were still played out of the same old books. There resounded through the sergeant-major's window-shutters the familiar lines that the deceased choir had rendered over his father's grave: –

He comes the pri-soners to re-lease,  
In Sa-tan's bon-dage held.

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<sup>1</sup> **Waterloo and the fall of Napoleon** – the Battle of Waterloo was the final defeat of Napoleon

When they had finished they went on to another house, leaving him to silence and loneliness as before.

The candle wanted snuffing, but he did not snuff it, and he sat on till it had burnt down into the socket and made waves of shadow on the ceiling.

The Christmas cheerfulness of next morning was broken at breakfast-time by tragic intelligence which went down the village like wind. Sergeant-Major Holway had been found shot through the head by his own hand at the cross-roads in Long Ash Lane where his father lay buried.

On the table in the cottage he had left a piece of paper, on which he had written his wish that he might be buried at the Cross beside his father. But the paper was accidentally swept to the floor, and overlooked till after his funeral, which took place in the ordinary way in the churchyard.

## **The Outcasts of Poker Flat (Bret Harte)**

As Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler, stepped into the main street of Poker Flat on the morning of the twenty-third of November, 1850, he was conscious of a change in its moral atmosphere since the preceding night. Two or three men, conversing earnestly together, ceased as he approached, and exchanged significant glances. There was a Sabbath<sup>1</sup> lull in the air which, in a settlement unused to Sabbath influences, looked ominous.

Mr. Oakhurst's calm, handsome face betrayed small concern in these indications. Whether he was conscious of any predisposing cause was another question. 'I reckon they're after somebody,' he reflected; 'likely it's me.' He returned to his pocket the handkerchief with which he had been whipping away the red dust of Poker Flat from his neat boots, and quietly discharged his mind of any further conjecture.

In point of fact, Poker Flat was 'after somebody.' It had lately suffered the loss of several thousand dollars, two valuable horses, and a prominent citizen. It was experiencing a spasm of virtuous reaction, quite as lawless and ungovernable as any of the acts that had provoked it. A secret committee had determined to rid the town of all improper persons. This was done permanently in regard of two men who were then hanging from the boughs of a sycamore in the gulch, and temporarily in the banishment of certain other objectionable characters. I regret to say that some of these were ladies. It is but due to the sex, however, to state that their impropriety was professional, and it was only in such easily established standards of evil that Poker Flat ventured to sit in judgment.

Mr. Oakhurst was right in supposing that he was included in this category. A few of the committee had urged hanging him as a possible example, and a sure method of reimbursing themselves from his pockets of the sums he had won from them. 'It's agin justice,' said Jim Wheeler, 'to let this yer young man from Roaring Camp – an entire stranger – carry away our money.' But a crude sentiment of equity residing in the breasts of those who had been fortunate enough to win from Mr. Oakhurst overruled this narrower local prejudice.

Mr. Oakhurst received his sentence with philosophic calmness, none the less coolly that he was aware of the hesitation of his judges. He was too much of a gambler not to accept Fate. With him life was at best an uncertain game, and he recognized the usual percentage in favor of the dealer.

A body of armed men accompanied the deported wickedness of Poker Flat to the outskirts of the settlement. Besides Mr. Oakhurst, who was known to be a coolly desperate man, and for whose intimidation the armed escort was intended, the expatriated party consisted of a young woman familiarly known as the 'Duchess'; another, who had won the title of 'Mother Shipton'; and 'Uncle Billy,' a suspected sluice-robber and confirmed drunkard. The cavalcade provoked no comments from the spectators, nor was any word uttered by the escort. Only, when the gulch which marked the uttermost limit of Poker Flat was reached, the leader spoke briefly and to the point. The exiles were forbidden to return at the peril of their lives.

As the escort disappeared, their pent-up feelings found vent in a few hysterical tears from the

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<sup>1</sup> **Sabbath** – a holy day of rest (Sunday for the Christians and Saturday for the Jews)

Duchess, some bad language from Mother Shipton, and a Parthian volley<sup>1</sup> of expletives from Uncle Billy. The philosophic Oakhurst alone remained silent. He listened calmly to Mother Shipton's desire to cut somebody's heart out, to the repeated statements of the Duchess that she would die in the road, and to the alarming oaths that seemed to be bumped out of Uncle Billy as he rode forward. With the easy good humor characteristic of his class, he insisted upon exchanging his own riding horse, 'Five Spot,' for the sorry mule which the Duchess rode. But even this act did not draw the party into any closer sympathy. The young woman readjusted her somewhat draggled plumes with a feeble, faded coquetry; Mother Shipton eyed the possessor of 'Five Spot' with malevolence, and Uncle Billy included the whole party in one sweeping anathema<sup>2</sup>.

The road to Sandy Bar – a camp that, not having as yet experienced the regenerating influences of Poker Flat, consequently seemed to offer some invitation to the emigrants – lay over a steep mountain range. It was distant a day's severe travel. In that advanced season, the party soon passed out of the moist, temperate regions of the foothills into the dry, cold, bracing air of the Sierras<sup>3</sup>. The trail was narrow and difficult. At noon the Duchess, rolling out of her saddle upon the ground, declared her intention of going no farther, and the party halted.

The spot was singularly wild and impressive. A wooded amphitheater, surrounded on three sides by precipitous cliffs of naked granite, sloped gently toward the crest of another precipice that overlooked the valley. It was, undoubtedly, the most suitable spot for a camp, had camping been advisable. But Mr. Oakhurst knew that scarcely half the journey to Sandy Bar was accomplished, and the party were not equipped or provisioned for delay. This fact he pointed out to his companions curtly, with a philosophic commentary on the folly of 'throwing up their hand before the game was played out.' But they were furnished with liquor, which in this emergency stood them in place of food, fuel, rest, and prescience. In spite of his remonstrances, it was not long before they were more or less under its influence. Uncle Billy passed rapidly from a bellicose state into one of stupor, the Duchess became maudlin, and Mother Shipton snored. Mr. Oakhurst alone remained erect, leaning against a rock, calmly surveying them.

Mr. Oakhurst did not drink. It interfered with a profession which required coolness, impassiveness, and presence of mind, and, in his own language, he 'couldn't afford it.' As he gazed at his recumbent fellow exiles, the loneliness begotten of his pariah trade, his habits of life, his very vices, for the first time seriously oppressed him. He bestirred himself in dusting his black clothes, washing his hands and face, and other acts characteristic of his studiously neat habits, and for a moment forgot his annoyance. The thought of deserting his weaker and more pitiable companions never perhaps occurred to him. Yet he could not help feeling the want of that excitement which, singularly enough, was most conducive to that calm equanimity for which he was notorious. He looked at the gloomy walls that rose a thousand feet sheer above the circling pines around him; at the sky, ominously clouded; at the valley below, already deepening into shadow. And, doing so, suddenly he heard his own name called.

A horseman slowly ascended the trail. In the fresh, open face of the newcomer Mr. Oakhurst recognized Tom Simson, otherwise known as the 'Innocent' of Sandy Bar. He had met him some months before over a 'little game,' and had, with perfect equanimity, won the entire fortune – amounting to some forty dollars – of that guileless youth. After the game was finished, Mr. Oakhurst drew the youthful speculator behind the door and thus addressed him: 'Tommy, you're a good little man, but you can't gamble worth a cent. Don't try it over again.' He then handed him his money back, pushed him gently from the room, and so made a devoted slave of Tom Simson.

There was a remembrance of this in his boyish and enthusiastic greeting of Mr. Oakhurst. He had started, he said, to go to Poker Flat to seek his fortune. 'Alone?' No, not exactly alone; in fact (a giggle), he had run away with Piney Woods. Didn't Mr. Oakhurst remember Piney? She that used to wait on the table at the Temperance House? They had been engaged a long time, but old Jake Woods had objected, and so they had run away, and were going to Poker Flat to be married, and

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<sup>1</sup> **Parthian volley** – a number of curses and oaths directed at smb. one by one

<sup>2</sup> **anathema** – a curse and the forced expulsion of smb. from some communion (originally Christian)

<sup>3</sup> **the Sierras** – Sierra Nevada, a major mountain range in the west of North America



here they were. And they were tired out, and how lucky it was they had found a place to camp and company. All this the Innocent delivered rapidly, while Piney, a stout, comely damsel of fifteen, emerged from behind the pine tree, where she had been blushing unseen, and rode to the side of her lover.

Mr. Oakhurst seldom troubled himself with sentiment, still less with propriety; but he had a vague idea that the situation was not fortunate. He retained, however, his presence of mind sufficiently to kick Uncle Billy, who was about to say something, and Uncle Billy was sober enough to recognize in Mr. Oakhurst's kick a superior power that would not bear trifling. He then endeavored to dissuade Tom Simson from delaying further, but in vain. He even pointed out the fact that there was no provision, nor means of making a camp. But, unluckily, the Innocent met this objection by assuring the party that he was provided with an extra mule loaded with provisions and by the discovery of a rude attempt at a log house near the trail. 'Piney can stay with Mrs. Oakhurst,' said the Innocent, pointing to the Duchess, 'and I can shift for myself.'

Nothing but Mr. Oakhurst's admonishing foot saved Uncle Billy from bursting into a roar of laughter. As it was, he felt compelled to retire up the canyon until he could recover his gravity. There he confided the joke to the tall pine trees, with many slaps of his leg, contortions of his face, and the usual profanity. But when he returned to the party, he found them seated by a fire – for the air had grown strangely chill and the sky overcast – in apparently amicable conversation. Piney was actually talking in an impulsive, girlish fashion to the Duchess, who was listening with an interest and animation she had not shown for many days. The Innocent was holding forth, apparently with equal effect, to Mr. Oakhurst and Mother Shipton, who was actually relaxing into amiability. 'Is this yer a damned picnic?' said Uncle Billy with inward scorn as he surveyed the sylvan group, the glancing firelight, and the tethered animals in the foreground. Suddenly an idea mingled with the alcoholic fumes that disturbed his brain. It was apparently of a jocular nature, for he felt impelled to slap his leg again and cram his fist into his mouth.

As the shadows crept slowly up the mountain, a slight breeze rocked the tops of the pine trees, and moaned through their long and gloomy aisles. The ruined cabin, patched and covered with pine boughs, was set apart for the ladies. As the lovers parted, they unaffectedly exchanged a kiss, so honest and sincere that it might have been heard above the swaying pines. The frail Duchess and the malevolent Mother Shipton were probably too stunned to remark upon this last evidence of simplicity, and so turned without a word to the hut. The fire was replenished, the men lay down before the door, and in a few minutes were asleep.

Mr. Oakhurst was a light sleeper. Toward morning he awoke benumbed and cold. As he stirred the dying fire, the wind, which was now blowing strongly, brought to his cheek that which caused the blood to leave it – snow!

He started to his feet with the intention of awakening the sleepers, for there was no time to lose. But turning to where Uncle Billy had been lying, he found him gone. A suspicion leaped to his brain and a curse to his lips. He ran to the spot where the mules had been tethered; they were no longer there. The tracks were already rapidly disappearing in the snow.

The momentary excitement brought Mr. Oakhurst back to the fire with his usual calm. He did not waken the sleepers. The Innocent slumbered peacefully, with a smile on his good-humored, freckled face; the virgin Piney slept beside her frailer sisters as sweetly as though attended by celestial guardians; and Mr. Oakhurst, drawing his blanket over his shoulders, stroked his mustaches and waited for the dawn. It came slowly in a whirling mist of snowflakes that dazzled and confused the eye. What could be seen of the landscape appeared magically changed. He looked over the valley, and summed up the present and future in two words – 'snowed in!'

A careful inventory of the provisions, which, fortunately for the party, had been stored within the hut and so escaped the felonious fingers of Uncle Billy, disclosed the fact that with care and prudence they might last ten days longer. 'That is,' said Mr. Oakhurst, sotto voce to the Innocent, 'if you're willing to board us. If you ain't – and perhaps you'd better not – you can wait till Uncle Billy gets back with provisions.' For some occult reason, Mr. Oakhurst could not bring himself to disclose Uncle Billy's rascality, and so offered the hypothesis that he had wandered from the camp

and had accidentally stampeded the animals. He dropped a warning to the Duchess and Mother Shipton, who of course knew the facts of their associate's defection. 'They'll find out the truth about us all when they find out anything,' he added, significantly, 'and there's no good frightening them now.'

Tom Simson not only put all his worldly store at the disposal of Mr. Oakhurst, but seemed to enjoy the prospect of their enforced seclusion. 'We'll have a good camp for a week, and then the snow'll melt, and we'll all go back together.' The cheerful gaiety of the young man, and Mr. Oakhurst's calm, infected the others. The Innocent with the aid of pine boughs extemporized a thatch for the roofless cabin, and the Duchess directed Piney in the rearrangement of the interior with a taste and tact that opened the blue eyes of that provincial maiden to their fullest extent. 'I reckon now you're used to fine things at Poker Flat,' said Piney. The Duchess turned away sharply to conceal something that reddened her cheeks through its professional tint, and Mother Shipton requested Piney not to 'chatter.' But when Mr. Oakhurst returned from a weary search for the trail, he heard the sound of happy laughter echoed from the rocks. He stopped in some alarm, and his thoughts first naturally reverted to the whisky, which he had prudently cached. 'And yet it don't somehow sound like whisky,' said the gambler. It was not until he caught sight of the blazing fire through the still-blinding storm and the group around it that he settled to the conviction that it was 'square fun.'

Whether Mr. Oakhurst had cached his cards with the whisky as something debarred the free access of the community, I cannot say. It was certain that, in Mother Shipton's words, he 'didn't say cards once' during that evening. Haply the time was beguiled by an accordion, produced somewhat ostentatiously by Tom Simson from his pack. Notwithstanding some difficulties attending the manipulation of this instrument, Piney Woods managed to pluck several reluctant melodies from its keys, to an accompaniment by the Innocent on a pair of bone castanets. But the crowning festivity of the evening was reached in a rude camp-meeting hymn, which the lovers, joining hands, sang with great earnestness and vociferation. I fear that a certain defiant tone and Covenanter's swing to its chorus, rather than any devotional quality, caused it speedily to infect the others, who at last joined in the refrain:

'I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,  
And I'm bound to die in His army.'

The pines rocked, the storm eddied and whirled above the miserable group, and the flames of their altar leaped heavenward as if in token of the vow.

At midnight the storm abated, the rolling clouds parted, and the stars glittered keenly above the sleeping camp. Mr. Oakhurst, whose professional habits had enabled him to live on the smallest possible amount of sleep, in dividing the watch with Tom Simson somehow managed to take upon himself the greater part of that duty. He excused himself to the Innocent by saying that he had 'often been a week without sleep.' 'Doing what?' asked Tom. 'Poker!' replied Oakhurst, sententiously; 'when a man gets a streak of luck, – nigger luck – he don't get tired. The luck gives in first. Luck,' continued the gambler, reflectively, 'is a mighty queer thing. All you know about it for certain is that it's bound to change. And it's finding out when it's going to change that makes you. We've had a streak of bad luck since we left Poker Flat – you come along, and slap you get into it, too. If you can hold your cards right along you're all right. For,' added the gambler, with cheerful irrelevance,

'I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,  
And I'm bound to die in His army.'"

The third day came, and the sun, looking through the white-curtained valley, saw the outcasts divide their slowly decreasing store of provisions for the morning meal. It was one of the peculiarities of that mountain climate that its rays diffused a kindly warmth over the wintry

landscape, as if in regretful commiseration of the past. But it revealed drift on drift of snow piled high around the hut – a hopeless, uncharted, trackless sea of white lying below the rocky shores to which the castaways still clung. Through the marvelously clear air the smoke of the pastoral village of Poker Flat rose miles away. Mother Shipton saw it, and from a remote pinnacle of her rocky fastness hurled in that direction a final malediction. It was her last vituperative attempt, and perhaps for that reason was invested with a certain degree of sublimity. It did her good, she privately informed the Duchess. ‘Just you go out there and cuss, and see.’ She then set herself to the task of amusing ‘the child,’ as she and the Duchess were pleased to call Piney. Piney was no chicken, but it was a soothing and original theory of the pair thus to account for the fact that she didn’t swear and wasn’t improper.

When night crept up again through the gorges, the reedy notes of the accordion rose and fell in fitful spasms and long-drawn gasps by the flickering campfire. But music failed to fill entirely the aching void left by insufficient food, and a new diversion was proposed by Piney – storytelling. Neither Mr. Oakhurst nor his female companions caring to relate their personal experiences, this plan would have failed too but for the Innocent. Some months before he had chanced upon a stray copy of Mr. Pope’s ingenious translation of the *Iliad*. He now proposed to narrate the principal incidents of that poem – having thoroughly mastered the argument and fairly forgotten the words – in the current vernacular of Sandy Bar. And so for the rest of that night the Homeric demigods again walked the earth. Trojan bully and wily Greek wrestled in the winds, and the great pines in the canyon seemed to bow to the wrath of the son of Peleus<sup>1</sup>. Mr. Oakhurst listened with quiet satisfaction. Most especially was he interested in the fate of ‘Ash-heels,’ as the Innocent persisted in denominating the ‘swift-footed Achilles’<sup>2</sup>.

So with small food and much of Homer<sup>3</sup> and the accordion, a week passed over the heads of the outcasts. The sun again forsook them, and again from leaden skies the snowflakes were sifted over the land. Day by day closer around them drew the snowy circle, until at last they looked from their prison over drifted walls of dazzling white that towered twenty feet above their heads. It became more and more difficult to replenish their fires, even from the fallen trees beside them, now half-hidden in the drifts. And yet no one complained. The lovers turned from the dreary prospect and looked into each other’s eyes, and were happy. Mr. Oakhurst settled himself coolly to the losing game before him. The Duchess, more cheerful than she had been, assumed the care of Piney. Only Mother Shipton – once the strongest of the party – seemed to sicken and fade. At midnight on the tenth day she called Oakhurst to her side. ‘I’m going,’ she said, in a voice of querulous weakness, ‘but don’t say anything about it. Don’t waken the kids. Take the bundle from under my head and open it.’ Mr. Oakhurst did so. It contained Mother Shipton’s rations for the last week, untouched. ‘Give ’em to the child,’ she said, pointing to the sleeping Piney. ‘You’ve starved yourself,’ said the gambler. ‘That’s what they call it,’ said the woman, querulously, as she lay down again and, turning her face to the wall, passed quietly away.

The accordion and the bones were put aside that day, and Homer was forgotten. When the body of Mother Shipton had been committed to the snow, Mr. Oakhurst took the Innocent aside, and showed him a pair of snowshoes, which he had fashioned from the old pack saddle. ‘There’s one chance in a hundred to save her yet,’ he said, pointing to Piney; ‘but it’s there,’ he added, pointing toward Poker Flat. ‘If you can reach there in two days she’s safe.’ ‘And you?’ asked Tom Simson. ‘I’ll stay here,’ was the curt reply.

The lovers parted with a long embrace. ‘You are not going, too?’ said the Duchess as she saw Mr. Oakhurst apparently waiting to accompany him. ‘As far as the canyon,’ he replied. He turned suddenly, and kissed the Duchess, leaving her pallid face aflame and her trembling limbs rigid with amazement.

Night came, but not Mr. Oakhurst. It brought the storm again and the whirling snow. Then the

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1 **Peleus** – in Greek mythology, the king of the Myrmidons and the father of Achilles

2 **Achilles** – in Greek mythology, the son of the mortal man Peleus and a sea nymph, the bravest hero of the Trojan War

3 **Homer** (9th–8th century BC) – a great poet of ancient Greece, the author of the ‘Iliad’ and ‘Odyssey’

Duchess, feeding the fire, found that someone had quietly piled beside the hut enough fuel to last a few days longer. The tears rose to her eyes, but she hid them from Piney.

The women slept but little. In the morning, looking into each other's faces, they read their fate. Neither spoke; but Piney, accepting the position of the stronger, drew near and placed her arm around the Duchess's waist. They kept this attitude for the rest of the day. That night the storm reached its greatest fury, and, rending asunder the protecting pines, invaded the very hut.

Toward morning they found themselves unable to feed the fire, which gradually died away. As the embers slowly blackened, the Duchess crept closer to Piney, and broke the silence of many hours: 'Piney, can you pray?' 'No, dear,' said Piney, simply. The Duchess, without knowing exactly why, felt relieved, and, putting her head upon Piney's shoulder, spoke no more. And so reclining, the younger and purer pillowing the head of her soiled sister upon her virgin breast, they fell asleep.

The wind lulled as if it feared to waken them. Feathery drifts of snow, shaken from the long pine boughs, flew like white-winged birds, and settled about them as they slept. The moon through the rifted clouds looked down upon what had been the camp. But all human stain, all trace of earthly travail, was hidden beneath the spotless mantle mercifully flung from above.

They slept all that day and the next, nor did they waken when voices and footsteps broke the silence of the camp. And when pitying fingers brushed the snow from their wan faces, you could scarcely have told from the equal peace that dwelt upon them which was she that had sinned. Even the law of Poker Flat recognized this, and turned away, leaving them still locked in each other's arms.

But at the head of the gulch, on one of the largest pine trees, they found the deuce of clubs pinned to the bark with a bowie knife. It bore the following, written in pencil, in a firm hand:

BENEATH THIS TREE  
LIES THE BODY  
OF  
JOHN OAKHURST,  
WHO STRUCK A STREAK OF BAD LUCK  
ON THE 23D OF NOVEMBER, 1850,  
AND  
HANDED IN HIS CHECKS  
ON THE 7TH DECEMBER, 1850.

And pulseless and cold, with a Derringer by his side and a bullet in his heart, though still calm as in life, beneath the snow lay he who was at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat.

## **The Convalescence of Jack Hamlin (Bret Harte)**

The habitually quiet, ascetic face of Seth Rivers was somewhat disturbed and his brows were knitted as he climbed the long ascent of Windy Hill to its summit and his own rancho. Perhaps it was the effect of the characteristic wind, which that afternoon seemed to assault him from all points at once and did not cease its battery even at his front door, but hustled him into the passage, blew him into the sitting room, and then celebrated its own exit from the long, rambling house by the banging of doors throughout the halls and the slamming of windows in the remote distance.

Mrs. Rivers looked up from her work at this abrupt onset of her husband, but without changing her own expression of slightly fatigued self-righteousness. Accustomed to these elemental eruptions, she laid her hands from force of habit upon the lifting tablecloth, and then rose submissively to brush together the scattered embers and ashes from the large hearthstone, as she had often done before.

'You're in early, Seth,' she said.

'Yes. I stopped at the Cross Roads Post Office. Lucky I did, or you'd hev had kempany on

your hands afore you knowed it – this very night! I found this letter from Dr. Duchesne,’ and he produced a letter from his pocket.

Mrs. Rivers looked up with an expression of worldly interest. Dr. Duchesne had brought her two children into the world with some difficulty, and had skillfully attended her through a long illness consequent upon the inefficient maternity of soulful but fragile American women of her type. The doctor had more than a mere local reputation as a surgeon, and Mrs. Rivers looked up to him as her sole connecting link with a world of thought beyond Windy Hill.

‘He’s comin’ up yer to-night, bringin’ a friend of his – a patient that he wants us to board and keep for three weeks until he’s well agin,’ continued Mr. Rivers. ‘Ye know how the doctor used to rave about the pure air on our hill.’

Mrs. Rivers shivered slightly, and drew her shawl over her shoulders, but nodded a patient assent.

‘Well, he says it’s just what that patient oughter have to cure him. He’s had lung fever and other things, and this yer air and gin’ral quiet is bound to set him up. We’re to board and keep him without any fuss or feathers, and the doctor sez he’ll pay liberal for it. This yer’s what he sez,’ concluded Mr. Rivers, reading from the letter: “‘He is now fully convalescent, though weak, and really requires no other medicine than the – ozone” – yes, that’s what the doctor calls it – “of Windy Hill, and in fact as little attendance as possible. I will not let him keep even his negro servant with him. He’ll give you no trouble, if he can be prevailed upon to stay the whole time of his cure.”’

‘There’s our spare room – it hasn’t been used since Parson Greenwood was here,’ said Mrs. Rivers reflectively. ‘Melinda could put it to rights in an hour. At what time will he come?’

‘He’d come about nine. They drive over from Hightown depot. But,’ he added grimly, ‘here ye are orderin’ rooms to be done up and ye don’t know who for.’

‘You said a friend of Dr. Duchesne,’ returned Mrs. Rivers simply.

‘Dr. Duchesne has many friends that you and me mightn’t cotton to,’ said her husband. ‘This man is Jack Hamlin.’ As his wife’s remote and introspective black eyes returned only vacancy, he added quickly. ‘The noted gambler!’

‘Gambler?’ echoed his wife, still vaguely.

‘Yes – reg’lar; it’s his business.’

‘Goodness, Seth! He can’t expect to do it here.’

‘No,’ said Seth quickly, with that sense of fairness to his fellow man which most women find it so difficult to understand. ‘No – and he probably won’t mention the word “card” while he’s here.’

‘Well?’ said Mrs. Rivers interrogatively.

‘And,’ continued Seth, seeing that the objection was not pressed, ‘he’s one of them desprit men! A reg’lar fighter! Killed two or three men in dools!’

Mrs. Rivers stared. ‘What could Dr. Duchesne have been thinking of? Why, we wouldn’t be safe in the house with him!’

Again Seth’s sense of equity triumphed. ‘I never heard of his fightin’ anybody but his own kind, and when he was bullyragged. And ez to women he’s quite t’other way in fact, and that’s why I think ye oughter know it afore you let him come. He don’t go round with decent women. In fact’ – But here Mr. Rivers, in the sanctity of conjugal confidences and the fullness of Bible reading, used a few strong scriptural substantives happily unnecessary to repeat here.

‘Seth!’ said Mrs. Rivers suddenly, ‘you seem to know this man.’

The unexpectedness and irrelevancy of this for a moment startled Seth. But that chaste and God-fearing man had no secrets. ‘Only by hearsay, Jane,’ he returned quietly; ‘but if ye say the word I’ll stop his comin’ now.’

‘It’s too late,’ said Mrs. Rivers decidedly.

‘I reckon not,’ returned her husband, ‘and that’s why I came straight here. I’ve only got to meet them at the depot and say this thing can’t be done – and that’s the end of it. They’ll go off quiet to the hotel.’

‘I don’t like to disappoint the doctor, Seth,’ said Mrs. Rivers. ‘We might,’ she added, with a troubled look of inquiry at her husband, ‘we might take that Mr. Hamlin on trial. Like as not he

won't stay, anyway, when he sees what we're like, Seth. What do you think? It would be only our Christian duty, too.'

'I was thinkin' o' that as a professin' Christian, Jane,' said her husband. 'But supposin' that other Christians don't look at it in that light. Thar's Deacon Stubbs and his wife and the parson. Ye remember what he said about "no covenant with sin"?''

'The Stubbses have no right to dictate who I'll have in my house,' said Mrs. Rivers quickly, with a faint flush in her rather sallow cheeks.

'It's your say and nobody else's,' assented her husband with grim submissiveness. 'You do what you like.'

Mrs. Rivers mused. 'There's only myself and Melinda here,' she said with sublime naivete; 'and the children ain't old enough to be corrupted. I am satisfied if you are, Seth,' and she again looked at him inquiringly.

'Go ahead, then, and get ready for 'em,' said Seth, hurrying away with unaffected relief. 'If you have everything fixed by nine o'clock, that'll do.'

Mrs. Rivers had everything 'fixed' by that hour, including herself presumably, for she had put on a gray dress which she usually wore when shopping in the county town, adding a prim collar and cuffs. A pearl-encircled brooch, the wedding gift of Seth, and a solitaire ring next to her wedding ring, with a locket containing her children's hair, accented her position as a proper wife and mother. At a quarter to nine she had finished tidying the parlor, opening the harmonium so that the light might play upon its polished keyboard, and bringing from the forgotten seclusion of her closet two beautifully bound volumes of Tupper's 'Poems' and Pollok's 'Course of Time,' to impart a literary grace to the centre table. She then drew a chair to the table and sat down before it with a religious magazine in her lap. The wind roared over the deep-throated chimney, the clock ticked monotonously, and then there came the sound of wheels and voices.

But Mrs. Rivers was not destined to see her guest that night. Dr. Duchesne, under the safe lee of the door, explained that Mr. Hamlin had been exhausted by the journey, and, assisted by a mild opiate, was asleep in the carriage; that if Mrs. Rivers did not object, they would carry him at once to his room. In the flaring and guttering of candles, the flashing of lanterns, the flapping of coats and shawls, and the bewildering rush of wind, Mrs. Rivers was only vaguely conscious of a slight figure muffled tightly in a cloak carried past her in the arms of a grizzled negro up the staircase, followed by Dr. Duchesne. With the closing of the front door on the tumultuous world without, a silence fell again on the little parlor.

When the doctor made his reappearance it was to say that his patient was being undressed and put to bed by his negro servant, who, however, would return with the doctor to-night, but that the patient would be left with everything that was necessary, and that he would require no attention from the family until the next day. Indeed, it was better that he should remain undisturbed. As the doctor confined his confidences and instructions entirely to the physical condition of their guest, Mrs. Rivers found it awkward to press other inquiries.

'Of course,' she said at last hesitatingly, but with a certain primness of expression, 'Mr. Hamlin must expect to find everything here very different from what he is accustomed to – at least from what my husband says are his habits.'

'Nobody knows that better than he, Mrs. Rivers,' returned the doctor with an equally marked precision of manner, 'and you could not have a guest who would be less likely to make you remind him of it.'

A little annoyed, yet not exactly knowing why, Mrs. Rivers abandoned the subject, and as the doctor shortly afterwards busied himself in the care of his patient, with whom he remained until the hour of his departure, she had no chance of renewing it. But as he finally shook hands with his host and hostess, it seemed to her that he slightly recurred to it. 'I have the greatest hope of the curative effect of this wonderful locality on my patient, but even still more of the beneficial effect of the complete change of his habits, his surroundings, and their influences.' Then the door closed on the man of science and the grizzled negro servant, the noise of the carriage wheels was shut out with the song of the wind in the pine tops, and the rancho of Windy Hill possessed Mr. Jack Hamlin in

peace. Indeed, the wind was now falling, as was its custom at that hour, and the moon presently arose over a hushed and sleeping landscape.

For the rest of the evening the silent presence in the room above affected the household; the half-curious servants and ranch hands spoke in whispers in the passages, and at evening prayers, in the dining room, Seth Rivers, kneeling before and bowed over a rush-bottomed chair whose legs were clutched by his strong hands, included 'the stranger within our gates' in his regular supplications. When the hour for retiring came, Seth, with a candle in his hand, preceded his wife up the staircase, but stopped before the door of their guest's room. 'I reckon,' he said interrogatively to Mrs. Rivers, 'I oughter see ef he's wantin' anythin'?'

'You heard what the doctor said,' returned Mrs. Rivers cautiously. At the same time she did not speak decidedly, and the frontiersman's instinct of hospitality prevailed. He knocked lightly; there was no response. He turned the door handle softly. The door opened. A faint clean perfume – an odor of some general personality rather than any particular thing – stole out upon them. The light of Seth's candle struck a few glints from some cut-glass and silver, the contents of the guest's dressing case, which had been carefully laid out upon a small table by his negro servant. There was also a refined neatness in the disposition of his clothes and effects which struck the feminine eye of even the tidy Mrs. Rivers as something new to her experience. Seth drew nearer the bed with his shaded candle, and then, turning, beckoned his wife to approach. Mrs. Rivers hesitated – but for the necessity of silence she would have openly protested – but that protest was shut up in her compressed lips as she came forward.

For an instant that awe with which absolute helplessness invests the sleeping and dead was felt by both husband and wife. Only the upper part of the sleeper's face was visible above the bedclothes, held in position by a thin white nervous hand that was encircled at the wrist by a ruffle. Seth stared. Short brown curls were tumbled over a forehead damp with the dews of sleep and exhaustion. But what appeared more singular, the closed eyes of this vessel of wrath and recklessness were fringed with lashes as long and silky as a woman's. Then Mrs. Rivers gently pulled her husband's sleeve, and they both crept back with a greater sense of intrusion and even more cautiously than they had entered. Nor did they speak until the door was closed softly and they were alone on the landing. Seth looked grimly at his wife.

'Don't look much ez ef he could hurt anybody.'

'He looks like a sick man,' returned Mrs. Rivers calmly.

The unconscious object of this criticism and attention slept until late; slept through the stir of awakened life within and without, through the challenge of early cocks in the lean-to shed, through the creaking of departing ox teams and the lazy, long-drawn commands of teamsters, through the regular strokes of the morning pump and the splash of water on stones, through the far-off barking of dogs and the half-intelligible shouts of ranchmen; slept through the sunlight on his ceiling, through its slow descent of his wall, and awoke with it in his eyes! He woke, too, with a delicious sense of freedom from pain, and of even drawing a long breath without difficulty – two facts so marvelous and dreamlike that he naturally closed his eyes again lest he should waken to a world of suffering and dyspnoea<sup>1</sup>. Satisfied at last that this relief was real, he again opened his eyes, but upon surroundings so strange, so wildly absurd and improbable, that he again doubted their reality. He was lying in a moderately large room, primly and severely furnished, but his attention was for the moment riveted to a gilt frame upon the wall beside him bearing the text, 'God Bless Our Home,' and then on another frame on the opposite wall which admonished him to 'Watch and Pray.' Beside them hung an engraving of the 'Raising of Lazarus<sup>2</sup>,' and a Hogarthian<sup>3</sup> lithograph of 'The Drunkard's Progress.' Mr. Hamlin closed his eyes; he was dreaming certainly – not one of those wild, fantastic visions that had so miserably filled the past long nights of pain and suffering, but still

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<sup>1</sup> **dyspnoea** – acute shortness of breath

<sup>2</sup> **Lazarus** – a biblical figure; when Lazaurus was dead for four days, he was raised by Jesus Christ from the dead.

<sup>3</sup> **Hogarthian** – painted by William Hogarth (1697–1764), an English artist, best known for his engravings and paintings

a dream! At last, opening one eye stealthily, he caught the flash of the sunlight upon the crystal and silver articles of his dressing case, and that flash at once illuminated his memory. He remembered his long weeks of illness and the devotion of Dr. Duchesne. He remembered how, when the crisis was past, the doctor had urged a complete change and absolute rest, and had told him of a secluded rancho in some remote locality kept by an honest Western pioneer whose family he had attended. He remembered his own reluctant assent, impelled by gratitude to the doctor and the helplessness of a sick man. He now recalled the weary journey thither, his exhaustion and the semi-consciousness of his arrival in a bewildering wind on a shadowy hilltop. And this was the place!

He shivered slightly, and ducked his head under the cover again. But the brightness of the sun and some exhilarating quality in the air tempted him to have another outlook, avoiding as far as possible the grimly decorated walls. If they had only left him his faithful servant he could have relieved himself of that mischievous badinage which always alternately horrified and delighted that devoted negro. But he was alone – absolutely alone – in this conventicle!

Presently he saw the door open slowly. It gave admission to the small round face and yellow ringlets of a little girl, and finally to her whole figure, clasping a doll nearly as large as herself. For a moment she stood there, arrested by the display of Mr. Hamlin's dressing case on the table. Then her glances moved around the room and rested upon the bed. Her blue eyes and Mr. Hamlin's brown ones met and mingled. Without a moment's hesitation she moved to the bedside. Taking her doll's hands in her own, she displayed it before him.

'Isn't it pitty?'

Mr. Hamlin was instantly his old self again. Thrusting his hand comfortably under the pillow, he lay on his side and gazed at it long and affectionately. 'I never,' he said in a faint voice, but with immovable features, 'saw anything so perfectly beautiful. Is it alive?'

'It's a dolly,' she returned gravely, smoothing down its frock and straightening its helpless feet. Then seized with a spontaneous idea, like a young animal she suddenly presented it to him with both hands and said, –

'Kiss it.'

Mr. Hamlin implanted a chaste salute on its vermilion cheek. 'Would you mind letting me hold it for a little?' he said with extreme diffidence.

The child was delighted, as he expected. Mr. Hamlin placed it in a sitting posture on the edge of his bed, and put an ostentatious paternal arm around it.

'But you're alive, ain't you?' he said to the child.

This subtle witticism convulsed her. 'I'm a little girl,' she gurgled.

'I see; her mother?'

'Ess.'

'And who's your mother?'

'Mammy.'

'Mrs. Rivers?'

The child nodded until her ringlets were shaken on her cheek. After a moment she began to laugh bashfully and with repression, yet as Mr. Hamlin thought a little mischievously. Then as he looked at her interrogatively she suddenly caught hold of the ruffle of his sleeve.

'Oo's got on mammy's nighty.'

Mr. Hamlin started. He saw the child's obvious mistake and actually felt himself blushing. It was unprecedented – it was the sheerest weakness – it must have something to do with the confounded air.

'I grieve to say you are deeply mistaken – it is my very own,' he returned with great gravity. Nevertheless, he drew the coverlet close over his shoulder. But here he was again attracted by another face at the half-opened door – a freckled one, belonging to a boy apparently a year or two older than the girl. He was violently telegraphing to her to come away, although it was evident that he was at the same time deeply interested in the guest's toilet articles. Yet as his bright gray eyes and Mr. Hamlin's brown ones met, he succumbed, as the girl had, and walked directly to the bedside. But he did it bashfully – as the girl had not. He even attempted a defensive explanation.



‘She hadn’t oughter come in here, and mar wouldn’t let her, and she knows it,’ he said with superior virtue.

‘But I asked her to come as I’m asking you,’ said Mr. Hamlin promptly, ‘and don’t you go back on your sister or you’ll never be president of the United States.’ With this he laid his hand on the boy’s tow head, and then, lifting himself on his pillow to a half-sitting posture, put an arm around each of the children, drawing them together, with the doll occupying the central post of honor. ‘Now,’ continued Mr. Hamlin, albeit in a voice a little faint from the exertion, ‘now that we’re comfortable together I’ll tell you the story of the good little boy who became a pirate in order to save his grandmother and little sister from being eaten by a wolf at the door.’

But, alas! that interesting record of self-sacrifice never was told. For it chanced that Melinda Bird, Mrs. Rivers’s help, following the trail of the missing children, came upon the open door and glanced in. There, to her astonishment, she saw the domestic group already described, and to her eyes dominated by the ‘most beautiful and perfectly elegant’ young man she had ever seen. But let not the incautious reader suppose that she succumbed as weakly as her artless charges to these fascinations. The character and antecedents of that young man had been already delivered to her in the kitchen by the other help. With that single glance she halted; her eyes sought the ceiling in chaste exaltation. Falling back a step, she called in ladylike hauteur and precision, ‘Mary Emmeline and John Wesley.’

Mr. Hamlin glanced at the children. ‘It’s Melindy looking for us,’ said John Wesley. But they did not move. At which Mr. Hamlin called out faintly but cheerfully, ‘They’re here, all right.’

Again the voice arose with still more marked and lofty distinctness, ‘John Wesley and Mary Em-me-line.’ It seemed to Mr. Hamlin that human accents could not convey a more significant and elevated ignoring of some implied impropriety in his invitation. He was for a moment crushed.

But he only said to his little friends with a smile, ‘You’d better go now and we’ll have that story later.’

‘Affer bekus?’ suggested Mary Emmeline.

‘In the woods,’ added John Wesley.

Mr. Hamlin nodded blandly. The children trotted to the door. It closed upon them and Miss Bird’s parting admonition, loud enough for Mr. Hamlin to hear, ‘No more freedoms, no more intrudings, you hear.’

The older culprit, Hamlin, retreated luxuriously under his blankets, but presently another new sensation came over him – absolutely, hunger. Perhaps it was the child’s allusion to ‘bekus,’ but he found himself wondering when it would be ready. This anxiety was soon relieved by the appearance of his host himself bearing a tray, possibly in deference to Miss Bird’s sense of propriety. It appeared also that Dr. Duchesne had previously given suitable directions for his diet, and Mr. Hamlin found his repast simple but enjoyable. Always playfully or ironically polite to strangers, he thanked his host and said he had slept splendidly.

‘It’s this yer “ozone” in the air that Dr. Duchesne talks about,’ said Seth complacently.

‘I am inclined to think it is also those texts,’ said Mr. Hamlin gravely, as he indicated them on the wall. ‘You see they reminded me of church and my boyhood’s slumbers there. I have never slept so peacefully since.’ Seth’s face brightened so interestedly at what he believed to be a suggestion of his guest’s conversion that Mr. Hamlin was fain to change the subject. When his host had withdrawn he proceeded to dress himself, but here became conscious of his weakness and was obliged to sit down. In one of those enforced rests he chanced to be near the window, and for the first time looked on the environs of his place of exile. For a moment he was staggered. Everything seemed to pitch downward from the rocky outcrop on which the rambling house and farm sheds stood. Even the great pines around it swept downward like a green wave, to rise again in enormous billows as far as the eye could reach. He could count a dozen of their tumbled crests following each other on their way to the distant plain. In some vague point of that shimmering horizon of heat and dust was the spot he came from the preceding night. Yet the recollection of it and his feverish past seemed to confuse him, and he turned his eyes gladly away.

Pale, a little tremulous, but immaculate and jaunty in his white flannels and straw hat, he at

last made his way downstairs. To his great relief he found the sitting room empty, as he would have willingly deferred his formal acknowledgments to his hostess later. A single glance at the interior determined him not to linger, and he slipped quietly into the open air and sunshine. The day was warm and still, as the wind only came up with the going down of the sun, and the atmosphere was still redolent with the morning spicing of pine and hay and a stronger balm that seemed to fill his breast with sunshine. He walked toward the nearest shade – a cluster of young buckeyes – and having with a certain civic fastidiousness flicked the dust from a stump with his handkerchief he sat down. It was very quiet and calm. The life and animation of early morning had already vanished from the hill, or seemed to be suspended with the sun in the sky. He could see the ranchmen and oxen toiling on the green terraced slopes below, but no sound reached his ears. Even the house he had just quitted seemed empty of life throughout its rambling length. His seclusion was complete. Could he stand it for three weeks? Perhaps it need not be for so long; he was already stronger! He foresaw that the ascetic Seth might become wearisome. He had an intuition that Mrs. Rivers would be equally so; he should certainly quarrel with Melinda, and this would probably debar him from the company of the children – his only hope.

But his seclusion was by no means so complete as he expected. He presently was aware of a camp-meeting hymn hummed somewhat ostentatiously by a deep contralto voice, which he at once recognized as Melinda's, and saw that severe virgin proceeding from the kitchen along the ridge until within a few paces of the buckeyes, when she stopped and, with her hand shading her eyes, apparently began to examine the distant fields. She was a tall, robust girl, not without certain rustic attractions, of which she seemed fully conscious. This latter weakness gave Mr. Hamlin a new idea. He put up the penknife with which he had been paring his nails while wondering why his hands had become so thin, and awaited events. She presently turned, approached the buckeyes, plucked a spike of the blossoms with great girlish lightness, and then apparently discovering Mr. Hamlin, started in deep concern and said with somewhat stentorian politeness: 'I BEG your pardon – didn't know I was intruding!'

'Don't mention it,' returned Jack promptly, but without moving. 'I saw you coming and was prepared; but generally – as I have something the matter with my heart – a sudden joy like this is dangerous.'

Somewhat mystified, but struggling between an expression of rigorous decorum and gratified vanity, Miss Melinda stammered, 'I was only' –

'I knew it – I saw what you were doing,' interrupted Jack gravely, 'only I wouldn't do it if I were you. You were looking at one of those young men down the hill. You forgot that if you could see him he could see you looking too, and that would only make him conceited. And a girl with YOUR attractions don't require that.'

'Ez if,' said Melinda, with lofty but somewhat reddening scorn, 'there was a man on this hull rancho that I'd take a second look at.'

'It's the first look that does the business,' returned Jack simply. 'But maybe I was wrong. Would you mind – as you're going straight back to the house' (Miss Melinda had certainly expressed no such intention) – 'turning those two little kids loose out here? I've a sort of engagement with them.'

'I will speak to their mar,' said Melinda primly, yet with a certain sign of relenting, as she turned away.

'You can say to her that I regretted not finding her in the sitting room when I came down,' continued Jack tactfully.

Apparently the tact was successful, for he was delighted a few moments later by the joyous onset of John Wesley and Mary Emmeline upon the buckeyes, which he at once converted into a game of hide and seek, permitting himself at last to be shamelessly caught in the open. But here he wisely resolved upon guarding against further grown-up interruption, and consulting with his companions found that on one of the lower terraces there was a large reservoir fed by a mountain rivulet, but they were not allowed to play there. Thither, however, the reckless Jack hied with his playmates and was presently ensconced under a willow tree, where he dexterously fashioned tiny

willow canoes with his penknife and sent them sailing over a submerged expanse of nearly an acre. But half an hour of this ingenious amusement was brought to an abrupt termination. While cutting bark, with his back momentarily turned on his companions, he heard a scream, and turned quickly to see John Wesley struggling in the water, grasping a tree root, and Mary Emmeline – nowhere! In another minute he saw the strings of her pinafore appear on the surface a few yards beyond, and in yet another minute, with a swift rueful glance at his white flannels, he had plunged after her. A disagreeable shock of finding himself out of his depths was, however, followed by contact with the child's clothing, and clutching her firmly, a stroke or two brought him panting to the bank. Here a gasp, a gurgle, and then a roar from Mary Emmeline, followed by a sympathetic howl from John Wesley, satisfied him that the danger was over. Rescuing the boy from the tree root, he laid them both on the grass and contemplated them exercising their lungs with miserable satisfaction. But here he found his own breathing impeded in addition to a slight faintness, and was suddenly obliged to sit down beside them, at which, by some sympathetic intuition, they both stopped crying.

Encouraged by this, Mr. Hamlin got them to laughing again, and then proposed a race home in their wet clothes, which they accepted, Mr. Hamlin, for respiratory reasons, lagging in their rear until he had the satisfaction of seeing them captured by the horrified Melinda in front of the kitchen, while he slipped past her and regained his own room. Here he changed his saturated clothes, tried to rub away a certain chilliness that was creeping over him, and lay down in his dressing gown to miserable reflections. He had nearly drowned the children and overexcited himself, in spite of his promise to the doctor! He would never again be entrusted with the care of the former nor be believed by the latter!

But events are not always logical in sequence. Mr. Hamlin went comfortably to sleep and into a profuse perspiration. He was awakened by a rapping at his door, and opening it, was surprised to find Mrs. Rivers with anxious inquiries as to his condition. 'Indeed,' she said, with an emotion which even her prim reserve could not conceal, 'I did not know until now how serious the accident was, and how but for you and Divine Providence my little girl might have been drowned. It seems Melinda saw it all.'

Inwardly objurgating the spying Melinda, but relieved that his playmates hadn't broken their promise of secrecy, Mr. Hamlin laughed.

'I'm afraid that your little girl wouldn't have got into the water at all but for me – and you must give all the credit of getting her out to the other fellow.' He stopped at the severe change in Mrs. Rivers's expression, and added quite boyishly and with a sudden drop from his usual levity, 'But please don't keep the children away from me for all that, Mrs. Rivers.'

Mrs. Rivers did not, and the next day Jack and his companions sought fresh playing fields and some new story-telling pastures. Indeed, it was a fine sight to see this pale, handsome, elegantly dressed young fellow lounging along between a blue-checkered pinafored girl on one side and a barefooted boy on the other. The ranchmen turned and looked after him curiously. One, a rustic prodigal, reduced by dissipation to the swine-husks of ranching, saw fit to accost him familiarly.

'The last time I saw you dealing poker in Sacramento, Mr. Hamlin, I did not reckon to find you up here playing with a couple of kids.'

'No!' responded Mr. Hamlin suavely, 'and yet I remember I was playing with some country idiots down there, and you were one of them. Well! understand that up here I prefer the kids. Don't let me have to remind you of it.'

Nevertheless, Mr. Hamlin could not help noticing that for the next two or three days there were many callers at the ranch and that he was obliged in his walks to avoid the highroad on account of the impertinent curiosity of wayfarers. Some of them were of that sex which he would not have contented himself with simply calling 'curious.'

'To think,' said Melinda confidently to her mistress, 'that that thar Mrs. Stubbs, who wouldn't go to the Hightown Hotel because there was a play actress thar, has been snoopin' round here twice since that young feller came.'

Of this fact, however, Mr. Hamlin was blissfully unconscious.

Nevertheless, his temper was growing uncertain; the angle of his smart straw hat was

becoming aggressive to strangers; his politeness sardonic. And now Sunday morning had come with an atmosphere of starched piety and well-soaped respectability at the rancho, and the children were to be taken with the rest of the family to the day-long service at Hightown. As these Sabbath pilgrimages filled the main road, he was fain to take himself and his loneliness to the trails and byways, and even to invade the haunts of some other elegant outcasts like himself – to wit, a crested hawk, a graceful wild cat beautifully marked, and an eloquently reticent rattlesnake. Mr. Hamlin eyed them without fear, and certainly without reproach. They were not out of their element.

Suddenly he heard his name called in a stentorian contralto. An impatient ejaculation rose to his lips, but died upon them as he turned. It was certainly Melinda, but in his present sensitive loneliness it struck him for the first time that he had never actually seen her before as she really was. Like most men in his profession he was a quick reader of thoughts and faces when he was interested, and although this was the same robust, long-limbed, sunburnt girl he had met, he now seemed to see through her triple incrustation of human vanity, conventional piety, and outrageous Sabbath finery an honest, sympathetic simplicity that commanded his respect.

‘You are back early from church,’ he said.

‘Yes. One service is good enough for me when thar ain’t no special preacher,’ she returned, ‘so I jest sez to Silas, “as I ain’t here to listen to the sisters cackle ye kin put to the buckboard and drive me home ez soon ez you please.”’

‘And so his name is Silas,’ suggested Mr. Hamlin cheerfully.

‘Go ’long with you, Mr. Hamlin, and don’t pester,’ she returned, with heifer-like playfulness. ‘Well, Silas put to, and when we rose the hill here I saw your straw hat passin’ in the gulch, and sez to Silas, sez I, “Ye kin pull up here, for over yar is our new boarder, Jack Hamlin, and I’m goin’ to talk with him.” “All right,” sez he, “I’d sooner trust ye with that gay young gambolier every day of the week than with them saints down thar on Sunday. He deals ez straight ez he shoots, and is about as nigh onto a gentleman as they make ’em.”’

For one moment or two Miss Bird only saw Jack’s long lashes. When his eyes once more lifted they were shining. ‘And what did you say?’ he said, with a short laugh.

‘I told him he needn’t be Christopher Columbus to have discovered that.’ She turned with a laugh toward Jack, to be met by the word ‘shake,’ and an outstretched thin white hand which grasped her large red one with a frank, fraternal pressure.

‘I didn’t come to tell ye that,’ remarked Miss Bird as she sat down on a boulder, took off her yellow hat, and restacked her tawny mane under it, ‘but this: I reckoned I went to Sunday meetin’ as I ought ter. I kalkilated to hear considerable about “Faith” and “Works,” and sich, but I didn’t reckon to hear all about you from the Lord’s Prayer to the Doxology<sup>1</sup>. You were in the special prayers ez a warnin’, in the sermon ez a text; they picked out hymns to fit ye! And always a drefful example and a visitation. And the rest o’ the tune it was all gabble, gabble by the brothers and sisters about you. I reckon, Mr. Hamlin, that they know everything you ever did since you were knee-high to a grasshopper, and a good deal more than you ever thought of doin’. The women is all dead set on convertin’ ye and savin’ ye by their own precious selves, and the men is ekally dead set on gettin’ rid o’ ye on that account.’

‘And what did Seth and Mrs. Rivers say?’ asked Hamlin composedly, but with kindling eyes.

‘They stuck up for ye ez far ez they could. But ye see the parson hez got a holt upon Seth, havin’ caught him kissin’ a convert at camp meeting; and Deacon Turner knows suthin about Mrs. Rivers’s sister, who kicked over the pail and jumped the fence years ago, and she’s afeard a’ him. But what I wanted to tell ye was that they’re all comin’ up here to take a look at ye – some on ’em to-night. You ain’t afeard, are ye?’ she added, with a loud laugh.

‘Well, it looks rather desperate, doesn’t it?’ returned Jack, with dancing eyes.

‘I’ll trust ye for all that,’ said Melinda. ‘And now I reckon I’ll trot along to the rancho. Ye needn’t offer ter see me home,’ she added, as Jack made a movement to accompany her. ‘Everybody up here ain’t as fair-minded ez Silas and you, and Melinda Bird hez a character to lose! So long!’ With this she cantered away, a little heavily, perhaps, adjusting her yellow hat with both

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<sup>1</sup> **Doxology** – praise to God sung during masses in Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and Protestant churches

hands as she clattered down the steep hill.

That afternoon Mr. Hamlin drew largely on his convalescence to mount a half-broken mustang, and in spite of the rising afternoon wind to gallop along the highroad in quite as mischievous and breezy a fashion. He was wont to allow his mustang's nose to hang over the hind rails of wagons and buggies containing young couples, and to dash ahead of sober carryalls that held elderly 'members in good standing.'

An accomplished rider, he picked up and brought back the flying parasol of Mrs. Deacon Stubbs without dismounting. He finally came home a little blown, but dangerously composed.

There was the usual Sunday evening gathering at Windy Hill Rancho – neighbors and their wives, deacons and the pastor – but their curiosity was not satisfied by the sight of Mr. Hamlin, who kept his own room and his own counsel. There was some desultory conversation, chiefly on church topics, for it was vaguely felt that a discussion of the advisability or getting rid of the guest of their host was somewhat difficult under this host's roof, with the guest impending at any moment. Then a diversion was created by some of the church choir practicing the harmonium with the singing of certain more or less lugubrious anthems. Mrs. Rivers presently joined in, and in a somewhat faded soprano, which, however, still retained considerable musical taste and expression, sang, 'Come, ye disconsolate.' The wind moaned over the deep-throated chimney in a weird harmony with the melancholy of that human appeal as Mrs. Rivers sang the first verse: –

'Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish, Come to the Mercy Seat, fervently kneel; Here bring your wounded hearts – here tell your anguish, Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal!'

A pause followed, and the long-drawn, half-human sigh of the mountain wind over the chimney seemed to mingle with the wail of the harmonium. And then, to their thrilled astonishment, a tenor voice, high, clear, but tenderly passionate, broke like a skylark over their heads in the lines of the second verse: –

'Joy of the desolate, Light of the straying, Hope of the penitent – fadeless and pure; Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying, Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot cure!'

The hymn was old and familiar enough, Heaven knows. It had been quite popular at funerals, and some who sat there had had its strange melancholy borne upon them in time of loss and tribulations, but never had they felt its full power before. Accustomed as they were to emotional appeal and to respond to it, as the singer's voice died away above them, their very tears flowed and fell with that voice. A few sobbed aloud, and then a voice asked tremulously, –

'Who is it?'

'It's Mr. Hamlin,' said Seth quietly. 'I've heard him often hummin' things before.'

There was another silence, and the voice of Deacon Stubbs broke in harshly, –

'It's rank blasphemy.'

'If it's rank blasphemy to sing the praise o' God, not only better than some folks in the choir, but like an angel o' light, I wish you'd do a little o' that blaspheming on Sundays, Mr. Stubbs.'

The speaker was Mrs. Stubbs, and as Deacon Stubbs was a notoriously bad singer the shot told.

'If he's sincere, why does he stand aloof? Why does he not join us?' asked the parson.

'He hasn't been asked,' said Seth quietly. 'If I ain't mistaken this yer gathering this evening was specially to see how to get rid of him.'

There was a quick murmur of protest at this. The parson exchanged glances with the deacon and saw that they were hopelessly in the minority.

'I will ask him myself,' said Mrs. Rivers suddenly.

'So do, Sister Rivers; so do,' was the unmistakable response.

Mrs. Rivers left the room and returned in a few moments with a handsome young man, pale, elegant, composed, even to a grave indifference. What his eyes might have said was another thing;

the long lashes were scarcely raised.

'I don't mind playing a little,' he said quietly to Mrs. Rivers, as if continuing a conversation, 'but you'll have to let me trust my memory.'

'Then you – er – play the harmonium?' said the parson, with an attempt at formal courtesy.

'I was for a year or two the organist in the choir of Dr. Todd's church at Sacramento,' returned Mr. Hamlin quietly.

The blank amazement on the faces of Deacons Stubbs and Turner and the parson was followed by wreathed smiles from the other auditors and especially from the ladies. Mr. Hamlin sat down to the instrument, and in another moment took possession of it as it had never been held before. He played from memory as he had implied, but it was the memory of a musician. He began with one or two familiar anthems, in which they all joined. A fragment of a mass and a Latin chant followed. An 'Ave Maria' from an opera was his first secular departure, but his delighted audience did not detect it. Then he hurried them along in unfamiliar language to 'O mio Fernando' and 'Spiritu gentil,' which they fondly imagined were hymns, until, with crowning audacity, after a few preliminary chords of the 'Miserere,' he landed them broken-hearted in the Trovatore's donjon tower with 'Non te scordar de mi.'

Amidst the applause he heard the preacher suavely explain that those Popish masses were always in the Latin language, and rose from the instrument satisfied with his experiment. Excusing himself as an invalid from joining them in a light collation in the dining room, and begging his hostess's permission to retire, he nevertheless lingered a few moments by the door as the ladies filed out of the room, followed by the gentlemen, until Deacon Turner, who was bringing up the rear, was abreast of him. Here Mr. Hamlin became suddenly deeply interested in a framed pencil drawing which hung on the wall. It was evidently a schoolgirl's amateur portrait, done by Mrs. Rivers. Deacon Turner halted quickly by his side as the others passed out – which was exactly what Mr. Hamlin expected.

'Do you know the face?' said the deacon eagerly.

Thanks to the faithful Melinda, Mr. Hamlin did know it perfectly. It was a pencil sketch of Mrs. Rivers's youthfully erring sister. But he only said he thought he recognized a likeness to someone he had seen in Sacramento.

The deacon's eye brightened. 'Perhaps the same one – perhaps,' he added in a submissive and significant tone 'a – er – painful story.'

'Rather – to him,' observed Hamlin quietly.

'How? – I – er – don't understand,' said Deacon Turner.

'Well, the portrait looks like a lady I knew in Sacramento who had been in some trouble when she was a silly girl, but had got over it quietly. She was, however, troubled a good deal by some mean hound who was every now and then raking up the story wherever she went. Well, one of her friends – I might have been among them, I don't exactly remember just now – challenged him, but although he had no conscientious convictions about slandering a woman, he had some about being shot for it, and declined. The consequence was he was cowhided once in the street, and the second time tarred and feathered<sup>1</sup> and ridden on a rail out of town. That, I suppose, was what you meant by your "painful story." But is this the woman?'

'No, no,' said the deacon hurriedly, with a white face, 'you have quite misunderstood.'

'But whose is this portrait?' persisted Jack.

'I believe that – I don't know exactly – but I think it is a sister of Mrs. Rivers's,' stammered the deacon.

'Then, of course, it isn't the same woman,' said Jack in simulated indignation.

'Certainly – of course not,' returned the deacon.

'Phew!' said Jack. 'That was a mighty close call. Lucky we were alone, wasn't it?'

'Yes,' said the deacon, with a feeble smile.

'Seth,' continued Jack, with a thoughtful air, 'looks like a quiet man, but I shouldn't like to have made that mistake about his sister-in-law before him. These quiet men are apt to shoot straight.'

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<sup>1</sup> **tarred and feathered** – punished (originally by putting tar on smb. and then covering with feathers)

Better keep this to ourselves.'

Deacon Turner not only kept the revelation to himself but apparently his own sacred person also, as he did not call again at Windy Hill Rancho during Mr. Hamlin's stay. But he was exceedingly polite in his references to Jack, and alluded patronizingly to a 'little chat' they had had together. And when the usual reaction took place in Mr. Hamlin's favor and Jack was actually induced to perform on the organ at Hightown Church next Sunday, the deacon's voice was loudest in his praise. Even Parson Greenwood allowed himself to be non-committal as to the truth of the rumor, largely circulated, that one of the most desperate gamblers in the State had been converted through his exhortations.

So, with breezy walks and games with the children, occasional confidences with Melinda and Silas, and the Sabbath 'singing of anthems,' Mr. Hamlin's three weeks of convalescence drew to a close. He had lately relaxed his habit of seclusion so far as to mingle with the company gathered for more social purposes at the rancho, and once or twice unbent so far as to satisfy their curiosity in regard to certain details of his profession.

'I have no personal knowledge of games of cards,' said Parson Greenwood patronizingly, 'and think I am right in saying that our brothers and sisters are equally inexperienced. I am – ahem – far from believing, however, that entire ignorance of evil is the best preparation for combating it, and I should be glad if you'd explain to the company the intricacies of various games. There is one that you mentioned, with a – er – scriptural name.'

'Faro,' said Hamlin, with an unmoved face.

'Pharaoh,' repeated the parson gravely; 'and one which you call "poker," which seems to require great self-control.'

'I couldn't make you understand poker without your playing it,' said Jack decidedly.

'As long as we don't gamble – that is, play for money – I see no objection,' returned the parson.

'And,' said Jack musingly, 'you could use beans.'

It was agreed finally that there would be no falling from grace in their playing among themselves, in an inquiring Christian spirit, under Jack's guidance, he having decided to abstain from card playing during his convalescence, and Jack permitted himself to be persuaded to show them the following evening.

It so chanced, however, that Dr. Duchesne, finding the end of Jack's 'cure' approaching, and not hearing from that interesting invalid, resolved to visit him at about this time. Having no chance to apprise Jack of his intention, on coming to Hightown at night he procured a conveyance at the depot to carry him to Windy Hill Rancho. The wind blew with its usual nocturnal rollicking persistency, and at the end of his turbulent drive it seemed almost impossible to make himself heard amongst the roaring of the pines and some astounding preoccupation of the inmates. After vainly knocking, the doctor pushed open the front door and entered. He rapped at the closed sitting room door, but receiving no reply, pushed it open upon the most unexpected and astounding scene he had ever witnessed. Around the centre table several respectable members of the Hightown Church, including the parson, were gathered with intense and eager faces playing poker, and behind the parson, with his hands in his pockets, carelessly lounged the doctor's patient, the picture of health and vigor. A disused pack of cards was scattered on the floor, and before the gentle and precise Mrs. Rivers was heaped a pile of beans that would have filled a quart measure.

When Dr. Duchesne had tactfully retreated before the hurried and stammering apologies of his host and hostess, and was alone with Jack in his rooms, he turned to him with a gravity that was more than half affected and said, 'How long, sir, did it take you to effect this corruption?'

'Upon my honor,' said Jack simply, 'they played last night for the first time. And they forced me to show them. But,' added Jack after a significant pause, 'I thought it would make the game livelier and be more of a moral lesson if I gave them nearly all good pat hands. So I ran in a cold deck on them – the first time I ever did such a thing in my life. I fixed up a pack of cards so that one had three tens, another three jacks, and another three queens, and so on up to three aces. In a minute they had all tumbled to the game, and you never saw such betting. Every man and woman there

believed he or she had struck a sure thing, and staked accordingly. A new panful of beans was brought on, and Seth, your friend, banked for them. And at last the parson raked in the whole pile.'

'I suppose you gave him the three aces,' said Dr. Duchesne gloomily.

'The parson,' said Jack slowly, 'HADN'T A SINGLE PAIR IN HIS HAND. It was the stoniest, deadest, neatest BLUFF I ever saw. And when he'd frightened off the last man who held out and laid that measly hand of his face down on that pile of kings, queens, and aces, and looked around the table as he raked in the pile, there was a smile of humble self-righteousness on his face that was worth double the money.'

## **The Beast with Five Fingers (William Fryer Harvey)**

When I was a little boy I once went with my father to call on Adrian Borlsover. I played on the floor with a black spaniel while my father appealed for a subscription. Just before we left my father said, 'Mr. Borlsover, may my son here shake hands with you? It will be a thing to look back upon with pride when he grows to be a man.'

I came up to the bed on which the old man was lying and put my hand in his, awed by the still beauty of his face. He spoke to me kindly, and hoped that I should always try to please my father. Then he placed his right hand on my head and asked for a blessing to rest upon me. 'Amen!' said my father, and I followed him out of the room, feeling as if I wanted to cry. But my father was in excellent spirits.

'That old gentleman, Jim,' said he, 'is the most wonderful man in the whole town. For ten years he has been quite blind.'

'But I saw his eyes,' I said. 'They were ever so black and shiny; they weren't shut up like Nora's puppies. Can't he see at all?'

And so I learnt for the first time that a man might have eyes that looked dark and beautiful and shining without being able to see.

'Just like Mrs. Tomlinson has big ears,' I said, 'and can't hear at all except when Mr. Tomlinson shouts.'

'Jim,' said my father, 'it's not right to talk about a lady's ears. Remember what Mr. Borlsover said about pleasing me and being a good boy.'

That was the only time I saw Adrian Borlsover. I soon forgot about him and the hand which he laid in blessing on my head. But for a week I prayed that those dark tender eyes might see.

'His spaniel may have puppies,' I said in my prayers, 'and he will never be able to know how funny they look with their eyes all closed up. Please let old Mr. Borlsover see.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Adrian Borlsover, as my father had said, was a wonderful man. He came of an eccentric family. Borlsovers' sons, for some reason, always seemed to marry very ordinary women, which perhaps accounted for the fact that no Borlsover had been a genius, and only one Borlsover had been mad. But they were great champions of little causes, generous patrons of odd sciences, founders of querulous sects, trustworthy guides to the bypath meadows of erudition.

Adrian was an authority on the fertilization of orchids. He had held at one time the family living at Borlsover Conyers, until a congenital weakness of the lungs obliged him to seek a less rigorous climate in the sunny south coast watering-place where I had seen him. Occasionally he would relieve one or other of the local clergy. My father described him as a fine preacher, who gave long and inspiring sermons from what many men would have considered unprofitable texts. 'An excellent proof,' he would add, 'of the truth of the doctrine of direct verbal inspiration.'

Adrian Borlsover was exceedingly clever with his hands. His penmanship was exquisite. He illustrated all his scientific papers, made his own woodcuts, and carved the reredos<sup>1</sup> that is at present the chief feature of interest in the church at Borlsover Conyers. He had an exceedingly

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<sup>1</sup> **reredos** – in church, an ornamental screen covering the wall at the back of the altar



clever knack in cutting silhouettes for young ladies and paper pigs and cows for little children, and made more than one complicated wind instrument of his own devising.

When he was fifty years old Adrian Borlsover lost his sight. In a wonderfully short time he had adapted himself to the new conditions of life. He quickly learned to read Braille<sup>2</sup>. So marvelous indeed was his sense of touch that he was still able to maintain his interest in botany. The mere passing of his long supple fingers over a flower was sufficient means for its identification, though occasionally he would use his lips. I have found several letters of his among my father's correspondence. In no case was there anything to show that he was afflicted with blindness and this in spite of the fact that he exercised undue economy in the spacing of lines. Towards the close of his life the old man was credited with powers of touch that seemed almost uncanny: it has been said that he could tell at once the color of a ribbon placed between his fingers. My father would neither confirm nor deny the story.

## I

Adrian Borlsover was a bachelor. His elder brother George had married late in life, leaving one son, Eustace, who lived in the gloomy Georgian mansion at Borlsover Conyers, where he could work undisturbed in collecting material for his great book on heredity.

Like his uncle, he was a remarkable man. The Borlsovers had always been born naturalists, but Eustace possessed in a special degree the power of systematizing his knowledge. He had received his university education in Germany, and then, after post-graduate work in Vienna and Naples<sup>3</sup>, had traveled for four years in South America and the East, getting together a huge store of material for a new study into the processes of variation.

He lived alone at Borlsover Conyers with Saunders his secretary, a man who bore a somewhat dubious reputation in the district, but whose powers as a mathematician, combined with his business abilities, were invaluable to Eustace.

Uncle and nephew saw little of each other. The visits of Eustace were confined to a week in the summer or autumn: long weeks that dragged almost as slowly as the bath-chair in which the old man was drawn along the sunny sea front. In their way the two men were fond of each other, though their intimacy would doubtless have been greater had they shared the same religious views. Adrian held to the old-fashioned evangelical dogmas of his early manhood; his nephew for many years had been thinking of embracing Buddhism. Both men possessed, too, the reticence the Borlsovers had always shown, and which their enemies sometimes called hypocrisy. With Adrian it was a reticence as to the things he had left undone; but with Eustace it seemed that the curtain which he was so careful to leave undrawn hid something more than a half-empty chamber.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two years before his death Adrian Borlsover developed, unknown to himself, the not uncommon power of automatic writing. Eustace made the discovery by accident. Adrian was sitting reading in bed, the forefinger of his left hand tracing the Braille characters, when his nephew noticed that a pencil the old man held in his right hand was moving slowly along the opposite page. He left his seat in the window and sat down beside the bed. The right hand continued to move, and now he could see plainly that they were letters and words which it was forming.

'Adrian Borlsover,' wrote the hand, 'Eustace Borlsover, George Borlsover, Francis Borlsover Sigismund Borlsover, Adrian Borlsover, Eustace Borlsover, Saville Borlsover. B, for Borlsover. Honesty is the Best Policy. Beautiful Belinda Borlsover.'

'What curious nonsense!' said Eustace to himself.

'King George the Third ascended the throne in 1760,' wrote the hand. 'Crowd, a noun of

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<sup>2</sup> **Braille** – a writing system used for the blind and consisting of a code of 63 characters, invented in 1824 by Louis Braille (1809–1852), a French educator who was blind himself

<sup>3</sup> **Naples** – a city in southern Italy, founded in 600 BC

multitude; a collection of individuals – Adrian Borlsover, Eustace Borlsover.’

‘It seems to me,’ said his uncle, closing the book, ‘that you had much better make the most of the afternoon sunshine and take your walk now.’ ‘I think perhaps I will,’ Eustace answered as he picked up the volume. ‘I won’t go far, and when I come back I can read to you those articles in *Nature* about which we were speaking.’ He went along the promenade, but stopped at the first shelter, and seating himself in the corner best protected from the wind, he examined the book at leisure. Nearly every page was scored with a meaningless jungle of pencil marks: rows of capital letters, short words, long words, complete sentences, copy-book tags. The whole thing, in fact, had the appearance of a copy-book, and on a more careful scrutiny Eustace thought that there was ample evidence to show that the handwriting at the beginning of the book, good though it was not nearly so good as the handwriting at the end.

He left his uncle at the end of October, with a promise to return early in December. It seemed to him quite clear that the old man’s power of automatic writing was developing rapidly, and for the first time he looked forward to a visit that combined duty with interest.

But on his return he was at first disappointed. His uncle, he thought, looked older. He was listless too, preferring others to read to him and dictating nearly all his letters. Not until the day before he left had Eustace an opportunity of observing Adrian Borlsover’s new-found faculty.

The old man, propped up in bed with pillows, had sunk into a light sleep. His two hands lay on the coverlet, his left hand tightly clasping his right. Eustace took an empty manuscript book and placed a pencil within reach of the fingers of the right hand. They snatched at it eagerly; then dropped the pencil to unloose the left hand from its restraining grasp.

‘Perhaps to prevent interference I had better hold that hand,’ said Eustace to himself, as he watched the pencil. Almost immediately it began to write.

‘Blundering Borlsovers, unnecessarily unnatural, extraordinarily eccentric, culpably curious.’

‘Who are you?’ asked Eustace, in a low voice.

‘Never you mind,’ wrote the hand of Adrian.

‘Is it my uncle who is writing?’

‘Oh, my prophetic soul, mine uncle.’

‘Is it anyone I know?’

‘Silly Eustace, you’ll see me very soon.’

‘When shall I see you?’

‘When poor old Adrian’s dead.’

‘Where shall I see you?’

‘Where shall you not?’

Instead of speaking his next question, Borlsover wrote it. ‘What is the time?’

The fingers dropped the pencil and moved three or four times across the paper. Then, picking up the pencil, they wrote:

‘Ten minutes before four. Put your book away, Eustace. Adrian mustn’t find us working at this sort of thing. He doesn’t know what to make of it, and I won’t have poor old Adrian disturbed. *Au revoir*.’

Adrian Borlsover awoke with a start.

‘I’ve been dreaming again,’ he said; ‘such queer dreams of leaguered cities and forgotten towns. You were mixed up in this one, Eustace, though I can’t remember how. Eustace, I want to warn you. Don’t walk in doubtful paths. Choose your friends well. Your poor grandfather—’

A fit of coughing put an end to what he was saying, but Eustace saw that the hand was still writing. He managed unnoticed to draw the book away. ‘I’ll light the gas,’ he said, ‘and ring for tea.’ On the other side of the bed curtain he saw the last sentences that had been written.

‘It’s too late, Adrian,’ he read. ‘We’re friends already; aren’t we, Eustace Borlsover?’

On the following day Eustace Borlsover left. He thought his uncle looked ill when he said good-by, and the old man spoke despondently of the failure his life had been.

‘Nonsense, uncle!’ said his nephew. ‘You have got over your difficulties in a way not one in a hundred thousand would have done. Every one marvels at your splendid perseverance in teaching

your hand to take the place of your lost sight. To me it's been a revelation of the possibilities of education.'

'Education,' said his uncle dreamily, as if the word had started a new train of thought, 'education is good so long as you know to whom and for what purpose you give it. But with the lower orders of men, the base and more sordid spirits, I have grave doubts as to its results. Well, good-by, Eustace, I may not see you again. You are a true Borlsover, with all the Borlsover faults. Marry, Eustace. Marry some good, sensible girl. And if by any chance I don't see you again, my will is at my solicitor's. I've not left you any legacy, because I know you're well provided for, but I thought you might like to have my books. Oh, and there's just one other thing. You know, before the end people often lose control over themselves and make absurd requests. Don't pay any attention to them, Eustace. Good-by!' and he held out his hand. Eustace took it. It remained in his a fraction of a second longer than he had expected, and gripped him with a virility that was surprising. There was, too, in its touch a subtle sense of intimacy.

'Why, uncle!' he said, 'I shall see you alive and well for many long years to come.'

Two months later Adrian Borlsover died.

## II

Eustace Borlsover was in Naples at the time. He read the obituary notice in the *Morning Post* on the day announced for the funeral.

'Poor old fellow!' he said. 'I wonder where I shall find room for all his books.'

The question occurred to him again with greater force when three days later he found himself standing in the library at Borlsover Conyers, a huge room built for use, and not for beauty, in the year of Waterloo by a Borlsover who was an ardent admirer of the great Napoleon. It was arranged on the plan of many college libraries, with tall, projecting bookcases forming deep recesses of dusty silence, fit graves for the old hates of forgotten controversy, the dead passions of forgotten lives. At the end of the room, behind the bust of some unknown eighteenth-century divine, an ugly iron corkscrew stair led to a shelf-lined gallery. Nearly every shelf was full.

'I must talk to Saunders about it,' said Eustace. 'I suppose that it will be necessary to have the billiard-room fitted up with book cases.'

The two men met for the first time after many weeks in the dining-room that evening.

'Hullo!' said Eustace, standing before the fire with his hands in his pockets. 'How goes the world, Saunders? Why these dress togs?' He himself was wearing an old shooting-jacket. He did not believe in mourning, as he had told his uncle on his last visit; and though he usually went in for quiet-colored ties, he wore this evening one of an ugly red, in order to shock Morton the butler, and to make them thrash out the whole question of mourning for themselves in the servants' hall. Eustace was a true Borlsover. 'The world,' said Saunders 'goes the same as usual, confoundedly slow. The dress togs are accounted for by an invitation from Captain Lockwood to bridge.'

'How are you getting there?'

'I've told your coachman to drive me in your carriage. Any objection?'

'Oh, dear me, no! We've had all things in common for far too many years for me to raise objections at this hour of the day.'

'You'll find your correspondence in the library,' went on Saunders. 'Most of it I've seen to. There are a few private letters I haven't opened. There's also a box with a rat, or something, inside it that came by the evening post. Very likely it's the six-toed albino. I didn't look, because I didn't want to mess up my things but I should gather from the way it's jumping about that it's pretty hungry.'

'Oh, I'll see to it,' said Eustace, 'while you and the Captain earn an honest penny.'

Dinner over and Saunders gone, Eustace went into the library. Though the fire had been lit the room was by no means cheerful.

'We'll have all the lights on at any rate,' he said, as he turned the switches. 'And, Morton,' he added, when the butler brought the coffee, 'get me a screwdriver or something to undo this box.'

Whatever the animal is, he's kicking up the deuce of a row. What is it? Why are you dawdling?'

'If you please, sir, when the postman brought it he told me that they'd bored the holes in the lid at the post-office. There were no breathin' holes in the lid, sir, and they didn't want the animal to die. That is all, sir.'

'It's culpably careless of the man, whoever he was,' said Eustace, as he removed the screws, 'packing an animal like this in a wooden box with no means of getting air. Confound it all! I meant to ask Morton to bring me a cage to put it in. Now I suppose I shall have to get one myself.'

He placed a heavy book on the lid from which the screws had been removed, and went into the billiard-room. As he came back into the library with an empty cage in his hand he heard the sound of something falling, and then of something scuttling along the floor.

'Bother it! The beast's got out. How in the world am I to find it again in this library!'

To search for it did indeed seem hopeless. He tried to follow the sound of the scuttling in one of the recesses where the animal seemed to be running behind the books in the shelves, but it was impossible to locate it. Eustace resolved to go on quietly reading. Very likely the animal might gain confidence and show itself. Saunders seemed to have dealt in his usual methodical manner with most of the correspondence. There were still the private letters.

What was that? Two sharp clicks and the lights in the hideous candelabra that hung from the ceiling suddenly went out.

'I wonder if something has gone wrong with the fuse,' said Eustace, as he went to the switches by the door. Then he stopped. There was a noise at the other end of the room, as if something was crawling up the iron corkscrew stair. 'If it's gone into the gallery,' he said, 'well and good.' He hastily turned on the lights, crossed the room, and climbed up the stair. But he could see nothing. His grandfather had placed a little gate at the top of the stair, so that children could run and romp in the gallery without fear of accident. This Eustace closed, and having considerably narrowed the circle of his search, returned to his desk by the fire.

How gloomy the library was! There was no sense of intimacy about the room. The few busts that an eighteenth-century Borlsover had brought back from the grand tour, might have been in keeping in the old library. Here they seemed out of place. They made the room feel cold, in spite of the heavy red damask curtains and great gilt cornices.

With a crash two heavy books fell from the gallery to the floor; then, as Borlsover looked, another and yet another.

'Very well; you'll starve for this, my beauty!' he said. 'We'll do some little experiments on the metabolism of rats deprived of water. Go on! Chuck them down! I think I've got the upper hand.' He turned once again to his correspondence. The letter was from the family solicitor. It spoke of his uncle's death and of the valuable collection of books that had been left to him in the will.

'There was one request,' he read, 'which certainly came as a surprise to me. As you know, Mr. Adrian Borlsover had left instructions that his body was to be buried in as simple a manner as possible at Eastbourne. He expressed a desire that there should be neither wreaths nor flowers of any kind, and hoped that his friends and relatives would not consider it necessary to wear mourning. The day before his death we received a letter canceling these instructions. He wished his body to be embalmed (he gave us the address of the man we were to employ – Pennifer, Ludgate Hill), with orders that his right hand was to be sent to you, stating that it was at your special request. The other arrangements as to the funeral remained unaltered.'

'Good Lord!' said Eustace; 'what in the world was the old boy driving at? And what in the name of all that's holy is that?'

Someone was in the gallery. Someone had pulled the cord attached to one of the blinds, and it had rolled up with a snap. Someone must be in the gallery, for a second blind did the same. Someone must be walking round the gallery, for one after the other the blinds sprang up, letting in the moonlight.

'I haven't got to the bottom of this yet,' said Eustace, 'but I will do before the night is very much older,' and he hurried up the corkscrew stair. He had just got to the top when the lights went

out a second time, and he heard again the scuttling along the floor. Quickly he stole on tiptoe in the dim moonshine in the direction of the noise, feeling as he went for one of the switches. His fingers touched the metal knob at last. He turned on the electric light.

About ten yards in front of him, crawling along the floor, was a man's hand. Eustace stared at it in utter astonishment. It was moving quickly, in the manner of a geometer caterpillar, the fingers humped up one moment, flattened out the next; the thumb appeared to give a crab-like motion to the whole. While he was looking, too surprised to stir, the hand disappeared round the corner Eustace ran forward. He no longer saw it, but he could hear it as it squeezed its way behind the books on one of the shelves. A heavy volume had been displaced. There was a gap in the row of books where it had got in. In his fear lest it should escape him again, he seized the first book that came to his hand and plugged it into the hole. Then, emptying two shelves of their contents, he took the wooden boards and propped them up in front to make his barrier doubly sure.

'I wish Saunders was back,' he said; 'one can't tackle this sort of thing alone.' It was after eleven, and there seemed little likelihood of Saunders returning before twelve. He did not dare to leave the shelf unwatched, even to run downstairs to ring the bell. Morton the butler often used to come round about eleven to see that the windows were fastened, but he might not come. Eustace was thoroughly unstrung. At last he heard steps down below.

'Morton!' he shouted; 'Morton!'

'Sir?'

'Has Mr. Saunders got back yet?'

'Not yet, sir.'

'Well, bring me some brandy, and hurry up about it. I'm up here in the gallery, you duffer.'

'Thanks,' said Eustace, as he emptied the glass. 'Don't go to bed yet, Morton. There are a lot of books that have fallen down by accident; bring them up and put them back in their shelves.'

Morton had never seen Borlsover in so talkative a mood as on that night. 'Here,' said Eustace, when the books had been put back and dusted, 'you might hold up these boards for me, Morton. That beast in the box got out, and I've been chasing it all over the place.'

'I think I can hear it chawing at the books, sir. They're not valuable, I hope? I think that's the carriage, sir; I'll go and call Mr. Saunders.'

It seemed to Eustace that he was away for five minutes, but it could hardly have been more than one when he returned with Saunders. 'All right, Morton, you can go now. I'm up here, Saunders.'

'What's all the row?' asked Saunders, as he lounged forward with his hands in his pockets. The luck had been with him all the evening. He was completely satisfied, both with himself and with Captain Lockwood's taste in wines. 'What's the matter? You look to me to be in an absolute blue funk.'

'That old devil of an uncle of mine,' began Eustace – 'oh, I can't explain it all. It's his hand that's been playing old Harry all the evening. But I've got it cornered behind these books. You've got to help me catch it.'

'What's up with you, Eustace? What's the game?'

'It's no game, you silly idiot! If you don't believe me take out one of those books and put your hand in and feel.'

'All right,' said Saunders; 'but wait till I've rolled up my sleeve. The accumulated dust of centuries, eh?' He took off his coat, knelt down, and thrust his arm along the shelf.

'There's something there right enough,' he said. 'It's got a funny stumpy end to it, whatever it is, and nips like a crab. Ah, no, you don't!' He pulled his hand out in a flash. 'Shove in a book quickly. Now it can't get out.'

'What was it?' asked Eustace.

'It was something that wanted very much to get hold of me. I felt what seemed like a thumb and forefinger. Give me some brandy.'

'How are we to get it out of there?'

'What about a landing net?'

‘No good. It would be too smart for us. I tell you, Saunders, it can cover the ground far faster than I can walk. But I think I see how we can manage it. The two books at the end of the shelf are big ones that go right back against the wall. The others are very thin. I’ll take out one at a time, and you slide the rest along until we have it squashed between the end two.’

It certainly seemed to be the best plan. One by one, as they took out the books, the space behind grew smaller and smaller. There was something in it that was certainly very much alive. Once they caught sight of fingers pressing outward for a way of escape. At last they had it pressed between the two big books.

‘There’s muscle there, if there isn’t flesh and blood,’ said Saunders, as he held them together. ‘It seems to be a hand right enough, too. I suppose this is a sort of infectious hallucination. I’ve read about such cases before.’

‘Infectious fiddlesticks!’ said Eustace, his face white with anger; ‘bring the thing downstairs. We’ll get it back into the box.’ It was not altogether easy, but they were successful at last. ‘Drive in the screws,’ said Eustace, ‘we won’t run any risks. Put the box in this old desk of mine. There’s nothing in it that I want. Here’s the key. Thank goodness, there’s nothing wrong with the lock.’

‘Quite a lively evening,’ said Saunders. ‘Now let’s hear more about your uncle.’

They sat up together until early morning. Saunders had no desire for sleep. Eustace was trying to explain and to forget: to conceal from himself a fear that he had never felt before – the fear of walking alone down the long corridor to his bedroom.

### III

‘Whatever it was,’ said Eustace to Saunders on the following morning, ‘I propose that we drop the subject. There’s nothing to keep us here for the next ten days. We’ll motor up to the Lakes and get some climbing.’

‘And see nobody all day, and sit bored to death with each other every night. Not for me thanks. Why not run up to town? Run’s the exact word in this case, isn’t it? We’re both in such a blessed funk. Pull yourself together Eustace, and let’s have another look at the hand.’

‘As you like,’ said Eustace; ‘there’s the key.’ They went into the library and opened the desk. The box was as they had left it on the previous night.

‘What are you waiting for?’ asked Eustace.

‘I am waiting for you to volunteer to open the lid. However, since you seem to funk it, allow me. There doesn’t seem to be the likelihood of any rumpus this morning, at all events.’ He opened the lid and picked out the hand.

‘Cold?’ asked Eustace.

‘Tepid. A bit below blood-heat by the feel. Soft and supple too. If it’s the embalming, it’s a sort of embalming I’ve never seen before. Is it your uncle’s hand?’

‘Oh, yes, it’s his all right,’ said Eustace. ‘I should know those long thin fingers anywhere. Put it back in the box, Saunders. Never mind about the screws. I’ll lock the desk, so that there’ll be no chance of its getting out. We’ll compromise by motoring up to town for a week. If we get off soon after lunch we ought to be at Grantham<sup>1</sup> or Stamford<sup>2</sup> by night.’

‘Right,’ said Saunders; ‘and to-morrow – Oh, well, by to-morrow we shall have forgotten all about this beastly thing.’

If when the morrow came they had not forgotten, it was certainly true that at the end of the week they were able to tell a very vivid ghost story at the little supper Eustace gave on Hallow E’en.

‘You don’t want us to believe that it’s true, Mr. Borlsover? How perfectly awful!’

‘I’ll take my oath on it, and so would Saunders here; wouldn’t you, old chap?’

‘Any number of oaths,’ said Saunders. ‘It was a long thin hand, you know, and it gripped me just like that.’

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<sup>1</sup> **Grantham** – a town in Lincolnshire in east-central England, first mentioned in 1086

<sup>2</sup> **Stamford** – a town on the River Welland in Lincolnshire in eastcentral England

‘Don’t Mr. Saunders! Don’t! How perfectly horrid! Now tell us another one, do. Only a really creepy one, please!’

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‘Here’s a pretty mess!’ said Eustace on the following day as he threw a letter across the table to Saunders. ‘It’s your affair, though. Mrs. Merrit, if I understand it, gives a month’s notice.’

‘Oh, that’s quite absurd on Mrs. Merrit’s part,’ Saunders replied. ‘She doesn’t know what she’s talking about. Let’s see what she says.’

‘DEAR SIR,’ he read, ‘this is to let you know that I must give you a month’s notice as from Tuesday the 13th. For a long time I’ve felt the place too big for me, but when Jane Parfit, and Emma Laidlaw go off with scarcely as much as an “if you please,” after frightening the wits out of the other girls, so that they can’t turn out a room by themselves or walk alone down the stairs for fear of treading on half-frozen toads or hearing it run along the passages at night, all I can say is that it’s no place for me. So I must ask you, Mr. Borlsover, sir, to find a new housekeeper that has no objection to large and lonely houses, which some people do say, not that I believe them for a minute, my poor mother always having been a Wesleyan<sup>1</sup>, are haunted.

‘Yours faithfully,  
ELIZABETH MERRIT.

‘P.S. – I should be obliged if you would give my respects to Mr. Saunders. I hope that he won’t run no risks with his cold.’

‘Saunders,’ said Eustace, ‘you’ve always had a wonderful way with you in dealing with servants. You mustn’t let poor old Merrit go.’

‘Of course she shan’t go,’ said Saunders. ‘She’s probably only angling for a rise in salary. I’ll write to her this morning.’

‘No; there’s nothing like a personal interview. We’ve had enough of town. We’ll go back to-morrow, and you must work your cold for all it’s worth. Don’t forget that it’s got on to the chest, and will require weeks of feeding up and nursing.’

‘All right. I think I can manage Mrs. Merrit.’

But Mrs. Merrit was more obstinate than he had thought. She was very sorry to hear of Mr. Saunders’s cold, and how he lay awake all night in London coughing; very sorry indeed. She’d change his room for him gladly, and get the south room aired. And wouldn’t he have a basin of hot bread and milk last thing at night? But she was afraid that she would have to leave at the end of the month.

‘Try her with an increase of salary,’ was the advice of Eustace.

It was no use. Mrs. Merrit was obdurate, though she knew of a Mrs. Handyside who had been housekeeper to Lord Gargrave, who might be glad to come at the salary mentioned.

‘What’s the matter with the servants, Morton?’ asked Eustace that evening when he brought the coffee into the library. ‘What’s all this about Mrs. Merrit wanting to leave?’

‘If you please, sir, I was going to mention it myself. I have a confession to make, sir. When I found your note asking me to open that desk and take out the box with the rat, I broke the lock as you told me, and was glad to do it, because I could hear the animal in the box making a great noise, and I thought it wanted food. So I took out the box, sir, and got a cage, and was going to transfer it, when the animal got away.’

‘What in the world are you talking about? I never wrote any such note.’

‘Excuse me, sir, it was the note I picked up here on the floor on the day you and Mr. Saunders left. I have it in my pocket now.’

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<sup>1</sup> Wesleyan – belonging to the family of the Wesleys

It certainly seemed to be in Eustace's handwriting. It was written in pencil, and began somewhat abruptly.

'Get a hammer, Morton,' he read, 'or some other tool, and break open the lock in the old desk in the library. Take out the box that is inside. You need not do anything else. The lid is already open. Eustace Borlsover.'

'And you opened the desk?'

'Yes, sir; and as I was getting the cage ready the animal hopped out.'

'What animal?'

'The animal inside the box, sir.'

'What did it look like?'

'Well, sir, I couldn't tell you,' said Morton nervously; 'my back was turned, and it was halfway down the room when I looked up.'

'What was its color?' asked Saunders; 'black?'

'Oh, no, sir, a grayish white. It crept along in a very funny way, sir. I don't think it had a tail.'

'What did you do then?'

'I tried to catch it, but it was no use. So I set the rat-traps and kept the library shut. Then that girl Emma Laidlaw left the door open when she was cleaning, and I think it must have escaped.'

'And you think it was the animal that's been frightening the maids?'

'Well, no, sir, not quite. They said it was – you'll excuse me, sir – a hand that they saw. Emma trod on it once at the bottom of the stairs. She thought then it was a half-frozen toad, only white. And then Parfit was washing up the dishes in the scullery. She wasn't thinking about anything in particular. It was close on dusk. She took her hands out of the water and was drying them absent-minded like on the roller towel, when she found that she was drying someone else's hand as well, only colder than hers.'

'What nonsense!' exclaimed Saunders.

'Exactly, sir; that's what I told her; but we couldn't get her to stop.'

'You don't believe all this?' said Eustace, turning suddenly towards the butler.

'Me, sir? Oh, no, sir! I've not seen anything.'

'Nor heard anything?'

'Well, sir, if you must know, the bells do ring at odd times, and there's nobody there when we go; and when we go round to draw the blinds of a night, as often as not somebody's been there before us. But as I says to Mrs. Merrit, a young monkey might do wonderful things, and we all know that Mr. Borlsover has had some strange animals about the place.'

'Very well, Morton, that will do.'

'What do you make of it?' asked Saunders when they were alone. 'I mean of the letter he said you wrote.'

'Oh, that's simple enough,' said Eustace. 'See the paper it's written on? I stopped using that years ago, but there were a few odd sheets and envelopes left in the old desk. We never fastened up the lid of the box before locking it in. The hand got out, found a pencil, wrote this note, and shoved it through a crack on to the floor where Morton found it. That's plain as daylight.'

'But the hand couldn't write?'

'Couldn't it? You've not seen it do the things I've seen,' and he told Saunders more of what had happened at Eastbourne.

'Well,' said Saunders, 'in that case we have at least an explanation of the legacy. It was the hand which wrote, unknown to your uncle, that letter to your solicitor, bequeathing itself to you. Your uncle had no more to do with that request than I. In fact, it would seem that he had some idea of this automatic writing, and feared it.'

'Then if it's not my uncle, what is it?'

'I suppose some people might say that a disembodied spirit had got your uncle to educate and prepare a little body for it. Now it's got into that little body and is off on its own.'

'Well, what are we to do?'

'We'll keep our eyes open,' said Saunders, 'and try to catch it. If we can't do that, we shall



have to wait till the bally clockwork runs down. After all, if it's flesh and blood, it can't live forever.'

For two days nothing happened. Then Saunders saw it sliding down the banister in the hall. He was taken unawares, and lost a full second before he started in pursuit, only to find that the thing had escaped him. Three days later, Eustace, writing alone in the library at night, saw it sitting on an open book at the other end of the room. The fingers crept over the page, feeling the print as if it were reading; but before he had time to get up from his seat, it had taken the alarm and was pulling itself up the curtains. Eustace watched it grimly as it hung on to the cornice with three fingers, flicking thumb and forefinger at him in an expression of scornful derision.

'I know what I'll do,' he said. 'If I only get it into the open I'll set the dogs on to it.'

He spoke to Saunders of the suggestion.

'It's jolly good idea,' he said; 'only we won't wait till we find it out of doors. We'll get the dogs. There are the two terriers and the under-keeper's Irish mongrel that's on to rats like a flash. Your spaniel has not got spirit enough for this sort of game.' They brought the dogs into the house, and the keeper's Irish mongrel chewed up the slippers, and the terriers tripped up Morton as he waited at table; but all three were welcome. Even false security is better than no security at all.

For a fortnight nothing happened. Then the hand was caught, not by the dogs, but by Mrs. Merrit's gray parrot. The bird was in the habit of periodically removing the pins that kept its seed and water tins in place, and of escaping through the holes in the side of the cage. When once at liberty Peter would show no inclination to return, and would often be about the house for days. Now, after six consecutive weeks of captivity, Peter had again discovered a new means of unloosing his bolts and was at large, exploring the tapestried forests of the curtains and singing songs in praise of liberty from cornice and picture rail.

'It's no use your trying to catch him,' said Eustace to Mrs. Merrit, as she came into the study one afternoon towards dusk with a step-ladder. 'You'd much better leave Peter alone. Starve him into surrender, Mrs. Merrit, and don't leave bananas and seed about for him to peck at when he fancies he's hungry. You're far too softhearted.'

'Well, sir, I see he's right out of reach now on that picture rail, so if you wouldn't mind closing the door, sir, when you leave the room, I'll bring his cage in tonight and put some meat inside it. He's that fond of meat, though it does make him pull out his feathers to suck the quills. They *do* say that if you cook—'

'Never mind, Mrs. Merrit,' said Eustace, who was busy writing. 'That will do; I'll keep an eye on the bird.'

There was silence in the room, unbroken but for the continuous whisper of his pen.

'Scratch poor Peter,' said the bird. 'Scratch poor old Peter!'

'Be quiet, you beastly bird!'

'Poor old Peter! Scratch poor Peter, do.'

'I'm more likely to wring your neck if I get hold of you.' He looked up at the picture rail, and there was the hand holding on to a hook with three fingers, and slowly scratching the head of the parrot with the fourth. Eustace ran to the bell and pressed it hard; then across to the window, which he closed with a bang. Frightened by the noise the parrot shook its wings preparatory to flight, and as it did so the fingers of the hand got hold of it by the throat. There was a shrill scream from Peter as he fluttered across the room, wheeling round in circles that ever descended, borne down under the weight that clung to him. The bird dropped at last quite suddenly, and Eustace saw fingers and feathers rolled into an inextricable mass on the floor. The struggle abruptly ceased as finger and thumb squeezed the neck; the bird's eyes rolled up to show the whites, and there was a faint, half-choked gurgle. But before the fingers had time to lose their hold, Eustace had them in his own.

'Send Mr. Saunders here at once,' he said to the maid who came in answer to the bell. 'Tell him I want him immediately.'

Then he went with the hand to the fire. There was a ragged gash across the back where the bird's beak had torn it, but no blood oozed from the wound. He noticed with disgust that the nails had grown long and discolored.

'I'll burn the beastly thing,' he said. But he could not burn it. He tried to throw it into the flames, but his own hands, as if restrained by some old primitive feeling, would not let him. And so Saunders found him pale and irresolute, with the hand still clasped tightly in his fingers.

'I've got it at last,' he said in a tone of triumph.

'Good; let's have a look at it.'

'Not when it's loose. Get me some nails and a hammer and a board of some sort.'

'Can you hold it all right?'

'Yes, the thing's quite limp; tired out with throttling poor old Peter, I should say.'

'And now,' said Saunders when he returned with the things, 'what are we going to do?'

'Drive a nail through it first, so that it can't get away; then we can take our time over examining it.'

'Do it yourself,' said Saunders. 'I don't mind helping you with guinea-pigs occasionally when there's something to be learned; partly because I don't fear a guinea-pig's revenge. This thing's different.'

'All right, you miserable skunk. I won't forget the way you've stood by me.'

He took up a nail, and before Saunders had realised what he was doing had driven it through the hand, deep into the board.

'Oh, my aunt,' he giggled hysterically, 'look at it now,' for the hand was writhing in agonized contortions, squirming and wriggling upon the nail like a worm upon the hook.

'Well,' said Saunders, 'you've done it now. I'll leave you to examine it.'

'Don't go, in heaven's name. Cover it up, man, cover it up! Shove a cloth over it! Here!' and he pulled off the antimacassar from the back of a chair and wrapped the board in it. 'Now get the keys from my pocket and open the safe. Chuck the other things out. Oh, Lord, it's getting itself into frightful knots! and open it quick!' He threw the thing in and banged the door.

'We'll keep it there till it dies,' he said. 'May I burn in hell if I ever open the door of that safe again.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Mrs. Merrit departed at the end of the month. Her successor certainly was more successful in the management of the servants. Early in her rule she declared that she would stand no nonsense, and gossip soon withered and died. Eustace Borlsover went back to his old way of life. Old habits crept over and covered his new experience. He was, if anything, less morose, and showed a greater inclination to take his natural part in country society.

'I shouldn't be surprised if he marries one of these days,' said Saunders. 'Well, I'm in no hurry for such an event. I know Eustace far too well for the future Mrs. Borlsover to like me it will be the same old story again: a long friendship slowly made – marriage – and a long friendship quickly forgotten.'

## IV

But Eustace Borlsover did not follow the advice of his uncle and marry. He was too fond of old slippers and tobacco. The cooking, too, under Mrs. Handyside's management was excellent, and she seemed, too, to have a heaven-sent faculty in knowing when to stop dusting.

Little by little the old life resumed its old power. Then came the burglary. The men, it was said, broke into the house by way of the conservatory. It was really little more than an attempt, for they only succeeded in carrying away a few pieces of plate from the pantry. The safe in the study was certainly found open and empty, but, as Mr. Borlsover informed the police inspector, he had kept nothing of value in it during the last six months.

'Then you're lucky in getting off so easily, sir,' the man replied. 'By the way they have gone about their business, I should say they were experienced cracksmen. They must have caught the alarm when they were just beginning their evening's work.'

‘Yes,’ said Eustace, ‘I suppose I am lucky.’

‘I’ve no doubt,’ said the inspector, ‘that we shall be able to trace the men. I’ve said that they must have been old hands at the game. The way they got in and opened the safe shows that. But there’s one little thing that puzzles me. One of them was careless enough not to wear gloves, and I’m bothered if I know what he was trying to do. I’ve traced his finger-marks on the new varnish on the window sashes in every one of the downstairs rooms. They are very distinct ones too.’

‘Right hand or left, or both?’ asked Eustace.

‘Oh, right every time. That’s the funny thing. He must have been a foolhardy fellow, and I rather think it was him that wrote that.’ He took out a slip of paper from his pocket. ‘That’s what he wrote, sir. “I’ve got out, Eustace Borlsover, but I’ll be back before long.” Some gaol bird just escaped, I suppose. It will make it all the easier for us to trace him. Do you know the writing, sir?’

‘No,’ said Eustace; ‘it’s not the writing of anyone I know.’

‘I’m not going to stay here any longer,’ said Eustace to Saunders at luncheon. ‘I’ve got on far better during the last six months than ever I expected, but I’m not going to run the risk of seeing that thing again. I shall go up to town this afternoon. Get Morton to put my things together, and join me with the car at Brighton on the day after to-morrow. And bring the proofs of those two papers with you. We’ll run over them together.’

‘How long are you going to be away?’

‘I can’t say for certain, but be prepared to stay for some time. We’ve stuck to work pretty closely through the summer, and I for one need a holiday. I’ll engage the rooms at Brighton. You’ll find it best to break the journey at Hitchin. I’ll wire to you there at the Crown to tell you the Brighton address.’

The house he chose at Brighton was in a terrace. He had been there before. It was kept by his old college gyp, a man of discreet silence, who was admirably partnered by an excellent cook. The rooms were on the first floor. The two bedrooms were at the back, and opened out of each other. ‘Saunders can have the smaller one, though it is the only one with a fireplace,’ he said. ‘I’ll stick to the larger of the two, since it’s got a bathroom adjoining. I wonder what time he’ll arrive with the car.’

Saunders came about seven, cold and cross and dirty. ‘We’ll light the fire in the dining-room,’ said Eustace, ‘and get Prince to unpack some of the things while we are at dinner. What were the roads like?’

‘Rotten; swimming with mud, and a beastly cold wind against us all day. And this is July. Dear old England!’

‘Yes,’ said Eustace, ‘I think we might do worse than leave dear old England for a few months.’

They turned in soon after twelve.

‘You oughtn’t to feel cold, Saunders,’ said Eustace, ‘when you can afford to sport a great cat-skin lined coat like this. You do yourself very well, all things considered. Look at those gloves, for instance. Who could possibly feel cold when wearing them?’

‘They are far too clumsy though for driving. Try them on and see,’ and he tossed them through the door on to Eustace’s bed, and went on with his unpacking. A minute later he heard a shrill cry of terror. ‘Oh, Lord,’ he heard, ‘it’s in the glove! Quick, Saunders, quick!’ Then came a smacking thud. Eustace had thrown it from him. ‘I’ve chucked it into the bathroom,’ he gasped, ‘it’s hit the wall and fallen into the bath. Come now if you want to help.’ Saunders, with a lighted candle in his hand, looked over the edge of the bath. There it was, old and maimed, dumb and blind, with a ragged hole in the middle, crawling, staggering, trying to creep up the slippery sides, only to fall back helpless.

‘Stay there,’ said Saunders. ‘I’ll empty a collar box or something, and we’ll jam it in. It can’t get out while I’m away.’

‘Yes, it can,’ shouted Eustace. ‘It’s getting out now. It’s climbing up the plug chain. No, you brute, you filthy brute, you don’t! Come back, Saunders, it’s getting away from me. I can’t hold it; it’s all slippery. Curse its claw! Shut the window, you idiot! The top too, as well as the bottom. You

utter idiot! It's got out!' There was the sound of something dropping on to the hard flagstones below, and Eustace fell back fainting.

\* \* \* \* \*

For a fortnight he was ill.

'I don't know what to make of it,' the doctor said to Saunders. 'I can only suppose that Mr. Borlsover has suffered some great emotional shock. You had better let me send someone to help you nurse him. And by all means indulge that whim of his never to be left alone in the dark. I would keep a light burning all night if I were you. But he *must* have more fresh air. It's perfectly absurd this hatred of open windows.'

Eustace, however, would have no one with him but Saunders. 'I don't want the other men,' he said. 'They'd smuggle it in somehow. I know they would.'

'Don't worry about it, old chap. This sort of thing can't go on indefinitely. You know I saw it this time as well as you. It wasn't half so active. It won't go on living much longer, especially after that fall. I heard it hit the flags myself. As soon as you're a bit stronger we'll leave this place; not bag and baggage, but with only the clothes on our backs, so that it won't be able to hide anywhere. We'll escape it that way. We won't give any address, and we won't have any parcels sent after us. Cheer up, Eustace! You'll be well enough to leave in a day or two. The doctor says I can take you out in a chair to-morrow.'

'What have I done?' asked Eustace. 'Why does it come after me? I'm no worse than other men. I'm no worse than you, Saunders; you know I'm not. It was you who were at the bottom of that dirty business in San Diego<sup>1</sup>, and that was fifteen years ago.'

'It's not that, of course,' said Saunders. 'We are in the twentieth century, and even the parsons have dropped the idea of your old sins finding you out. Before you caught the hand in the library it was filled with pure malevolence – to you and all mankind. After you spiked it through with that nail it naturally forgot about other people, and concentrated its attention on you. It was shut up in the safe, you know, for nearly six months. That gives plenty of time for thinking of revenge.'

Eustace Borlsover would not leave his room, but he thought that there might be something in Saunders's suggestion to leave Brighton without notice. He began rapidly to regain his strength.

'We'll go on the first of September,' he said.

\* \* \* \* \*

The evening of August 31st was oppressively warm. Though at midday the windows had been wide open, they had been shut an hour or so before dusk. Mrs. Prince had long since ceased to wonder at the strange habits of the gentlemen on the first floor. Soon after their arrival she had been told to take down the heavy window curtains in the two bedrooms, and day by day the rooms had seemed to grow more bare. Nothing was left lying about.

'Mr. Borlsover doesn't like to have any place where dirt can collect,' Saunders had said as an excuse. 'He likes to see into all the corners of the room.'

'Couldn't I open the window just a little?' he said to Eustace that evening. 'We're simply roasting in here, you know.'

'No, leave well alone. We're not a couple of boarding-school misses fresh from a course of hygiene lectures. Get the chessboard out.'

They sat down and played. At ten o'clock Mrs. Prince came to the door with a note. 'I am sorry I didn't bring it before,' she said, 'but it was left in the letter-box.'

'Open it, Saunders, and see if it wants answering.'

It was very brief. There was neither address nor signature.

'Will eleven o'clock to-night be suitable for our last appointment?'

'Who is it from?' asked Borlsover.

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<sup>1</sup> San Diego – a port and city on the Pacific coast in southern California

‘It was meant for me,’ said Saunders. ‘There’s no answer, Mrs. Prince,’ and he put the paper into his pocket. ‘A dunning letter from a tailor; I suppose he must have got wind of our leaving.’

It was a clever lie, and Eustace asked no more questions. They went on with their game.

On the landing outside Saunders could hear the grandfather’s clock whispering the seconds, blurring out the quarter-hours.

‘Check!’ said Eustace. The clock struck eleven. At the same time there was a gentle knocking on the door; it seemed to come from the bottom panel.

‘Who’s there?’ asked Eustace.

There was no answer.

‘Mrs. Prince, is that you?’

‘She is up above,’ said Saunders; ‘I can hear her walking about the room.’

‘Then lock the door; bolt it too. Your move, Saunders.’

While Saunders sat with his eyes on the chessboard, Eustace walked over to the window and examined the fastenings. He did the same in Saunders’s room and the bathroom. There were no doors between the three rooms, or he would have shut and locked them too.

‘Now, Saunders,’ he said, ‘don’t stay all night over your move. I’ve had time to smoke one cigarette already. It’s bad to keep an invalid waiting. There’s only one possible thing for you to do. What was that?’

‘The ivy blowing against the window. There, it’s your move now, Eustace.’

‘It wasn’t the ivy, you idiot. It was someone tapping at the window,’ and he pulled up the blind. On the outer side of the window, clinging to the sash, was the hand.

‘What is it that it’s holding?’

‘It’s a pocket-knife. It’s going to try to open the window by pushing back the fastener with the blade.’

‘Well, let it try,’ said Eustace. ‘Those fasteners screw down; they can’t be opened that way. Anyway, we’ll close the shutters. It’s your move, Saunders. I’ve played.’

But Saunders found it impossible to fix his attention on the game. He could not understand Eustace, who seemed all at once to have lost his fear. ‘What do you say to some wine?’ he asked. ‘You seem to be taking things coolly, but I don’t mind confessing that I’m in a blessed funk.’

‘You’ve no need to be. There’s nothing supernatural about that hand, Saunders. I mean it seems to be governed by the laws of time and space. It’s not the sort of thing that vanishes into thin air or slides through oaken doors. And since that’s so, I defy it to get in here. We’ll leave the place in the morning. I for one have bottomed the depths of fear. Fill your glass, man! The windows are all shuttered, the door is locked and bolted. Pledge me my uncle Adrian! Drink, man! What are you waiting for?’

Saunders was standing with his glass half raised. ‘It can get in,’ he said hoarsely; ‘it can get in! We’ve forgotten. There’s the fireplace in my bedroom. It will come down the chimney.’

‘Quick!’ said Eustace, as he rushed into the other room; ‘we haven’t a minute to lose. What can we do? Light the fire, Saunders. Give me a match, quick!’

‘They must be all in the other room. I’ll get them.’

‘Hurry, man, for goodness’ sake! Look in the bookcase! Look in the bathroom! Here, come and stand here; I’ll look.’

‘Be quick!’ shouted Saunders. ‘I can hear something!’

‘Then plug a sheet from your bed up the chimney. No, here’s a match.’ He had found one at last that had slipped into a crack in the floor.

‘Is the fire laid? Good, but it may not burn. I know – the oil from that old reading-lamp and this cotton-wool. Now the match, quick! Pull the sheet away, you fool! We don’t want it now.’

There was a great roar from the grate as the flames shot up. Saunders had been a fraction of a second too late with the sheet. The oil had fallen on to it. It, too, was burning.

‘The whole place will be on fire!’ cried Eustace, as he tried to beat out the flames with a blanket. ‘It’s no good! I can’t manage it. You must open the door, Saunders, and get help.’

Saunders ran to the door and fumbled with the bolts. The key was stiff in the lock.

‘Hurry!’ shouted Eustace; ‘the whole place is ablaze!’

The key turned in the lock at last. For half a second Saunders stopped to look back. Afterwards he could never be quite sure as to what he had seen, but at the time he thought that something black and charred was creeping slowly, very slowly, from the mass of flames towards Eustace Borlsover. For a moment he thought of returning to his friend, but the noise and the smell of the burning sent him running down the passage crying, ‘Fire! Fire!’ He rushed to the telephone to summon help, and then back to the bathroom – he should have thought of that before – for water. As he burst open the bedroom door there came a scream of terror which ended suddenly, and then the sound of a heavy fall.

## **Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment (Nathaniel Hawthorne)**

That very singular man, old Dr. Heidegger, once invited four venerable friends to meet him in his study. There were three white-bearded gentlemen, Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew, and Mr. Gascoigne, and a withered gentlewoman, whose name was the Widow Wycherly. They were all melancholy old creatures, who had been unfortunate in life, and whose greatest misfortune it was that they were not long ago in their graves. Mr. Medbourne, in the vigor of his age, had been a prosperous merchant, but had lost his all by a frantic speculation, and was now little better than a mendicant. Colonel Killigrew had wasted his best years, and his health and substance, in the pursuit of sinful pleasures, which had given birth to a brood of pains, such as the gout, and divers other torments of soul and body. Mr. Gascoigne was a ruined politician, a man of evil fame, or at least had been so till time had buried him from the knowledge of the present generation, and made him obscure instead of infamous. As for the Widow Wycherly, tradition tells us that she was a great beauty in her day; but, for a long while past, she had lived in deep seclusion, on account of certain scandalous stories which had prejudiced the gentry of the town against her. It is a circumstance worth mentioning that each of these three old gentlemen, Mr. Medbourne, Colonel Killigrew, and Mr. Gascoigne, were early lovers of the Widow Wycherly, and had once been on the point of cutting each other’s throats for her sake. And, before proceeding further, I will merely hint that Dr. Heidegger and all his foul guests were sometimes thought to be a little beside themselves, – as is not unfrequently the case with old people, when worried either by present troubles or woeful recollections.

‘My dear old friends,’ said Dr. Heidegger, motioning them to be seated, ‘I am desirous of your assistance in one of those little experiments with which I amuse myself here in my study.’

If all stories were true, Dr. Heidegger’s study must have been a very curious place. It was a dim, old-fashioned chamber, festooned with cobwebs, and besprinkled with antique dust. Around the walls stood several oaken bookcases, the lower shelves of which were filled with rows of gigantic folios and black-letter quartos, and the upper with little parchment-covered duodecimos. Over the central bookcase was a bronze bust of Hippocrates<sup>1</sup>, with which, according to some authorities, Dr. Heidegger was accustomed to hold consultations in all difficult cases of his practice. In the obscurest corner of the room stood a tall and narrow oaken closet, with its door ajar, within which doubtfully appeared a skeleton. Between two of the bookcases hung a looking-glass, presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. Among many wonderful stories related of this mirror, it was fabled that the spirits of all the doctor’s deceased patients dwelt within its verge, and would stare him in the face whenever he looked thitherward. The opposite side of the chamber was ornamented with the full-length portrait of a young lady, arrayed in the faded magnificence of silk, satin, and brocade, and with a visage as faded as her dress. Above half a century ago, Dr. Heidegger had been on the point of marriage with this young lady; but, being affected with some slight disorder, she had swallowed one of her lover’s prescriptions, and died on the bridal evening. The greatest curiosity of the study remains to be mentioned; it was a ponderous folio volume, bound in black leather, with massive silver clasps. There were no letters on the back,

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<sup>1</sup> **Hippocrates** (460 BC–375 BC) – an ancient Greek physician who is regarded as the father of medicine

and nobody could tell the title of the book. But it was well known to be a book of magic; and once, when a chambermaid had lifted it, merely to brush away the dust, the skeleton had rattled in its closet, the picture of the young lady had stepped one foot upon the floor, and several ghastly faces had peeped forth from the mirror; while the brazen head of Hippocrates frowned, and said, – ‘Forbear!’

Such was Dr. Heidegger’s study. On the summer afternoon of our tale a small round table, as black as ebony, stood in the centre of the room, sustaining a cut-glass vase of beautiful form and elaborate workmanship. The sunshine came through the window, between the heavy festoons of two faded damask curtains, and fell directly across this vase; so that a mild splendor was reflected from it on the ashen visages of the five old people who sat around. Four champagne glasses were also on the table.

‘My dear old friends,’ repeated Dr. Heidegger, ‘may I reckon on your aid in performing an exceedingly curious experiment?’

Now Dr. Heidegger was a very strange old gentleman, whose eccentricity had become the nucleus for a thousand fantastic stories. Some of these fables, to my shame be it spoken, might possibly be traced back to my own veracious self; and if any passages of the present tale should startle the reader’s faith, I must be content to bear the stigma of a fiction monger.

When the doctor’s four guests heard him talk of his proposed experiment, they anticipated nothing more wonderful than the murder of a mouse in an air pump, or the examination of a cobweb by the microscope, or some similar nonsense, with which he was constantly in the habit of pestering his intimates. But without waiting for a reply, Dr. Heidegger hobbled across the chamber, and returned with the same ponderous folio, bound in black leather, which common report affirmed to be a book of magic. Undoing the silver clasps, he opened the volume, and took from among its black-letter pages a rose, or what was once a rose, though now the green leaves and crimson petals had assumed one brownish hue, and the ancient flower seemed ready to crumble to dust in the doctor’s hands.

‘This rose,’ said Dr. Heidegger, with a sigh, ‘this same withered and crumbling flower, blossomed five and fifty years ago. It was given me by Sylvia Ward, whose portrait hangs yonder; and I meant to wear it in my bosom at our wedding. Five and fifty years it has been treasured between the leaves of this old volume. Now, would you deem it possible that this rose of half a century could ever bloom again?’

‘Nonsense!’ said the Widow Wycherly, with a peevish toss of her head. ‘You might as well ask whether an old woman’s wrinkled face could ever bloom again.’

‘See!’ answered Dr. Heidegger.

He uncovered the vase, and threw the faded rose into the water which it contained. At first, it lay lightly on the surface of the fluid, appearing to imbibe none of its moisture. Soon, however, a singular change began to be visible. The crushed and dried petals stirred, and assumed a deepening tinge of crimson, as if the flower were reviving from a deathlike slumber; the slender stalk and twigs of foliage became green; and there was the rose of half a century, looking as fresh as when Sylvia Ward had first given it to her lover. It was scarcely full blown; for some of its delicate red leaves curled modestly around its moist bosom, within which two or three dewdrops were sparkling.

‘That is certainly a very pretty deception,’ said the doctor’s friends; carelessly, however, for they had witnessed greater miracles at a conjurer’s show; ‘pray how was it effected?’

‘Did you never hear of the “Fountain of Youth”?’ asked Dr. Heidegger, ‘which Ponce De Leon, the Spanish adventurer, went in search of two or three centuries ago?’

‘But did Ponce De Leon ever find it?’ said the Widow Wycherly.

‘No,’ answered Dr. Heidegger, ‘for he never sought it in the right place. The famous Fountain of Youth, if I am rightly informed, is situated in the southern part of the Floridian peninsula<sup>1</sup>, not far from Lake Macaco. Its source is overshadowed by several gigantic magnolias, which, though numberless centuries old, have been kept as fresh as violets by the virtues of this wonderful water.

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<sup>1</sup> **the Floridian peninsula** – a peninsula in the southeast of the United States in the state of Florida; Juan Ponce de León (1460–1521), a Spanish explorer, discovered Florida in 1513 while searching for the mythical fountain of youth.

An acquaintance of mine, knowing my curiosity in such matters, has sent me what you see in the vase.'

'Ahem!' said Colonel Killigrew, who believed not a word of the doctor's story; 'and what may be the effect of this fluid on the human frame?'

'You shall judge for yourself, my dear colonel,' replied Dr. Heidegger; 'and all of you, my respected friends, are welcome to so much of this admirable fluid as may restore to you the bloom of youth. For my own part, having had much trouble in growing old, I am in no hurry to grow young again. With your permission, therefore, I will merely watch the progress of the experiment.'

While he spoke, Dr. Heidegger had been filling the four champagne glasses with the water of the Fountain of Youth. It was apparently impregnated with an effervescent gas, for little bubbles were continually ascending from the depths of the glasses, and bursting in silvery spray at the surface. As the liquor diffused a pleasant perfume, the old people doubted not that it possessed cordial and comfortable properties; and though utter skeptics as to its rejuvenescent power, they were inclined to swallow it at once. But Dr. Heidegger besought them to stay a moment.

'Before you drink, my respectable old friends,' said he, 'it would be well that, with the experience of a lifetime to direct you, you should draw up a few general rules for your guidance, in passing a second time through the perils of youth. Think what a sin and shame it would be, if, with your peculiar advantages, you should not become patterns of virtue and wisdom to all the young people of the age!'

The doctor's four venerable friends made him no answer, except by a feeble and tremulous laugh; so very ridiculous was the idea that, knowing how closely repentance treads behind the steps of error, they should ever go astray again.

'Drink, then,' said the doctor, bowing: 'I rejoice that I have so well selected the subjects of my experiment.'

With palsied hands, they raised the glasses to their lips. The liquor, if it really possessed such virtues as Dr. Heidegger imputed to it, could not have been bestowed on four human beings who needed it more woefully. They looked as if they had never known what youth or pleasure was, but had been the offspring of Nature's dotage, and always the gray, decrepit, sapless, miserable creatures, who now sat stooping round the doctor's table, without life enough in their souls or bodies to be animated even by the prospect of growing young again. They drank off the water, and replaced their glasses on the table.

Assuredly there was an almost immediate improvement in the aspect of the party, not unlike what might have been produced by a glass of generous wine, together with a sudden glow of cheerful sunshine brightening over all their visages at once. There was a healthful suffusion on their cheeks, instead of the ashen hue that had made them look so corpse-like. They gazed at one another, and fancied that some magic power had really begun to smooth away the deep and sad inscriptions which Father Time had been so long engraving on their brows. The Widow Wycherly adjusted her cap, for she felt almost like a woman again.

'Give us more of this wondrous water!' cried they, eagerly. 'We are younger – but we are still too old! Quick – give us more!'

'Patience, patience!' quoth Dr. Heidegger, who sat watching the experiment with philosophic coolness. 'You have been a long time growing old. Surely, you might be content to grow young in half an hour! But the water is at your service.'

Again he filled their glasses with the liquor of youth, enough of which still remained in the vase to turn half the old people in the city to the age of their own grandchildren. While the bubbles were yet sparkling on the brim, the doctor's four guests snatched their glasses from the table, and swallowed the contents at a single gulp. Was it delusion? even while the draught was passing down their throats, it seemed to have wrought a change on their whole systems. Their eyes grew clear and bright; a dark shade deepened among their silvery locks, they sat around the table, three gentlemen of middle age, and a woman, hardly beyond her buxom prime.

'My dear widow, you are charming!' cried Colonel Killigrew, whose eyes had been fixed upon her face, while the shadows of age were flitting from it like darkness from the crimson



daybreak.

The fair widow knew, of old, that Colonel Killigrew's compliments were not always measured by sober truth; so she started up and ran to the mirror, still dreading that the ugly visage of an old woman would meet her gaze. Meanwhile, the three gentlemen behaved in such a manner as proved that the water of the Fountain of Youth possessed some intoxicating qualities; unless, indeed, their exhilaration of spirits were merely a lightsome dizziness caused by the sudden removal of the weight of years. Mr. Gascoigne's mind seemed to run on political topics, but whether relating to the past, present, or future, could not easily be determined, since the same ideas and phrases have been in vogue these fifty years. Now he rattled forth full-throated sentences about patriotism, national glory, and the people's right; now he muttered some perilous stuff or other, in a sly and doubtful whisper, so cautiously that even his own conscience could scarcely catch the secret; and now, again, he spoke in measured accents, and a deeply deferential tone, as if a royal ear were listening to his wellturned periods. Colonel Killigrew all this time had been trolling forth a jolly bottle song, and ringing his glass in symphony with the chorus, while his eyes wandered toward the buxom figure of the Widow Wycherly. On the other side of the table, Mr. Medbourne was involved in a calculation of dollars and cents, with which was strangely intermingled a project for supplying the East Indies with ice, by harnessing a team of whales to the polar icebergs.

As for the Widow Wycherly, she stood before the mirror courtesying and simpering to her own image, and greeting it as the friend whom she loved better than all the world beside. She thrust her face close to the glass, to see whether some long-remembered wrinkle or crow's foot had indeed vanished. She examined whether the snow had so entirely melted from her hair that the venerable cap could be safely thrown aside. At last, turning briskly away, she came with a sort of dancing step to the table.

'My dear old doctor,' cried she, 'pray favor me with another glass!'

'Certainly, my dear madam, certainly!' replied the complaisant doctor; 'see! I have already filled the glasses.'

There, in fact, stood the four glasses, brimful of this wonderful water, the delicate spray of which, as it effervesced from the surface, resembled the tremulous glitter of diamonds. It was now so nearly sunset that the chamber had grown duskier than ever; but a mild and moonlike splendor gleamed from within the vase, and rested alike on the four guests and on the doctor's venerable figure. He sat in a high-backed, elaborately-carved, oaken arm-chair, with a gray dignity of aspect that might have well befitted that very Father Time, whose power had never been disputed, save by this fortunate company. Even while quaffing the third draught of the Fountain of Youth, they were almost awed by the expression of his mysterious visage.

But, the next moment, the exhilarating gush of young life shot through their veins. They were now in the happy prime of youth. Age, with its miserable train of cares and sorrows and diseases, was remembered only as the trouble of a dream, from which they had joyously awoke. The fresh gloss of the soul, so early lost, and without which the world's successive scenes had been but a gallery of faded pictures, again threw its enchantment over all their prospects. They felt like new-created beings in a new-created universe.

'We are young! We are young!' they cried exultingly.

Youth, like the extremity of age, had effaced the strongly-marked characteristics of middle life, and mutually assimilated them all. They were a group of merry youngsters, almost maddened with the exuberant frolicsomeness of their years. The most singular effect of their gayety was an impulse to mock the infirmity and decrepitude of which they had so lately been the victims. They laughed loudly at their old-fashioned attire, the wide-skirted coats and flapped waistcoats of the young men, and the ancient cap and gown of the blooming girl. One limped across the floor like a gouty grandfather; one set a pair of spectacles astride of his nose, and pretended to pore over the black-letter pages of the book of magic; a third seated himself in an arm-chair, and strove to imitate the venerable dignity of Dr. Heidegger. Then all shouted mirthfully, and leaped about the room. The Widow Wycherly – if so fresh a damsel could be called a widow – tripped up to the doctor's chair, with a mischievous merriment in her rosy face.

‘Doctor, you dear old soul,’ cried she, ‘get up and dance with me!’ And then the four young people laughed louder than ever, to think what a queer figure the poor old doctor would cut.

‘Pray excuse me,’ answered the doctor quietly. ‘I am old and rheumatic, and my dancing days were over long ago. But either of these gay young gentlemen will be glad of so pretty a partner.’

‘Dance with me, Clara!’ cried Colonel Killigrew

‘No, no, I will be her partner!’ shouted Mr. Gascoigne.

‘She promised me her hand, fifty years ago!’ exclaimed Mr. Medbourne.

They all gathered round her. One caught both her hands in his passionate grasp another threw his arm about her waist – the third buried his hand among the glossy curls that clustered beneath the widow’s cap. Blushing, panting, struggling, chiding, laughing, her warm breath fanning each of their faces by turns, she strove to disengage herself, yet still remained in their triple embrace. Never was there a livelier picture of youthful rivalry, with bewitching beauty for the prize. Yet, by a strange deception, owing to the duskiness of the chamber, and the antique dresses which they still wore, the tall mirror is said to have reflected the figures of the three old, gray, withered grandsires, ridiculously contending for the skinny ugliness of a shrivelled grandam<sup>1</sup>.

But they were young: their burning passions proved them so. Inflamed to madness by the coquetry of the girl-widow, who neither granted nor quite withheld her favors, the three rivals began to interchange threatening glances. Still keeping hold of the fair prize, they grappled fiercely at one another’s throats. As they struggled to and fro, the table was overturned, and the vase dashed into a thousand fragments. The precious Water of Youth flowed in a bright stream across the floor, moistening the wings of a butterfly, which, grown old in the decline of summer, had alighted there to die. The insect fluttered lightly through the chamber, and settled on the snowy head of Dr. Heidegger.

‘Come, come, gentlemen! – come, Madam Wycherly,’ exclaimed the doctor, ‘I really must protest against this riot.’

They stood still and shivered; for it seemed as if gray Time were calling them back from their sunny youth, far down into the chill and darksome vale of years. They looked at old Dr. Heidegger, who sat in his carved arm-chair, holding the rose of half a century, which he had rescued from among the fragments of the shattered vase. At the motion of his hand, the four rioters resumed their seats; the more readily, because their violent exertions had wearied them, youthful though they were.

‘My poor Sylvia’s rose!’ ejaculated Dr. Heidegger, holding it in the light of the sunset clouds; ‘it appears to be fading again.’

And so it was. Even while the party were looking at it, the flower continued to shrivel up, till it became as dry and fragile as when the doctor had first thrown it into the vase. He shook off the few drops of moisture which clung to its petals.

‘I love it as well thus as in its dewy freshness,’ observed he, pressing the withered rose to his withered lips. While he spoke, the butterfly fluttered down from the doctor’s snowy head, and fell upon the floor.

His guests shivered again. A strange chillness, whether of the body or spirit they could not tell, was creeping gradually over them all. They gazed at one another, and fancied that each fleeting moment snatched away a charm, and left a deepening furrow where none had been before. Was it an illusion? Had the changes of a lifetime been crowded into so brief a space, and were they now four aged people, sitting with their old friend, Dr. Heidegger?

‘Are we grown old again, so soon?’ cried they, dolefully.

In truth they had. The Water of Youth possessed merely a virtue more transient than that of wine. The delirium which it created had effervesced away. Yes! they were old again. With a shuddering impulse, that showed her a woman still, the widow clasped her skinny hands before her face, and wished that the coffin lid were over it, since it could be no longer beautiful.

‘Yes, friends, ye are old again,’ said Dr. Heidegger, ‘and lo! the Water of Youth is all lavished on the ground. Well – I bemoan it not; for if the fountain gushed at my very doorstep, I

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<sup>1</sup> **grandam** = *obsolete* an old woman

would not stoop to bathe my lips in it – no, though its delirium were for years instead of moments. Such is the lesson ye have taught me!’

But the doctor’s four friends had taught no such lesson to themselves. They resolved forthwith to make a pilgrimage to Florida, and quaff at morning, noon, and night, from the Fountain of Youth.

## **The Birthmark (Nathaniel Hawthorne)**

In the latter part of the last century there lived a man of science, an eminent proficient in every branch of natural philosophy, who not long before our story opens had made experience of a spiritual affinity more attractive than any chemical one. He had left his laboratory to the care of an assistant, cleared his fine countenance from the furnace smoke, washed the stain of acids from his fingers, and persuaded a beautiful woman to become his wife. In those days when the comparatively recent discovery of electricity and other kindred mysteries of Nature seemed to open paths into the region of miracle, it was not unusual for the love of science to rival the love of woman in its depth and absorbing energy. The higher intellect, the imagination, the spirit, and even the heart might all find their congenial aliment in pursuits which, as some of their ardent votaries believed, would ascend from one step of powerful intelligence to another, until the philosopher should lay his hand on the secret of creative force and perhaps make new worlds for himself. We know not whether Aylmer possessed this degree of faith in man’s ultimate control over Nature. He had devoted himself, however, too unreservedly to scientific studies ever to be weaned from them by any second passion. His love for his young wife might prove the stronger of the two; but it could only be by intertwining itself with his love of science, and uniting the strength of the latter to his own.

Such a union accordingly took place, and was attended with truly remarkable consequences and a deeply impressive moral. One day, very soon after their marriage, Aylmer sat gazing at his wife with a trouble in his countenance that grew stronger until he spoke.

‘Georgiana,’ said he, ‘has it never occurred to you that the mark upon your cheek might be removed?’

‘No, indeed,’ said she, smiling; but perceiving the seriousness of his manner, she blushed deeply. ‘To tell you the truth it has been so often called a charm that I was simple enough to imagine it might be so.’

‘Ah, upon another face perhaps it might,’ replied her husband; ‘but never on yours. No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect, which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty, shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection.’

‘Shocks you, my husband!’ cried Georgiana, deeply hurt; at first reddening with momentary anger, but then bursting into tears. ‘Then why did you take me from my mother’s side? You cannot love what shocks you!’

To explain this conversation it must be mentioned that in the centre of Georgiana’s left cheek there was a singular mark, deeply interwoven, as it were, with the texture and substance of her face. In the usual state of her complexion – a healthy though delicate bloom – the mark wore a tint of deeper crimson, which imperfectly defined its shape amid the surrounding rosiness. When she blushed it gradually became more indistinct, and finally vanished amid the triumphant rush of blood that bathed the whole cheek with its brilliant glow. But if any shifting motion caused her to turn pale there was the mark again, a crimson stain upon the snow, in what Aylmer sometimes deemed an almost fearful distinctness. Its shape bore not a little similarity to the human hand, though of the smallest pygmy size. Georgiana’s lovers were wont to say that some fairy at her birth hour had laid her tiny hand upon the infant’s cheek, and left this impress there in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts. Many a desperate swain would have risked life for the privilege of pressing his lips to the mysterious hand. It must not be concealed, however, that the impression wrought by this fairy sign manual varied exceedingly, according to the difference of temperament in the beholders. Some fastidious persons – but they were exclusively of her own sex

– affirmed that the bloody hand, as they chose to call it, quite destroyed the effect of Georgiana's beauty, and rendered her countenance even hideous. But it would be as reasonable to say that one of those small blue stains which sometimes occur in the purest statuary marble would convert the Eve of Powers to a monster. Masculine observers, if the birthmark did not heighten their admiration, contented themselves with wishing it away, that the world might possess one living specimen of ideal loveliness without the semblance of a flaw. After his marriage, – for he thought little or nothing of the matter before, – Aylmer discovered that this was the case with himself.

Had she been less beautiful, – if Envy's self could have found aught else to sneer at, – he might have felt his affection heightened by the prettiness of this mimic hand, now vaguely portrayed, now lost, now stealing forth again and glimmering to and fro with every pulse of emotion that throbbed within her heart; but seeing her otherwise so perfect, he found this one defect grow more and more intolerable with every moment of their united lives. It was the fatal flaw of humanity which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps ineffaceably on all her productions, either to imply that they are temporary and finite, or that their perfection must be wrought by toil and pain. The crimson hand expressed the ineludible gripe in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mould, degrading them into kindred with the lowest, and even with the very brutes, like whom their visible frames return to dust. In this manner, selecting it as the symbol of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death, Aylmer's sombre imagination was not long in rendering the birthmark a frightful object, causing him more trouble and horror than ever Georgiana's beauty, whether of soul or sense, had given him delight.

At all the seasons which should have been their happiest, he invariably and without intending it, nay, in spite of a purpose to the contrary, reverted to this one disastrous topic. Trifling as it at first appeared, it so connected itself with innumerable trains of thought and modes of feeling that it became the central point of all. With the morning twilight Aylmer opened his eyes upon his wife's face and recognized the symbol of imperfection; and when they sat together at the evening hearth his eyes wandered stealthily to her cheek, and beheld, flickering with the blaze of the wood fire, the spectral hand that wrote mortality where he would fain have worshipped. Georgiana soon learned to shudder at his gaze. It needed but a glance with the peculiar expression that his face often wore to change the roses of her cheek into a deathlike paleness, amid which the crimson hand was brought strongly out, like a bass-relief of ruby on the whitest marble.

Late one night when the lights were growing dim, so as hardly to betray the stain on the poor wife's cheek, she herself, for the first time, voluntarily took up the subject.

'Do you remember, my dear Aylmer,' said she, with a feeble attempt at a smile, 'have you any recollection of a dream last night about this odious hand?'

'None! none whatever!' replied Aylmer, starting; but then he added, in a dry, cold tone, affected for the sake of concealing the real depth of his emotion, 'I might well dream of it; for before I fell asleep it had taken a pretty firm hold of my fancy.'

'And you did dream of it?' continued Georgiana, hastily; for she dreaded lest a gush of tears should interrupt what she had to say. 'A terrible dream! I wonder that you can forget it. Is it possible to forget this one expression? – "It is in her heart now; we must have it out!" Reflect, my husband; for by all means I would have you recall that dream.'

The mind is in a sad state when Sleep, the all-involving, cannot confine her spectres within the dim region of her sway, but suffers them to break forth, affrighting this actual life with secrets that perchance belong to a deeper one. Aylmer now remembered his dream. He had fancied himself with his servant Aminadab, attempting an operation for the removal of the birthmark; but the deeper went the knife, the deeper sank the hand, until at length its tiny grasp appeared to have caught hold of Georgiana's heart; whence, however, her husband was inexorably resolved to cut or wrench it away.

When the dream had shaped itself perfectly in his memory, Aylmer sat in his wife's presence with a guilty feeling. Truth often finds its way to the mind close muffled in robes of sleep, and then speaks with uncompromising directness of matters in regard to which we practise an unconscious self-deception during our waking moments. Until now he had not been aware of the tyrannizing

influence acquired by one idea over his mind, and of the lengths which he might find in his heart to go for the sake of giving himself peace.

‘Aylmer,’ resumed Georgiana, solemnly, ‘I know not what may be the cost to both of us to rid me of this fatal birthmark. Perhaps its removal may cause cureless deformity; or it may be the stain goes as deep as life itself. Again: do we know that there is a possibility, on any terms, of unclasping the firm grip of this little hand which was laid upon me before I came into the world?’

‘Dearest Georgiana, I have spent much thought upon the subject,’ hastily interrupted Aylmer. ‘I am convinced of the perfect practicability of its removal.’

‘If there be the remotest possibility of it,’ continued Georgiana, ‘let the attempt be made at whatever risk. Danger is nothing to me; for life, while this hateful mark makes me the object of your horror and disgust, – life is a burden which I would fling down with joy. Either remove this dreadful hand, or take my wretched life! You have deep science. All the world bears witness of it. You have achieved great wonders. Cannot you remove this little, little mark, which I cover with the tips of two small fingers? Is this beyond your power, for the sake of your own peace, and to save your poor wife from madness?’

‘Noblest, dearest, tenderest wife,’ cried Aylmer, rapturously, ‘doubt not my power. I have already given this matter the deepest thought – thought which might almost have enlightened me to create a being less perfect than yourself. Georgiana, you have led me deeper than ever into the heart of science. I feel myself fully competent to render this dear cheek as faultless as its fellow; and then, most beloved, what will be my triumph when I shall have corrected what Nature left imperfect in her fairest work! Even Pygmalion<sup>1</sup>, when his sculptured woman assumed life, felt not greater ecstasy than mine will be.’

‘It is resolved, then,’ said Georgiana, faintly smiling. ‘And, Aylmer, spare me not, though you should find the birthmark take refuge in my heart at last.’

Her husband tenderly kissed her cheek – her right cheek – not that which bore the impress of the crimson hand.

The next day Aylmer apprised his wife of a plan that he had formed whereby he might have opportunity for the intense thought and constant watchfulness which the proposed operation would require; while Georgiana, likewise, would enjoy the perfect repose essential to its success. They were to seclude themselves in the extensive apartments occupied by Aylmer as a laboratory, and where, during his toilsome youth, he had made discoveries in the elemental powers of Nature that had roused the admiration of all the learned societies in Europe. Seated calmly in this laboratory, the pale philosopher had investigated the secrets of the highest cloud region and of the profoundest mines; he had satisfied himself of the causes that kindled and kept alive the fires of the volcano; and had explained the mystery of fountains, and how it is that they gush forth, some so bright and pure, and others with such rich medicinal virtues, from the dark bosom of the earth. Here, too, at an earlier period, he had studied the wonders of the human frame, and attempted to fathom the very process by which Nature assimilates all her precious influences from earth and air, and from the spiritual world, to create and foster man, her masterpiece. The latter pursuit, however, Aylmer had long laid aside in unwilling recognition of the truth – against which all seekers sooner or later stumble – that our great creative Mother, while she amuses us with apparently working in the broadest sunshine, is yet severely careful to keep her own secrets, and, in spite of her pretended openness, shows us nothing but results. She permits us, indeed, to mar, but seldom to mend, and, like a jealous patentee, on no account to make. Now, however, Aylmer resumed these half-forgotten investigations; not, of course, with such hopes or wishes as first suggested them; but because they involved much physiological truth and lay in the path of his proposed scheme for the treatment of Georgiana.

As he led her over the threshold of the laboratory, Georgiana was cold and tremulous. Aylmer looked cheerfully into her face, with intent to reassure her, but was so startled with the intense glow of the birthmark upon the whiteness of her cheek that he could not restrain a strong convulsive

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<sup>1</sup> **Pygmalion** – in Greek mythology, a sculptor who made an ivory statue of a woman and then fell in love with it; Venus, the goddess of love, brought life into the statue in answer for Pygmalion’s prayer.

shudder. His wife fainted.

‘Aminadab! Aminadab!’ shouted Aylmer, stamping violently on the floor.

Forthwith there issued from an inner apartment a man of low stature, but bulky frame, with shaggy hair hanging about his visage, which was grimed with the vapors of the furnace. This personage had been Aylmer’s underworker during his whole scientific career, and was admirably fitted for that office by his great mechanical readiness, and the skill with which, while incapable of comprehending a single principle, he executed all the details of his master’s experiments. With his vast strength, his shaggy hair, his smoky aspect, and the indescribable earthiness that incrustated him, he seemed to represent man’s physical nature; while Aylmer’s slender figure, and pale, intellectual face, were no less apt a type of the spiritual element.

‘Throw open the door of the boudoir, Aminadab,’ said Aylmer, ‘and burn a pastil.’

‘Yes, master,’ answered Aminadab, looking intently at the lifeless form of Georgiana; and then he muttered to himself, ‘If she were my wife, I’d never part with that birthmark.’

When Georgiana recovered consciousness she found herself breathing an atmosphere of penetrating fragrance, the gentle potency of which had recalled her from her deathlike faintness. The scene around her looked like enchantment. Aylmer had converted those smoky, dingy, sombre rooms, where he had spent his brightest years in recondite pursuits, into a series of beautiful apartments not unfit to be the secluded abode of a lovely woman. The walls were hung with gorgeous curtains, which imparted the combination of grandeur and grace that no other species of adornment can achieve; and as they fell from the ceiling to the floor, their rich and ponderous folds, concealing all angles and straight lines, appeared to shut in the scene from infinite space. For aught Georgiana knew, it might be a pavilion among the clouds. And Aylmer, excluding the sunshine, which would have interfered with his chemical processes, had supplied its place with perfumed lamps, emitting flames of various hue, but all uniting in a soft, empurpled radiance. He now knelt by his wife’s side, watching her earnestly, but without alarm; for he was confident in his science, and felt that he could draw a magic circle round her within which no evil might intrude.

‘Where am I? Ah, I remember,’ said Georgiana, faintly; and she placed her hand over her cheek to hide the terrible mark from her husband’s eyes.

‘Fear not, dearest!’ exclaimed he. ‘Do not shrink from me! Believe me, Georgiana, I even rejoice in this single imperfection, since it will be such a rapture to remove it.’

‘Oh, spare me!’ sadly replied his wife. ‘Pray do not look at it again. I never can forget that convulsive shudder.’

In order to soothe Georgiana, and, as it were, to release her mind from the burden of actual things, Aylmer now put in practice some of the light and playful secrets which science had taught him among its profounder lore. Airy figures, absolutely bodiless ideas, and forms of unsubstantial beauty came and danced before her, imprinting their momentary footsteps on beams of light. Though she had some indistinct idea of the method of these optical phenomena, still the illusion was almost perfect enough to warrant the belief that her husband possessed sway over the spiritual world. Then again, when she felt a wish to look forth from her seclusion, immediately, as if her thoughts were answered, the procession of external existence flitted across a screen. The scenery and the figures of actual life were perfectly represented, but with that bewitching, yet indescribable difference which always makes a picture, an image, or a shadow so much more attractive than the original. When wearied of this, Aylmer bade her cast her eyes upon a vessel containing a quantity of earth. She did so, with little interest at first; but was soon startled to perceive the germ of a plant shooting upward from the soil. Then came the slender stalk; the leaves gradually unfolded themselves; and amid them was a perfect and lovely flower.

‘It is magical!’ cried Georgiana. ‘I dare not touch it.’

‘Nay, pluck it,’ answered Aylmer, – ‘pluck it, and inhale its brief perfume while you may. The flower will wither in a few moments and leave nothing save its brown seed vessels; but thence may be perpetuated a race as ephemeral as itself.’

But Georgiana had no sooner touched the flower than the whole plant suffered a blight, its leaves turning coal-black as if by the agency of fire.

‘There was too powerful a stimulus,’ said Aylmer, thoughtfully.

To make up for this abortive experiment, he proposed to take her portrait by a scientific process of his own invention. It was to be effected by rays of light striking upon a polished plate of metal. Georgiana assented; but, on looking at the result, was affrighted to find the features of the portrait blurred and indefinable; while the minute figure of a hand appeared where the cheek should have been. Aylmer snatched the metallic plate and threw it into a jar of corrosive acid.

Soon, however, he forgot these mortifying failures. In the intervals of study and chemical experiment he came to her flushed and exhausted, but seemed invigorated by her presence, and spoke in glowing language of the resources of his art. He gave a history of the long dynasty of the alchemists, who spent so many ages in quest of the universal solvent by which the golden principle might be elicited from all things vile and base. Aylmer appeared to believe that, by the plainest scientific logic, it was altogether within the limits of possibility to discover this long-sought medium; ‘but,’ he added, ‘a philosopher who should go deep enough to acquire the power would attain too lofty a wisdom to stoop to the exercise of it.’ Not less singular were his opinions in regard to the elixir vitae. He more than intimated that it was at his option to concoct a liquid that should prolong life for years, perhaps interminably; but that it would produce a discord in Nature which all the world, and chiefly the quaffer of the immortal nostrum, would find cause to curse.

‘Aylmer, are you in earnest?’ asked Georgiana, looking at him with amazement and fear. ‘It is terrible to possess such power, or even to dream of possessing it.’

‘Oh, do not tremble, my love,’ said her husband. ‘I would not wrong either you or myself by working such inharmonious effects upon our lives; but I would have you consider how trifling, in comparison, is the skill requisite to remove this little hand.’

At the mention of the birthmark, Georgiana, as usual, shrank as if a red-hot iron had touched her cheek.

Again Aylmer applied himself to his labors. She could hear his voice in the distant furnace room giving directions to Aminadab, whose harsh, uncouth, misshapen tones were audible in response, more like the grunt or growl of a brute than human speech. After hours of absence, Aylmer reappeared and proposed that she should now examine his cabinet of chemical products and natural treasures of the earth. Among the former he showed her a small vial, in which, he remarked, was contained a gentle yet most powerful fragrance, capable of impregnating all the breezes that blow across a kingdom. They were of inestimable value, the contents of that little vial; and, as he said so, he threw some of the perfume into the air and filled the room with piercing and invigorating delight.

‘And what is this?’ asked Georgiana, pointing to a small crystal globe containing a gold-colored liquid. ‘It is so beautiful to the eye that I could imagine it the elixir of life.’

‘In one sense it is,’ replied Aylmer; ‘or, rather, the elixir of immortality. It is the most precious poison that ever was concocted in this world. By its aid I could apportion the lifetime of any mortal at whom you might point your finger. The strength of the dose would determine whether he were to linger out years, or drop dead in the midst of a breath. No king on his guarded throne could keep his life if I, in my private station, should deem that the welfare of millions justified me in depriving him of it.’

‘Why do you keep such a terrific drug?’ inquired Georgiana in horror.

‘Do not mistrust me, dearest,’ said her husband, smiling; ‘its virtuous potency is yet greater than its harmful one. But see! here is a powerful cosmetic. With a few drops of this in a vase of water, freckles may be washed away as easily as the hands are cleansed. A stronger infusion would take the blood out of the cheek, and leave the rosiest beauty a pale ghost.’

‘Is it with this lotion that you intend to bathe my cheek?’ asked Georgiana, anxiously.

‘Oh, no,’ hastily replied her husband; ‘this is merely superficial. Your case demands a remedy that shall go deeper.’

In his interviews with Georgiana, Aylmer generally made minute inquiries as to her sensations and whether the confinement of the rooms and the temperature of the atmosphere agreed with her. These questions had such a particular drift that Georgiana began to conjecture that she was

already subjected to certain physical influences, either breathed in with the fragrant air or taken with her food. She fancied likewise, but it might be altogether fancy, that there was a stirring up of her system – a strange, indefinite sensation creeping through her veins, and tingling, half painfully, half pleasurably, at her heart. Still, whenever she dared to look into the mirror, there she beheld herself pale as a white rose and with the crimson birthmark stamped upon her cheek. Not even Aylmer now hated it so much as she.

To dispel the tedium of the hours which her husband found it necessary to devote to the processes of combination and analysis, Georgiana turned over the volumes of his scientific library. In many dark old tomes she met with chapters full of romance and poetry. They were the works of philosophers of the middle ages, such as Albertus Magnus<sup>1</sup>, Cornelius Agrippa<sup>2</sup>, Paracelsus<sup>3</sup>, and the famous friar who created the prophetic Brazen Head. All these antique naturalists stood in advance of their centuries, yet were imbued with some of their credulity, and therefore were believed, and perhaps imagined themselves to have acquired from the investigation of Nature a power above Nature, and from physics a sway over the spiritual world. Hardly less curious and imaginative were the early volumes of the Transactions of the Royal Society, in which the members, knowing little of the limits of natural possibility, were continually recording wonders or proposing methods whereby wonders might be wrought.

But to Georgiana the most engrossing volume was a large folio from her husband's own hand, in which he had recorded every experiment of his scientific career, its original aim, the methods adopted for its development, and its final success or failure, with the circumstances to which either event was attributable. The book, in truth, was both the history and emblem of his ardent, ambitious, imaginative, yet practical and laborious life. He handled physical details as if there were nothing beyond them; yet spiritualized them all, and redeemed himself from materialism by his strong and eager aspiration towards the infinite. In his grasp the veriest clod of earth assumed a soul. Georgiana, as she read, revered Aylmer and loved him more profoundly than ever, but with a less entire dependence on his judgment than heretofore. Much as he had accomplished, she could not but observe that his most splendid successes were almost invariably failures, if compared with the ideal at which he aimed. His brightest diamonds were the merest pebbles, and felt to be so by himself, in comparison with the inestimable gems which lay hidden beyond his reach. The volume, rich with achievements that had won renown for its author, was yet as melancholy a record as ever mortal hand had penned. It was the sad confession and continual exemplification of the shortcomings of the composite man, the spirit burdened with clay and working in matter, and of the despair that assails the higher nature at finding itself so miserably thwarted by the earthly part. Perhaps every man of genius in whatever sphere might recognize the image of his own experience in Aylmer's journal.

So deeply did these reflections affect Georgiana that she laid her face upon the open volume and burst into tears. In this situation she was found by her husband.

'It is dangerous to read in a sorcerer's books,' said he with a smile, though his countenance was uneasy and displeased. 'Georgiana, there are pages in that volume which I can scarcely glance over and keep my senses. Take heed lest it prove as detrimental to you.'

'It has made me worship you more than ever,' said she.

'Ah, wait for this one success,' rejoined he, 'then worship me if you will. I shall deem myself hardly unworthy of it. But come, I have sought you for the luxury of your voice. Sing to me, dearest.'

So she poured out the liquid music of her voice to quench the thirst of his spirit. He then took his leave with a boyish exuberance of gayety, assuring her that her seclusion would endure but a little longer, and that the result was already certain. Scarcely had he departed when Georgiana felt irresistibly impelled to follow him. She had forgotten to inform Aylmer of a symptom which for

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1 **Albertus Magnus** (1200–1280) – a bishop, philosopher and teacher of German origin; he is considered patron saint of those who cultivate natural sciences.

2 **Cornelius Agrippa** (1486–1535) – a physician, theologian, philosopher and expert in occultism

3 **Paracelsus** (1413–1541) – a German-Swiss physician and alchemist; he was the first to establish the role of chemistry in medicine.



two or three hours past had begun to excite her attention. It was a sensation in the fatal birthmark, not painful, but which induced a restlessness throughout her system. Hastening after her husband, she intruded for the first time into the laboratory.

The first thing that struck her eye was the furnace, that hot and feverish worker, with the intense glow of its fire, which by the quantities of soot clustered above it seemed to have been burning for ages. There was a distilling apparatus in full operation. Around the room were retorts, tubes, cylinders, crucibles, and other apparatus of chemical research. An electrical machine stood ready for immediate use. The atmosphere felt oppressively close, and was tainted with gaseous odors which had been tormented forth by the processes of science. The severe and homely simplicity of the apartment, with its naked walls and brick pavement, looked strange, accustomed as Georgiana had become to the fantastic elegance of her boudoir. But what chiefly, indeed almost solely, drew her attention, was the aspect of Aylmer himself.

He was pale as death, anxious and absorbed, and hung over the furnace as if it depended upon his utmost watchfulness whether the liquid which it was distilling should be the draught of immortal happiness or misery. How different from the sanguine and joyous mien that he had assumed for Georgiana's encouragement!

'Carefully now, Aminadab; carefully, thou human machine; carefully, thou man of clay!' muttered Aylmer, more to himself than his assistant. 'Now, if there be a thought too much or too little, it is all over.'

'Ho! ho!' mumbled Aminadab. 'Look, master! look!'

Aylmer raised his eyes hastily, and at first reddened, then grew paler than ever, on beholding Georgiana. He rushed towards her and seized her arm with a gripe that left the print of his fingers upon it.

'Why do you come hither? Have you no trust in your husband?' cried he, impetuously. 'Would you throw the blight of that fatal birthmark over my labors? It is not well done. Go, prying woman, go!'

'Nay, Aylmer,' said Georgiana with the firmness of which she possessed no stinted endowment, 'it is not you that have a right to complain. You mistrust your wife; you have concealed the anxiety with which you watch the development of this experiment. Think not so unworthily of me, my husband. Tell me all the risk we run, and fear not that I shall shrink; for my share in it is far less than your own.'

'No, no, Georgiana!' said Aylmer, impatiently; 'it must not be.'

'I submit,' replied she calmly. 'And, Aylmer, I shall quaff whatever draught you bring me; but it will be on the same principle that would induce me to take a dose of poison if offered by your hand.'

'My noble wife,' said Aylmer, deeply moved, 'I knew not the height and depth of your nature until now. Nothing shall be concealed. Know, then, that this crimson hand, superficial as it seems, has clutched its grasp into your being with a strength of which I had no previous conception. I have already administered agents powerful enough to do aught except to change your entire physical system. Only one thing remains to be tried. If that fail us we are ruined.'

'Why did you hesitate to tell me this?' asked she.

'Because, Georgiana,' said Aylmer, in a low voice, 'there is danger.'

'Danger? There is but one danger – that this horrible stigma shall be left upon my cheek!' cried Georgiana. 'Remove it, remove it, whatever be the cost, or we shall both go mad!'

'Heaven knows your words are too true,' said Aylmer, sadly. 'And now, dearest, return to your boudoir. In a little while all will be tested.'

He conducted her back and took leave of her with a solemn tenderness which spoke far more than his words how much was now at stake. After his departure Georgiana became rapt in musings. She considered the character of Aylmer, and did it completer justice than at any previous moment. Her heart exulted, while it trembled, at his honorable love – so pure and lofty that it would accept nothing less than perfection nor miserably make itself contented with an earthlier nature than he had dreamed of. She felt how much more precious was such a sentiment than that meaner kind which

would have borne with the imperfection for her sake, and have been guilty of treason to holy love by degrading its perfect idea to the level of the actual; and with her whole spirit she prayed that, for a single moment, she might satisfy his highest and deepest conception. Longer than one moment she well knew it could not be; for his spirit was ever on the march, ever ascending, and each instant required something that was beyond the scope of the instant before.

The sound of her husband's footsteps aroused her. He bore a crystal goblet containing a liquor colorless as water, but bright enough to be the draught of immortality. Aylmer was pale; but it seemed rather the consequence of a highly-wrought state of mind and tension of spirit than of fear or doubt.

'The concoction of the draught has been perfect,' said he, in answer to Georgiana's look. 'Unless all my science have deceived me, it cannot fail.'

'Save on your account, my dearest Aylmer,' observed his wife, 'I might wish to put off this birthmark of mortality by relinquishing mortality itself in preference to any other mode. Life is but a sad possession to those who have attained precisely the degree of moral advancement at which I stand. Were I weaker and blinder it might be happiness. Were I stronger, it might be endured hopefully. But, being what I find myself, methinks I am of all mortals the most fit to die.'

'You are fit for heaven without tasting death!' replied her husband 'But why do we speak of dying? The draught cannot fail. Behold its effect upon this plant.'

On the window seat there stood a geranium diseased with yellow blotches, which had overspread all its leaves. Aylmer poured a small quantity of the liquid upon the soil in which it grew. In a little time, when the roots of the plant had taken up the moisture, the unsightly blotches began to be extinguished in a living verdure.

'There needed no proof,' said Georgiana, quietly. 'Give me the goblet I joyfully stake all upon your word.'

'Drink, then, thou lofty creature!' exclaimed Aylmer, with fervid admiration. 'There is no taint of imperfection on thy spirit. Thy sensible frame, too, shall soon be all perfect.'

She quaffed the liquid and returned the goblet to his hand.

'It is grateful,' said she with a placid smile. 'Methinks it is like water from a heavenly fountain; for it contains I know not what of unobtrusive fragrance and deliciousness. It allays a feverish thirst that had parched me for many days. Now, dearest, let me sleep. My earthly senses are closing over my spirit like the leaves around the heart of a rose at sunset.'

She spoke the last words with a gentle reluctance, as if it required almost more energy than she could command to pronounce the faint and lingering syllables. Scarcely had they loitered through her lips ere she was lost in slumber. Aylmer sat by her side, watching her aspect with the emotions proper to a man the whole value of whose existence was involved in the process now to be tested. Mingled with this mood, however, was the philosophic investigation characteristic of the man of science. Not the minutest symptom escaped him. A heightened flush of the cheek, a slight irregularity of breath, a quiver of the eyelid, a hardly perceptible tremor through the frame, – such were the details which, as the moments passed, he wrote down in his folio volume. Intense thought had set its stamp upon every previous page of that volume, but the thoughts of years were all concentrated upon the last.

While thus employed, he failed not to gaze often at the fatal hand, and not without a shudder. Yet once, by a strange and unaccountable impulse he pressed it with his lips. His spirit recoiled, however, in the very act, and Georgiana, out of the midst of her deep sleep, moved uneasily and murmured as if in remonstrance. Again Aylmer resumed his watch. Nor was it without avail. The crimson hand, which at first had been strongly visible upon the marble paleness of Georgiana's cheek, now grew more faintly outlined. She remained not less pale than ever; but the birthmark with every breath that came and went, lost somewhat of its former distinctness. Its presence had been awful; its departure was more awful still. Watch the stain of the rainbow fading out the sky, and you will know how that mysterious symbol passed away.

'By Heaven! it is well-nigh gone!' said Aylmer to himself, in almost irrepressible ecstasy. 'I can scarcely trace it now. Success! success! And now it is like the faintest rose color. The lightest

flush of blood across her cheek would overcome it. But she is so pale!’

He drew aside the window curtain and suffered the light of natural day to fall into the room and rest upon her cheek. At the same time he heard a gross, hoarse chuckle, which he had long known as his servant Aminadab’s expression of delight.

‘Ah, clod! ah, earthly mass!’ cried Aylmer, laughing in a sort of frenzy, ‘you have served me well! Matter and spirit – earth and heaven – have both done their part in this! Laugh, thing of the senses! You have earned the right to laugh.’

These exclamations broke Georgiana’s sleep. She slowly unclosed her eyes and gazed into the mirror which her husband had arranged for that purpose. A faint smile flitted over her lips when she recognized how barely perceptible was now that crimson hand which had once blazed forth with such disastrous brilliancy as to scare away all their happiness. But then her eyes sought Aylmer’s face with a trouble and anxiety that he could by no means account for.

‘My poor Aylmer!’ murmured she.

‘Poor? Nay, richest, happiest, most favored!’ exclaimed he. ‘My peerless bride, it is successful! You are perfect!’

‘My poor Aylmer,’ she repeated, with a more than human tenderness, ‘you have aimed loftily; you have done nobly. Do not repent that with so high and pure a feeling, you have rejected the best the earth could offer. Aylmer, dearest Aylmer, I am dying!’

Alas! it was too true! The fatal hand had grappled with the mystery of life, and was the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame. As the last crimson tint of the birthmark – that sole token of human imperfection – faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere, and her soul, lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenward flight. Then a hoarse, chuckling laugh was heard again! Thus ever does the gross fatality of earth exult in its invariable triumph over the immortal essence which, in this dim sphere of half development, demands the completeness of a higher state. Yet, had Aylmer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life of the selfsame texture with the celestial. The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present.

## **The Voice in the Night (William Hope Hodgson)**

It was a dark, starless night. We were becalmed in the northern Pacific. Our exact position I do not know; for the sun had been hidden during the course of a weary, breathless week by a thin haze which had seemed to float above us, about the height of our mastheads, at whiles descending and shrouding the surrounding sea.

With there being no wind, we had steadied the tiller, and I was the only man on deck. The crew, consisting of two men and a boy, were sleeping forward in their den, while Will – my friend, and the master of our little craft – was aft in his bunk on the port side of the little cabin.

Suddenly, from out of the surrounding darkness, there came a hail:

‘Schooner, ahoy!’

The cry was so unexpected that I gave no immediate answer, because of my surprise.

It came again – a voice curiously throaty and inhuman, calling from somewhere upon the dark sea away on our port broadside:

‘Schooner, ahoy!’

‘Hullo!’ I sang out, having gathered my wits somewhat. ‘What are you? What do you want?’

‘You need not be afraid,’ answered the queer voice, having probably noticed some trace of confusion in my tone. ‘I am only an old – man.’

The pause sounded odd, but it was only afterward that it came back to me with any significance.

‘Why don’t you come alongside, then?’ I queried somewhat snappishly, for I liked not his hinting at my having been a trifle shaken.

‘I—I – can’t. It wouldn’t be safe. I—’ The voice broke off, and there was silence.

‘What do you mean?’ I asked, growing more and more astonished. ‘What’s not safe? Where are you?’

I listened for a moment, but there came no answer. And then, a sudden indefinite suspicion, of I knew not what, coming to me, I stepped swiftly to the binnacle and took out the lighted lamp. At the same time, I knocked on the deck with my heel to waken Will. Then I was back at the side, throwing the yellow funnel of light out into the silent immensity beyond our rail. As I did so, I heard a slight muffled cry, and then the sound of a splash, as though someone had dipped oars abruptly. Yet I cannot say with certainty that I saw anything; save, it seemed to me, that with the first flash of the light there had been something upon the waters, where now there was nothing.

‘Hullo, there!’ I called. ‘What foolery is this?’

But there came only the indistinct sounds of a boat being pulled away into the night.

Then I heard Will’s voice from the direction of the after scuttle:

‘What’s up, George?’

‘Come here, Will!’ I said.

‘What is it?’ he asked, coming across the deck.

I told him the queer thing that had happened. He put several questions; then, after a moment’s silence, he raised his hands to his lips and hailed:

‘Boat, ahoy!’

From a long distance away there came back to us a faint reply, and my companion repeated his call. Presently, after a short period of silence, there grew on our hearing the muffled sound of oars, at which Will hailed again.

This time there was a reply: ‘Put away the light.’

‘I’m damned if I will,’ I muttered; but Will told me to do as the voice bade, and I shoved it down under the bulwarks.

‘Come nearer,’ he said, and the oar strokes continued. Then, when apparently some half dozen fathoms distant, they again ceased.

‘Come alongside!’ exclaimed Will. ‘There’s nothing to be frightened of aboard here.’

‘Promise that you will not show the light?’

‘What’s to do with you,’ I burst out, ‘that you’re so infernally afraid of the light?’

‘Because—’ began the voice, and stopped short.

‘Because what?’ I asked quickly.

Will put his hand on my shoulder. ‘Shut up a minute, old man,’ he said in a low voice. ‘Let me tackle him.’

He leaned more over the rail. ‘See here, mister,’ he said, ‘this is a pretty queer business, you coming upon us like this, right out in the middle of the blessed Pacific. How are we to know what sort of a hanky-panky trick you’re up to? You say there’s only one of you. How are we to know, unless we get a squint at you – eh? What’s your objection to the light, anyway?’

As he finished, I heard the noise of the oars again, and then the voice came; but now from a greater distance, and sounding extremely hopeless and pathetic.

‘I am sorry – sorry! I would not have troubled you, only I am hungry, and – so is she.’

The voice died away, and the sound of the oars, dipping irregularly, was borne to us.

‘Stop!’ sang out Will. ‘I don’t want to drive you away. Come back! We’ll keep the light hidden if you don’t like it.’

He turned to me. ‘It’s a damned queer rig, this; but I think there’s nothing to be afraid of?’

There was a question in his tone, and I replied, ‘No, I think the poor devil’s been wrecked around here, and gone crazy.’

The sound of the oars drew nearer.

‘Shove that lamp back in the binnacle,’ said Will; then he leaned over the rail and listened. I replaced the lamp and came back to his side. The dipping of the oars ceased some dozen yards distant.

‘Won’t you come alongside now?’ asked Will in an even voice. ‘I have had the lamp put back

in the binnacle.'

'I—I cannot,' replied the voice. 'I dare not come nearer. I dare not even pay you for the – the provisions.'

'That's all right,' said Will, and hesitated. 'You're welcome to as much grub as you can take—' Again he hesitated.

'You are very good!' exclaimed the voice. 'May God, who understands everything, reward you—' It broke off huskily.

'The – the lady?' said Will abruptly. 'Is she—'

'I have left her behind upon the island,' came the voice.

'What island?' I cut in.

'I know not its name,' returned the voice. 'I would to God—' it began, and checked itself as suddenly.

'Could we not send a boat for her?' asked Will at this point.

'No!' said the voice, with extraordinary emphasis. 'My God! No!' There was a moment's pause; then it added, in a tone which seemed a merited reproach, 'It was because of our want I ventured – because her agony tortured me.'

'I am a forgetful brute!' exclaimed Will. 'Just wait a minute, whoever you are, and I will bring you up something at once.'

In a couple of minutes he was back again, and his arms were full of various edibles. He paused at the rail.

'Can't you come alongside for them?' he asked.

'No – I dare not,' replied the voice, and it seemed to me that in its tones I detected a note of stifled craving, as though the owner hushed a mortal desire. It came to me then in a flash that the poor old creature out there in the darkness was suffering for actual need for that which Will held in his arms; and yet, because of some unintelligible dread, refraining from dashing to the side of our schooner and receiving it. And with the lightning-like conviction there came the knowledge that the Invisible was not mad, but sanely facing some intolerable horror.

'Damn it, Will!' I said, full of many feelings, over which predominated a vast sympathy. 'Get a box. We must float off the stuff to him in it.'

This we did, propelling it away from the vessel, out into the darkness, by means of a boat hook.

In a minute a slight cry from the Invisible came to us, and we knew that he had secured the box.

A little later he called out a farewell to us, and so heartfelt a blessing that I am sure we were the better for it. Then, without more ado, we heard the ply of oars across the darkness.

'Pretty soon off,' remarked Will, with perhaps just a little sense of injury.

'Wait,' I replied. 'I think somehow he'll come back. He must have been badly needing that food.'

'And the lady,' said Will. For a moment he was silent; then he continued, 'It's the queerest thing ever I've tumbled across since I've been fishing.'

'Yes,' I said, and fell to pondering.

And so the time slipped away – an hour, another, and still Will stayed with me; for the queer adventure had knocked all desire for sleep out of him.

The third hour was three parts through when we heard again the sound of oars across the silent ocean.

'Listen!' said Will, a low note of excitement in his voice.

'He's coming, just as I thought,' I muttered.

The dipping of the oars grew nearer, and I noted that the strokes were firmer and longer. The food had been needed.

They came to a stop a little distance off the broadside, and the queer voice came again to us through the darkness:

'Schooner, ahoy!'

‘That you?’ asked Will.

‘Yes,’ replied the voice. ‘I left you suddenly, but – but there was great need.’

‘The lady?’ questioned Will.

‘The – lady is grateful now on earth. She will be more grateful soon in – in heaven.’

Will began to make some reply, in a puzzled voice, but became confused and broke off. I said nothing. I was wondering at the curious pauses, and apart from my wonder, I was full of a great sympathy.

The voice continued, ‘We – she and I have talked, as we shared the result of God’s tenderness and yours–’

Will interposed, but without coherence

‘I beg of you not to – to belittle your deed of Christian charity this night,’ said the voice. ‘Be sure that it has not escaped His notice.’

It stopped, and there was a full minute’s silence. Then it came again. ‘We have spoken together upon that which – which has befallen us. We had thought to go out, without telling anyone of the terror which has come into our – lives. She is with me in believing that tonight’s happenings are under a special ruling, and that it is God’s wish that we should tell to you all that we have suffered since – since–’

‘Yes?’ said Will softly.

‘Since the sinking of the *Albatross* .’

‘Ah!’ I exclaimed involuntarily. ‘She left Newcastle<sup>1</sup> for ’Frisco<sup>2</sup> some six months ago, and hasn’t been heard of since.’

‘Yes,’ answered the voice. ‘But some few degrees to the north of the line, she was caught in a terrible storm and dismasted. When the calm came, it was found that she was leaking badly, and presently, it falling to a calm, the sailors took to the boats, leaving – leaving a young lady – my fiancée – and myself upon the wreck.

‘We were below, gathering together a few of our belongings, when they left. They were entirely callous, through fear, and when we came up upon the decks, we saw them only as small shapes afar off upon the horizon. Yet we did not despair, but set to work and constructed a small raft. Upon this we put such few matters as it would hold, including a quantity of water and some ship’s biscuit. Then, the vessel being very deep in the water, we got ourselves onto the raft and pushed off.

‘It was later that I observed we seemed to be in the way of some tide or current, which bore us from the ship at an angle, so that in the course of three hours, by my watch, her hull became invisible to our sight, her broken masts remaining in view for a somewhat longer period. Then, toward evening, it grew misty, and so through the night. The next day we were still encompassed by the mist, the weather remaining quiet.

‘For four days we drifted through this strange haze, until, on the evening of the fourth day, there grew upon our ears the murmur of breakers at a distance. Gradually it became plainer, and somewhat after midnight, it appeared to sound upon either hand at no very great space. The raft was raised upon a swell several times, and then we were in smooth water, and the noise of the breakers was behind.

‘When the morning came, we found that we were in a sort of great lagoon, but of this we noticed little at the time; for close before us, through the enshrouding mist, loomed the hull of a large sailing vessel. With one accord we fell upon our knees and thanked God, for we thought that here was an end to our perils. We had much to learn.

‘The raft drew near to the ship, and we shouted on them to take us aboard; but none answered. Presently the raft touched against the side of the vessel, and seeing a rope hanging downward, I seized it and began to climb. Yet I had much ado to make my way up, because of a kind of gray, lichenous fungus that had seized upon the rope and blotched the side of the ship lividly.

‘I reached the rail and clambered over it, onto the deck. Here I saw that the decks were

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<sup>1</sup> **Newcastle** – a city in the United States named for Newcastle upon Tyne in England

<sup>2</sup> **Frisco** = San Francisco

covered in great patches with the gray masses, some of them rising into nodules several feet in height; but at the time I thought less of this matter than of the possibility of there being people aboard the ship. I shouted, but none answered. Then I went to the door below the poop deck. I opened it and peered in. There was a great smell of staleness, so that I knew in a moment that nothing living was within, and with the knowledge, I shut the door quickly, for I felt suddenly lonely.

‘I went back to the side where I had scrambled up. My – my sweetheart was still sitting quietly upon the raft. Seeing me look down, she called up to know whether there were any aboard the ship. I replied that the vessel had the appearance of having been long deserted, but that if she would wait a little, I would see whether there was anything in the shape of a ladder by which she could ascend to the deck. Then we would make a search through the vessel together. A little later, on the opposite side of the decks, I found a rope side ladder. This I carried across, and a minute afterward she was beside me.

‘Together we explored the cabins and apartments in the afterpart of the ship, but nowhere was there any sign of life. Here and there, within the cabins themselves, we came across odd patches of that queer fungus; but this, as my sweetheart said, could be cleansed away.

‘In the end, having assured ourselves that the after portion of the vessel was empty, we picked our ways to the bows, between the ugly gray nodules of that strange growth; and here we made a further search, which told us that there was indeed none aboard but ourselves.

‘This being now beyond any doubt, we returned to the stern of the ship and proceeded to make ourselves as comfortable as possible. Together we cleared out and cleaned two of the cabins, and after that I made examination whether there was anything eatable in the ship. This I soon found was so, and thanked God for His goodness. In addition to this I discovered a fresh-water pump, and having fixed it, I found the water drinkable, though somewhat unpleasant to the taste.

‘For several days we stayed aboard the ship without attempting to get to the shore. We were busily engaged in making the place habitable. Yet even thus early we became aware that our lot was even less to be desired than might have been imagined; for though, as a first step, we scraped away the odd patches of growth that studded the floors and walls of the cabins and saloon, yet they returned almost to their original size within the space of twenty-four hours, which not only discouraged us but gave us a feeling of vague unease.

‘Still we would not admit ourselves beaten, so set to work afresh, and not only scraped away the fungus but soaked the places where it had been with carbolic, a canful of which I had found in the pantry. Yet by the end of the week the growth had returned in full strength, and in addition it had spread to other places, as though our touching it had allowed germs from it to travel elsewhere.

‘On the seventh morning, my sweetheart woke to find a small patch of it growing on her pillow, close to her face. At that, she came to me, as soon as she could get her garments upon her. I was in the galley at the time, lighting the fire for breakfast.’

“‘Come here, John,” she said, and led me aft. When I saw the thing upon her pillow I shuddered, and then and there we agreed to go right out of the ship and see whether we could not fare to make ourselves more comfortable ashore.

‘Hurriedly we gathered together our few belongings, and even among these I found that the fungus had been at work, for one of her shawls had a little lump of it growing near one edge. I threw the whole thing over the side without saying anything to her.

‘The raft was still alongside, but it was too clumsy to guide, and I lowered down a small boat that hung across the stern, and in this we made our way to the shore. Yet as we drew near to it, I became gradually aware that here the vile fungus, which had driven us from the ship, was growing riot. In places it rose into horrible, fantastic mounds, which seemed almost to quiver, as with a quiet life, when the wind blew across them. Here and there it took on the forms of vast fingers, and in others it just spread out flat and smooth and treacherous. Odd places, it appeared as grotesque stunted trees, extraordinarily kinked and gnarled – the whole quaking vilely at times.

‘At first it seemed to us that there was no single portion of the surrounding shore which was not hidden beneath the masses of the hideous lichen; yet in this I found we were mistaken, for

somewhat later, coasting along the shore at a little distance, we descried a smooth white patch of what appeared to be fine sand, and there we landed. It was not sand. What it was I do not know.

‘All that I have observed is that upon it the fungus will not grow; while everywhere else, save where the sandlike earth wanders oddly, pathwise, amid the gray desolation of the lichen, there is nothing but that loathsome grayness.

‘It is difficult to make you understand how cheered we were to find one place that was absolutely free from the growth, and here we deposited our belongings. Then we went back to the ship for such things as it seemed to us we should need. Among other matters, I managed to bring ashore with me one of the ship’s sails. With it I constructed two small tents, which, though exceedingly rough-shaped, served the purposes for which they were intended. In these we lived and stored our various necessities, and thus for a matter of some four weeks all went smoothly and without particular unhappiness. Indeed, I may say with much happiness – for – we were together.

‘It was on the thumb of her right hand that the growth first showed. It was only a small circular spot, much like a little gray mole. My God! How the fear leaped to my heart when she showed me the place. We cleansed it, between us, washing it with carbolic and water. In the morning of the following day she showed her hand to me again. The gray warty thing had returned. For a little while we looked at one another in silence. Then, still wordless, we started again to remove it. In the midst of the operation she spoke suddenly.

“‘What’s that on the side of your face, dear?’ Her voice was sharp with anxiety. I put my hand up to feel.

“‘There! Under the hair by your ear. A little to the front a bit.’ My finger rested upon the place, and then I knew.

“‘Let us get your thumb done first,’ I said. And she submitted, only because she was afraid to touch me until it was cleansed. I finished washing and disinfecting her thumb, and then she turned to my face. After it was finished we sat together and talked awhile of many things; for there had come into our lives sudden, very terrible thoughts. We were, all at once, afraid of something worse than death. We spoke of loading the boat with provisions and water and making our way out onto the sea; yet we were helpless, for many causes, and – and the growth had attacked us already. We decided to stay. God would do with us what was His will. We would wait.

‘A month, two months, three months passed and the places grew somewhat, and there had come others. Yet we fought so strenuously with the fear that its headway was but slow, comparatively speaking.

‘Occasionally we ventured off to the ship for such stores as we needed. There we found that the fungus grew persistently. One of the nodules on the main deck soon became as high as my head.

‘We had now given up all thought or hope of leaving the island. We had realized that it would be unallowable to go among healthy humans with the thing from which we were suffering.

‘With this determination and knowledge in our minds we knew that we should have to husband our food and water; for we did not know, at that time, but that we should possibly live for many years.

‘This reminds me that I have told you that I am an old man. Judged by years this is not so. But – but –’

He broke off, then continued somewhat abruptly, ‘As I was saying, we knew that we should have to use care in the matter of food. But we had no idea then how little food there was left of which to take care. It was a week later that I made the discovery that all the other bread tanks – which I had supposed full – were empty, and that (beyond odd tins of vegetables and meat, and some other matters) we had nothing on which to depend but the bread in the tank which I had already opened.

‘After learning this I bestirred myself to do what I could, and set to work at fishing in the lagoon; but with no success. At this I was somewhat inclined to feel desperate, until the thought came to me to try outside the lagoon, in the open sea.

‘Here, at times, I caught odd fish, but so infrequently that they proved of but little help in keeping us from the hunger which threatened. It seemed to me that our deaths were likely to come



by hunger, and not by the growth of the thing which had seized upon our bodies.

‘We were in this state of mind when the fourth month wore out. Then I made a very horrible discovery. One morning, a little before midday, I came off from the ship with a portion of the biscuits which were left. In the mouth of her tent I saw my sweetheart sitting, eating something.

“‘What is it, my dear?’ I called out as I leaped ashore. Yet, on hearing my voice, she seemed confused, and turning, slyly threw something toward the edge of the little clearing. It fell short, and a vague suspicion having arisen within me, I walked across and picked it up. It was a piece of the gray fungus.

‘As I went to her with it in my hand, she turned deadly pale; then a rose red.

‘I felt strangely dazed and frightened.

“‘My dear! My dear!’ I said, and could say no more. Yet at my words she broke down and cried bitterly. Gradually, as she calmed, I got from her the news that she had tried it the preceding day, and – and liked it. I got her to promise on her knees not to touch it again, however great our hunger. After she had promised, she told me that the desire for it had come suddenly, and that until the moment of desire, she had experienced nothing toward it but the most extreme repulsion.

‘Later in the day, feeling strangely restless and much shaken with the thing which I had discovered, I made my way along one of the twisted paths – formed by the white, sandlike substance – which led among the fungoid growth. I had, once before, ventured along there, but not to any great distance. This time, being involved in perplexing thought, I went much farther than hitherto.

‘Suddenly I was called to myself by a queer hoarse sound on my left. Turning quickly, I saw that there was movement among an extraordinarily shaped mass of fungus close to my elbow. It was swaying uneasily, as though it possessed life of its own. Abruptly, as I stared, the thought came to me that the thing had a grotesque resemblance to the figure of a distorted human creature. Even as the fancy flashed into my brain, there was a slight, sickening noise of tearing, and I saw that one of the branchlike arms was detaching itself from the surrounding masses, and coming toward me. The head of the thing, a shapeless gray ball, inclined in my direction. I stood stupidly, and the vile arm brushed across my face. I gave out a frightened cry and ran back a few paces. There was a sweetish taste upon my lips where the thing had touched me. I licked them, and was immediately filled with an inhuman desire. I turned and seized a mass of the fungus. Then more, and – more. I was insatiable. In the midst of devouring, the remembrance of the morning’s discovery swept into my amazed brain. It was sent by God. I dashed the fragment I held to the ground. Then, utterly wretched and feeling a dreadful guiltiness, I made my way back to the encampment.

‘I think she knew, by some marvelous intuition which love must have given, so soon as she set eyes on me. Her quiet sympathy made it easier for me, and I told her of my sudden weakness, yet omitted to mention the extraordinary thing which had gone before. I desired to spare her all unnecessary terror.

‘But for myself I had added an intolerable knowledge, to breed an incessant terror in my brain; for I doubted not that I had seen the end of one of these men who had come to the island in the ship in the lagoon; and in that monstrous ending I had seen our own.

‘Thereafter we kept from the abominable food, though the desire for it had entered into our blood. Yet our dreary punishment was upon us; for day by day, with monstrous rapidity, the fungoid growth took hold of our poor bodies. Nothing we could do would check it materially, and so – and so – we who had been human became – well, it matters less each day. Only – only we had been man and maid!

‘And day by day the fight is more dreadful to withstand the hunger-lust for the terrible lichen.

‘A week ago we ate the last of the biscuit, and since that time I have caught three fish. I was out here fishing tonight when your schooner drifted upon me out of the mist. I hailed you. You know the rest, and may God, out of His great heart, bless you for your goodness to a – a couple of poor outcast souls.’

There was the dip of an oar – another. Then the voice came again, and for the last time, sounding through the slight surrounding mist, ghostly and mournful.

‘God bless you! Good-by!’

‘Good-by,’ we shouted together hoarsely, our hearts full of many emotions I glanced about me. I became aware that the dawn was upon us.

The sun flung a stray beam across the hidden sea, pierced the mist dully, and lit up the receding boat with a gloomy fire. Indistinctly I saw something nodding between the oars. I thought of a sponge – a great, gray nodding sponge. The oars continued to ply. They were gray – as was the boat – and my eyes searched a moment vainly for the conjunction of hand and oar. My gaze flashed back to the – head. It nodded forward as the oars went backward for the stroke. Then the oars were dipped, the boat shot out of the patch of light, and the – the thing went nodding into the mist.

## **The Devil and Tom Walker (Washington Irving)**

A few miles from Boston, in Massachusetts, there is a deep inlet winding several miles into the interior of the country from Charles Bay, and terminating in a thickly wooded swamp, or morass. On one side of this inlet is a beautiful dark grove; on the opposite side the land rises abruptly from the water’s edge, into a high ridge on which grow a few scattered oaks of great age and immense size. Under one of these gigantic trees, according to old stories, there was a great amount of treasure buried by Kidd<sup>1</sup> the pirate. The inlet allowed a facility to bring the money in a boat secretly and at night to the very foot of the hill. The elevation of the place permitted a good look out to be kept that no one was at hand, while the remarkable trees formed good landmarks by which the place might easily be found again. The old stories add, moreover, that the devil presided at the hiding of the money, and took it under his guardianship; but this, it is well known, he always does with buried treasure, particularly when it has been ill gotten. Be that as it may, Kidd never returned to recover his wealth; being shortly after seized at Boston, sent out to England, and there hanged for a pirate.

About the year 1727, just at the time when earthquakes were prevalent in New England, and shook many tall sinners down upon their knees, there lived near this place a meagre miserly fellow of the name of Tom Walker. He had a wife as miserly as himself; they were so miserly that they even conspired to cheat each other. Whatever the woman could lay hands on she hid away: a hen could not cackle but she was on the alert to secure the new-laid egg. Her husband was continually prying about to detect her secret hoards, and many and fierce were the conflicts that took place about what ought to have been common property. They lived in a forlorn looking house that stood alone and had an air of starvation. A few straggling savin trees, emblems of sterility, grew near it; no smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveller stopped at its door. A miserable horse, whose ribs were as articulate as the bars of a gridiron, stalked about a field where a thin carpet of moss, scarcely covering the ragged beds of pudding stone, tantalized and balked his hunger; and sometimes he would lean his head over the fence, look piteously at the passer by, and seem to petition deliverance from this land of famine. The house and its inmates had altogether a bad name. Tom’s wife was a tall termagant, fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm. Her voice was often heard in wordy warfare with her husband; and his face sometimes showed signs that their conflicts were not confined to words. No one ventured, however, to interfere between them; the lonely wayfarer shrunk within himself at the horrid clamour and clapper clawing; eyed the den of discord askance, and hurried on his way, rejoicing, if a bachelor, in his celibacy.

One day that Tom Walker had been to a distant part of the neighbourhood, he took what he considered a short cut homewards through the swamp. Like most short cuts, it was an ill chosen route. The swamp was thickly grown with great gloomy pines and hemlocks, some of them ninety feet high; which made it dark at noonday, and a retreat for all the owls of the neighbourhood. It was full of pits and quagmires, partly covered with weeds and mosses; where the green surface often betrayed the traveller into a gulf of black smothering mud; there were also dark and stagnant pools, the abodes of the tadpole, the bull-frog, and the water snake, and where trunks of pines and hemlocks lay half drowned, half rotting, looking like alligators, sleeping in the mire.

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<sup>1</sup> **Kidd** – William Kidd (1645–1701), a British pirate, one of the most colourful outlaws of all time

Tom had long been picking his way cautiously through this treacherous forest; stepping from tuft to tuft of rushes and roots which afforded precarious footholds among deep sloughs; or pacing carefully, like a cat, along the prostrate trunks of trees; startled now and then by the sudden screaming of the bittern, or the quacking of a wild duck, rising on the wing from some solitary pool. At length he arrived at a piece of firm ground, which ran out like a peninsula into the deep bosom of the swamp. It had been one of the strong holds of the Indians during their wars with the first colonists. Here they had thrown up a kind of fort which they had looked upon as almost impregnable, and had used as a place of refuge for their squaws and children. Nothing remained of the Indian fort but a few embankments gradually sinking to the level of the surrounding earth, and already overgrown in part by oaks and other forest trees, the foliage of which formed a contrast to the dark pines and hemlocks of the swamp.

It was late in the dusk of evening that Tom Walker reached the old fort, and he paused there for a while to rest himself. Anyone but he would have felt unwilling to linger in this lonely melancholy place, for the common people had a bad opinion of it from the stories handed down from the time of the Indian wars; when it was asserted that the savages held incantations here and made sacrifices to the evil spirit. Tom Walker, however, was not a man to be troubled with any fears of the kind.

He reposed himself for some time on the trunk of a fallen hemlock, listening to the boding cry of the tree toad, and delving with his walking staff into a mound of black mould at his feet. As he turned up the soil unconsciously, his staff struck against something hard. He raked it out of the vegetable mould, and lo! a cloven skull with an Indian tomahawk<sup>1</sup> buried deep in it, lay before him. The rust on the weapon showed the time that had elapsed since this death blow had been given. It was a dreary memento of the fierce struggle that had taken place in this last foothold of the Indian warriors.

‘Humph!’ said Tom Walker, as he gave the skull a kick to shake the dirt from it.

‘Let that skull alone!’ said a gruff voice.

Tom lifted up his eyes and beheld a great black man, seated directly opposite him on the stump of a tree. He was exceedingly surprised, having neither seen nor heard any one approach, and he was still more perplexed on observing, as well as the gathering gloom would permit, that the stranger was neither negro nor Indian. It is true, he was dressed in a rude, half Indian garb, and had a red belt or sash swathed round his body, but his face was neither black nor copper colour, but swarthy and dingy and begrimed with soot, as if he had been accustomed to toil among fires and forges. He had a shock of coarse black hair that stood out from his head in all directions; and bore an axe on his shoulder.

He scowled for a moment at Tom with a pair of great red eyes.

‘What are you doing in my grounds?’ said the black man, with a hoarse growling voice.

‘Your grounds?’ said Tom, with a sneer; ‘no more your grounds than mine: they belong to Deacon Peabody.’

‘Deacon Peabody be d – d,’ said the stranger, ‘as I flatter myself he will be, if he does not look more to his own sins and less to his neighbour’s. Look yonder, and see how Deacon Peabody is faring.’

Tom looked in the direction that the stranger pointed, and beheld one of the great trees, fair and flourishing without, but rotten at the core, and saw that it had been nearly hewn through, so that the first high wind was likely to below it down. On the bark of the tree was scored the name of Deacon Peabody. He now looked round and found most of the tall trees marked with the name of some great men of the colony, and all more or less scored by the axe. The one on which he had been seated, and which had evidently just been hewn down, bore the name of Crowninshield; and he recollected a mighty rich man of that name, who made a vulgar display of wealth, which it was whispered he had acquired by buccaneering.

‘He’s just ready for burning!’ said the black man, with a growl of triumph. ‘You see I am likely to have a good stock of firewood for winter.’

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<sup>1</sup> **tomahawk** – a war hatchet of the North American Indians

‘But what right have you,’ said Tom, ‘to cut down Deacon Peabody’s timber?’

‘The right of prior claim,’ said the other. ‘This woodland belonged to me long before one of your white faced race put foot upon the soil.’

‘And pray, who are you, if I may be so bold?’ said Tom.

‘Oh, I go by various names. I am the Wild Huntsman in some countries; the Black Miner in others. In this neighbourhood I am known by the name of the Black Woodsman. I am he to whom the red men devoted this spot, and now and then roasted a white man by way of sweet smelling sacrifice. Since the red men have been exterminated by you white savages, I amuse myself by presiding at the persecutions of quakers<sup>1</sup> and Anabaptists<sup>2</sup>; I am the great patron and prompter of slave dealers, and the grand master of the Salem witches<sup>3</sup>.’

‘The upshot of all which is, that, if I mistake not,’ said Tom, sturdily, ‘you are he commonly called Old Scratch.’

‘The same at your service!’ replied the black man, with a half civil nod.

Such was the opening of this interview, according to the old story, though it has almost too familiar an air to be credited. One would think that to meet with such a singular personage in this wild lonely place, would have shaken any man’s nerves: but Tom was a hard-minded fellow, not easily daunted, and he had lived so long with a termagant wife, that he did not even fear the devil.

It is said that after this commencement, they had a long and earnest conversation together, as Tom returned homewards. The black man told him of great sums of money which had been buried by Kidd the pirate, under the oak trees on the high ridge not far from the morass. All these were under his command and protected by his power, so that none could find them but such as propitiated his favour. These he offered to place within Tom Walker’s reach, having conceived an especial kindness for him: but they were to be had only on certain conditions. What these conditions were, may easily be surmised, though Tom never disclosed them publicly. They must have been very hard, for he required time to think of them, and he was not a man to stick at trifles where money was in view. When they had reached the edge of the swamp the stranger paused.

‘What proof have I that all you have been telling me is true?’ said Tom.

‘There is my signature,’ said the black man, pressing his finger on Tom’s forehead. So saying, he turned off among the thickets of the swamp, and seemed, as Tom said, to go down, down, down, into the earth, until nothing but his head and shoulders could be seen, and so on until he totally disappeared.

When Tom reached home he found the black print of a finger burnt, as it were, into his forehead, which nothing could obliterate.

The first news his wife had to tell him was the sudden death of Absalom Crowninshield the rich buccaneer. It was announced in the papers with the usual flourish that ‘a great man had fallen in Israel.’

Tom recollected the tree which his black friend had just hewn down, and which was ready for burning. ‘Let the freebooter roast,’ said Tom, ‘who cares!’ He now felt convinced that all he had heard and seen was no illusion.

He was not prone to let his wife into his confidence; but as this was an uneasy secret, he willingly shared it with her. All her avarice was awakened at the mention of hidden gold, and she urged her husband to comply with the black man’s terms and secure what would make them wealthy for life. However Tom might have felt disposed to sell himself to the devil, he was determined not to do so to oblige his wife; so he flatly refused out of the mere spirit of contradiction. Many and bitter were the quarrels they had on the subject, but the more she talked the more resolute was Tom not to be damned to please her. At length she determined to drive the bargain on her own account, and if she succeeded, to keep all the gain to herself.

Being of the same fearless temper as her husband, she set off for the old Indian fort towards

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<sup>1</sup> **quakers** – Society of Friends, a religious Christian group that first appeared in the 17th century England with the idea of direct apprehension of God

<sup>2</sup> **Anabaptists** – a radical movement of the Protestant Reformation, the spiritual ancestor of Baptists and Quakers

<sup>3</sup> **the Salem witches** – in 1692, nineteen women were accused of witchcraft and hanged in the town of Salem in Massachusetts

the close of a summer's day. She was many hours absent. When she came back she was reserved and sullen in her replies. She spoke something of a black man whom she had met about twilight, hewing at the root of a tall tree. He was sulky, however, and would not come to terms; she was to go again with a propitiatory offering, but what it was she forbore to say.

The next evening she set off again for the swamp, with her apron heavily laden. Tom waited and waited for her, but in vain: midnight came, but she did not make her appearance; morning, noon, night returned, but still she did not come. Tom now grew uneasy for her safety; especially as he found she had carried off in her apron the silver teapot and spoons and every portable article of value. Another night elapsed, another morning came; but no wife. In a word, she was never heard of more.

What was her real fate nobody knows, in consequence of so many pretending to know. It is one of those facts that have become confounded by a variety of historians. Some asserted that she lost her way among the tangled mazes of the swamp and sunk into some pit or slough; others, more uncharitable, hinted that she had eloped with the household booty, and made off to some other province; while others assert that the tempter had decoyed her into a dismal quagmire on top of which her hat was found lying. In confirmation of this, it was said a great black man with an axe on his shoulder was seen late that very evening coming out of the swamp, carrying a bundle tied in a check apron, with an air of surly triumph.

The most current and probable story, however, observes that Tom Walker grew so anxious about the fate of his wife and his property that he sat out at length to seek them both at the Indian fort. During a long summer's afternoon he searched about the gloomy place, but no wife was to be seen. He called her name repeatedly, but she was nowhere to be heard. The bittern alone responded to his voice, as he flew screaming by; or the bull frog croaked dolefully from a neighbouring pool. At length, it is said, just in the brown hour of twilight, when the owls began to hoot and the bats to flit about, his attention was attracted by the clamour of carrion crows that were hovering about a cypress tree. He looked and beheld a bundle tied in a check apron and hanging in the branches of the tree; with a great vulture perched hard by, as if keeping watch upon it. He leaped with joy, for he recognized his wife's apron, and supposed it to contain the household valuables.

'Let us get hold of the property,' said he, consolingly to himself, 'and we will endeavour to do without the woman.'

As he scrambled up the tree the vulture spread its wide wings, and sailed off screaming into the deep shadows of the forest. Tom seized the check apron, but, woeful sight! found nothing but a heart and liver tied up in it.

Such, according to the most authentic old story, was all that was to be found of Tom's wife. She had probably attempted to deal with the black man as she had been accustomed to deal with her husband; but though a female scold is generally considered a match for the devil, yet in this instance she appears to have had the worst of it. She must have died game however; for it is said Tom noticed many prints of cloven feet deeply stamped about the tree, and several handfuls of hair, that looked as if they had been plucked from the coarse black shock of the woodsman. Tom knew his wife's prowess by experience. He shrugged his shoulders as he looked at the signs of a fierce clapper clawing. 'Egad,' said he to himself, 'Old Scratch must have had a tough time of it!'

Tom consoled himself for the loss of his property with the loss of his wife; for he was a man of fortitude. He even felt something like gratitude towards the black woodsman, who he considered had done him a kindness. He sought, therefore, to cultivate a farther acquaintance with him, but for some time without success; the old black legs played shy, for whatever people may think, he is not always to be had for calling for; he knows how to play his cards when pretty sure of his game.

At length, it is said, when delay had whetted Tom's eagerness to the quick, and prepared him to agree to any thing rather than not gain the promised treasure, he met the black man one evening in his usual woodman dress, with his axe on his shoulder, sauntering along the edge of the swamp, and humming a tune. He affected to receive Tom's advance with great indifference, made brief replies, and went on humming his tune.

By degrees, however, Tom brought him to business, and they began to haggle about the terms

on which the former was to have the pirate's treasure. There was one condition which need not be mentioned, being generally understood in all cases where the devil grants favours; but there were others about which, though of less importance, he was inflexibly obstinate. He insisted that the money found through his means should be employed in his service. He proposed, therefore, that Tom should employ it in the black traffic; that is to say, that he should fit out a slave ship. This, however, Tom resolutely refused; he was bad enough in all conscience; but the devil himself could not tempt him to turn slave dealer.

Finding Tom so squeamish on this point, he did not insist upon it, but proposed instead that he should turn usurer; the devil being extremely anxious for the increase of usurers, looking upon them as his peculiar people.

To this no objections were made, for it was just to Tom's taste.

'You shall open a broker's shop in Boston next month,' said the black man.

'I'll do it tomorrow, if you wish,' said Tom Walker.

'You shall lend money at two per cent. a month.'

'Egad, I'll charge four!' replied Tom Walker.

'You shall extort bonds, foreclose mortgages, drive the merchant to bankruptcy—'

'I'll drive him to the d—l,' cried Tom Walker, eagerly.

'You are the usurer for my money!' said the black legs, with delight. 'When will you want the rhino?'

'This very night.'

'Done!' said the devil.

'Done!' said Tom Walker. — So they shook hands, and struck a bargain.

A few days' time saw Tom Walker seated behind his desk in a counting house in Boston. His reputation for a ready moneyed man, who would lend money out for a good consideration, soon spread abroad. Everybody remembers the days of Governor Belcher, when money was particularly scarce. It was a time of paper credit. The country had been deluged with government bills; the famous Land Bank had been established; there had been a rage for speculating; the people had run mad with schemes for new settlements; for building cities in the wilderness; land jobbers went about with maps of grants, and townships, and Eldorados<sup>1</sup>, lying nobody knew where, but which everybody was ready to purchase. In a word, the great speculating fever which breaks out every now and then in the country, had raged to an alarming degree, and everybody was dreaming of making sudden fortunes from nothing. As usual the fever had subsided; the dream had gone off, and the imaginary fortunes with it; the patients were left in doleful plight, and the whole country resounded with the consequent cry of 'hard times.'

At this propitious time of public distress did Tom Walker set up as a usurer in Boston. His door was soon thronged by customers. The needy and the adventurous; the gambling speculator; the dreaming land jobber; the thriftless tradesman; the merchant with cracked credit; in short, every one driven to raise money by desperate means and desperate sacrifices, hurried to Tom Walker.

Thus Tom was the universal friend of the needy, and he acted like a 'friend in need;' that is to say, he always exacted good pay and good security. In proportion to the distress of the applicant was the hardness of his terms. He accumulated bonds and mortgages; gradually squeezed his customers closer and closer; and sent them at length, dry as a sponge from his door.

In this way he made money hand over hand; became a rich and mighty man, and exalted his cocked hat upon change. He built himself, as usual, a vast house, out of ostentation; but left the greater part of it unfinished and unfurnished out of parsimony. He even set up a carriage in the fullness of his vain glory, though he nearly starved the horses which drew it; and as the ungreased wheels groaned and screeched on the axle trees, you would have thought you heard the souls of the poor debtors he was squeezing.

As Tom waxed old, however, he grew thoughtful. Having secured the good things of this world, he began to feel anxious about those of the next. He thought with regret on the bargain he had made with his black friend, and set his wits to work to cheat him out of the conditions. He

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<sup>1</sup> **Eldorado** — a mythical country of gold and other riches

became, therefore, all of a sudden, a violent church goer. He prayed loudly and strenuously as if heaven were to be taken by force of lungs. Indeed, one might always tell when he had sinned most during the week, by the clamour of his Sunday devotion. The quiet Christians who had been modestly and steadfastly travelling Zionward<sup>1</sup>, were struck with self reproach at seeing themselves so suddenly outstripped in their career by this new-made convert. Tom was as rigid in religious, as in money matters; he was a stern supervisor and censurer of his neighbours, and seemed to think every sin entered up to their account became a credit on his own side of the page. He even talked of the expediency of reviving the persecution of quakers and anabaptists. In a word, Tom's zeal became as notorious as his riches.

Still, in spite of all this strenuous attention to forms, Tom had a lurking dread that the devil, after all, would have his due. That he might not be taken unawares, therefore, it is said he always carried a small bible in his coat pocket. He had also a great folio bible on his counting house desk, and would frequently be found reading it when people called on business; on such occasions he would lay his green spectacles on the book, to mark the place, while he turned round to drive some usurious bargain.

Some say that Tom grew a little crack brained in his old days, and that fancying his end approaching, he had his horse new shod, saddled and bridled, and buried with his feet uppermost; because he supposed that at the last day the world would be turned upside down; in which case he should find his horse standing ready for mounting, and he was determined at the worst to give his old friend a run for it. This, however, is probably a mere old wives fable. If he really did take such a precaution it was totally superfluous; at least so says the authentic old legend which closes his story in the following manner.

On one hot afternoon in the dog days, just as a terrible black thundergust was coming up, Tom sat in his counting house in his white linen cap and India silk morning gown. He was on the point of foreclosing a mortgage, by which he would complete the ruin of an unlucky land speculator for whom he had professed the greatest friendship. The poor land jobber begged him to grant a few months indulgence. Tom had grown testy and irritated and refused another day.

'My family will be ruined and brought upon the parish,' said the land jobber. 'Charity begins at home,' replied Tom, 'I must take care of myself in these hard times.'

'You have made so much money out of me,' said the speculator.

Tom lost his patience and his piety – 'The devil take me,' said he, 'if I have made a farthing!'

Just then there were three loud knocks at the street door. He stepped out to see who was there. A black man was holding a black horse which neighed and stamped with impatience.

'Tom, you're come for!' said the black fellow, gruffly. Tom shrunk back, but too late. He had left his little bible at the bottom of his coat pocket, and his big bible on the desk buried under the mortgage he was about to foreclose: never was sinner taken more unawares. The black man whisked him like a child astride the horse and away he galloped in the midst of a thunder storm. The clerks stuck their pens behind their ears and stared after him from the windows. Away went Tom Walker, dashing down the streets; his white cap bobbing up and down; his morning gown fluttering in the wind, and his steed striking fire out of the pavement at every bound. When the clerks turned to look for the black man he had disappeared.

Tom Walker never returned to foreclose the mortgage. A countryman who lived on the borders of the swamp, reported that in the height of the thunder gust he had heard a great clattering of hoofs and a howling along the road, and that when he ran to the window he just caught sight of a figure, such as I have described, on a horse that galloped like mad across the fields, over the hills and down into the black hemlock swamp towards the old Indian fort; and that shortly after a thunderbolt fell in that direction which seemed to set the whole forest in a blaze.

The good people of Boston shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, but had been so much accustomed to witches and goblins and tricks of the devil in all kinds of shapes from the first settlement of the colony, that they were not so much horror struck as might have been expected.

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<sup>1</sup> **Zionward** – in the Old Testament, Zion is a hill in ancient Jerusalem where God dwells; in Christian literature and hymns it is a heavenly city or the earthly city of true Christian faith.

Trustees were appointed to take charge of Tom's effects. There was nothing, however, to administer upon. On searching his coffers all his bonds and mortgages were found reduced to cinders. In place of gold and silver his iron chest was filled with chips and shavings; two skeletons lay in his stable instead of his half starved horses, and the very next day his great house took fire and was burnt to the ground.

Such was the end of Tom Walker and his ill gotten wealth. Let all griping money brokers lay this story to heart. The truth of it is not to be doubted. The very hole under the oak trees, from whence he dug Kidd's money is to be seen to this day; and the neighbouring swamp and old Indian fort is often haunted in stormy nights by a figure on horseback, in a morning gown and white cap, which is doubtless the troubled spirit of the usurer. In fact, the story has resolved itself into a proverb, and is the origin of that popular saying, prevalent throughout New England, of 'The Devil and Tom Walker.'

## A Tragedy of Error (Henry James)

### I

A low English phaeton<sup>1</sup> was drawn up before the door of the post office of a French seaport town. In it was seated a lady, with her veil down and her parasol held closely over her face. My story begins with a gentleman coming out of the office and handing her a letter.

He stood beside the carriage a moment before getting in. She gave him her parasol to hold, and then lifted her veil, showing a very pretty face. This couple seemed to be full of interest for the passers by, most of whom stared hard and exchanged significant glances. Such persons as were looking on at the moment saw the lady turn very pale as her eyes fell on the direction of the letter. Her companion saw it too, and instantly stepping into the place beside her, took up the reins, and drove rapidly along the main street of the town, past the harbor, to an open road skirting the sea. Here he slackened pace. The lady was leaning back, with her veil down again, and the letter lying open in her lap. Her attitude was almost that of unconsciousness, and he could see that her eyes were closed. Having satisfied himself of this, he hastily possessed himself of the letter, and read as follows:

Southampton<sup>2</sup>, July 16th, 18 —.

My Dear Hortense:

You will see by my postmark that I am a thousand leagues nearer home than when I last wrote, but I have hardly time to explain the change. M.P — has given me a most unlooked-for congé<sup>3</sup>. After so many months of separation, we shall be able to spend a few weeks together. God be praised! We got in here from New York this morning, and I have had the good luck to find a vessel, the *Armorique*, which sails straight for H—. The mail leaves directly, but we shall probably be detained a few hours by the tide; so this will reach you a day before I arrive: the master calculates we shall get in early Thursday morning. Ah, Hortense! how the time drags! Three whole days. If I did not write from New York, it is because I was unwilling to torment you with an expectancy which, as it is, I venture to hope, you will find long enough. Farewell. To a warmer greeting!

Your devoted C. B.

When the gentleman replaced the paper on his companion's lap, his face was almost as pale as hers. For a moment he gazed fixedly and vacantly before him, and a half-suppressed curse escaped his lips. Then his eyes reverted to his neighbor. After some hesitation, during which he allowed the reins to hang so loose that the horse lapsed into a walk, he touched her gently on the shoulder.

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1 **phaeton** — in the 18th–19th centuries, an open four-wheeled carriage without doors

2 **Southampton** — a city and port on the English Channel in southern England

3 **congé** = permission to depart (*French*)



‘Well, Hortense,’ said he, in a very pleasant tone, ‘what’s the matter; have you fallen asleep?’

Hortense slowly opened her eyes, and, seeing that they had left the town behind them, raised her veil. Her features were stiffened with horror.

‘Read that,’ said she, holding out the open letter.

The gentleman took it, and pretended to read it again.

‘Ah! M. Bernier returns. Delightful!’ he exclaimed.

‘How, delightful?’ asked Hortense; ‘we mustn’t jest at so serious a crisis, my friend.’

‘True,’ said the other, ‘it will be a solemn meeting. Two years of absence is a great deal.’

‘O Heaven! I shall never dare to face him,’ cried Hortense, bursting into tears.

Covering her face with one hand, she put out the other toward that of her friend. But he was plunged in so deep a reverie, that he did not perceive the movement. Suddenly he came to, aroused by her sobs.

‘Come, come,’ said he, in the tone of one who wishes to coax another into mistrust of a danger before which he does not himself feel so secure but that the sight of a companion’s indifference will give him relief. ‘What if he does come? He need learn nothing. He will stay but a short time, and sail away again as unsuspecting as he came.’

‘Learn nothing! You surprise me. Every tongue that greets him, if only to say *bon jour*, will wag to the tune of a certain person’s misconduct.’

‘Bah! People don’t think about us quite as much as you fancy. You and I, n’est-ce pas?<sup>1</sup> we have little time to concern ourselves about our neighbors’ failings. Very well, other people are in the same box, better or worse. When a ship goes to pieces on those rocks out at sea, the poor devils who are pushing their way to land on a floating spar, don’t bestow many glances on those who are battling with the waves beside them. Their eyes are fastened to the shore, and all their care is for their own safety. In life we are all afloat on a tumultuous sea; we are all struggling toward some *terra firma*<sup>2</sup> of wealth or love or leisure. The roaring of the waves we kick up about us and the spray we dash into our eyes deafen and blind us to the sayings and doing of our fellows. Provided we climb high and dry, what do we care for them?’

‘Ay, but if we don’t? When we’ve lost hope ourselves, we want to make others sink. We hang weights about their necks, and dive down into the dirtiest pools for stones to cast at them. My friend, you don’t feel the shots which are not aimed at you. It isn’t of you the town talks, but of me: a poor woman throws herself off the pier yonder, and drowns before a kind hand has time to restrain her, and her corpse floats over the water for all the world to look at. When her husband comes up to see what the crowd means, is there any lack of kind friends to give him the good news of his wife’s death?’

‘As long as a woman is light enough to float, Hortense, she is not counted drowned. It’s only when she sinks out of sight that they give her up.’

Hortense was silent a moment, looking at the sea with swollen eyes.

‘Louis,’ she said at last, ‘we were speaking metaphorically: I have half a mind to drown myself literally.’

‘Nonsense!’ replied Louis, ‘an accused pleads *not guilty*, and hangs himself in prison. What do the papers say? People talk, do they? Can’t you talk as well as they? A woman is in the wrong from the moment she holds her tongue and refuses battle. And that you do too often. That pocket handkerchief is always more or less of a flag of truce.’

‘I’m sure I don’t know,’ said Hortense indifferently; ‘perhaps it is.’

There are moments of grief in which certain aspects of the subject of our distress seem as irrelevant as matters entirely foreign to it. Her eyes were still fastened on the sea. There was another silence. ‘O my poor Charles!’ she murmured, at length, ‘to what a hearth do you return!’

‘Hortense,’ said the gentleman, as if he had not heard her, although, to a third person, it would have appeared that it was because he had done so that he spoke: ‘I do not need to tell you that it will never happen to me to betray our secret. But I will answer for it that so long as M. Bernier is at

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1 *n’est-ce pas?* = isn’t it? (*French*)

2 *terra firma* = solid ground (*Latin*)

home no mortal shall breathe a syllable of it.'

'What of that?' sighed Hortense. 'He will not be with me ten minutes without guessing it.'

'Oh, as for that,' said her companion, dryly, 'that's your own affair.'

'Monsieur de Meyrau!' cried the lady.

'It seems to me,' continued the other, 'that in making such a guarantee, I have done my part of the business.'

'Your part of the business!' sobbed Hortense.

M. de Meyrau made no reply, but with a great cut of the whip sent the horse bounding along the road. Nothing more was said. Hortense lay back in the carriage with her face buried in her handkerchief, moaning. Her companion sat upright, with contracted brows and firmly set teeth, looking straight before him, and by an occasional heavy lash keeping the horse at a furious pace. A wayfarer might have taken him for a ravisher escaping with a victim worn out with resistance. Travellers to whom they were known would perhaps have seen a deep meaning in this accidental analogy. So, by a *detour*<sup>1</sup>, they returned to the town.

When Hortense reached home, she went straight up to a little boudoir on the second floor, and shut herself in. This room was at the back of the house, and her maid, who was at that moment walking in the long garden which stretched down to the water, where there was a landing place for small boats, saw her draw in the window blind and darken the room, still in her bonnet and cloak. She remained alone for a couple of hours. At five o'clock, some time after the hour at which she was usually summoned to dress her mistress for the evening, the maid knocked at Hortense's door, and offered her services. Madame called out, from within, that she had a *migraine*, and would not be dressed.

'Can I get anything for madame?' asked Josephine; 'a *tisane*, a warm drink, something?'

'Nothing, nothing.'

'Will madame dine?'

'No.'

'Madame had better not go wholly without eating.'

'Bring me a bottle of wine – of brandy.'

Josephine obeyed. When she returned, Hortense was standing in the doorway, and as one of the shutters had meanwhile been thrown open, the woman could see that, although her mistress's hat had been tossed upon the sofa, her cloak had not been removed, and that her face was very pale. Josephine felt that she might not offer sympathy nor ask questions.

'Will madame have nothing more?' she ventured to say, as she handed her the tray.

Madame shook her head, and closed and locked the door.

Josephine stood a moment vexed, irresolute, listening. She heard no sound. At last she deliberately stooped down and applied her eye to the keyhole.

This is what she saw:

Her mistress had gone to the open window, and stood with her back to the door, looking out at the sea. She held the bottle by the neck in one hand, which hung listlessly by her side; the other was resting on a glass half filled with water, standing, together with an open letter, on a table beside her. She kept this position until Josephine began to grow tired of waiting. But just as she was about to arise in despair of gratifying her curiosity, madame raised the bottle and glass, and filled the latter full. Josephine looked more eagerly. Hortense held it a moment against the light, and then drained it down.

Josephine could not restrain an involuntary whistle. But her surprise became amazement when she saw her mistress prepare to take a second glass. Hortense put it down, however, before its contents were half gone, as if struck by a sudden thought, and hurried across the room. She stooped down before a cabinet, and took out a small opera glass. With this she returned to the window, put it to her eyes, and again spent some moments in looking seaward. The purpose of this proceeding Josephine could not make out. The only result visible to her was that her mistress suddenly dropped the lorgnette on the table, and sank down on an armchair, covering her face with her hands.

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<sup>1</sup> **detour** = roundabout way

Josephine could contain her wonderment no longer. She hurried down to the kitchen.

‘Valentine,’ said she to the cook, ‘what on earth can be the matter with Madame? She will have no dinner, she is drinking brandy by the glassful, a moment ago she was looking out to sea with a lorgnette, and now she is crying dreadfully with an open letter in her lap.’

The cook looked up from her potato-peeling with a significant wink.

‘What can it be,’ said she, ‘but that monsieur returns?’

## II

At six o’clock, Josephine and Valentine were still sitting together, discussing the probable causes and consequences of the event hinted at by the latter. Suddenly Madame Bernier’s bell rang. Josephine was only too glad to answer it. She met her mistress descending the stairs, combed, cloaked, and veiled, with no traces of agitation, but a very pale face.

‘I am going out,’ said Madame Bernier; ‘if M. le Vicomte comes, tell him I am at my mother-in-law’s, and wish him to wait till I return.’

Josephine opened the door, and let her mistress pass; then stood watching her as she crossed the court.

‘Her mother-in-law’s,’ muttered the maid; ‘she has the face!’

When Hortense reached the street, she took her way, not through the town, to the ancient quarter where that ancient lady, her husband’s mother, lived, but in a very different direction. She followed the course of the quay, beside the harbor, till she entered a crowded region, chiefly the residence of fishermen and boatmen. Here she raised her veil. Dusk was beginning to fall. She walked as if desirous to attract as little observation as possible, and yet to examine narrowly the population in the midst of which she found herself. Her dress was so plain that there was nothing in her appearance to solicit attention; yet, if for any reason a passer by had happened to notice her, he could not have helped being struck by the contained intensity with which she scrutinized every figure she met. Her manner was that of a person seeking to recognize a long-lost friend, or perhaps, rather, a long-lost enemy, in a crowd. At last she stopped before a flight of steps, at the foot of which was a landing place for half a dozen little boats, employed to carry passengers between the two sides of the port, at times when the drawbridge above was closed for the passage of vessels. While she stood she was witness of the following scene:

A man, in a red woollen fisherman’s cap, was sitting on the top of the steps, smoking the short stump of a pipe, with his face to the water. Happening to turn about, his eye fell on a little child, hurrying along the quay toward a dingy tenement close at hand, with a jug in its arms.

‘Hullo, youngster!’ cried the man; ‘what have you got there? Come here.’

The little child looked back, but, instead of obeying, only quickened its walk.

‘The devil take you, come here!’ repeated the man angrily, ‘or I’ll wring your beggarly neck. You won’t obey your own uncle, eh?’

The child stopped, and ruefully made its way to its relative, looking around several times toward the house, as if to appeal to some counter authority.

‘Come, make haste!’ pursued the man, ‘or I shall go and fetch you. Move!’

The child advanced to within half a dozen paces of the steps, and then stood still, eyeing the man cautiously, and hugging the jug tight.

‘Come on, you little beggar, come up close.’

The youngster kept a stolid silence, however, and did not budge. Suddenly its self-styled uncle leaned forward, swept out his arm, clutched hold of its little sunburned wrist, and dragged it toward him.

‘Why didn’t you come when you were called?’ he asked, running his disengaged hand into the infant’s frowsy mop of hair, and shaking its head until it staggered. ‘Why didn’t you come, you unmannerly little brute, eh? – eh?-eh?’ accompanying every interrogation with a renewed shake.

The child made no answer. It simply and vainly endeavored to twist its neck around under the man’s gripe, and transmit some call for succor to the house.

‘Come, keep your head straight. Look at me, and answer me. What’s in that jug? Don’t lie.’

‘Milk.’

‘Who for?’

‘Granny.’

‘Granny be hanged.’

The man disengaged his hands, lifted the jug from the child’s feeble grasp, tilted it toward the light, surveyed its contents, put it to his lips, and exhausted them. The child, although liberated, did not retreat. It stood watching its uncle drink until he lowered the jug. Then, as he met its eyes, it said:

‘It was for the baby.’

For a moment the man was irresolute. But the child seemed to have a foresight of the parental resentment, for it had hardly spoken when it darted backward and scampered off, just in time to elude a blow from the jug, which the man sent clattering at its heels. When it was out of sight, he faced about to the water again, and replaced the pipe between his teeth with a heavy scowl and a murmur that sounded to Madame Bernier very like – ‘I wish the baby’d choke.’

Hortense was a mute spectator of this little drama. When it was over, she turned around, and retraced her steps twenty yards with her hand to her head. Then she walked straight back, and addressed the man.

‘My good man,’ she said, in a very pleasant voice, ‘are you the master of one of these boats?’

He looked up at her. In a moment the pipe was out of his mouth, and a broad grin in its place. He rose, with his hand to his cap.

‘I am, madame, at your service.’

‘Will you take me to the other side?’

‘You don’t need a boat; the bridge is closed,’ said one of his comrades at the foot of the steps, looking that way.

‘I know it,’ said Madame Bernier; ‘but I wish to go to the cemetery, and a boat will save me half a mile walking.’

‘The cemetery is shut at this hour.’

‘Allons<sup>1</sup>, leave madame alone,’ said the man first spoken to.

‘This way, my lady.’

Hortense seated herself in the stern of the boat. The man took the sculls.

‘Straight across?’ he asked.

Hortense looked around her. ‘It’s a fine evening,’ said she; suppose you row me out to the lighthouse, and leave me at the point nearest the cemetery on our way back.

‘Very well,’ rejoined the boatman; ‘fifteen sous,’ and began to pull lustily.

‘Allez<sup>2</sup>, I’ll pay you well,’ said Madame.

‘Fifteen sous is the fare,’ insisted the man.

‘Give me a pleasant row, and I’ll give you a hundred,’ said Hortense.

Her companion said nothing. He evidently wished to appear not to have heard her remark. Silence was probably the most dignified manner of receiving a promise too munificent to be anything but a jest.

For some time this silence was maintained, broken only by the trickling of the oars and the sounds from the neighboring shores and vessels. Madame Bernier was plunged in a sidelong scrutiny of her ferryman’s countenance. He was a man of about thirty-five. His face was dogged, brutal, and sullen. These indications were perhaps exaggerated by the dull monotony of his exercise. The eyes lacked a certain rascally gleam which had appeared in them when he was so *empressé*<sup>3</sup> with the offer of his services. The face was better then – that is, if vice is better than ignorance. We say a countenance is ‘lit up’ by a smile; and indeed that momentary flicker does the office of a candle in a dark room. It sheds a ray upon the dim upholstery of our souls. The visages

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1 **Allons** – come on (*French*)

2 **Allez** – come on (*French*)

3 **empressé** = impressed (*French*)

of poor men, generally, know few alternations. There is a large class of human beings whom fortune restricts to a single change of expression, or, perhaps, rather to a single expression. Ah me! the faces which wear either nakedness or rags; whose repose is stagnation, whose activity vice; ignorant at their worst, infamous at their best!

‘Don’t pull too hard,’ said Hortense at last. ‘Hadn’t you better take breath a moment?’

‘Madame is very good,’ said the man, leaning upon his oars. ‘But if you had taken me by the hour,’ he added, with a return of the vicious grin, ‘you wouldn’t catch me loitering.’

‘I suppose you work very hard,’ said Madame Bernier.

The man gave a little toss of his head, as if to intimate the inadequacy of any supposition to grasp the extent of his labors.

‘I’ve been up since four o’clock this morning, wheeling bales and boxes on the quay, and plying my little boat. Sweating without five minutes’ intermission. C’est comme ça<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes I tell my mate I think I’ll take a plunge in the basin to dry myself. Ha! ha! ha!’

‘And of course you gain little,’ said Madame Bernier.

‘Worse than nothing. Just what will keep me fat enough for starvation to feed on.’

‘How? you go without your necessary food?’

‘Necessary is a very elastic word, madame. You can narrow it down, so that in the degree above nothing it means luxury. My necessary food is sometimes thin air. If I don’t deprive myself of that, it’s because I can’t.’

‘Is it possible to be so unfortunate?’

‘Shall I tell you what I have eaten today?’

‘Do,’ said Madame Bernier.

‘A piece of black bread and a salt herring are all that have passed my lips for twelve hours.’

‘Why don’t you get some better work?’

‘If I should die tonight,’ pursued the boatman, heedless of the question, in the manner of a man whose impetus on the track of self-pity drives him past the signal flags of relief, ‘what would there be left to bury me? These clothes I have on might buy me a long box. For the cost of this shabby old suit, that hasn’t lasted me a twelve-month, I could get one that I wouldn’t wear out in a thousand years. La bonne idée!<sup>2</sup>’

‘Why don’t you get some work that pays better?’ repeated Hortense.

The man dipped his oars again.

‘Work that pays better? I must work for work. I must earn that too. Work is wages. I count the promise of the next week’s employment the best part of my Saturday night’s pocketings. Fifty casks rolled from the ship to the storehouse mean two things: thirty sous and fifty more to roll the next day. Just so a crushed hand, or a dislocated shoulder, mean twenty francs to the apothecary and *bon jour* to my business.’

‘Are you married?’ asked Hortense.

‘No, I thank you. I’m not cursed with that blessing. But I’ve an old mother, a sister, and three nephews, who look to me for support. The old woman’s too old to work; the lass is too lazy, and the little ones are too young. But they’re none of them too old or young to be hungry, allez. I’ll be hanged if I’m not a father to them all.’

There was a pause. The man had resumed rowing. Madame Bernier sat motionless, still examining her neighbor’s physiognomy. The sinking sun, striking full upon his face, covered it with an almost lurid glare. Her own features being darkened against the western sky, the direction of them was quite indistinguishable to her companion.

‘Why don’t you leave the place?’ she said at last.

‘Leave it! how?’ he replied, looking up with the rough avidity with which people of his class receive proposals touching their interests, extending to the most philanthropic suggestions that mistrustful eagerness with which experience has taught them to defend their own side of a bargain – the only form of proposal that she has made them acquainted with.

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1 C’est comme ça. = (it’s) like this. (French)

2 La bonne idée! = A good idea! (French)

'Go somewhere else,' said Hortense.

'Where, for instance!'

'To some new country – America.'

The man burst into a loud laugh. Madame Bernier's face bore more evidence of interest in the play of his features than of that discomfiture which generally accompanies the consciousness of ridicule.

'There's a lady's scheme for you! If you'll write for furnished apartments, *là-bas*<sup>1</sup>, I don't desire anything better. But no leaps in the dark for me. America and Algeria are very fine words to cram into an empty stomach when you're lounging in the sun, out of work, just as you stuff tobacco into your pipe and let the smoke curl around your head. But they fade away before a cutlet and a bottle of wine. When the earth grows so smooth and the air so pure that you can see the American coast from the pier yonder, then I'll make up my bundle. Not before.'

'You're afraid, then, to risk anything?'

'I'm afraid of nothing, *moi*. But I am not a fool either. I don't want to kick away my *sabots*<sup>2</sup> till I am certain of a pair of shoes. I can go barefoot here. I don't want to find water where I counted on land. As for America, I've been there already.'

'Ah! you've been there?'

'I've been to Brazil and Mexico and California and the West Indies.'

'Ah!'

'I've been to Asia, too.'

'Ah!'

'*Pardio*, to China and India. Oh, I've seen the world! I've been three times around the Cape.'

'You've been a seaman then?'

'Yes, ma'am; fourteen years.'

'On what ship?'

'Bless your heart, on fifty ships.'

'French?'

'French and English and Spanish; mostly Spanish.'

'Ah?'

'Yes, and the more fool I was.'

'How so?'

'Oh, it was a dog's life. I'd drown any dog that would play half the mean tricks I used to see.'

'And you never had a hand in any yourself?'

'*Pardon*, I gave what I got. I was as good a Spaniard and as great a devil as any. I carried my knife with the best of them, and drew it as quickly, and plunged it as deep. I've got scars, if you weren't a lady. But I'd warrant to find you their mates on a dozen Spanish hides!'

He seemed to pull with renewed vigor at the recollection. There was a short silence.

'Do you suppose,' said Madame Bernier, in a few moments 'do you remember – that is, can you form any idea whether you ever killed a man?'

There was a momentary slackening of the boatman's oars. He gave a sharp glance at his passenger's countenance, which was still so shaded by her position, however, as to be indistinguishable. The tone of her interrogation had betrayed a simple, idle curiosity.

He hesitated a moment, and then gave one of those conscious, cautious, dubious smiles, which may cover either a criminal assumption of more than the truth or a guilty repudiation of it.

'*Mon Dieu!*<sup>3</sup>' said he, with a great shrug, 'there's a question!..... I never killed one without a reason.'

'Of course not,' said Hortense.

'Though a reason in South America, *ma foi!*<sup>4</sup>' added the boatman, 'wouldn't be a reason

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1 **là-bas** = here, there (*French*)

2 **sabots** – a kind of shoes

3 **Mon Dieu!** = My God! (*French*)

4 **ma foi!** = my! (*French*)

here.'

'I suppose not. What would be a reason there?'

'Well, if I killed a man in Valparaiso<sup>1</sup> – I don't say I did, mind – it's because my knife went in farther than I intended.'

'But why did you use it at all?'

'I didn't. If I had, it would have been because he drew his against me.'

'And why should he have done so?'

'Ventrebleu!<sup>2</sup> for as many reasons as there are craft in the harbor.'

'For example?'

'Well, that I should have got a place in a ship's company that he was trying for.'

'Such things as that? is it possible?'

'Oh, for smaller things. That a lass should have given me a dozen oranges she had promised him.'

'How odd!' said Madame Bernier, with a shrill kind of laugh. 'A man who owed you a grudge of this kind would just come up and stab you, I suppose, and think nothing of it?'

'Precisely. Drive a knife up to the hilt into your back, with an oath, and slice open a melon with it, with a song, five minutes afterward.'

'And when a person is afraid, or ashamed, or in some way unable to take revenge himself, does he – or it may be a woman – does she get someone else to do it for her?'

'Parbleu!<sup>3</sup> Poor devils on the lookout for such work are as plentiful all along the South American coast as *commissionaires* on the street corners here.' The ferryman was evidently surprised at the fascination possessed by this infamous topic for so lady-like a person; but having, as you see, a very ready tongue, it is probable that his delight in being able to give her information and hear himself talk were still greater. 'And then down there,' he went on, 'they never forget a grudge. If a fellow doesn't serve you one day, he'll do it another. A Spaniard's hatred is like lost sleep – you can put it off for a time, but it will gripe you in the end. The rascals always keep their promises to themselves... An enemy on shipboard is jolly fun. It's like bulls tethered in the same field. You can't stand still half a minute except against a wall. Even when he makes friends with you, his favors never taste right. Messing with him is like drinking out of a pewter mug. And so it is everywhere. Let your shadow once flit across a Spaniard's path, and he'll always see it there. If you've never lived in any but these damned clockworky European towns, you can't imagine the state of things in a South American seaport – one half the population waiting round the corner for the other half. But I don't see that it's so much better here, where every man's a spy on every other. There you meet an assassin at every turn, here a *sergent de ville* <sup>4</sup>... At all events, the life *là bas* used to remind me, more than anything else, of sailing in a shallow channel, where you don't know what infernal rock you may ground on. Every man has a standing account with his neighbor, just as madame has at her *fournisseur's* <sup>5</sup>; and, *ma foi*, those are the only accounts they settle. The master of the *Santiago* may pay me one of these days for the pretty names I heaved after him when we parted company, but he'll never pay me my wages'.

A short pause followed this exposition of the virtues of the Spaniard.

'You yourself never put a man out of the world, then?' resumed Hortense.

'Oh, que si!<sup>6</sup>... Are you horrified?'

'Not at all. I know that the thing is often justifiable.'

The man was silent a moment, perhaps with surprise, for the next thing he said was:

'Madame is Spanish?'

'In that, perhaps, I am,' replied Hortense.

Again her companion was silent. The pause was prolonged. Madame Bernier broke it by a

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1 **Valparaiso** – a city and port on the Pacific coast of Chile

2 **Ventrebleu!** = by gosh! (*French*)

3 **Parbleu!** = by jingo! (*French*)

4 **sergent de ville** = policeman (*French*)

5 **fournisseur** = supplier, provider (*French*)

6 **que si** – here: if only (*French*)

question which showed that she had been following the same train of thought.

‘What is sufficient ground in this country for killing a man?’

The boatman sent a loud laugh over the water. Hortense drew her cloak closer about her.

‘I’m afraid there is none.’

‘Isn’t there a right of self-defence?’

‘To be sure there is – it’s one I ought to know something about. But it’s one that ces messieurs<sup>6</sup> at the Palais make short work with.’

‘In South America and those countries, when a man makes life insupportable to you, what do you do?’

‘*Mon Dieu!* I suppose you kill him.’

‘And in France?’

‘I suppose you kill yourself. Ha! ha! ha!’

By this time they had reached the end of the great breakwater, terminating in a lighthouse, the limit, on one side, of the inner harbor. The sun had set.

‘Here we are at the lighthouse,’ said the man; ‘it’s growing dark. Shall we turn?’

Hortense rose in her place a few moments, and stood looking out to sea. ‘Yes,’ she said at last, ‘you may go back – slowly.’ When the boat had headed round she resumed her old position, and put one of her hands over the side, drawing it through the water as they moved, and gazing into the long ripples.

At last she looked up at her companion. Now that her face caught some of the lingering light of the west, he could see that it was deathly pale.

‘You find it hard to get along in the world,’ said she: ‘I shall be very glad to help you.’

The man started, and stared a moment. Was it because this remark jarred upon the expression which he was able faintly to discern in her eyes? The next, he put his hand to his cap.

‘Madame is very kind. What will you do?’

Madame Bernier returned his gaze.

‘I will trust you.’

‘Ah!’

‘And reward you.’

‘Ah? Madame has a piece of work for me?’

‘A piece of work,’ Hortense nodded.

The man said nothing, waiting apparently for an explanation. His face wore the look of lowering irritation which low natures feel at being puzzled.

‘Are you a bold man?’

Light seemed to come in this question. The quick expansion of his features answered it. You cannot touch upon certain subjects with an inferior but by the sacrifice of the barrier which separates you from him. There are thoughts and feelings and glimpses and foreshadowings of thoughts which level all inequalities of station.

‘I’m bold enough,’ said the boatman, ‘for anything *you* want me to do.’

‘Are you bold enough to commit a crime?’

‘Not for nothing.’

‘If I ask you to endanger your peace of mind, to risk your personal safety for me, it is certainly not as a favor. I will give you ten times the weight in gold of every grain by which your conscience grows heavier in my service.’

The man gave her a long, hard look through the dim light.

‘I know what you want me to do,’ he said at last.

‘Very well,’ said Hortense; ‘will you do it?’

He continued to gaze. She met his eyes like a woman who has nothing more to conceal.

‘State your case.’

‘Do you know a vessel named the *Armorique*, a steamer?’

‘Yes, it runs from Southampton.’

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<sup>6</sup> ces messieurs = these gentlemen (*French*)



'It will arrive tomorrow morning early. Will it be able to cross the bar?'

'No; not till noon.'

'I thought so. I expect a person by it – a man.'

Madame Bernier appeared unable to continue, as if her voice had given way.

'Well, well?' said her companion.

'He's the person' – she stopped again.

'The person who –?'

'The person whom I wish to get rid of.'

For some moments nothing was said. The boatman was the first to speak again.

'Have you formed a plan?'

Hortense nodded.

'Let's hear it.'

'The person in question,' said Madame Bernier, 'will be impatient to land before noon. The house to which he returns will be in view of the vessel if, as you say, she lies at anchor. If he can get a boat, he will be sure to come ashore. Eh bien!<sup>1</sup> – but you understand me.'

'Aha! you mean my boat – *this* boat?'

'O God!'

Madame Bernier sprang up in her seat, threw out her arms, and sank down again, burying her face in her knees. Her companion hastily shipped his oars, and laid his hands on her shoulders.

'Allons donc<sup>2</sup>, in the devil's name, don't break down,' said he; 'we'll come to an understanding.'

Kneeling in the bottom of the boat, and supporting her by his grasp, he succeeded in making her raise herself, though her head still drooped.

'You want me to finish him in the boat?'

No answer.

'Is he an old man?'

Hortense shook her head faintly.

'My age?'

She nodded.

'Sapristi!<sup>3</sup> it isn't so easy.'

'He can't swim,' said Hortense, without looking up; 'he – he is lame.'

'Nom de Dieu!<sup>4</sup>' The boatman dropped his hands. Hortense looked up quickly. Do you read the pantomime?

'Never mind,' added the man at last, 'it will serve as a sign.'

'Mais oui<sup>5</sup>. And besides that, he will ask to be taken to the Maison Bernier, the house with its back to the water, on the extension of the great quay. *Tenez*, you can almost see it from here.'

'I know the place,' said the boatman, and was silent, as if asking and answering himself a question.

Hortense was about to interrupt the train of thought which she apprehended he was following, when he forestalled her.

'How am I to be sure of my affair?' asked he.

'Of your reward? I've thought of that. This watch is a pledge of what I shall be able and glad to give you afterward. There are two thousand francs' worth of pearls in the case.'

'Il faut fixer la somme<sup>6</sup>, ' said the man, leaving the watch untouched.

'That lies with you.'

'Good. You know that I have the right to ask a high price.'

'Certainly. Name it.'

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1 **Eh bien!** – here: Oh, well! (*French*)

2 **Eh bien!** – here: Oh, well! (*French*)

3 **Sapristi!** – an exclamation of annoyance (*French*)

4 **Nom de Dieu!** = Good God! (*French*)

5 **Mais oui** = Oh, yes, certainly (*French*)

6 **Il faut fixer la somme.** = It is necessary to fix the sum. (*French*)

'It's only on the supposition of a large sum that I will so much as consider your proposal. *Songez donc*, that it's a MURDER you ask of me.'

'The price – the price?'

'*Tenez*,' continued the man, 'poached game is always high. The pearls in that watch are costly because it's worth a man's life to get at them. You want me to be your pearl diver. Be it so. You must guarantee me a safe descent, – it's a descent, you know – ha! – you must furnish me the armor of safety; a little gap to breathe through while I'm at my work – the thought of a capful of Napoleons!'

'My good man, I don't wish to talk to you or to listen to your sallies. I wish simply to know your price. I'm not bargaining for a pair of chickens. Propose a sum.'

The boatman had by this time resumed his seat and his oars. He stretched out for a long, slow pull, which brought him closely face to face with his temptress. This position, his body bent forward, his eyes fixed on Madame Bernier's face, he kept for some seconds. It was perhaps fortunate for Hortense's purpose at that moment – it had often aided her purposes before – that she was a pretty woman.<sup>1</sup> A plain face might have emphasized the utterly repulsive nature of the negotiation. Suddenly, with a quick, convulsive movement, the man completed the stroke.

'*Pas si bête!* propose one yourself.'

'Very well,' said Hortense, 'if you wish it. *Voyons*: I'll give you what I can. I have fifteen thousand francs' worth of jewels. I'll give you them, or, if they will get you into trouble, their value. At home, in a box I have a thousand francs in gold. You shall have those. I'll pay your passage and outfit to America. I have friends in New York. I'll write to them to get you work.'

'And you'll give your washing to my mother and sister, *bien*? Ha! ha! Jewels, fifteen thousand francs; one thousand more makes sixteen; passage to America – first class – five hundred francs; outfit – what does Madame understand by that?'

'Everything needful for your success *là-bas*.'

'A written denial that I am an assassin? *Ma foi*, it were better not to remove the impression. It's served me a good turn, on this side of the water at least. Call it twenty-five thousand francs.'

'Very well; but not a sous more.'

'Shall I trust you?'

'Am I not trusting you? It is well for you that I do not allow myself to think of the venture I am making.'

'Perhaps we're even there. We neither of us can afford to make account of certain possibilities. Still, I'll trust you, too.... *Tiens!*' added the boatman, 'here we are near the quay.' Then with a mock-solemn touch of his cap, 'Will Madame still visit the cemetery?'

'Come, quick, let me land,' said Madame Bernier, impatiently.

'We *have* been among the dead, after a fashion,' persisted the boatman, as he gave her his hand.

### III

It was more than eight o'clock when Madame Bernier reached her own house.

'Has M. de Meyrau been here?' she asked of Josephine.

'Yes, ma'am; and on learning that Madame was out, he left a note, *chez monsieur*.'

Hortense found a sealed letter on the table in her husband's old study. It ran as follows:

'I was desolated at finding you out. I had a word to tell you. I have accepted an invitation to sup and pass the night at C–, thinking it would look well. For the same reason I have resolved to take the bull by the horns, and go aboard the steamer on my return, to welcome M. Bernier home – the privilege of an old friend. I am told the *Armorique* will anchor off the bar by daybreak. What do

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<sup>1</sup> James's footnote: I am told that there was no resisting her smile; and that she had at her command, in moments of grief, a certain look of despair which filled even the roughest hearts with sympathy, and won over the kindest to the cruel cause.

you think? But it's too late to let me know. Applaud my *savoir faire*<sup>2</sup> – you will, at all events, in the end. You will see how it will smooth matters.'

'Baffled! baffled!' hissed Madame, when she had read the note; 'God deliver me from my friends!' She paced up and down the room several times, and at last began to mutter to herself, as people often do in moments of strong emotion: 'Bah! but he'll never get up by daybreak. He'll oversleep himself, especially after tonight's supper. The other will be before him. Oh, my poor head, you've suffered too much to fail in the end!'

Josephine reappeared to offer to remove her mistress's things. The latter, in her desire to reassure herself, asked the first question that occurred to her.

'Was M. le Vicomte alone?'

'No madame; another gentleman was with him – M. de Saulges, I think. They came in a hack, with two portmanteaus.'

Though I have judged best, hitherto, often from an exaggerated fear of trenching on the ground of fiction, to tell you what this poor lady did and said, rather than what she thought, I may disclose what passed in her mind now:

'Is he a coward? is he going to leave me? or is he simply going to pass these last hours in play and drink? He might have stayed with me. Ah! my friend, you do little for me, who do so much for you; who commit murder, and – Heaven help me! – suicide for you!.... But I suppose he knows best. At all events, he will make a night of it.'

When the cook came in late that evening, Josephine, who had sat up for her, said:

'You've no idea how Madame is looking. She's ten years older since this morning. Holy mother! what a day this has been for her!'

'Wait till tomorrow,' said the oracular Valentine.

Later, when the women went up to bed in the attic, they saw a light under Hortense's door, and during the night Josephine, whose chamber was above Madame's, and who couldn't sleep (for sympathy, let us say), heard movements beneath her, which told that her mistress was even more wakeful than she.

#### IV

There was considerable bustle around the *Armorique* as she anchored outside the harbor of H–, in the early dawn of the following day. A gentleman, with an overcoat, walking stick, and small valise, came alongside in a little fishing boat, and got leave to go aboard.

'Is M. Bernier here?' he asked of one of the officers, the first man he met.

'I fancy he's gone ashore, sir. There was a boatman inquiring for him a few minutes ago, and I think he carried him off.'

M. de Meyrau reflected a moment. Then he crossed over to the other side of the vessel, looking landward. Leaning over the bulwarks he saw an empty boat moored to the ladder which ran up the vessel's side.

'That's a town boat, isn't it?' he said to one of the hands standing by.

'Yes, sir.'

'Where's the master?'

'I suppose he'll be here in a moment. I saw him speaking to one of the officers just now.'

De Meyrau descended the ladder, and seated himself at the stern of the boat. As the sailor he had just addressed was handing down his bag, a face with a red cap looked over the bulwarks.

'Hullo, my man!' cried De Meyrau, 'is this your boat?'

'Yes, sir, at your service,' answered the red cap, coming to the top of the ladder, and looking hard at the gentleman's stick and portmanteau.

'Can you take me to town, to Madame Bernier's, at the end of the new quay?'

'Certainly, sir,' said the boatman, scuttling down the ladder, 'you're just the gentleman I want.'

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<sup>2</sup> *savoir faire* = self-control, quick wit, endurance (French)

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An hour later Hortense Bernier came out of the house, and began to walk slowly through the garden toward the terrace which overlooked the water. The servants, when they came down at an early hour, had found her up and dressed, or rather, apparently, not undressed, for she wore the same clothes as the evening before.

'*Tiens!*' exclaimed Josephine, after seeing her, 'Madame gained ten years yesterday; she has gained ten more during the night.'

When Madame Bernier reached the middle of the garden she halted, and stood for a moment motionless, listening. The next, she uttered a great cry. For she saw a figure emerge from below the terrace, and come limping toward her with outstretched arms.

## **The Ghost of the Marchioness of Appleford (Jerome K. Jerome)**

This is the story, among others, of Henry the waiter – or, as he now prefers to call himself, Henri – told to me in the long dining-room of the Riffel Alp Hotel, where I once stayed for a melancholy week 'between seasons,' sharing the echoing emptiness of the place with two maiden ladies, who talked all day to one another in frightened whispers. Henry's construction I have discarded for its amateurishness; his method being generally to commence a story at the end, and then, working backwards to the beginning, wind up with the middle. But in all other respects I have endeavoured to retain his method, which was individual; and this, I think, is the story as he would have told it to me himself, had he told it in this order:

My first place – well to be honest, it was a coffee shop in the Mile End Road – I'm not ashamed of it. We all have our beginnings. Young 'Kipper,' as we called him – he had no name of his own, not that he knew of anyhow, and that seemed to fit him down to the ground – had fixed his pitch just outside, between our door and the music hall at the corner; and sometimes, when I might happen to have a bit on, I'd get a paper from him, and pay him for it, when the governor was not about, with a mug of coffee, and odds and ends that the other customers had left on their plates – an arrangement that suited both of us. He was just about as sharp as they make boys, even in the Mile End Road, which is saying a good deal; and now and then, spying around among the right sort, and keeping his ears open, he would put me up to a good thing, and I would tip him a bob or a tanner as the case might be. He was the sort that gets on – you know.

One day in he walks, for all the world as if the show belonged to him, with a young imp of a girl on his arm, and down they sits at one of the tables.

'Garson,' he calls out, 'what's the menoo to-day?'

'The menoo to-day,' I says, 'is that you get outside 'fore I clip you over the ear, and that you take that back and put it where you found it;' meaning o' course, the kid.

She was a pretty little thing, even then, in spite of the dirt, with those eyes like saucers, and red hair. It used to be called 'carrots' in those days. Now all the swells have taken it up – or as near as they can get to it – and it's auburn.

'Enery,' he replied to me, without so much as turning a hair, 'I'm afraid you're forgetting your position. When I'm on the kerb shouting "Speshul!" and you comes to me with yer 'a'penny in yer 'and, you're master an' I'm man. When I comes into your shop to order refreshments, and to pay for 'em, I'm boss. Savey? You can bring me a rasher and two eggs, and see that they're this season's. The lidy will have a full-sized haddick and a cocoa.'

Well, there was justice in what he said. He always did have sense, and I took his order. You don't often see anybody put it away like that girl did. I took it she hadn't had a square meal for many a long day. She polished off a ninepenny haddick, skin and all, and after that she had two penny rashers, with six slices of bread and butter – 'doorsteps,' as we used to call them – and two half pints of cocoa, which is a meal in itself the way we used to make it. 'Kipper' must have had a

bit of luck that day. He couldn't have urged her on more had it been a free feed.

'Ave an egg,' he suggested, the moment the rashers had disappeared. 'One of these eggs will just about finish yer.'

'I don't really think as I can,' says she, after considering like.

'Well, you know your own strength,' he answers. 'Perhaps you're best without it. Speshully if yer not used to 'igh living.'

I was glad to see them finish, 'cause I was beginning to get a bit nervous about the coin, but he paid up right enough, and giv me a ha'penny for myself.

That was the first time I ever waited upon those two, but it wasn't to be the last by many a long chalk, as you'll see. He often used to bring her in after that. Who she was and what she was he didn't know, and she didn't know, so there was a pair of them. She'd run away from an old woman down Limehouse way, who used to beat her. That was all she could tell him. He got her a lodging with an old woman, who had an attic in the same house where he slept – when it would run to that – taught her to yell 'Speshul!' and found a corner for her. There ain't room for boys and girls in the Mile End Road. They're either kids down there or they're grown-ups. 'Kipper' and 'Carrots' – as we named her – looked upon themselves as sweethearts, though he couldn't have been more than fifteen, and she barely twelve; and that he was regular gone on her anyone could see with half an eye. Not that he was soft about it – that wasn't his style. He kept her in order, and she had just to mind, which I guess was a good thing for her, and when she wanted it he'd use his hand on her, and make no bones about it. That's the way among that class. They up and give the old woman a friendly clump, just as you or me would swear at the missus, or fling a boot-jack at her. They don't mean anything more.

I left the coffee shop later on for a place in the city, and saw nothing more of them for five years. When I did it was at a restaurant in Oxford Street – one of those amateur shows run by a lot of women, who know nothing about the business, and spend the whole day gossiping and flirting – 'love-shops,' I call 'em. There was a yellow-haired lady manageress who never heard you when you spoke to her, 'cause she was always trying to hear what some seedy old fool would be whispering to her across the counter. Then there were waitresses, and their notion of waiting was to spend an hour talking to a twopenny cup of coffee, and to look haughty and insulted whenever anybody as really wanted something ventured to ask for it. A frizzle-haired cashier used to make love all day out of her pigeon-hole with the two box-office boys from the Oxford Music Hall, who took it turn and turn about. Sometimes she'd leave off to take a customer's money, and sometimes she wouldn't. I've been to some rummy places in my time; and a waiter ain't the blind owl as he's supposed to be. But never in my life have I seen so much love-making, not all at once, as used to go on in that place. It was a dismal, gloomy sort of hole, and spoony couples seemed to scent it out by instinct, and would spend hours there over a pot of tea and assorted pastry. 'Idyllic,' some folks would have thought it: I used to get the fair dismals watching it. There was one girl – a weird-looking creature, with red eyes and long thin hands, that gave you the creeps to look at. She'd come in regular with her young man, a pale-faced nervous sort of chap, at three o'clock every afternoon. Theirs was the funniest love-making I ever saw. She'd pinch him under the table, and run pins into him, and he'd sit with his eyes glued on her as if she'd been a steaming dish of steak and onions and he a starving beggar the other side of the window. A strange story that was – as I came to learn it later on. I'll tell you that, one day.

I'd been engaged for the 'heavy work,' but as the heaviest order I ever heard given there was for a cold ham and chicken, which I had to slip out for to the nearest cook-shop, I must have been chiefly useful from an ornamental point of view.

I'd been there about a fortnight, and was feeling pretty sick of it, when in walked young 'Kipper.' I didn't know him at first, he'd changed so. He was swinging a silver-mounted crutch stick, which was the kind that was fashionable just then, and was dressed in a showy check suit and a white hat. But the thing that struck me most was his gloves. I suppose I hadn't improved quite so much myself, for he knew me in a moment, and held out his hand.

'What, 'Enery!' he says, 'you've moved on, then!'

‘Yes,’ I says, shaking hands with him, ‘and I could move on again from this shop without feeling sad. But you’ve got on a bit?’ I says.

‘So-so,’ he says, ‘I’m a journalist.’

‘Oh,’ I says, ‘what sort?’ for I’d seen a good many of that lot during six months I’d spent at a house in Fleet Street, and their get-up hadn’t sumptuousness about it, so to speak. ‘Kipper’s’ rig-out must have totted up to a tidy little sum. He had a diamond pin in his tie that must have cost somebody fifty quid, if not him.

‘Well,’ he answers, ‘I don’t wind out the confidential advice to old Beaky, and that sort of thing. I do the tips, yer know. “Cap’n Kit,” that’s my name.’

‘What, the Captain Kit?’ I says. O’ course I’d heard of him.

‘Be’old!’ he says.

‘Oh, it’s easy enough,’ he goes on. ‘Some of ’em’s bound to come out right, and when one does, you take it from me, our paper mentions the fact. And when it is a wrong ’un – well, a man can’t always be shouting about himself, can ’e?’

He ordered a cup of coffee. He said he was waiting for someone, and we got to chatting about old times.

‘How’s Carrots?’ I asked.

‘Miss Caroline Trevelyan,’ he answered, ‘is doing well.’

‘Oh,’ I says, ‘you’ve found out her fam’ly name, then?’

‘We’ve found out one or two things about that lidy,’ he replies. ‘D’yer remember ’er dancing?’

‘I have seen her flinging her petticoats about outside the shop, when the copper wasn’t by, if that’s what you mean,’ I says.

‘That’s what I mean,’ he answers. ‘That’s all the rage now, “skirt-dancing” they calls it. She’s a-coming out at the Oxford to-morrow. It’s ’er I’m waiting for. She’s a-coming on, I tell you she is,’ he says.

‘Shouldn’t wonder,’ says I; ‘that was her disposition.’

‘And there’s another thing we’ve found out about ’er,’ he says. He leant over the table, and whispered it, as if he was afraid that anybody else might hear: ‘she’s got a voice.’

‘Yes,’ I says, ‘some women have.’

‘Ah,’ he says, ‘but ’er voice is the sort of voice yer want to listen to.’

‘Oh,’ I says, ‘that’s its speciality, is it?’

‘That’s it, sonny,’ he replies.

She came in a little later. I’d a’ known her anywhere for her eyes, and her red hair, in spite of her being that clean you might have eaten your dinner out of her hand. And as for her clothes! Well, I’ve mixed a good deal with the toffs in my time, and I’ve seen duchesses dressed more showily and maybe more expensively, but her clothes seemed to be just a framework to show her up. She was a beauty, you can take it from me; and it’s not to be wondered that the La-De-Das<sup>1</sup> were round her when they did see her, like flies round an open jam tart.

Before three months were up she was the rage of London – leastways of the music-hall part of it – with her portrait in all the shop windows, and interviews with her in half the newspapers. It seems she was the daughter of an officer who had died in India when she was a baby, and the niece of a bishop somewhere in Australia. He was dead too. There didn’t seem to be any of her ancestry as wasn’t dead, but they had all been swells. She had been educated privately, she had, by a relative; and had early displayed an aptitude for dancing, though her friends at first had much opposed her going upon the stage. There was a lot more of it – you know the sort of thing. Of course, she was a connection of one of our best known judges – they all are – and she merely acted in order to support a grandmother, or an invalid sister, I forget which. A wonderful talent for swallowing, these newspaper chaps has, some of ’em!

‘Kipper’ never touched a penny of her money, but if he had been her agent at twenty-five per cent. he couldn’t have worked harder, and he just kept up the hum about her, till if you didn’t want

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<sup>1</sup> **La-De-Das** – pretentious people

to hear anything more about Caroline Trevelyan, your only chance would have been to lie in bed, and never look at a newspaper. It was Caroline Trevelyan at Home, Caroline Trevelyan at Brighton, Caroline Trevelyan and the Shah of Persia, Caroline Trevelyan and the Old Apple-woman. When it wasn't Caroline Trevelyan herself it would be Caroline Trevelyan's dog as would be doing something out of the common, getting himself lost or summoned or drowned – it didn't matter much what.

I moved from Oxford Street to the new 'Horseshoe' that year – it had just been rebuilt – and there I saw a good deal of them, for they came in to lunch there or supper pretty regular. Young 'Kipper' – or the 'Captain' as everybody called him – gave out that he was her half-brother.

'I'd to be some sort of a relation, you see,' he explained to me. 'I'd a' been 'er brother out and out; that would have been simpler, only the family likeness wasn't strong enough. Our styles o' beauty ain't similar.' They certainly wasn't.

'Why don't you marry her?' I says, 'and have done with it?'

He looked thoughtful at that. 'I did think of it,' he says, 'and I know, jolly well, that if I 'ad suggested it 'fore she'd found herself, she'd have agreed, but it don't seem quite fair now.'

'How d'ye mean fair?' I says.

'Well, not fair to 'er,' he says. 'I've got on all right, in a small way; but she – well, she can just 'ave 'er pick of the nobs. There's one on 'em as I've made inquiries about. 'E'll be a dook, if a kid pegs out as is expected to, and anyhow 'e'll be a markis, and 'e means the straight thing – no error. It ain't fair for me to stand in 'er way.'

'Well,' I says, 'you know your own business, but it seems to me she wouldn't have much way to stand in if it hadn't been for you.'

'Oh, that's all right,' he says. 'I'm fond enough of the gell, but I shan't clamour for a tombstone with wiolets, even if she ain't ever Mrs. Capt'n Kit. Business is business; and I ain't going to queer 'er pitch for 'er.'

I've often wondered what she'd a' said, if he'd up and put the case to her plain, for she was a good sort; but, naturally enough, her head was a bit swelled, and she'd read so much rot about herself in the papers that she'd got at last to half believe some of it. The thought of her connection with the well-known judge seemed to hamper her at times, and she wasn't quite so chummy with 'Kipper' as used to be the case in the Mile End Road days, and he wasn't the sort as is slow to see a thing.

One day when he was having lunch by himself, and I was waiting on him, he says, raising his glass to his lips, 'Well, 'Enery, here's luck to yer! I won't be seeing you agen for some time.'

'Oh,' I says. 'What's up now?'

'I am,' he says, 'or rather my time is. I'm off to Africa.'

'Oh,' I says, 'and what about--'

'That's all right,' he interrupts. 'I've fixed up that – a treat. Truth, that's why I'm going.'

I thought at first he meant she was going with him.

'No,' he says, 'she's going to be the Duchess of Ridingshire with the kind consent o' the kid I spoke about. If not, she'll be the Marchioness of Appleford. 'E's doing the square thing. There's going to be a quiet marriage to-morrow at the Registry Office, and then I'm off.'

'What need for you to go?' I says.

'No need,' he says; 'it's a fancy o' mine. You see, me gone, there's nothing to 'amper 'er – nothing to interfere with 'er settling down as a quiet, respectable toff. With a 'alf-brother, who's always got to be spry with some fake about 'is lineage and 'is ancestral estates, and who drops 'is 'h's,' complications are sooner or later bound to a-rise. Me out of it – everything's simple. Savey?'

Well, that's just how it happened. Of course, there was a big row when the family heard of it, and a smart lawyer was put up to try and undo the thing. No expense was spared, you bet; but it was all no go. Nothing could be found out against her. She just sat tight and said nothing. So the thing had to stand. They went and lived quietly in the country and abroad for a year or two, and then folks forgot a bit, and they came back to London. I often used to see her name in print, and then the papers always said as how she was charming and graceful and beautiful, so I suppose the family had

made up its mind to get used to her.

One evening in she comes to the Savoy. My wife put me up to getting that job, and a good job it is, mind you, when you know your way about. I'd never have had the cheek to try for it, if it hadn't been for the missis. She's a clever one – she is. I did a good day's work when I married her.

'You shave off that moustache of yours – it ain't an ornament,' she says to me, 'and chance it. Don't get attempting the lingo. Keep to the broken English, and put in a shrug or two. You can manage that all right.'

I followed her tip. Of course the manager saw through me, but I got in a 'Oui, monsieur' now and again, and they, being short handed at the time, could not afford to be strict, I suppose. Anyhow I got took on, and there I stopped for the whole season, and that was the making of me.

Well, as I was saying, in she comes to the supper rooms, and toffy enough she looked in her diamonds and furs, and as for haughtiness there wasn't a born Marchioness she couldn't have given points to. She comes straight up to my table and sits down. Her husband was with her, but he didn't seem to have much to say, except to repeat her orders. Of course I looked as if I'd never set eyes on her before in all my life, though all the time she was a-pecking at the mayonnaise and a-sipping at the Giessler, I was thinking of the coffee-shop and of the ninepenny haddick and the pint of cocoa.

'Go and fetch my cloak,' she says to him after a while. 'I am cold.'

And up he gets and goes out.

She never moved her head, and spoke as though she was merely giving me some order, and I stands behind her chair, respectful like, and answers according to the same tip,

'Ever hear from "Kipper"?' she says to me.

'I have had one or two letters from him, your ladyship,' I answers.

'Oh, stow that,' she says. 'I am sick of "your ladyship." Talk English; I don't hear much of it. How's he getting on?'

'Seems to be doing himself well,' I says. 'He's started an hotel, and is regular raking it in, he tells me.'

'Wish I was behind the bar with him!' says she.

'Why, don't it work then?' I asks.

'It's just like a funeral with the corpse left out,' says she. 'Serves me jolly well right for being a fool!'

The Marquis, he comes back with her cloak at that moment, and I says: 'Certainement, madame,' and gets clear.

I often used to see her there, and when a chance occurred she would talk to me. It seemed to be a relief to her to use her own tongue, but it made me nervous at times for fear someone would hear her.

Then one day I got a letter from 'Kipper' to say he was over for a holiday and was stopping at Morley's, and asking me to look him up.

He had not changed much except to get a bit fatter and more prosperous-looking. Of course, we talked about her ladyship, and I told him what she said.

'Rum things, women,' he says; 'never know their own minds.'

'Oh, they know them all right when they get there,' I says. 'How could she tell what being a Marchioness was like till she'd tried it?'

'Pity,' he says, musing like. 'I reckoned it the very thing she'd tumble to. I only come over to get a sight of 'er, and to satisfy myself as she was getting along all right. Seems I'd better a' stopped away.'

'You ain't ever thought of marrying yourself?' I asks.

'Yes, I have,' he says. 'It's slow for a man over thirty with no wife and kids to bustle him, you take it from me, and I ain't the talent for the Don Juan fake.'

'You're like me,' I says, 'a day's work, and then a pipe by your own fireside with your slippers on. That's my swarry. You'll find someone as will suit you before long.'

'No I shan't,' says he. 'I've come across a few as might, if it 'adn't been for 'er. It's like the toffs as come out our way. They've been brought up on 'ris de veau a la financier,' and sich like,



and it just spoils 'em for the bacon and greens.'

I give her the office the next time I see her, and they met accidental like in Kensington Gardens<sup>1</sup> early one morning. What they said to one another I don't know, for he sailed that same evening, and, it being the end of the season, I didn't see her ladyship again for a long while.

When I did it was at the Hotel Bristol in Paris, and she was in widow's weeds, the Marquis having died eight months before. He never dropped into that dukedom, the kid turning out healthier than was expected, and hanging on; so she was still only a Marchioness, and her fortune, though tidy, was nothing very big – not as that class reckons. By luck I was told off to wait on her, she having asked for someone as could speak English. She seemed glad to see me and to talk to me.

'Well,' I says, 'I suppose you'll be bossing that bar in Capetown<sup>2</sup> now before long?'

'Talk sense,' she answers. 'How can the Marchioness of Appleford marry a hotel keeper?'

'Why not,' I says, 'if she fancies him? What's the good of being a Marchioness if you can't do what you like?'

'That's just it,' she snaps out; 'you can't. It would not be doing the straight thing by the family. No,' she says, 'I've spent their money, and I'm spending it now. They don't love me, but they shan't say as I have disgraced them. They've got their feelings same as I've got mine.'

'Why not chuck the money?' I says. 'They'll be glad enough to get it back,' they being a poor lot, as I heard her say.

'How can I?' she says. 'It's a life interest. As long as I live I've got to have it, and as long as I live I've got to remain the Marchioness of Appleford.'

She finishes her soup, and pushes the plate away from her. 'As long as I live,' she says, talking to herself.

'By Jove!' she says, starting up 'why not?'

'Why not what?' I says.

'Nothing,' she answers. 'Get me an African telegraph form, and be quick about it!'

I fetched it for her, and she wrote it and gave it to the porter then and there; and, that done, she sat down and finished her dinner.

She was a bit short with me after that; so I judged it best to keep my own place.

In the morning she got an answer that seemed to excite her, and that afternoon she left; and the next I heard of her was a paragraph in the newspaper, headed – 'Death of the Marchioness of Appleford. Sad accident.' It seemed she had gone for a row on one of the Italian lakes with no one but a boatman. A squall had come on, and the boat had capsized. The boatman had swum ashore, but he had been unable to save his passenger, and her body had never been recovered. The paper reminded its readers that she had formerly been the celebrated tragic actress, Caroline Trevelyan, daughter of the well-known Indian judge of that name.

It gave me the blues for a day or two – that bit of news. I had known her from a baby as you might say, and had taken an interest in her. You can call it silly, but hotels and restaurants seemed to me less interesting now there was no chance of ever seeing her come into one again.

I went from Paris to one of the smaller hotels in Venice. The missis thought I'd do well to pick up a bit of Italian, and perhaps she fancied Venice for herself. That's one of the advantages of our profession. You can go about. It was a second-rate sort of place, and one evening, just before lighting-up time, I had the *salle-à-manger* all to myself, and had just taken up a paper when I hears the door open, and I turns round.

I saw 'her' coming down the room. There was no mistaking her. She wasn't that sort.

I sat with my eyes coming out of my head till she was close to me, and then I says:

'Carrots!' I says, in a whisper like. That was the name that come to me.

'"Carrots" it is,' she says, and down she sits just opposite to me, and then she laughs.

I could not speak, I could not move, I was that took aback, and the more frightened I looked the more she laughed till 'Kipper' comes into the room. There was nothing ghostly about him. I never see a man look more as if he had backed the winner.

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<sup>1</sup> **Kensington Gardens** – a park in central London to the west of Hyde Park

<sup>2</sup> **Capetown** – a city and seaport in South Africa

‘Why, it’s ’Enery,’ he says; and he gives me a slap on the back, as knocks the life into me again.

‘I heard you was dead,’ I says, still staring at her. ‘I read it in the paper – “death of the Marchioness of Appleford.”’

‘That’s all right,’ she says. ‘The Marchioness of Appleford is as dead as a door-nail<sup>2</sup>, and a good job too. Mrs. Captain Kit’s my name, née “Carrots.”’

‘You said as ’ow I’d find someone to suit me ’fore long,’ says ‘Kipper’ to me, ‘and, by Jove! you were right; I ’ave. I was waiting till I found something equal to her ladyship, and I’d ’ave ’ad to wait a long time, I’m thinking, if I ’adn’t come across this one ‘ere’; and he tucks her up under his arm just as I remember his doing that day he first brought her into the coffee-shop, and Lord, what a long time ago that was!

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That is the story, among others, told me by Henry, the waiter. I have, at his request, substituted artificial names for real ones. For Henry tells me that at Capetown Captain Kit’s First-class Family and Commercial Hotel still runs, and that the landlady is still a beautiful woman with fine eyes and red hair, who might almost be taken for a duchess – until she opens her mouth, when her accent is found to be still slightly reminiscent of the Mile End Road.

## **The White Heron (Sarah Orne Jewett)**

### **I**

The woods were already filled with shadows one June evening, just before eight o’clock, though a bright sunset still glimmered faintly among the trunks of the trees. A little girl was driving home her cow, a plodding, dilatory, provoking creature in her behavior, but a valued companion for all that. They were going away from whatever light there was, and striking deep into the woods, but their feet were familiar with the path, and it was no matter whether their eyes could see it or not.

There was hardly a night the summer through when the old cow could be found waiting at the pasture bars; on the contrary, it was her greatest pleasure to hide herself away among the high huckleberry bushes, and though she wore a loud bell she had made the discovery that if one stood perfectly still it would not ring. So Sylvia had to hunt for her until she found her, and call Co’! Co’! with never an answering Moo, until her childish patience was quite spent. If the creature had not given good milk and plenty of it, the case would have seemed very different to her owners. Besides, Sylvia had all the time there was, and very little use to make of it. Sometimes in pleasant weather it was a consolation to look upon the cow’s pranks as an intelligent attempt to play hide and seek, and as the child had no playmates she lent herself to this amusement with a good deal of zest. Though this chase had been so long that the wary animal herself had given an unusual signal of her whereabouts, Sylvia had only laughed when she came upon Mistress Moolly at the swamp-side, and urged her affectionately homeward with a twig of birch leaves. The old cow was not inclined to wander farther, she even turned in the right direction for once as they left the pasture, and stepped along the road at a good pace. She was quite ready to be milked now, and seldom stopped to browse. Sylvia wondered what her grandmother would say because they were so late. It was a great while since she had left home at half-past five o’clock, but everybody knew the difficulty of making this errand a short one. Mrs. Tilley had chased the horned torment too many summer evenings herself to blame anyone else for lingering, and was only thankful as she waited that she had Sylvia, nowadays, to give such valuable assistance. The good woman suspected that Sylvia loitered occasionally on her own account; there never was such a child for straying about out-of-doors since the world was made! Everybody said that it was a good change for a little maid who had tried to grow for eight years in a crowded manufacturing town, but, as for Sylvia herself, it seemed as if she

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<sup>2</sup> as dead as a door-nail – *idiom* absolutely dead

never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm. She thought often with wistful compassion of a wretched geranium that belonged to a town neighbor.

‘Afraid of folks,’ old Mrs. Tilley said to herself, with a smile, after she had made the unlikely choice of Sylvia from her daughter’s houseful of children, and was returning to the farm. “‘Afraid of folks,” they said! I guess she won’t be troubled no great with ’em up to the old place!’ When they reached the door of the lonely house and stopped to unlock it, and the cat came to purr loudly, and rub against them, a deserted pussy, indeed, but fat with young robins, Sylvia whispered that this was a beautiful place to live in, and she never should wish to go home.

The companions followed the shady wood-road, the cow taking slow steps and the child very fast ones. The cow stopped long at the brook to drink, as if the pasture were not half a swamp, and Sylvia stood still and waited, letting her bare feet cool themselves in the shoal water, while the great twilight moths struck softly against her. She waded on through the brook as the cow moved away, and listened to the thrushes with a heart that beat fast with pleasure. There was a stirring in the great boughs overhead. They were full of little birds and beasts that seemed to be wide awake, and going about their world, or else saying good-night to each other in sleepy twitters. Sylvia herself felt sleepy as she walked along. However, it was not much farther to the house, and the air was soft and sweet. She was not often in the woods so late as this, and it made her feel as if she were a part of the gray shadows and the moving leaves. She was just thinking how long it seemed since she first came to the farm a year ago, and wondering if everything went on in the noisy town just the same as when she was there, the thought of the great red-faced boy who used to chase and frighten her made her hurry along the path to escape from the shadow of the trees.

Suddenly this little woods-girl is horror-stricken to hear a clear whistle not very far away. Not a bird’s-whistle, which would have a sort of friendliness, but a boy’s whistle, determined, and somewhat aggressive. Sylvia left the cow to whatever sad fate might await her, and stepped discreetly aside into the bushes, but she was just too late. The enemy had discovered her, and called out in a very cheerful and persuasive tone, ‘Halloa, little girl, how far is it to the road?’ and trembling Sylvia answered almost inaudibly, ‘A good ways.’ She did not dare to look boldly at the tall young man, who carried a gun over his shoulder, but she came out of her bush and again followed the cow, while he walked alongside.

‘I have been hunting for some birds,’ the stranger said kindly, ‘and I have lost my way, and need a friend very much. Don’t be afraid,’ he added gallantly. ‘Speak up and tell me what your name is, and whether you think I can spend the night at your house, and go out gunning early in the morning.’

Sylvia was more alarmed than before. Would not her grandmother consider her much to blame? But who could have foreseen such an accident as this? It did not seem to be her fault, and she hung her head as if the stem of it were broken, but managed to answer ‘Sylvy,’ with much effort when her companion again asked her name.

Mrs. Tilley was standing in the doorway when the trio came into view. The cow gave a loud moo by way of explanation.

‘Yes, you’d better speak up for yourself, you old trial! Where’d she tucked herself away this time, Sylvy?’ But Sylvia kept an awed silence; she knew by instinct that her grandmother did not comprehend the gravity of the situation. She must be mistaking the stranger for one of the farmer-lads of the region. The young man stood his gun beside the door, and dropped a lumpy game-bag beside it; then he bade Mrs. Tilley good-evening, and repeated his wayfarer’s story, and asked if he could have a night’s lodging.

‘Put me anywhere you like,’ he said. ‘I must be off early in the morning, before day; but I am very hungry, indeed. You can give me some milk at any rate, that’s plain.’

‘Dear sakes, yes,’ responded the hostess, whose long slumbering hospitality seemed to be easily awakened. ‘You might fare better if you went out to the main road a mile or so, but you’re welcome to what we’ve got. I’ll milk right off, and you make yourself at home. You can sleep on husks or feathers,’ she proffered graciously. ‘I raised them all myself. There’s good pasturing for geese just below here towards the ma’sh. Now step round and set a plate for the gentleman, Sylvy!’

And Sylvia promptly stepped. She was glad to have something to do, and she was hungry herself.

It was a surprise to find so clean and comfortable a little dwelling in this New England wilderness. The young man had known the horrors of its most primitive housekeeping, and the dreary squalor of that level of society which does not rebel at the companionship of hens. This was the best thrift of an old-fashioned farmstead, though on such a small scale that it seemed like a hermitage. He listened eagerly to the old woman's quaint talk, he watched Sylvia's pale face and shining gray eyes with ever growing enthusiasm, and insisted that this was the best supper he had eaten for a month, and afterward the new-made friends sat down in the door-way together while the moon came up.

Soon it would be berry-time, and Sylvia was a great help at picking. The cow was a good milker, though a plaguy thing to keep track of, the hostess gossiped frankly, adding presently that she had buried four children, so Sylvia's mother, and a son (who might be dead) in California were all the children she had left. 'Dan, my boy, was a great hand to go gunning,' she explained sadly. 'I never wanted for pa'tridges or gray squer'ls while he was to home. He's been a great wand'rer, I expect, and he's no hand to write letters. There, I don't blame him, I'd ha' seen the world myself if it had been so I could.

'Sylvy takes after him,' the grandmother continued affectionately, after a minute's pause. 'There ain't a foot o' ground she don't know her way over, and the wild creatures counts her one o' themselves. Squer'ls she'll tame to come an' feed right out o' her hands, and all sorts o' birds. Last winter she got the jay-birds to bangeing here, and I believe she'd 'a' scanted herself of her own meals to have plenty to throw out amongst 'em, if I hadn't kep' watch. Anything but crows, I tell her, I'm willin' to help support, – though Dan he had a tamed one o' them that did seem to have reason same as folks. It was round here a good spell after he went away. Dan an' his father they didn't hitch, – but he never held up his head ag'in after Dan had dared him an' gone off.'

The guest did not notice this hint of family sorrows in his eager interest in something else.

'So Sylvy knows all about birds, does she?' he exclaimed, as he looked round at the little girl who sat, very demure but increasingly sleepy, in the moonlight. 'I am making a collection of birds myself. I have been at it ever since I was a boy.' (Mrs. Tilley smiled.) 'There are two or three very rare ones I have been hunting for these five years. I mean to get them on my own ground if they can be found.'

'Do you cage 'em up?' asked Mrs. Tilley doubtfully, in response to this enthusiastic announcement.

'Oh no, they're stuffed and preserved, dozens and dozens of them,' said the ornithologist, 'and I have shot or snared every one myself. I caught a glimpse of a white heron a few miles from here on Saturday, and I have followed it in this direction. They have never been found in this district at all. The little white heron, it is,' and he turned again to look at Sylvia with the hope of discovering that the rare bird was one of her acquaintances. But Sylvia was watching a hop-toad in the narrow footpath.

'You would know the heron if you saw it,' the stranger continued eagerly. 'A queer tall white bird with soft feathers and long thin legs. And it would have a nest perhaps in the top of a high tree, made of sticks, something like a hawk's nest.'

Sylvia's heart gave a wild beat; she knew that strange white bird, and had once stolen softly near where it stood in some bright green swamp grass, away over at the other side of the woods. There was an open place where the sunshine always seemed strangely yellow and hot, where tall, nodding rushes grew, and her grandmother had warned her that she might sink in the soft black mud underneath and never be heard of more. Not far beyond were the salt marshes just this side the sea itself, which Sylvia wondered and dreamed much about, but never had seen, whose great voice could sometimes be heard above the noise of the woods on stormy nights.

'I can't think of anything I should like so much as to find that heron's nest,' the handsome stranger was saying. 'I would give ten dollars to anybody who could show it to me,' he added desperately, 'and I mean to spend my whole vacation hunting for it if need be. Perhaps it was only migrating, or had been chased out of its own region by some bird of prey.'

Mrs. Tilley gave amazed attention to all this, but Sylvia still watched the toad, not divining, as she might have done at some calmer time, that the creature wished to get to its hole under the door-step, and was much hindered by the unusual spectators at that hour of the evening. No amount of thought, that night, could decide how many wished-for treasures the ten dollars, so lightly spoken of, would buy. The next day the young sportsman hovered about the woods, and Sylvia kept him company, having lost her first fear of the friendly lad, who proved to be most kind and sympathetic. He told her many things about the birds and what they knew and where they lived and what they did with themselves. And he gave her a jack-knife which she thought as great a treasure as if she were a desert-islander. All day long he did not once make her troubled or afraid except when he brought down some unsuspecting singing creature from its bough. Sylvia would have liked him vastly better without his gun; she could not understand why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much. But as the day waned, Sylvia still watched the young man with loving admiration. She had never seen anybody so charming and delightful; the woman's heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled by a dream of love. Some premonition of that great power stirred and swayed these young creatures who traversed the solemn woodlands with soft-footed silent care. They stopped to listen to a bird's song; they pressed forward again eagerly, parting the branches, – speaking to each other rarely and in whispers; the young man going first and Sylvia following, fascinated, a few steps behind, with her gray eyes dark with excitement.

She grieved because the longed-for white heron was elusive, but she did not lead the guest, she only followed, and there was no such thing as speaking first. The sound of her own unquestioned voice would have terrified her, – it was hard enough to answer yes or no when there was need of that. At last evening began to fall, and they drove the cow home together, and Sylvia smiled with pleasure when they came to the place where she heard the whistle and was afraid only the night before.

## II

Half a mile from home, at the farther edge of the woods, where the land was highest, a great pine-tree stood, the last of its generation. Whether it was left for a boundary mark, or for what reason, no one could say; the woodchoppers who had felled its mates were dead and gone long ago, and a whole forest of sturdy trees, pines and oaks and maples, had grown again. But the stately head of this old pine towered above them all and made a landmark for sea and shore miles and miles away. Sylvia knew it well. She had always believed that whoever climbed to the top of it could see the ocean; and the little girl had often laid her hand on the great rough trunk and looked up wistfully at those dark boughs that the wind always stirred, no matter how hot and still the air might be below. Now she thought of the tree with a new excitement, for why, if one climbed it at break of day, could not one see all the world, and easily discover from whence the white heron flew, and mark the place, and find the hidden nest?

What a spirit of adventure, what wild ambition! What fancied triumph and delight and glory for the later morning when she could make known the secret! It was almost too real and too great for the childish heart to bear.

All night the door of the little house stood open and the whippoorwills came and sang upon the very step. The young sportsman and his old hostess were sound asleep, but Sylvia's great design kept her broad awake and watching. She forgot to think of sleep. The short summer night seemed as long as the winter darkness, and at last when the whippoorwills ceased, and she was afraid the morning would after all come too soon, she stole out of the house and followed the pasture path through the woods, hastening toward the open ground beyond, listening with a sense of comfort and companionship to the drowsy twitter of a half-awakened bird, whose perch she had jarred in passing. Alas, if the great wave of human interest which flooded for the first time this dull little life should sweep away the satisfactions of an existence heart to heart with nature and the dumb life of the forest! There was the huge tree asleep yet in the paling moonlight, and small and silly Sylvia began with utmost bravery to mount to the top of it, with tingling, eager blood coursing the

channels of her whole frame, with her bare feet and fingers, that pinched and held like bird's claws to the monstrous ladder reaching up, up, almost to the sky itself. First she must mount the white oak tree that grew alongside, where she was almost lost among the dark branches and the green leaves heavy and wet with dew; a bird fluttered off its nest, and a red squirrel ran to and fro and scolded pettishly at the harmless housebreaker. Sylvia felt her way easily. She had often climbed there, and knew that higher still one of the oak's upper branches chafed against the pine trunk, just where its lower boughs were set close together. There, when she made the dangerous pass from one tree to the other, the great enterprise would really begin.

She crept out along the swaying oak limb at last, and took the daring step across into the old pine-tree. The way was harder than she thought; she must reach far and hold fast, the sharp dry twigs caught and held her and scratched her like angry talons, the pitch made her thin little fingers clumsy and stiff as she went round and round the tree's great stem, higher and higher upward. The sparrows and robins in the woods below were beginning to wake and twitter to the dawn, yet it seemed much lighter there aloft in the pine-tree, and the child knew she must hurry if her project were to be of any use.

The tree seemed to lengthen itself out as she went up, and to reach farther and farther upward. It was like a great main-mast to the voyaging earth; it must truly have been amazed that morning through all its ponderous frame as it felt this determined spark of human spirit wending its way from higher branch to branch. Who knows how steadily the least twigs held themselves to advantage this light, weak creature on her way! The old pine must have loved his new dependent. More than all the hawks, and bats, and moths, and even the sweet voiced thrushes, was the brave, beating heart of the solitary gray-eyed child. And the tree stood still and frowned away the winds that June morning while the dawn grew bright in the east.

Sylvia's face was like a pale star, if one had seen it from the ground, when the last thorny bough was past, and she stood trembling and tired but wholly triumphant, high in the tree-top. Yes, there was the sea with the dawning sun making a golden dazzle over it, and toward that glorious east flew two hawks with slow-moving pinions. How low they looked in the air from that height when one had only seen them before far up, and dark against the blue sky. Their gray feathers were as soft as moths; they seemed only a little way from the tree, and Sylvia felt as if she too could go flying away among the clouds. Westward, the woodlands and farms reached miles and miles into the distance; here and there were church steeples, and white villages, truly it was a vast and awesome world

The birds sang louder and louder. At last the sun came up bewilderingly bright. Sylvia could see the white sails of ships out at sea, and the clouds that were purple and rose-colored and yellow at first began to fade away. Where was the white heron's nest in the sea of green branches, and was this wonderful sight and pageant of the world the only reward for having climbed to such a giddy height? Now look down again, Sylvia, where the green marsh is set among the shining birches and dark hemlocks; there where you saw the white heron once you will see him again; look, look! a white spot of him like a single floating feather comes up from the dead hemlock and grows larger, and rises, and comes close at last, and goes by the landmark pine with steady sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck and crested head. And wait! wait! do not move a foot or a finger, little girl, do not send an arrow of light and consciousness from your two eager eyes, for the heron has perched on a pine bough not far beyond yours, and cries back to his mate on the nest and plumes his feathers for the new day! The child gives a long sigh a minute later when a company of shouting cat-birds comes also to the tree, and vexed by their fluttering and lawlessness the solemn heron goes away. She knows his secret now, the wild, light, slender bird that floats and wavers, and goes back like an arrow presently to his home in the green world beneath. Then Sylvia, well satisfied, makes her perilous way down again, not daring to look far below the branch she stands on, ready to cry sometimes because her fingers ache and her lamed feet slip. Wondering over and over again what the stranger would say to her, and what he would think when she told him how to find his way straight to the heron's nest.

'Sylvy, Sylvy!' called the busy old grandmother again and again, but nobody answered, and

the small husk bed was empty and Sylvia had disappeared.

The guest waked from a dream, and remembering his day's pleasure hurried to dress himself that might it sooner begin. He was sure from the way the shy little girl looked once or twice yesterday that she had at least seen the white heron, and now she must really be made to tell. Here she comes now, paler than ever, and her worn old frock is torn and tattered, and smeared with pine pitch. The grandmother and the sportsman stand in the door together and question her, and the splendid moment has come to speak of the dead hemlock-tree by the green marsh.

But Sylvia does not speak after all, though the old grandmother fretfully rebukes her, and the young man's kind, appealing eyes are looking straight in her own. He can make them rich with money; he has promised it, and they are poor now. He is so well worth making happy, and he waits to hear the story she can tell.

No, she must keep silence! What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb? Has she been nine years growing and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake? The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away. Dear loyalty, that suffered a sharp pang as the guest went away disappointed later in the day that could have served and followed him and loved him as a dog loves! Many a night Sylvia heard the echo of his whistle haunting the pasture path as she came home with the loitering cow. She forgot even her sorrow at the sharp report of his gun and the sight of thrushes and sparrows dropping silent to the ground, their songs hushed and their pretty feathers stained and wet with blood. Were the birds better friends than their hunter might have been, – who can tell? Whatever treasures were lost to her, woodlands and summer-time, remember! Bring your gifts and graces and tell your secrets to this lonely country child!

## **The Boarding House (James Joyce)**

Mrs. Mooney was a butcher's daughter. She was a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself: a determined woman. She had married her father's foreman and opened a butcher's shop near Spring Gardens. But as soon as his father-in-law was dead Mr. Mooney began to go to the devil. He drank, plundered the till, ran headlong into debt. It was no use making him take the pledge: he was sure to break out again a few days after. By fighting his wife in the presence of customers and by buying bad meat he ruined his business. One night he went for his wife with the cleaver and she had to sleep in a neighbour's house.

After that they lived apart. She went to the priest and got a separation from him with care of the children. She would give him neither money nor food nor house-room; and so he was obliged to enlist himself as a sheriff's man. He was a shabby stooped little drunkard with a white face and a white moustache and white eyebrows, pencilled above his little eyes, which were veined and raw; and all day long he sat in the bailiff's room, waiting to be put on a job. Mrs. Mooney, who had taken what remained of her money out of the butcher business and set up a boarding house in Hardwicke Street, was a big imposing woman. Her house had a floating population made up of tourists from Liverpool and the Isle of Man and, occasionally, artistes from the music halls. Its resident population was made up of clerks from the city. She governed the house cunningly and firmly, knew when to give credit, when to be stern and when to let things pass. All the resident young men spoke of her as The Madam.

Mrs. Mooney's young men paid fifteen shillings a week for board and lodgings (beer or stout at dinner excluded). They shared in common tastes and occupations and for this reason they were very chummy with one another. They discussed with one another the chances of favourites and outsiders. Jack Mooney, the Madam's son, who was clerk to a commission agent in Fleet Street, had the reputation of being a hard case. He was fond of using soldiers' obscenities: usually he came home in the small hours. When he met his friends he had always a good one to tell them and he was

always sure to be on to a good thing – that is to say, a likely horse or a likely artiste. He was also handy with the mits and sang comic songs. On Sunday nights there would often be a reunion in Mrs. Mooney's front drawing-room. The music-hall artistes would oblige; and Sheridan played waltzes and polkas and vamped accompaniments. Polly Mooney, the Madam's daughter, would also sing. She sang:

I'm a . . naughty girl.  
You needn't sham:  
You know I am.

Polly was a slim girl of nineteen; she had light soft hair and a small full mouth. Her eyes, which were grey with a shade of green through them, had a habit of glancing upwards when she spoke with anyone, which made her look like a little perverse madonna. Mrs. Mooney had first sent her daughter to be a typist in a corn-factor's office but, as a disreputable sheriff's man used to come every other day to the office, asking to be allowed to say a word to his daughter, she had taken her daughter home again and set her to do housework. As Polly was very lively the intention was to give her the run of the young men. Besides, young men like to feel that there is a young woman not very far away. Polly, of course, flirted with the young men but Mrs. Mooney, who was a shrewd judge, knew that the young men were only passing the time away: none of them meant business. Things went on so for a long time and Mrs. Mooney began to think of sending Polly back to typewriting when she noticed that something was going on between Polly and one of the young men. She watched the pair and kept her own counsel.

Polly knew that she was being watched, but still her mother's persistent silence could not be misunderstood. There had been no open complicity between mother and daughter, no open understanding but, though people in the house began to talk of the affair, still Mrs. Mooney did not intervene. Polly began to grow a little strange in her manner and the young man was evidently perturbed. At last, when she judged it to be the right moment, Mrs. Mooney intervened. She dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat: and in this case she had made up her mind.

It was a bright Sunday morning of early summer, promising heat, but with a fresh breeze blowing. All the windows of the boarding house were open and the lace curtains ballooned gently towards the street beneath the raised sashes. The belfry of George's Church sent out constant peals and worshippers, singly or in groups, traversed the little circus before the church, revealing their purpose by their self-contained demeanour no less than by the little volumes in their gloved hands. Breakfast was over in the boarding house and the table of the breakfast-room was covered with plates on which lay yellow streaks of eggs with morsels of bacon-fat and bacon-rind. Mrs. Mooney sat in the straw arm-chair and watched the servant Mary remove the breakfast things. She made Mary collect the crusts and pieces of broken bread to help to make Tuesday's bread-pudding. When the table was cleared, the broken bread collected, the sugar and butter safe under lock and key, she began to reconstruct the interview which she had had the night before with Polly. Things were as she had suspected: she had been frank in her questions and Polly had been frank in her answers. Both had been somewhat awkward, of course. She had been made awkward by her not wishing to receive the news in too cavalier a fashion or to seem to have connived and Polly had been made awkward not merely because allusions of that kind always made her awkward but also because she did not wish it to be thought that in her wise innocence she had divined the intention behind her mother's tolerance.

Mrs. Mooney glanced instinctively at the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece as soon as she had become aware through her reverie that the bells of George's Church had stopped ringing. It was seventeen minutes past eleven: she would have lots of time to have the matter out with Mr. Doran and then catch short twelve at Marlborough Street. She was sure she would win. To begin with, she had all the weight of social opinion on her side: she was an outraged mother. She had allowed him to live beneath her roof, assuming that he was a man of honour and he had simply abused her hospitality. He was thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, so that youth could not be pleaded as his



excuse; nor could ignorance be his excuse since he was a man who had seen something of the world. He had simply taken advantage of Polly's youth and inexperience: that was evident. The question was: What reparation would he make?

There must be reparation made in such case. It is all very well for the man: he can go his ways as if nothing had happened, having had his moment of pleasure, but the girl has to bear the brunt. Some mothers would be content to patch up such an affair for a sum of money; she had known cases of it. But she would not do so. For her only one reparation could make up for the loss of her daughter's honour: marriage.

She counted all her cards again before sending Mary up to Doran's room to say that she wished to speak with him. She felt sure she would win. He was a serious young man, not rakish or loud-voiced like the others. If it had been Mr. Sheridan or Mr. Meade or Bantam Lyons her task would have been much harder. She did not think he would face publicity. All the lodgers in the house knew something of the affair; details had been invented by some. Besides, he had been employed for thirteen years in a great Catholic wine-merchant's office and publicity would mean for him, perhaps, the loss of his job. Whereas if he agreed all might be well. She knew he had a good screw for one thing and she suspected he had a bit of stuff put by.

Nearly the half-hour! She stood up and surveyed herself in the pier-glass. The decisive expression of her great florid face satisfied her and she thought of some mothers she knew who could not get their daughters off their hands.

Mr. Doran was very anxious indeed this Sunday morning. He had made two attempts to shave but his hand had been so unsteady that he had been obliged to desist. Three days' reddish beard fringed his jaws and every two or three minutes a mist gathered on his glasses so that he had to take them off and polish them with his pocket-handkerchief. The recollection of his confession of the night before was a cause of acute pain to him; the priest had drawn out every ridiculous detail of the affair and in the end had so magnified his sin that he was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation. The harm was done. What could he do now but marry her or run away? He could not brazen it out. The affair would be sure to be talked of and his employer would be certain to hear of it. Dublin is such a small city: everyone knows everyone else's business. He felt his heart leap warmly in his throat as he heard in his excited imagination old Mr. Leonard calling out in his rasping voice: 'Send Mr. Doran here, please.'

All his long years of service gone for nothing! All his industry and diligence thrown away! As a young man he had sown his wild oats, of course; he had boasted of his free-thinking and denied the existence of God to his companions in public-houses. But that was all passed and done with. . . nearly. He still bought a copy of Reynolds's Newspaper every week but he attended to his religious duties and for nine-tenths of the year lived a regular life. He had money enough to settle down on; it was not that. But the family would look down on her. First of all there was her disreputable father and then her mother's boarding house was beginning to get a certain fame. He had a notion that he was being had. He could imagine his friends talking of the affair and laughing. She was a little vulgar; some times she said 'I seen' and 'If I had've known.' But what would grammar matter if he really loved her? He could not make up his mind whether to like her or despise her for what she had done. Of course he had done it too. His instinct urged him to remain free, not to marry. Once you are married you are done for, it said.

While he was sitting helplessly on the side of the bed in shirt and trousers she tapped lightly at his door and entered. She told him all, that she had made a clean breast of it to her mother and that her mother would speak with him that morning. She cried and threw her arms round his neck, saying:

'O Bob! Bob! What am I to do? What am I to do at all?'

She would put an end to herself, she said.

He comforted her feebly, telling her not to cry, that it would be all right, never fear. He felt against his shirt the agitation of her bosom.

It was not altogether his fault that it had happened. He remembered well, with the curious patient memory of the celibate, the first casual caresses her dress, her breath, her fingers had given

him. Then late one night as he was undressing for bed she had tapped at his door, timidly. She wanted to relight her candle at his for hers had been blown out by a gust. It was her bath night. She wore a loose open combing-jacket of printed flannel. Her white instep shone in the opening of her furry slippers and the blood glowed warmly behind her perfumed skin. From her hands and wrists too as she lit and steadied her candle a faint perfume arose.

On nights when he came in very late it was she who warmed up his dinner. He scarcely knew what he was eating feeling her beside him alone, at night, in the sleeping house. And her thoughtfulness! If the night was anyway cold or wet or windy there was sure to be a little tumbler of punch ready for him. Perhaps they could be happy together. .

They used to go upstairs together on tiptoe, each with a candle, and on the third landing exchange reluctant goodnights. They used to kiss. He remembered well her eyes, the touch of her hand and his delirium. .

But delirium passes. He echoed her phrase, applying it to himself: 'What am I to do?' The instinct of the celibate warned him to hold back. But the sin was there; even his sense of honour told him that reparation must be made for such a sin.

While he was sitting with her on the side of the bed Mary came to the door and said that the missus wanted to see him in the parlour. He stood up to put on his coat and waistcoat, more helpless than ever. When he was dressed he went over to her to comfort her. It would be all right, never fear. He left her crying on the bed and moaning softly: 'O my God!'

Going down the stairs his glasses became so dimmed with moisture that he had to take them off and polish them. He longed to ascend through the roof and fly away to another country where he would never hear again of his trouble, and yet a force pushed him downstairs step by step. The implacable faces of his employer and of the Madam stared upon his discomfiture. On the last flight of stairs he passed Jack Mooney who was coming up from the pantry nursing two bottles of Bass. They saluted coldly; and the lover's eyes rested for a second or two on a thick bulldog face and a pair of thick short arms. When he reached the foot of the staircase he glanced up and saw Jack regarding him from the door of the return-room.

Suddenly he remembered the night when one of the music-hall artistes, a little blond Londoner, had made a rather free allusion to Polly. The reunion had been almost broken up on account of Jack's violence. Everyone tried to quiet him. The music-hall artiste, a little paler than usual, kept smiling and saying that there was no harm meant: but Jack kept shouting at him that if any fellow tried that sort of a game on with his sister he'd bloody well put his teeth down his throat, so he would.

Polly sat for a little time on the side of the bed, crying. Then she dried her eyes and went over to the looking-glass. She dipped the end of the towel in the water-jug and refreshed her eyes with the cool water. She looked at herself in profile and readjusted a hairpin above her ear. Then she went back to the bed again and sat at the foot. She regarded the pillows for a long time and the sight of them awakened in her mind secret, amiable memories. She rested the nape of her neck against the cool iron bed-rail and fell into a reverie. There was no longer any perturbation visible on her face.

She waited on patiently, almost cheerfully, without alarm, her memories gradually giving place to hopes and visions of the future. Her hopes and visions were so intricate that she no longer saw the white pillows on which her gaze was fixed or remembered that she was waiting for anything.

At last she heard her mother calling. She started to her feet and ran to the banisters.

'Polly! Polly!'

'Yes, mamma?'

'Come down, dear. Mr. Doran wants to speak to you.'

Then she remembered what she had been waiting for.

## **The Bronckhorst Divorce-case (Rudyard Kipling)**

*In the daytime, when she moved about me,  
In the night, when she was sleeping at my side,—  
I was wearied, I was wearied of her presence,  
Day by day and night by night I grew to hate her—  
Would God that she or I had died!*

### **Confessions**

There was a man called Bronckhorst – a three-cornered, middle-aged man in the Army – grey as a badger, and, some people said, with a touch of country-blood in him. That, however, cannot be proved. Mrs. Bronckhorst was not exactly young, though fifteen years younger than her husband. She was a large, pale, quiet woman, with heavy eyelids over weak eyes, and hair that turned red or yellow as the lights fell on it.

Bronckhorst was not nice in any way. He had no respect for the pretty public and private lies that make life a little less nasty than it is. His manner towards his wife was coarse. There are many things – including actual assault with the clenched fist – that a wife will endure; but seldom a wife can bear – as Mrs. Bronckhorst bore – with a long course of brutal, hard chaff, making light of her weaknesses, her headaches, her small fits of gaiety, her dresses, her queer little attempts to make herself attractive to her husband when she knows that she is not what she has been, and – worst of all – the love that she spends on her children. That particular sort of heavy-handed jest was specially dear to Bronckhorst. I suppose that he had first slipped into it, meaning no harm, in the honeymoon, when folk find their ordinary stock of endearments run short, and so go to the other extreme to express their feelings. A similar impulse makes a man say, ‘*Hutt*, you old beast!’ when a favourite horse nuzzles his coat-front. Unluckily, when the reaction of marriage sets in, the form of speech remains, and, the tenderness having died out, hurts the wife more than she cares to say. But Mrs. Bronckhorst was devoted to her ‘Teddy’ as she called him. Perhaps that was why he objected to her. Perhaps – this is only a theory to account for his infamous behaviour later on – he gave way to the queer, savage feeling that sometimes takes by the throat a husband twenty years married, when he sees, across the table, the same, same face of his wedded wife, and knows that, as he has sat facing it, so must he continue to sit until the day of its death or his own. Most men and all women know the spasm. It only lasts for three breaths as a rule, must be a ‘throw-back’ to times when men and women were rather worse than they are now, and is too unpleasant to be discussed.

Dinner at the Bronckhorsts’ was an infliction few men cared to undergo. Bronckhorst took a pleasure in saying things that made his wife wince. When their little boy came in at dessert Bronckhorst used to give him half a glass of wine, and, naturally enough, the poor little mite got first riotous, next miserable, and was removed screaming. Bronckhorst asked if that was the way Teddy usually behaved, and whether Mrs. Bronckhorst could not spare some of her time ‘to teach the little beggar decency’. Mrs. Bronckhorst, who loved the boy more than her own life, tried not to cry – her spirit seemed to have been broken by her marriage. Lastly, Bronckhorst used to say, ‘There! That’ll do, that’ll do. For God’s sake try to behave like a rational woman. Go into the drawing-room.’ Mrs. Bronckhorst would go, trying to carry it all off with a smile; and the guest of the evening would feel angry and uncomfortable.

After three years of this cheerful life – for Mrs. Bronckhorst had no women-friends to talk to – the station was startled by the news that Bronckhorst had instituted proceedings *on the criminal count*, against a man called Biel, who certainly had been rather attentive to Mrs. Bronckhorst whenever she had appeared in public. The utter want of reserve with which Bronckhorst treated his own dishonour helped us to know that the evidence against Biel would be entirely circumstantial and native. There were no letters; but Bronckhorst said openly that he would rack Heaven and Earth until he saw Biel superintending the manufacture of carpets in the Central Jail. Mrs. Bronckhorst kept entirely to her house, and let charitable folks say what they pleased. Opinions were divided. Some two-thirds of the station jumped at once to the conclusion that Biel was guilty; but a dozen men who knew and liked him held by him. Biel was furious and surprised. He denied the whole thing, and vowed that he would thrash Bronckhorst within an inch of his life. No jury, we knew, would convict a man on the criminal count on native evidence in a land where you can buy a

murder-charge, including the corpse, all complete for fifty-four rupees; but Biel did not care to scrape through by the benefit of a doubt. He wanted the whole thing cleared; but, as he said one night, 'He can prove anything with servants' evidence, and I've only my bare word.' This was almost a month before the case came on; and beyond agreeing with Biel, we could do little. All that we could be sure of was that the native evidence would be bad enough to blast Biel's character for the rest of his service; for when a native begins perjury he perjures himself thoroughly. He does not boggle over details.

Some genius at the end of the table whereat the affair was being talked over, said, 'Look here! I don't believe lawyers are any good. Get a man to wire to Strickland, and beg him to come down and pull us through.'

Strickland was about a hundred and eighty miles up the line. He had not long been married to Miss Youghal, but he scented in the telegram a chance of return to the old detective work that his soul lusted after, and next time he came in and heard our story. He finished his pipe and said oracularly, 'We must get at the evidence. Oorya bearer, Mussulman *khit* and sweeper *ayah*<sup>1</sup>, I suppose, are the pillars of the charge. I am on in this piece; but I'm afraid I'm getting rusty in my talk.'

He rose and went into Biel's bedroom, where his trunk had been put, and shut the door. An hour later, we heard him say, 'I hadn't the heart to part with my old make-ups when I married. Will this do?' There was a loathly fakir<sup>2</sup> salaaming<sup>3</sup> in the doorway.

'Now lend me fifty rupees,' said Strickland, 'and give me your Words of Honour that you won't tell my wife.'

He got all that he asked for, and left the house while the table drank his health. What he did only he himself knows. A *fakir* hung about Bronckhorst's compound for twelve days. Then a sweeper appeared, and when Biel heard of *him*, he said that Strickland was an angel full-fledged. Whether the sweeper made love to Janki, Mrs. Bronckhorst's *ayah*, is a question which concerns Strickland exclusively.

He came back at the end of three weeks, and said quietly, 'You spoke the truth, Biel. The whole business is put up from beginning to end. Jove! It almost astonishes *me*! That Bronckhorst beast isn't fit to live.'

There was uproar and shouting, and Biel said, 'How are you going to prove it? You can't say that you've been trespassing on Bronckhorst's compound in disguise!'

'No,' said Strickland. 'Tell your lawyer-fool, whoever he is, to get up something strong about "inherent improbabilities" and "discrepancies of evidence"'. He won't have to speak, but it will make him happy, *I* 'm going to run this business.'

Biel held his tongue, and the other men waited to see what would happen. They trusted Strickland as men trust quiet men. When the case came off the Court was crowded. Strickland hung about in the veranda of the Court, till he met the Mohammedan<sup>4</sup> *khitmutgar*<sup>5</sup>. Then he murmured a *fakir's* blessing in his ear, and asked him how his second wife did. The man spun round, and, as he looked into the eyes of 'Estreekin Sahib'<sup>6</sup>, his jaw dropped. You must remember that before Strickland was married, he was, as I have told you already, a power among natives. Strickland whispered a rather coarse vernacular proverb to the effect that he was abreast of all that was going on, and went into the Court armed with a gut trainer's-whip.

The Mohammedan was the first witness, and Strickland beamed upon him from the back of the Court. The man moistened his lips with his tongue and, in his abject fear of 'Estreekin Sahib', the *fakir* went back on every detail of his evidence – said he was a poor man, and God was his witness that he had forgotten everything that Bronckhorst Sahib had told him to say. Between his terror of Strickland, the Judge, and Bronckhorst he collapsed weeping.

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1 **ayah** – in India and other former British colonies, a maidservant, a housemaid

2 **fakir** – in Islam and Hinduism, a holy man with miraculous powers

3 **salaaming** – here: to saying greetings

4 **Mohammedan** = Muslim

5 **khitmutgar** = servant (*Persian*)

6 **Sahib** – master or government officer in British India

Then began the panic among the witnesses. Janki, the *ayah*, leering chastely behind her veil, turned grey, and the bearer left the Court. He said that his Mamma was dying, and that it was not wholesome for any man to lie unthrifly in the presence of 'Estreekin Sahib'.

Biel said politely to Bronckhorst, 'Your witnesses don't seem to work. Haven't you any forged letters to produce?' But Bronckhorst was swaying to and fro in his chair, and there was a dead pause after Biel had been called to order.

Bronckhorst's Counsel saw the look on his client's face, and without more ado pitched his papers on the little green-baize table, and mumbled something about having been misinformed. The whole Court applauded wildly, like soldiers at a theatre, and the Judge began to say what he thought.

\* \* \* \* \*

Biel came out of the Court, and Strickland dropped a gut trainer's-whip in the veranda. Ten minutes later, Biel was cutting Bronckhorst into ribbons behind the old Court cells, quietly and without scandal. What was left of Bronckhorst was sent home in a carriage; and his wife wept over it and nursed it into a man again. Later on, after Biel had managed to hush up the counter-charge against Bronckhorst of fabricating false evidence, Mrs. Bronckhorst, with her faint, watery smile, said that there had been a mistake, but it wasn't her Teddy's fault altogether. She would wait till her Teddy came back to her. Perhaps he had grown tired of her, or she had tried his patience, and perhaps we wouldn't cut her any more, and perhaps the mothers would let their children play with 'little Teddy' again. He was so lonely. Then the station invited Mrs. Bronckhorst everywhere, until Bronckhorst was fit to appear in public, when he went Home and took his wife with him. According to latest advices, her Teddy did come back to her, and they are moderately happy. Though, of course, he can never forgive her the thrashing that she was the indirect means of getting for him.

\* \* \* \* \*

What Biel wants to know is, 'Why didn't I press home the charge against the Bronckhorst brute, and have him run in?'

What Mrs. Strickland wants to know is, 'How *did* my husband bring such a lovely, lovely Waler from your station? I know *all* his money affairs; and I'm *certain* he didn't *buy* it.'

What I want to know is, 'How do women like Mrs. Bronckhorst come to marry men like Bronckhorst?'

And my conundrum is the most unanswerable of the three.

### **The Rocking-horse Winner (David Herbert Lawrence)**

There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and the love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them. They looked at her coldly, as if they were finding fault with her. And hurriedly she felt she must cover up some fault in herself. Yet what it was that she must cover up she never knew. Nevertheless, when her children were present, she always felt the centre of her heart go hard. This troubled her, and in her manner she was all the more gentle and anxious for her children, as if she loved them very much. Only she herself knew that at the centre of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody. Everybody else said of her: 'She is such a good mother. She adores her children.' Only she herself, and her children themselves, knew it was not so. They read it in each other's eyes.

There were a boy and two little girls. They lived in a pleasant house, with a garden, and they had discreet servants, and felt themselves superior to anyone in the neighbourhood.

Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house. There was never enough money. The mother had a small income, and the father had a small income, but not nearly enough

for the social position which they had to keep up. The father went in to town to some office. But though he had good prospects, these prospects never materialised. There was always the grinding sense of the shortage of money, though the style was always kept up.

At last the mother said, 'I will see if *I* can't make something.' But she did not know where to begin. She racked her brains, and tried this thing and the other, but could not find anything successful. The failure made deep lines come into her face. Her children were growing up, they would have to go to school. There must be more money, there must be more money. The father, who was always very handsome and expensive in his tastes, seemed as if he never *would* be able to do anything worth doing. And the mother, who had a great belief in herself, did not succeed any better, and her tastes were just as expensive.

And so the house came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: *There must be more money! There must be more money!* The children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud. They heard it at Christmas, when the expensive and splendid toys filled the nursery. Behind the shining modern rocking-horse, behind the smart doll's-house, a voice would start whispering: 'There *must* be more money! There *must* be more money!' And the children would stop playing, to listen for a moment. They would look into each other's eyes, to see if they had all heard. And each one saw in the eyes of the other two that they too had heard. 'There *must* be more money! There *must* be more money!'

It came whispering from the springs of the still-swaying rocking-horse, and even the horse, bending his wooden, champing head, heard it. The big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram, could hear it quite plainly, and seemed to be smirking all the more self-consciously because of it. The foolish puppy, too, that took the place of the teddy-bear, he was looking so extraordinarily foolish for no other reason but that he heard the secret whisper all over the house: 'There *must* be more money.'

Yet nobody ever said it aloud. The whisper was everywhere, and therefore no one spoke it. Just as no one ever says: 'We are breathing!' in spite of the fact that breath is coming and going all the time.

'Mother!' said the boy Paul one day. 'Why don't we keep a car of our own? Why do we always use uncle's, or else a taxi?'

'Because we're the poor members of the family,' said the mother.

'But why *are* we, mother?'

'Well – I suppose,' she said slowly and bitterly, 'it's because your father has no luck.'

The boy was silent for some time.

'Is luck money, mother?' he asked, rather timidly.

'No, Paul! Not quite. It's what causes you to have money.'

'Oh!' said Paul vaguely. 'I thought when Uncle Oscar said *filthy lucker*, it meant money.'

'*Filthy lucre* does mean money,' said the mother. 'But it's lucre, not luck.'

'Oh!' said the boy. 'Then what *is* luck, mother?'

'It's what causes you to have money. If you're lucky you have money. That's why it's better to be born lucky than rich. If you're rich, you may lose your money. But if you're lucky, you will always get more money.'

'Oh! Will you! And is father not lucky?'

'Very unlucky, I should say,' she said bitterly.

The boy watched her with unsure eyes.

'Why?' he asked.

'I don't know. Nobody ever knows why one person is lucky and another unlucky.'

'Don't they? Nobody at all? Does *nobody* know?'

'Perhaps God! But He never tells.'

'He ought to, then. And aren't you lucky either, mother?'

'I can't be, if I married an unlucky husband.'

'But by yourself, aren't you?'

'I used to think I was, before I married. Now I think I am very unlucky indeed.'

‘Why?’

‘Well – never mind! Perhaps I’m not really,’ she said.

The child looked at her, to see if she meant it. But he saw, by the lines of her mouth, that she was only trying to hide something from him.

‘Well, anyhow,’ he said stoutly, ‘I’m a lucky person.’

‘Why?’ said his mother, with a sudden laugh.

He stared at her. He didn’t even know why he had said it.

‘God told me,’ he asserted, brazening it out.

‘I hope He did, dear!’ she said, again with a laugh, but rather bitter.

‘He did, mother!’

‘Excellent!’ said the mother, using one of her husband’s exclamations.

The boy saw she did not believe him; or rather, that she paid no attention to his assertion. This angered him somewhere, and made him want to compel her attention.

He went off by himself, vaguely, in a childish way, seeking for the clue to ‘luck’. Absorbed, taking no heed of other people, he went about with a sort of stealth, seeking inwardly for luck. He wanted luck, he wanted it, he wanted it. When the two girls were playing dolls, in the nursery, he would sit on his big rocking-horse, charging madly into space, with a frenzy that made the little girls peer at him uneasily. Wildly the horse careered, the waving dark hair of the boy tossed, his eyes had a strange glare in them. The little girls dared not speak to him.

When he had ridden to the end of his mad little journey, he climbed down and stood in front of his rocking-horse, staring fixedly into its lowered face. Its red mouth was slightly open, its big eye was wide and glassy bright.

‘Now!’ he would silently command the snorting steed. ‘Now take me to where there is luck! Now take me!’

And he would slash the horse on the neck with the little whip he had asked Uncle Oscar for. He *knew* the horse could take him to where there was luck, if only he forced it. So he would mount again, and start on his furious ride, hoping at last to get there. He knew he could get there.

‘You’ll break your horse, Paul!’ said the nurse.

‘He’s always riding like that! I wish he’d leave off!’ said his elder sister Joan.

But he only glared down on them in silence. Nurse gave him up. She could make nothing of him. Anyhow he was growing beyond her.

One day his mother and his Uncle Oscar came in when he was on one of his furious rides. He did not speak to them.

‘Hallo! you young jockey! Riding a winner?’ said his uncle.

‘Aren’t you growing too big for a rocking-horse? You’re not a very little boy any longer, you know,’ said his mother.

But Paul only gave a blue glare from his big, rather close-set eyes. He would speak to nobody when he was in full tilt. His mother watched him with an anxious expression on her face.

At last he suddenly stopped forcing his horse into the mechanical gallop, and slid down.

‘Well, I got there!’ he announced fiercely, his blue eyes still flaring, and his sturdy long legs straddling apart.

‘Where did you get to?’ asked his mother.

‘Where I wanted to go to,’ he flared back at her.

‘That’s right, son!’ said Uncle Oscar. ‘Don’t you stop till you get there. What’s the horse’s name?’

‘He doesn’t have a name,’ said the boy.

‘Gets on without all right?’ asked the uncle.

‘Well, he has different names. He was called Sansovino last week.’

‘Sansovino, eh? Won the Ascot<sup>1</sup>. How did you know his name?’

‘He always talks about horse-races with Bassett,’ said Joan.

The uncle was delighted to find that his small nephew was posted with all the racing news.

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1 the Ascot – a horse race in Ascot, a most fashionable event that takes place annually in June

Bassett, the young gardener who had been wounded in the left foot in the war, and had got his present job through Oscar Cresswell, whose batman he had been, was a perfect blade of the 'turf.' He lived in the racing events, and the small boy lived with him.

Oscar Cresswell got it all from Bassett.

'Master Paul comes and asks me, so I can't do more than tell him, sir,' said Bassett, his face terribly serious, as if he were speaking of religious matters.

'And does he ever put anything on a horse he fancies?'

'Well – I don't want to give him away – he's a young sport, a fine sport, sir. Would you mind asking him himself? He sort of takes a pleasure in it, and perhaps he'd feel I was giving him away, sir, if you don't mind.'

Bassett was serious as a church.

The uncle went back to his nephew, and took him off for a ride in the car.

'Say, Paul, old man, do you ever put anything on a horse?' the uncle asked.

The boy watched the handsome man closely.

'Why, do you think I oughtn't to?' he parried.

'Not a bit of it! I thought perhaps you might give me a tip for the Lincoln.'<sup>2</sup>

The car sped on into the country, going down to Uncle Oscar's place in Hampshire<sup>3</sup>.

'Honour bright?' said the nephew.

'Honour bright, son!' said the uncle.

'Well, then, Daffodil.'

'Daffodil! I doubt it, sonny. What about Mirza?'

'I only know the winner,' said the boy. 'That's Daffodil!'

'Daffodil, eh?' There was a pause. Daffodil was an obscure horse comparatively.

'Uncle!'

'Yes, son?'

'You won't let it go any further, will you? I promised Bassett'

'Bassett be damned, old man! What's he got to do with it?'

'We're partners! We've been partners from the first! Uncle, he lent me my first five shillings, which I lost. I promised him, honour bright, it was only between me and him: only you gave me that ten-shilling note I started winning with, so I thought you were lucky. You won't let it go any further, will you?'

The boy gazed at his uncle from those big, hot, blue eyes, set rather close together. The uncle stirred and laughed uneasily.

'Right you are, son! I'll keep your tip private. Daffodil, eh! How much are you putting on him?'

'All except twenty pounds,' said the boy. 'I keep that in reserve.'

The uncle thought it a good joke.

'You keep twenty pounds in reserve, do you, you young romancer? What are you betting, then?'

'I'm betting three hundred,' said the boy gravely. 'But it's between you and me, Uncle Oscar! Honour bright?'

The uncle burst into a roar of laughter.

'It's between you and me all right, you young Nat Gould,' he said, laughing. 'But where's your three hundred?'

'Bassett keeps it for me. We're partners.'

'You are, are you! And what is Bassett putting on Daffodil?'

'He won't go quite as high as I do, I expect. Perhaps he'll go a hundred and fifty.'

'What, pennies?' laughed the uncle.

'Pounds,' said the child, with a surprised look at his uncle. 'Bassett keeps a bigger reserve than I do.'

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<sup>2</sup> **the Lincoln** – an annual horse race in Lincolnshire

<sup>3</sup> **Hampshire** – a historic county in south-central England, on the English Channel



Between wonder and amusement, Uncle Oscar was silent. He pursued the matter no further, but he determined to take his nephew with him to the Lincoln races.

'Now, son,' he said, 'I'm putting twenty on Mirza, and I'll put five for you on any horse you fancy. What's your pick?'

'Daffodil, uncle!'

'No, not the fiver on Daffodil!'

'I should if it was my own fiver,' said the child.

'Good! Good! Right you are! A fiver for me and a fiver for you on Daffodil.'

The child had never been to a race-meeting before, and his eyes were blue fire. He pursed his mouth tight, and watched. A Frenchman just in front had put his money on Lancelot. Wild with excitement, he flayed his arms up and down, yelling '*Lancelot! Lancelot!*' in his French accent.

Daffodil came in first, Lancelot second, Mirza third. The child, flushed and with eyes blazing, was curiously serene. His uncle brought him five five-pound notes: four to one.

'What am I to do with these?' he cried, waving them before the boy's eyes.

'I suppose we'll talk to Bassett,' said the boy. 'I expect I have fifteen hundred now: and twenty in reserve: and this twenty.'

His uncle studied him for some moments.

'Look here, son!' he said. 'You're not serious about Bassett and that fifteen hundred, are you?'

'Yes, I am. But it's between you and me, uncle! Honour bright!'

'Honour bright all right, son! But I must talk to Bassett.'

'If you'd like to be a partner, uncle, with Bassett and me, we could all be partners. Only you'd have to promise, honour bright, uncle, not to let it go beyond us three. Bassett and I are lucky, and you must be lucky, because it was your ten shillings I started winning with. .'

Uncle Oscar took both Bassett and Paul into Richmond Park<sup>1</sup> for an afternoon, and there they talked.

'It's like this, you see, sir,' Bassett said. 'Master Paul would get me talking about racing events, spinning yarns, you know, sir. And he was always keen on knowing if I'd made or if I'd lost. It's about a year since, now, that I put five shillings on Blush of Dawn for him: and we lost. Then the luck turned, with that ten shillings he had from you: that we put on Singhalese. And since that time, it's been pretty steady, all things considering. What do you say, Master Paul?'

'We're all right when we're *sure*,' said Paul. 'It's when we're not quite sure that we go down.'

'Oh, but we're careful then,' said Bassett.

'But when are you *sure*?' smiled Uncle Oscar.

'It's Master Paul, sir,' said Bassett, in a secret, religious voice. 'It's as if he had it from heaven. Like Daffodil now, for the Lincoln. That was as sure as eggs.'

'Did you put anything on Daffodil?' asked Oscar Cresswell.

'Yes, sir. I made my bit.'

'And my nephew?'

Bassett was obstinately silent, looking at Paul.

'I made twelve hundred, didn't I, Bassett? I told uncle I was putting three hundred on Daffodil.'

'That's right,' said Bassett, nodding.

'But where's the money?' asked the uncle.

'I keep it safe locked up, sir. Master Paul, he can have it any minute he likes to ask for it.'

'What, fifteen hundred pounds?'

'And twenty! And *forty*, that is, with the twenty he made on the course.'

'It's amazing!' said the uncle.

'If Master Paul offers you to be partners, sir, I would, if I were you: if you'll excuse me,' said Bassett.

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<sup>1</sup> **Richmond Park** – a park on the River Thames in central London

Oscar Cresswell thought about it.

'I'll see the money,' he said.

They drove home again, and sure enough, Bassett came round to the garden-house with fifteen hundred pounds in notes. The twenty pounds reserve was left with Joe Glee, in the Turf Commission deposit.

'You see, it's all right, uncle, when I'm *sure* ! Then we go strong, for all we're worth. Don't we, Bassett?'

'We do that, Master Paul.'

'And when are you sure?' said the uncle, laughing.

'Oh, well, sometimes I'm *absolutely* sure, like about Daffodil,' said the boy; 'and sometimes I have an idea; and sometimes I haven't even an idea, have I, Bassett? Then we're careful, because we mostly go down.'

'You do, do you! And when you're sure, like about Daffodil, what makes you sure, sonny?'

'Oh, well, I don't know,' said the boy uneasily. 'I'm sure, you know, uncle; that's all.'

'It's as if he had it from heaven, sir,' Bassett reiterated.

'I should say so!' said the uncle.

But he became a partner. And when the Leger<sup>1</sup> was coming on, Paul was 'sure' about Lively Spark, which was a quite inconsiderable horse. The boy insisted on putting a thousand on the horse, Bassett went for five hundred, and Oscar Cresswell two hundred. Lively Spark came in first, and the betting had been ten to one against him. Paul had made ten thousand.

'You see,' he said, 'I was absolutely sure of him.'

Even Oscar Cresswell had cleared two thousand.

'Look here, son,' he said, 'this sort of thing makes me nervous.'

'It needn't, uncle! Perhaps I shan't be sure again for a long time.'

'But what are you going to do with your money?' asked the uncle.

'Of course,' said the boy, 'I started it for mother. She said she had no luck, because father is unlucky, so I thought if *I* was lucky, it might stop whispering.'

'What might stop whispering?'

'Our house! I *hate* our house for whispering.'

'What does it whisper?'

'Why – why' – the boy fidgeted – 'why, I don't know! But it's always short of money, you know, uncle.'

'I know it, son, I know it.'

'You know people send mother writs, don't you, uncle?'

'I'm afraid I do,' said the uncle.

'And then the house whispers like people laughing at you behind your back. It's awful, that is! I thought if I was lucky—'

'You might stop it,' added the uncle.

The boy watched him with big blue eyes, that had an uncanny cold fire in them, and he said never a word.

'Well then!' said the uncle. 'What are we doing?'

'I shouldn't like mother to know I was lucky,' said the boy.

'Why not, son?'

'She'd stop me.'

'I don't think she would.'

'Oh!' – and the boy writhed in an odd way – 'I *don't* want her to know, uncle.'

'All right, son! We'll manage it without her knowing.'

They managed it very easily. Paul, at the other's suggestion, handed over five thousand pounds to his uncle, who deposited it with the family lawyer, who was then to inform Paul's mother that a relative had put five thousand pounds into his hands, which sum was to be paid out a

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<sup>1</sup> **the Leger** – Saint Leger, one of the three English Crown horse races; it is held annually in September in Doncaster, Yorkshire, since 1776.

thousand pounds at a time, on the mother's birthday, for the next five years.

'So she'll have a birthday present of a thousand pounds for five successive years,' said Uncle Oscar. 'I hope it won't make it all the harder for her later.'

Paul's mother had her birthday in November. The house had been 'whispering' worse than ever lately, and even in spite of his luck, Paul could not bear up against it. He was very anxious to see the effect of the birthday letter, telling his mother about the thousand pounds.

When there were no visitors, Paul now took his meals with his parents, as he was beyond the nursery control. His mother went into town nearly every day. She had discovered that she had an odd knack of sketching furs and dress materials, so she worked secretly in the studio of a friend who was the chief 'artist' for the leading drapers. She drew the figures of ladies in furs and ladies in silk and sequins for the newspaper advertisements. This young woman artist earned several thousand pounds a year, but Paul's mother only made several hundreds, and she was again dissatisfied. She so wanted to be first in something, and she did not succeed, even in making sketches for drapery advertisements.

She was down to breakfast on the morning of her birthday. Paul watched her face as she read her letters. He knew the lawyer's letter. As his mother read it, her face hardened and became more expressionless. Then a cold, determined look came on her mouth. She hid the letter under the pile of others, and said not a word about it.

'Didn't you have anything nice in the post for your birthday, mother?' said Paul.

'Quite moderately nice,' she said, her voice cold and absent.

She went away to town without saying more.

But in the afternoon Uncle Oscar appeared. He said Paul's mother had had a long interview with the lawyer, asking if the whole five thousand could not be advanced at once, as she was in debt.

'What do you think, uncle?' said the boy.

'I leave it to you, son.'

'Oh, let her have it, then! We can get some more with the other,' said the boy.

'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, laddie!' said Uncle Oscar.

'But I'm sure to *know* for the Grand National; or the Lincolnshire; or else the Derby. I'm sure to know for *one* of them,' said Paul.

So Uncle Oscar signed the agreement, and Paul's mother touched the whole five thousand. Then something very curious happened. The voices in the house suddenly went mad, like a chorus of frogs on a spring evening. There were certain new furnishings, and Paul had a tutor. He was *really* going to Eton, his father's school, in the following autumn. There were flowers in the winter, and a blossoming of the luxury Paul's mother had been used to. And yet the voices in the house, behind the sprays of mimosa and almond-blossom, and from under the piles of iridescent cushions, simply trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy: 'There *must* be more money! Oh-h-h! There *must* be more money! Oh, now, now-w! now-w-w – there *must* be more money! – more than ever! More than ever!'

It frightened Paul terribly. He studied away at his Latin and Greek with his tutors. But his intense hours were spent with Bassett. The Grand National had gone by: he had not 'known,' and had lost a hundred pounds. Summer was at hand. He was in agony for the Lincoln. But even for the Lincoln he didn't 'know,' and he lost fifty pounds. He became wild-eyed and strange, as if something were going to explode in him.

'Let it alone, son! Don't you bother about it!' urged Uncle Oscar. But it was as if the boy couldn't really hear what his uncle was saying.

'I've got to know for the Derby! I've *got* to know for the Derby!' the child reiterated, his big blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness.

His mother noticed how overwrought he was.

'You'd better go to the seaside. Wouldn't you like to go now to the seaside, instead of waiting? I think you'd better,' she said, looking down at him anxiously, her heart curiously heavy because of him.

But the child lifted his uncanny blue eyes.

'I couldn't possibly go before the Derby, mother!' he said. 'I couldn't possibly!'

'Why not?' she said, her voice becoming heavy when she was opposed. 'Why not? You can still go from the seaside to see the Derby with your Uncle Oscar, if that's what you wish. No need for you to wait here. Besides, I think you care too much about these races. It's a bad sign. My family has been a gambling family, and you won't know till you grow up how much damage it has done. But it has done damage. I shall have to send Bassett away, and ask Uncle Oscar not to talk racing to you, unless you promise to be reasonable about it: go away to the seaside and forget it. You're all nerves!'

'I'll do what you like, mother, so long as you don't send me away till after the Derby,' the boy said.

'Send you away from where? Just from this house?'

'Yes,' he said, gazing at her.

'Why, you curious child, what makes you care about this house so much, suddenly? I never knew you loved it!'

He gazed at her without speaking. He had a secret within a secret, something he had not divulged, even to Bassett or to his Uncle Oscar.

But his mother, after standing undecided and a little bit sullen for some moments, said:

'Very well, then! Don't go to the seaside till after the Derby, if you don't wish it. But promise me you won't let your nerves go to pieces! Promise you won't think so much about horse-racing and *events*, as you call them!'

'Oh no!' said the boy, casually. 'I won't think much about them, mother. You needn't worry. I wouldn't worry, mother, if I were you.'

'If you were me and I were you,' said his mother, 'I wonder what we *should* do!'

'But you know you needn't worry, mother, don't you?' the boy repeated.

'I should be awfully glad to know it,' she said wearily.

'Oh, well, you *can*, you know. I mean you *ought* to know you needn't worry!' he insisted.

'Ought I? Then I'll see about it,' she said.

Paul's secret of secrets was his wooden horse, that which had no name. Since he was emancipated from a nurse and a nursery governess, he had had his rocking-horse removed to his own bedroom at the top of the house.

'Surely you're too big for a rocking-horse!' his mother had remonstrated.

'Well, you see, mother, till I can have a *real* horse, I like to have *some* sort of animal about,' had been his quaint answer.

'Do you feel he keeps you company?' she laughed.

'Oh yes! He's very good, he always keeps me company, when I'm there,' said Paul.

So the horse, rather shabby, stood in an arrested prance in the boy's bedroom.

The Derby was drawing near, and the boy grew more and more tense. He hardly heard what was spoken to him, he was very frail, and his eyes were really uncanny. His mother had sudden strange seizures of uneasiness about him. Sometimes, for half an hour, she would feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish. She wanted to rush to him at once, and know he was safe.

Two nights before the Derby, she was at a big party in town, when one of her rushes of anxiety about her boy, her first-born, gripped her heart till she could hardly speak. She fought with the feeling, might and main, for she believed in common-sense. But it was too strong. She had to leave the dance and go downstairs to telephone to the country. The children's nursery governess was terribly surprised and startled at being rung up in the night.

'Are the children all right, Miss Wilmot?'

'Oh yes, they are quite all right.'

'Master Paul? Is he all right?'

'He went to bed as right as a trivet. Shall I run up and look at him?'

'No!' said Paul's mother reluctantly. 'No! Don't trouble. It's all right. Don't sit up. We shall

be home fairly soon.' She did not want her son's privacy intruded upon.

'Very good,' said the governess.

It was about one o'clock when Paul's mother and father drove up to their house. All was still. Paul's mother went to her room and slipped off her white fur cloak. She had told her maid not to wait up for her. She heard her husband downstairs, mixing a whisky-and-soda.

And then, because of the strange anxiety at her heart, she stole upstairs to her son's room. Noiselessly she went along the upper corridor. Was there a faint noise? What was it?

She stood, with arrested muscles, outside his door, listening. There was a strange, heavy, and yet not loud noise. Her heart stood still. It was a soundless noise, yet rushing and powerful. Something huge, in violent, hushed motion. What was it? What in God's Name was it? She ought to know. She felt that she *knew* the noise. She knew what it was.

Yet she could not place it. She couldn't say what it was. And on and on it went, like a madness.

Softly, frozen with anxiety and fear, she turned the door-handle.

The room was dark. Yet in the space near the window, she heard and saw something plunging to and fro. She gazed in fear and amazement.

Then suddenly she switched on the light, and saw her son, in his green pyjamas, madly surging on his rocking-horse. The blaze of light suddenly lit him up, as he urged the wooden horse, and lit her up, as she stood, blonde, in her dress of pale green and crystal, in the doorway.

'Paul!' she cried. 'Whatever are you doing?'

'It's Malabar!' he screamed, in a powerful, strange voice. 'It's Malabar!'

His eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse. Then he fell with a crash to the ground, and she, all her tormented motherhood flooding upon her, rushed to gather him up.

But he was unconscious, and unconscious he remained, with some brain-fever. He talked and tossed, and his mother sat stonily by his side.

'Malabar! It's Malabar! Bassett, Bassett, I *know*: it's Malabar!'

So the child cried, trying to get up and urge the rocking-horse that gave him his inspiration.

'What does he mean by Malabar?' asked the heart-frozen mother.

'I don't know,' said the father, stonily.

'What does he mean by Malabar?' she asked her brother Oscar.

'It's one of the horses running for the Derby,' was the answer.

And, in spite of himself, Oscar Cresswell spoke to Bassett, and himself put a thousand on Malabar: at fourteen to one.

The third day of the illness was critical: they were watching for a change. The boy, with his rather long, curly hair, was tossing ceaselessly on the pillow. He neither slept nor regained consciousness, and his eyes were like blue stones. His mother sat, feeling her heart had gone, turned actually into a stone.

In the evening, Oscar Cresswell did not come, but Bassett sent a message, saying could he come up for one moment, just one moment? Paul's mother was very angry at the intrusion, but on second thoughts she agreed. The boy was the same. Perhaps Bassett might bring him to consciousness.

The gardener, a shortish fellow with a little brown moustache and sharp little brown eyes, tiptoed into the room, touched his imaginary cap to Paul's mother, and stole to the bedside, staring with glittering, smallish eyes at the tossing, dying child.

'Master Paul!' he whispered. 'Master Paul! Malabar came in first all right, a clean win. I did as you told me. You've made over seventy thousand pounds, you have; you've got over eighty thousand. Malabar came in all right, Master Paul.'

'Malabar! Malabar! Did I say Malabar, mother? Did I say Malabar? Do you think I'm lucky, mother? I knew Malabar, didn't I? Over eighty thousand pounds! I call that lucky, don't you, mother? Over eighty thousand pounds! I knew, didn't I know I knew? Malabar came in all right. If I ride my horse till I'm sure, then I tell you, Basset, you can go as high as you like. Did you go for all

you were worth, Bassett?’

‘I went a thousand on it, Master Paul.’

‘I never told you, mother, that if I can ride my horse, and *get there*, then I’m absolutely sure – oh, absolutely! Mother, did I ever tell you? I *am* lucky!’

‘No, you never did,’ said the mother.

But the boy died in the night.

And even as he lay dead, his mother heard her brother’s voice saying to her: ‘My God, Hester, you’re eighty-odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he’s best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner.’

## **The Dead Sexton (Sheridan Le Fanu)**

The sunsets were red, the nights were long, and the weather pleasantly frosty; and Christmas, the glorious herald of the New Year, was at hand, when an event – still recounted by winter firesides, with a horror made delightful by the mellowing influence of years – occurred in the beautiful little town of Golden Friars, and signalized, as the scene of its catastrophe, the old inn known throughout a wide region of the Northumbrian counties as the George and Dragon.

Toby Crooke, the sexton, was lying dead in the old coach-house in the inn yard. The body had been discovered, only half an hour before this story begins, under strange circumstances, and in a place where it might have lain the better part of a week undisturbed; and a dreadful suspicion astounded the village of Golden Friars.

A wintry sunset was glaring through a gorge of the western mountains, turning into fire the twigs of the leafless elms, and all the tiny blades of grass on the green by which the quaint little town is surrounded. It is built of light, grey stone, with steep gables and slender chimneys rising with airy lightness from the level sward by the margin of the beautiful lake, and backed by the grand amphitheatre of the fells at the other side, whose snowy peaks show faintly against the sky, tinged with the vaporous red of the western light. As you descend towards the margin of the lake, and see Golden Friars, its taper chimneys and slender gables, its curious old inn and gorgeous sign, and over all the graceful tower and spire of the ancient church, at this hour or by moonlight, in the solemn grandeur and stillness of the natural scenery that surrounds it, it stands before you like a fairy town.

Toby Crooke, the lank sexton, now fifty or upwards, had passed an hour or two with some village cronies, over a solemn pot of purl, in the kitchen of that cosy hostelry, the night before. He generally turned in there at about seven o’clock, and heard the news. This contented him: for he talked little, and looked always surly.

Many things are now raked up and talked over about him.

In early youth, he had been a bit of a scamp. He broke his indentures, and ran away from his master, the tanner of Bryemere; he had got into fifty bad scrapes and out again; and, just as the little world of Golden Friars had come to the conclusion that it would be well for all parties – except, perhaps, himself – and a happy riddance for his afflicted mother, if he were sunk, with a gross of quart pots about his neck, in the bottom of the lake in which the grey gables, the elms, and the towering fells of Golden Friars are mirrored, he suddenly returned, a reformed man at the ripe age of forty.

For twelve years he had disappeared, and no one knew what had become of him. Then, suddenly, as I say, he reappeared at Golden Friars – a very black and silent man, sedate and orderly. His mother was dead and buried; but the ‘prodigal son’ was received good-naturedly. The good vicar<sup>1</sup>, Doctor Jenner, reported to his wife:

‘His hard heart has been softened, dear Dolly. I saw him dry his eyes, poor fellow, at the sermon yesterday.’

‘I don’t wonder, Hugh darling. I know the part – “There is joy in Heaven.” I am sure it was – wasn’t it? It was quite beautiful. I almost cried myself.’

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<sup>1</sup> **vicar** – in the Church of England, the priest in charge of a parish

The Vicar laughed gently, and stooped over her chair and kissed her, and patted her cheek fondly.

‘You think too well of your old man’s sermons,’ he said. ‘I preach, you see, Dolly, very much to the *poor*. If *they* understand me, I am pretty sure everyone else must; and I think that my simple style goes more home to both feelings and conscience—’

‘You ought to have told me of his crying before. You *are* so eloquent,’ exclaimed Dolly Jenner. ‘No one preaches like my man. I have never heard such sermons.’

Not many, we may be sure; for the good lady had not heard more than six from any other divine for the last twenty years.

The personages of Golden Friars talked Toby Croke over on his return. Doctor Lincote said:

‘He must have led a hard life; he had *dried in* so, and got a good deal of hard muscle; and he rather fancied he had been soldiering – he stood like a soldier; and the mark over his right eye looked like a gunshot.’

People might wonder how he could have survived a gunshot over the eye; but was not Lincote a doctor – and an army doctor to boot – when he was young; and who, in Golden Friars, could dispute with him on points of surgery? And I believe the truth is, that this mark had been really made by a pistol bullet.

Mr. Jarlot, the attorney, would ‘go bail’ he had picked up some sense in his travels; and honest Turnbull, the host of the George and Dragon, said heartily:

‘We must look out something for him to put his hand to. *Now’s* the time to make a man of him.’

The end of it was that he became, among other things, the sexton of Golden Friars.

He was a punctual sexton. He meddled with no other person’s business; but he was a silent man, and by no means popular. He was reserved in company; and he used to walk alone by the shore of the lake, while other fellows played at fives or skittles; and when he visited the kitchen of the George, he had his liquor to himself, and in the midst of the general talk was a saturnine listener. There was something sinister in this man’s face; and when things went wrong with him, he could look dangerous enough.

There were whispered stories in Golden Friars about Toby Croke. Nobody could say how they got there. Nothing is more mysterious than the spread of rumour. It is like a vial poured on the air. It travels, like an epidemic, on the sightless currents of the atmosphere, or by the laws of a telluric influence equally intangible. These stories treated, though darkly, of the long period of his absence from his native village; but they took no well-defined shape, and no one could refer them to any authentic source.

The Vicar’s charity was of the kind that thinketh no evil; and in such cases he always insisted on proof. Croke was, of course, undisturbed in his office.

On the evening before the tragedy came to light – trifles are always remembered after the catastrophe – a boy, returning along the margin of the mere, passed him by seated on a prostrate trunk of a tree, under the ‘bield’ of a rock, counting silver money. His lean body and limbs were bent together, his knees were up to his chin, and his long fingers were telling the coins over hurriedly in the hollow of his other hand. He glanced at the boy, as the old English saying is, like ‘the devil looking over Lincoln.’ But a black and sour look from Mr. Croke, who never had a smile for a child nor a greeting for a wayfarer, was nothing strange.

Toby Croke lived in the grey stone house, cold and narrow, that stands near the church porch, with the window of its staircase looking out into the churchyard, where so much of his labour, for many a day, had been expended. The greater part of this house was untenanted.

The old woman who was in charge of it slept in a settle-bed, among broken stools, old sacks, rotten chests and other rattle-traps, in the small room at the rear of the house, floored with tiles.

At what time of the night she could not tell, she awoke, and saw a man, with his hat on, in her room. He had a candle in his hand, which he shaded with his coat from her eye; his back was towards her, and he was rummaging in the drawer in which she usually kept her money.

Having got her quarter’s pension of two pounds that day, however, she had placed it, folded in

a rag, in the corner of her tea caddy, and locked it up in the 'eat-malison' or cupboard.

She was frightened when she saw the figure in her room, and she could not tell whether her visitor might not have made his entrance from the contiguous churchyard. So, sitting bolt upright in her bed, her grey hair almost lifting her kerchief off her head, and all over in 'a fit o' t' creepins,' as she expressed it, she demanded:

'In God's name, what want ye thar?'

'Whar's the peppermint ye used to hev by ye, woman? I'm bad wi' an inward pain.'

'It's all gane a month sin', she answered; and offered to make him a 'het' drink if he'd get to his room.

But he said:

'Never mind, I'll try a mouthful o' gin.'

And, turning on his heel, he left her.

In the morning the sexton was gone. Not only in his lodging was there no account of him, but, when inquiry began to be extended, nowhere in the village of Golden Friars could he be found.

Still he might have gone off, on business of his own, to some distant village, before the town was stirring; and the sexton had no near kindred to trouble their heads about him. People, therefore, were willing to wait, and take his return ultimately for granted.

At three o'clock the good Vicar, standing at his hall door, looking across the lake towards the noble fells that rise, steep and furrowed, from that beautiful mere, saw two men approaching across the green, in a straight line, from a boat that was moored at the water's edge. They were carrying between them something which, though not very large, seemed ponderous.

'Ye'll ken this, sir,' said one of the boatmen as they set down, almost at his feet, a small church bell, such as in old-fashioned chimes yields the treble notes.

'This won't be less nor five stean. I ween it's fra' the church steeple yon.'

'What! one of our church bells?' ejaculated the Vicar – for a moment lost in horrible amazement. 'Oh, no! – *no*, that can't possibly be! Where did you find it?'

He had found the boat, in the morning, moored about fifty yards from her moorings where he had left it the night before, and could not think how that came to pass; and now, as he and his partner were about to take their oars, they discovered this bell in the bottom of the boat, under a bit of canvas, also the sexton's pick and spade – 'tom-spey'ad,' they termed that peculiar, broad-bladed implement.

'Very extraordinary! We must try whether there is a bell missing from the tower,' said the Vicar, getting into a fuss. 'Has Crooke come back yet? Does anyone know where he is?'

The sexton had not yet turned up.

'That's odd – that's provoking,' said the Vicar. 'However, my key will let us in. Place the bell in the hall while I get it; and then we can see what all this means.'

To the church, accordingly, they went, the Vicar leading the way, with his own key in his hand. He turned it in the lock, and stood in the shadow of the ground porch, and shut the door.

A sack, half full, lay on the ground, with open mouth, a piece of cord lying beside it. Something clanked within it as one of the men shoved it aside with his clumsy shoe.

The Vicar opened the church door and peeped in. The dusky glow from the western sky, entering through a narrow window, illuminated the shafts and arches, the old oak carvings, and the discoloured monuments, with the melancholy glare of a dying fire.

The Vicar withdrew his head and closed the door. The gloom of the porch was deeper than ever as, stooping, he entered the narrow door that opened at the foot of the winding stair that leads to the first loft; from which a rude ladder-stair of wood, some five and twenty feet in height, mounts through a trap to the ringers' loft.

Up the narrow stairs the Vicar climbed, followed by his attendants, to the first loft. It was very dark: a narrow bow-slit in the thick wall admitted the only light they had to guide them. The ivy leaves, seen from the deep shadow, flashed and flickered redly, and the sparrows twittered among them.

'Will one of you be so good as to go up and count the bells, and see if they are all right?' said



the Vicar. 'There should be—'

'Agoy! what's that?' exclaimed one of the men, recoiling from the foot of the ladder.

'By Jen!' ejaculated the other, in equal surprise.

'Good gracious!' gasped the Vicar, who, seeing indistinctly a dark mass lying on the floor, had stooped to examine it, and placed his hand upon a cold, dead face.

The men drew the body into the streak of light that traversed the floor.

It was the corpse of Toby Crooke! There was a frightful scar across his forehead.

The alarm was given. Doctor Lincote, and Mr. Jarlcot, and Turnbull, of the George and Dragon, were on the spot immediately; and many curious and horrified spectators of minor importance.

The first thing ascertained was that the man must have been many hours dead. The next was that his skull was fractured, across the forehead, by an awful blow. The next was that his neck was broken.

His hat was found on the floor, where he had probably laid it, with his handkerchief in it.

The mystery now began to clear a little; for a bell – one of the chime hung in the tower – was found where it had rolled to, against the wall, with blood and hair on the rim of it, which corresponded with the grizzly fracture across the front of his head.

The sack that lay in the vestibule was examined, and found to contain all the church plate; a silver salver that had disappeared, about a month before, from Dr. Lincote's store of valuables; the Vicar's gold pencil-case, which he thought he had forgot in the vestry book; silver spoons, and various other contributions, levied from time to time off a dozen different households, the mysterious disappearance of which spoils had, of late years, begun to make the honest little community uncomfortable. Two bells had been taken down from the chime; and now the shrewd part of the assemblage, putting things together, began to comprehend the nefarious plans of the sexton, who lay mangled and dead on the floor of the tower, where only two days ago he had tolled the holy bell to call the good Christians of Golden Friars to worship.

The body was carried into the yard of the George and Dragon and laid in the old coach-house; and the townsfolk came grouping in to have a peep at the corpse, and stood round, looking darkly, and talking as low as if they were in a church.

The Vicar, in gaiters and slightly shovel hat, stood erect, as one in a little circle of notables – the doctor, the attorney, Sir Geoffrey Mardykes, who happened to be in the town, and Turnbull, the host – in the centre of the paved yard, they having made an inspection of the body, at which troops of the village stragglers, to-ing and fro-ing, were gaping and frowning as they whispered their horrible conjectures.

'What d'ye think o' that?' said Tom Scales, the old hostler of the George, looking pale, with a stern, faint smile on his lips, as he and Dick Linklin sauntered out of the coach-house together.

'The deaul will hev his ain noo,' answered Dick, in his friend's ear. 'T' sexton's got a craighdraw like he gav' the lass over the clints of Scarsdale; ye mind what the ald soger told us when he hid his face in the kitchen of the George here? By Jen! I'll ne'er forget that story.'

'I ween 'twas all true enough,' replied the hostler; 'and the sizzup he gav' the sleepin' man wi' t' poker across the forehead. See whar the edge o' t' bell took him, and smashed his ain, the self-same lids. By ma sang, I wonder the deaul did na carry awa' his corpse i' the night, as he did wi' Tam Lunder's at Mooltern Mill.'

'Hout, man, who ever sid t' deaul inside o' a church?'

'The corpse is ill-faur'd enew to scare Satan himsel', for that matter; though it's true what you say. Ay, ye're reet tul a trippet, thar; for Beelzebub dar'n't show his snout inside the church, not the length o' the black o' my nail.'

While this discussion was going on, the gentlefolk who were talking the matter over in the centre of the yard had dispatched a message for the coroner all the way to the town of Hextan.

The last tint of sunset was fading from the sky by this time; so, of course, there was no thought of an inquest earlier than next day.

In the meantime it was horribly clear that the sexton had intended to rob the church of its

plate, and had lost his life in the attempt to carry the second bell, as we have seen, down the worn ladder of the tower. He had tumbled backwards and broken his neck upon the floor of the loft; and the heavy bell, in its fall, descended with its edge across his forehead.

Never was a man more completely killed by a double catastrophe, in a moment.

The bells and the contents of the sack, it was surmised, he meant to have conveyed across the lake that night, and with the help of his spade and pick to have buried them in Clousted Forest, and returned, after an absence of but a few hours – as he easily might – before morning, unmissed and unobserved. He would no doubt, having secured his booty, have made such arrangements as would have made it appear that the church had been broken into. He would, of course, have taken all measures to divert suspicion from himself, and have watched a suitable opportunity to repossess himself of the buried treasure and dispose of it in safety.

And now came out, into sharp relief, all the stories that had, one way or other, stolen after him into the town. Old Mrs. Pullen fainted when she saw him, and told Doctor Lincote, after, that she thought he was the highwayman who fired the shot that killed the coachman the night they were robbed on Hounslow Heath. There were the stories also told by the wayfaring old soldier with the wooden leg, and fifty others, up to this more than half disregarded, but which now seized on the popular belief with a startling grasp.

The fleeting light soon expired, and twilight was succeeded by the early night.

The inn yard gradually became quiet; and the dead sexton lay alone, in the dark, on his back, locked up in the old coach-house, the key of which was safe in the pocket of Tom Scales, the trusty old hostler of the George.

It was about eight o'clock, and the hostler, standing alone on the road in the front of the open door of the George and Dragon, had just smoked his pipe out. A bright moon hung in the frosty sky. The fells rose from the opposite edge of the lake like phantom mountains. The air was stirless. Through the boughs and sprays of the leafless elms no sigh or motion, however hushed, was audible. Not a ripple glimmered on the lake, which at one point only reflected the brilliant moon from its dark blue expanse like burnished steel. The road that runs by the inn door, along the margin of the lake, shone dazzlingly white.

White as ghosts, among the dark holly and juniper, stood the tall piers of the Vicar's gate, and their great stone balls, like heads, overlooking the same road, a few hundred yards up the lake, to the left. The early little town of Golden Friars was quiet by this time. Except for the townsfolk who were now collected in the kitchen of the inn itself, no inhabitant was now outside his own threshold.

Tom Scales was thinking of turning in. He was beginning to fill a little queer. He was thinking of the sexton, and could not get the fixed features of the dead man out of his head, when he heard the sharp though distant ring of a horse's hoof upon the frozen road. Tom's instinct apprized him of the approach of a guest to the George and Dragon. His experienced ear told him that the horseman was approaching by the Dardale road, which, after crossing that wide and dismal moss, passes the southern fells by Dunner Cleugh and finally enters the town of Golden Friars by joining the Mardykes road, at the edge of the lake, close to the gate of the Vicar's house.

A clump of tall trees stood at this point; but the moon shone full upon the road and cast their shadow backward.

The hoofs were plainly coming at a gallop, with a hollow rattle. The horseman was a long time in appearing. Tom wondered how he had heard the sound – so sharply frosty as the air was – so very far away.

He was right in his guess. The visitor was coming over the mountainous road from Dardale Moss; and he now saw a horseman, who must have turned the corner of the Vicar's house at the moment when his eye was wearied; for when he saw him for the first time he was advancing, in the hazy moonlight, like the shadow of a cavalier, at a gallop, upon the level strip of road that skirts the margin of the mere, between the George and the Vicar's piers.

The hostler had not long to wonder why the rider pushed his beast at so furious a pace, and how he came to have heard him, as he now calculated, at least three miles away. A very few moments sufficed to bring horse and rider to the inn door.

It was a powerful black horse, something like the great Irish hunter that figured a hundred years ago, and would carry sixteen stone with ease across country. It would have made a grand charger. Not a hair turned. It snorted, it pawed, it arched its neck; then threw back its ears and down its head, and looked ready to lash, and then to rear; and seemed impatient to be off again, and incapable of standing quiet for a moment.

The rider got down as light as shadow falls.

But he was a tall, sinewy figure. He wore a cape or short mantle, a cocked hat, and a pair of jack-boots, such as held their ground in some primitive corners of England almost to the close of the last century.

‘Take him, lad,’ said he to old Scales. ‘You need not walk or wisp him – he never sweats or tires. Give him his oats, and let him take his own time to eat them. House!’ cried the stranger – in the old-fashioned form of summons which still lingered, at that time, in out-of-the-way places – in a deep and piercing voice.

As Tom Scales led the horse away to the stables it turned its head towards its master with a short, shrill neigh.

‘About *your* business, old gentleman – we must not go too fast,’ the stranger cried back again to his horse, with a laugh as harsh and piercing; and he strode into the house.

The hostler led this horse into the inn yard. In passing, it sidled up to the coach-house gate, within which lay the dead sexton – snorted, pawed and lowered its head suddenly, with ear close to the plank, as if listening for a sound from within; then uttered again the same short, piercing neigh.

The hostler was chilled at this mysterious coquetry with the dead. He liked the brute less and less every minute.

In the meantime, its master had proceeded.

‘I’ll go to the inn kitchen,’ he said, in his startling bass, to the drawer who met him in the passage.

And on he went, as if he had known the place all his days: not seeming to hurry himself – stepping leisurely, the servant thought – but gliding on at such a rate, nevertheless, that he had passed his guide and was in the kitchen of the George before the drawer had got much more than half-way to it.

A roaring fire of dry wood, peat and coal lighted up this snug but spacious apartment – flashing on pots and pans, and dressers high-piled with pewter plates and dishes; and making the uncertain shadows of the long ‘hanks’ of onions and many a flitch and ham, depending from the ceiling, dance on its glowing surface.

The doctor and the attorney, even Sir Geoffrey Mardykes, did not disdain on this occasion to take chairs and smoke their pipes by the kitchen fire, where they were in the thick of the gossip and discussion excited by the terrible event.

The tall stranger entered uninvited.

He looked like a gaunt, athletic Spaniard of forty, burned half black in the sun, with a bony, flattened nose. A pair of fierce black eyes were just visible under the edge of his hat; and his mouth seemed divided, beneath the moustache, by the deep scar of a hare-lip.

Sir Geoffrey Mardykes and the host of the George, aided by the doctor and the attorney, were discussing and arranging, for the third or fourth time, their theories about the death and the probable plans of Toby Croke, when the stranger entered.

The new-comer lifted his hat, with a sort of smile, for a moment from his black head.

‘What do you call this place, gentlemen?’ asked the stranger.

‘The town of Golden Friars, sir,’ answered the doctor politely.

‘The George and Dragon, sir: Anthony Turnbull, at your service,’ answered mine host, with a solemn bow, at the same moment – so that the two voices went together, as if the doctor and the innkeeper were singing a catch.

‘The George and the Dragon,’ repeated the horseman, expanding his long hands over the fire which he had approached. ‘Saint George, King George, the Dragon, the Devil: it is a very grand idol, that outside your door, sir. You catch all sorts of worshippers – courtiers, fanatics, scamps:

all's fish, eh? Everybody welcome, provided he drinks like one. Suppose you brew a bowl or two of punch. I'll stand it. How many are we? *Here* – count, and let us have enough. Gentlemen, I mean to spend the night here, and my horse is in the stable. What holiday, fun, or fair has got so many pleasant faces together? When I last called here – for, now I bethink me, I have seen the place before – you all looked sad. It was on a Sunday, that dismalest of holidays; and it would have been positively melancholy only that your sexton – that saint upon earth – Mr. Crooke, was here.' He was looking round, over his shoulder, and added: 'Ha! don't I see him there?'

Frightened a good deal were some of the company. All gaped in the direction in which, with a nod, he turned his eyes.

'He's *not* thar – he *can't* be thar – we *see* he's not thar,' said Turnbull, as dogmatically as old Joe Willet might have delivered himself – for he did not care that the George should earn the reputation of a haunted house. 'He's met an accident, sir: he's dead – he's elsewhere – and therefore can't be here.'

Upon this the company entertained the stranger with the narrative – which they made easy by a division of labour, two or three generally speaking at a time, and no one being permitted to finish a second sentence without finding himself corrected and supplanted.

'The man's in Heaven, so sure as you're not,' said the traveller so soon as the story was ended. 'What! he was fiddling with the church bell, was he, and d – d for that – eh? Landlord, get us some drink. A sexton d – d for pulling down a church bell he has been pulling at for ten years!'

'You came, sir, by the Dardale-road, I believe?' said the doctor (village folk are curious). 'A dismal moss is Dardale Moss, sir; and a bleak clim' up the fells on t' other side.'

'I say "Yes" to all – from Dardale Moss, as black as pitch and as rotten as the grave, up that zigzag wall you call a road, that looks like chalk in the moonlight, through Dunner Cleugh, as dark as a coal-pit, and down here to the George and the Dragon, where you have a roaring fire, wise men, good punch – here it is – and a corpse in your coach-house. Where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Come, landlord, ladle out the nectar. Drink, gentlemen – drink, all. Brew another bowl at the bar. How divinely it stinks of alcohol! I hope you like it, gentlemen: it smells all over of spices, like a mummy. Drink, friends. Ladle, landlord. Drink, all. Serve it out.'

The guest fumbled in his pocket, and produced three guineas, which he slipped into Turnbull's fat palm.

'Let punch flow till that's out. I'm an old friend of the house. I call here, back and forward. I know you well, Turnbull, though you don't recognize me.'

'You have the advantage of me, sir,' said Mr. Turnbull, looking hard on that dark and sinister countenance – which, or the like of which, he could have sworn he had never seen before in his life. But he liked the weight and colour of his guineas, as he dropped them into his pocket. 'I hope you will find yourself comfortable while you stay.'

'You have given me a bedroom?'

'Yes, sir – the cedar chamber.'

'I know it – the very thing. No – no punch for me. By and by, perhaps.'

The talk went on, but the stranger had grown silent. He had seated himself on an oak bench by the fire, towards which he extended his feet and hands with seeming enjoyment; his cocked hat being, however, a little over his face.

Gradually the company began to thin. Sir Geoffrey Mardykes was the first to go; then some of the humbler townfolk. The last bowl of punch was on its last legs. The stranger walked into the passage and said to the drawer:

'Fetch me a lantern. I must see my nag. Light it – hey! That will do. No – you need not come.'

The gaunt traveller took it from the man's hand and strode along the passage to the door of the stable-yard, which he opened and passed out.

Tom Scales, standing on the pavement, was looking through the stable window at the horses when the stranger plucked his shirtsleeve. With an inward shock the hostler found himself alone in presence of the very person he had been thinking of.

'I say – they tell me you have something to look at in there' – he pointed with his thumb at the

old coach-house door. 'Let us have a peep.'

Tom Scales happened to be at that moment in a state of mind highly favourable to anyone in search of a submissive instrument. He was in great perplexity, and even perturbation. He suffered the stranger to lead him to the coach-house gate.

'You must come in and hold the lantern,' said he. 'I'll pay you handsomely.'

The old hostler applied his key and removed the padlock.

'What are you afraid of? Step in and throw the light on his face,' said the stranger grimly. 'Throw open the lantern: stand *there*. Stoop over him a little – he won't bite you. Steady, or you may pass the night with him!'

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In the meantime the company at the George had dispersed; and, shortly after, Anthony Turnbull – who, like a good landlord, was always last in bed, and first up, in his house – was taking, alone, his last look round the kitchen before making his final visit to the stable-yard, when Tom Scales tottered into the kitchen, looking like death, his hair standing upright; and he sat down on an oak chair, all in a tremble, wiped his forehead with his hand, and, instead of speaking, heaved a great sigh or two.

It was not till after he had swallowed a dram of brandy that he found his voice, and said:

'We've the deaul himsel' in t' house! By Jen! ye'd best send fo t' sir' (the clergyman). 'Happen he'll tak him in hand wi' holy writ, and send him elsewhidder deftly. Lord atween us and harm! I'm a sinfu' man. I tell ye, Mr. Turnbull, I dar' n't stop in t' George to-night under the same roof wi' him.'

'Ye mean the ra-beyoned, black-feyaced lad, wi' the brocken neb? Why, that's a gentleman wi' a pocket ful o' guineas, man, and a horse worth fifty pounds!'

'That horse is no better nor his rider. The nags that were in the stable wi' him, they all tuk the creepins, and sweated like rain down a thack. I tuk them all out o' that, away from him, into the hack-stable, and I thocht I cud never get them past him. But that's not all. When I was keekin inta t' winda at the nags, he comes behint me and claps his claw on ma shouther, and he gars me gang wi' him, and open the aad coach-house door, and haad the cannle for him, till he peaked into the deed man't feyace; and, as God's my judge, I sid the corpse open its eyes and wark its mouth, like a man smoorin' and strivin' to talk. I cudna move or say a word, though I felt my hair rising on my heed; but at lang-last I gev a yelloch, and say I, "La! what is that?" And he himsel' looked round on me, like the devil he is; and, wi' a skirl o' a laugh, he strikes the lantern out o' my hand. When I cum to myself we were outside the coach-house door. The moon was shinin' in, and I cud see the corpse stretched on the table whar we left it; and he kicked the door to wi' a purr o' his foot. "Lock it," says he; and so I did. And here's the key for ye – tak it yoursel', sir. He offer'd me money: he said he'd mak me a rich man if I'd sell him the corpse, and help him awa' wi' it.'

'Hout, man! What cud he want o' t' corpse? He's not doctor, to do a' that lids. He was takin' a rise out o' ye, lad,' said Turnbull.

'Na, na – he wants the corpse. There's summat you a' me can't tell he wants to do wi' 't; and he'd liefer get it wi' sin and thievin', and the damage of my soul. He's one of them freytens a boo or a dobbies off Dardale Moss, that's always astir wi' the like after nightfall; unless – Lord save us! – he be the deaul himsel'.'

'Whar is he noo?' asked the landlord, who was growing uncomfortable.

'He spang'd up the back stair to his room. I wonder you didn't hear him trampin' like a wild horse; and he clapt his door that the house shook again – but Lord knows whar he is noo. Let us gang awa's up to the Vicar's, and gan *him* come down, and talk wi' him.'

'Hoity toity, man – you're too easy scared,' said the landlord, pale enough by this time. 'Twould be a fine thing, truly, to send abroad that the house was haunted by the deaul himsel'! Why, 'twould be the ruin o' the George. You're sure ye locked the door on the corpse?'

'Aye, sir – sartain.'

‘Come wi’ me, Tom – we’ll gi’ a last look round the yard.’

So, side by side, with many a jealous look right and left, and over their shoulders, they went in silence. On entering the old-fashioned quadrangle, surrounded by stables and other offices – built in the antique cage-work fashion – they stopped for a while under the shadow of the inn gable, and looked round the yard, and listened. All was silent – nothing stirring.

The stable lantern was lighted; and with it in his hand Tony Turnbull, holding Tom Scales by the shoulder, advanced. He hauled Tom after him for a step or two; then stood still and shoved him before him for a step or two more; and thus cautiously – as a pair of skirmishers under fire – they approached the coach-house door.

‘There, ye see – all safe,’ whispered Tom, pointing to the lock, which hung – distinct in the moonlight – in its place. ‘Cum back, I say!’

‘Cum on, say I!’ retorted the landlord valorously. ‘It would never do to allow any tricks to be played with the chap in there’ – he pointed to the coach-house door.

‘The coroner here in the morning, and never a corpse to sit on!’ He unlocked the padlock with these words, having handed the lantern to Tom. ‘Here, keck in, Tom,’ he continued; ‘ye hev the lantern – and see if all’s as ye left it.’

‘Not me – na, not for the George and a’ that’s in it!’ said Tom, with a shudder, sternly, as he took a step backward.

‘What the – what are ye afraid on? Gi’ me the lantern – it is all one: *I* will.’

And cautiously, little by little, he opened the door; and, holding the lantern over his head in the narrow slit, he peeped in – frowning and pale – with one eye, as if he expected something to fly in his face. He closed the door without speaking, and locked it again.

‘As safe as a thief in a mill,’ he whispered with a nod to his companion. And at that moment a harsh laugh overhead broke the silence startlingly, and set all the poultry in the yard gabbling.

‘Thar he be!’ said Tom, clutching the landlord’s arm – ‘in the winda – see!’

The window of the cedar-room, up two pair of stairs, was open; and in the shadow a darker outline was visible of a man, with his elbows on the window-stone, looking down upon them.

‘Look at his eyes – like two live coals!’ gasped Tom.

The landlord could not see all this so sharply, being confused, and not so long-sighted as Tom.

‘Time, sir,’ called Tony Turnbull, turning cold as he thought he saw a pair of eyes shining down redly at him – ‘time for honest folk to be in their beds, and asleep!’

‘As sound as your sexton!’ said the jeering voice from above.

‘Come out of this,’ whispered the landlord fiercely to his hostler, plucking him hard by the sleeve.

They got into the house, and shut the door.

‘I wish we were shot of him,’ said the landlord, with something like a groan, as he leaned against the wall of the passage. ‘I’ll sit up, anyhow – and, Tom, you’ll sit wi’ me. Cum into the gun-room. No one shall steal the dead man out of my yard while I can draw a trigger.’

The gun-room in the George is about twelve feet square. It projects into the stable-yard and commands a full view of the old coach-house; and, through a narrow side window, a flanking view of the back door of the inn, through which the yard is reached.

Tony Turnbull took down the blunderbuss – which was the great ordnance of the house – and loaded it with a stiff charge of pistol bullets.

He put on a great-coat which hung there, and was his covering when he went out at night, to shoot wild ducks. Tom made himself comfortable likewise. They then sat down at the window, which was open, looking into the yard, the opposite side of which was white in the brilliant moonlight.

The landlord laid the blunderbuss across his knees, and stared into the yard. His comrade stared also. The door of the gun-room was locked; so they felt tolerably secure.

An hour passed; nothing had occurred. Another. The clock struck one. The shadows had shifted a little; but still the moon shone full on the old coach-house, and the stable where the guest’s

horse stood.

Turnbull thought he heard a step on the back-stair. Tom was watching the back-door through the side window, with eyes glazing with the intensity of his stare. Anthony Turnbull, holding his breath, listened at the room door. It was a false alarm.

When he came back to the window looking into the yard:

‘Hish! Look thar!’ said he in a vehement whisper.

From the shadow at the left they saw the figure of the gaunt horseman, in short cloak and jack-boots, emerge. He pushed open the stable door, and led out his powerful black horse. He walked it across the front of the building till he reached the old coach-house door; and there, with its bridle on its neck, he left it standing, while he stalked to the yard gate; and, dealing it a kick with his heel, it sprang back with the rebound, shaking from top to bottom, and stood open. The stranger returned to the side of his horse; and the door which secured the corpse of the dead sexton seemed to swing slowly open of itself as he entered, and returned with the corpse in his arms, and swung it across the shoulders of the horse, and instantly sprang into the saddle.

‘Fire!’ shouted Tom, and bang went the blunderbuss with a stunning crack. A thousand sparrows’ wings winnowed through the air from the thick ivy. The watch-dog yelled a furious bark. There was a strange ring and whistle in the air. The blunderbuss had burst to shivers right down to the very breech. The recoil rolled the inn-keeper upon his back on the floor, and Tom Scales was flung against the side of the recess of the window, which had saved him from a tumble as violent. In this position they heard the searing laugh of the departing horseman, and saw him ride out of the gate with his ghastly burden.

\* \* \* \* \*

Perhaps some of my readers, like myself, have heard this story told by Roger Turnbull, now host of the George and Dragon, the grandson of the very Tony who then swayed the spigot and keys of that inn, in the identical kitchen of which the fiend treated so many of the neighbours to punch.

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What infernal object was subserved by the possession of the dead villain’s body, I have not learned. But a very curious story, in which a vampire resuscitation of Crooke the sexton figures, may throw a light upon this part of the tale.

The result of Turnbull’s shot at the disappearing fiend certainly justifies old Andrew Moreton’s dictum, which is thus expressed in his curious ‘History of Apparitions’: ‘I warn rash brands who, pretending not to fear the devil, are for using the ordinary violences with him, which affect one man from another – or with an apparition, in which they may be sure to receive some mischief. I knew one fired a gun at an apparition and the gun burst in a hundred pieces in his hand; another struck at an apparition with a sword, and broke his sword in pieces and wounded his hand grievously; and ’tis next to madness for anyone to go that way to work with any spirit, be it angel or be it devil.’

## Making a Magazine (Stephen Leacock)

I dreamt one night not long ago that I was the editor of a great illustrated magazine. I offer no apology for this: I have often dreamt even worse of myself than that.

In any case I didn’t do it on purpose: very often, I admit, I try to dream that I am President Wilson<sup>1</sup>, or Mr. Bryan<sup>2</sup>, or the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, or a share of stock in the Standard Oil Co. for the

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<sup>1</sup> **President Wilson** – Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), president of the United States in 1913–1921, the creator of the League of Nations after World War I

<sup>2</sup> **Mr. Bryan** – William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925), an American politician and orator, the leader of the Democratic Party

sheer luxury and cheapness of it. But this was an accident. I had been sitting up late at night writing personal reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln<sup>3</sup>. I was writing against time. The presidential election was drawing nearer every day and the market for reminiscences of Lincoln was extremely brisk, but, of course, might collapse any moment. Writers of my class have to consider this sort of thing. For instance, in the middle of Lent, I find that I can do fairly well with 'Recent Lights on the Scriptures.' Then, of course, when the hot weather comes, the market for Christmas poetry opens and there's a fairly good demand for voyages in the Polar Seas. Later on, in the quiet of the autumn I generally write some 'Unpublished Letters from Goethe<sup>4</sup> to Balzac<sup>5</sup>,' and that sort of thing.

But it's a wearing occupation, full of disappointments, and needing the very keenest business instinct to watch every turn of the market.

I am afraid that this is a digression. I only wanted to explain how a man's mind could be so harassed and overwrought as to make him dream that he was an editor.

I knew at once in my dream where and what I was. As soon as I saw the luxury of the surroundings, – the spacious room with its vaulted ceiling, lit with stained glass, – the beautiful mahogany table at which I sat writing with a ten-dollar fountain pen, the gift of the manufacturers, – on embossed stationery, the gift of the embossers, – on which I was setting down words at eight and a half cents a word and deliberately picking out short ones through sheer business acuteness; – as soon as I saw; – this I said to myself –

'I am an editor, and this is my editorial sanctum.' Not that I have ever seen an editor or a sanctum. But I have sent so many manuscripts to so many editors and received them back with such unflinching promptness, that the scene before me was as familiar to my eye as if I had been wide awake.

As I thus mused, revelling in the charm of my surroundings and admiring the luxurious black alpaca coat and the dainty dickie which I wore, there was a knock at the door.

A beautiful creature entered. She evidently belonged to the premises, for she wore no hat and there were white cuffs upon her wrists. She has that indescribable beauty of effectiveness such as is given to hospital nurses.

This, I thought to myself, must be my private secretary.

'I hope I don't interrupt you, sir,' said the girl.

'My dear child,' I answered, speaking in that fatherly way in which an editor might well address a girl almost young enough to be his wife, 'pray do not mention it. Sit down. You must be fatigued after your labours of the morning. Let me ring for a club sandwich.'

'I came to say, sir,' the secretary went on, 'that there's a person downstairs waiting to see you.'

My manner changed at once.

'Is he a gentleman or a contributor?' I asked.

'He doesn't look exactly like a gentleman.'

'Very good,' I said. 'He's a contributor for sure. Tell him to wait. Ask the caretaker to lock him in the coal cellar, and kindly slip out and see if there's a policeman on the beat in case I need him.'

'Very good, sir,' said the secretary.

I waited for about an hour, wrote a few editorials advocating the rights of the people, smoked some Turkish cigarettes, drank a glass of sherry, and ate part of an anchovy sandwich.

Then I rang the bell. 'Bring that man here,' I said.

Presently they brought him in. He was a timid-looking man with an embarrassed manner and all the low cunning of an author stamped on his features. I could see a bundle of papers in his hand, and I knew that the scoundrel was carrying a manuscript.

'Now, sir,' I said, 'speak quickly. What's your business?'

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<sup>3</sup> **Abraham Lincoln** (1803–1865) – the United States president at the time of the American Civil War of 1861–1865

<sup>4</sup> **Goethe** – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), the greatest German poet, writer, scientist, critic and philosopher

<sup>5</sup> **Balzac** – Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), a French writer, one of the greatest novelists of all time



'I've got here a manuscript,' he began.

'What!' I shouted at him. 'A manuscript! You'd dare, would you! Bringing manuscripts in here! What sort of a place do you think this is?'

'It's the manuscript of a story,' he faltered.

'A story!' I shrieked. 'What on earth do you think we'd want stories for! Do you think we've nothing better to do than to print your idiotic ravings? Have you any idea, you idiot, of the expense we're put to in setting up our fifty pages of illustrated advertising? Look here,' I continued, seizing a bundle of proof illustrations that lay in front of me, 'do you see this charming picture of an Asbestos Cooker, guaranteed fireless, odourless, and purposeless? Do you see this patent motor-car with pneumatic cushions, and the full-page description of its properties? Can you form any idea of the time and thought that we have to spend on these things, and yet you dare to come in here with your miserable stories. By heaven,' I said, rising in my seat, 'I've a notion to come over there and choke you: I'm entitled to do it by the law, and I think I will.'

'Don't, don't,' he pleaded. 'I'll go away. I meant no harm. I'll take it with me.'

'No you don't,' I interrupted; 'none of your sharp tricks with this magazine. You've submitted this manuscript to me, and it stays submitted. If I don't like it, I shall prosecute you, and, I trust, obtain full reparation from the courts.'

To tell the truth, it had occurred to me that perhaps I might need after all to buy the miserable stuff. Even while I felt that my indignation at the low knavery of the fellow was justified, I knew that it might be necessary to control it. The present low state of public taste demands a certain amount of this kind of matter distributed among the advertising.

I rang the bell again.

'Please take this man away and shut him up again. Have them keep a good eye on him. He's an author.'

'Very good, sir,' said the secretary.

I called her back for one moment.

'Don't feed him anything,' I said.

'No,' said the girl.

The manuscript lay before me on the table. It looked bulky. It bore the title *Dorothy Dacres, or, Only a Clergyman's Daughter*.

I rang the bell again.

'Kindly ask the janitor to step this way.'

He came in. I could see from the straight, honest look in his features that he was a man to be relied upon.

'Jones,' I said, 'can you read?'

'Yes, sir,' he said, 'some.'

'Very good. I want you to take this manuscript and read it. Read it all through and then bring it back here.'

The janitor took the manuscript and disappeared. I turned to my desk again and was soon absorbed in arranging a full-page display of plumbers' furnishings for the advertising. It had occurred to me that by arranging the picture matter in a neat device with verses from 'Home Sweet Home' running through it in double-leaded old English type, I could set up a page that would be the delight of all business readers and make this number of the magazine a conspicuous success. My mind was so absorbed that I scarcely noticed that over an hour elapsed before the janitor returned.

'Well, Jones,' I said as he entered, 'have you read that manuscript?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And you find it all right – punctuation good, spelling all correct?'

'Very good indeed, sir.'

'And there is, I trust, nothing of what one would call a humorous nature in it? I want you to answer me quite frankly, Jones, – there is nothing in it that would raise a smile, or even a laugh, is there?'

'Oh, no, sir,' said Jones, 'nothing at all.'

‘And now tell me – for remember that the reputation of our magazine is at stake – does this story make a decided impression on you? Has it,’ and here I cast my eye casually at the latest announcement of a rival publication, ‘the kind of tour de force<sup>1</sup> which at once excites you to the full qui vive<sup>2</sup> and which contains a sustained brio<sup>3</sup> that palpitates on every page? Answer carefully, Jones, because if it hasn’t, I won’t buy it.’

‘I think it has,’ he said.

‘Very well,’ I answered; ‘now bring the author to me.’

In the interval of waiting, I hastily ran my eye through the pages of the manuscript.

Presently they brought the author back again. He had assumed a look of depression.

‘I have decided,’ I said, ‘to take your manuscript.’

Joy broke upon his face. He came nearer to me as if to lick my hand.

‘Stop a minute,’ I said. ‘I am willing to take your story, but there are certain things, certain small details which I want to change.’

‘Yes?’ he said timidly.

‘In the first place, I don’t like your title. *Dorothy Dacres, or, Only a Clergyman’s Daughter* is too quiet. I shall change it to read *Dorothea Dashaway, or, The Quicksands of Society*.’

‘But surely,’ began the contributor, beginning to wring his hands—

‘Don’t interrupt me,’ I said. ‘In the next place, the story is much too long.’ Here I reached for a large pair of tailor’s scissors that lay on the table. ‘This story contains nine thousand words. We never care to use more than six thousand. I must therefore cut some of it off.’ I measured the story carefully with a pocket tape that lay in front of me, cut off three thousand words and handed them back to the author. ‘These words,’ I said, ‘you may keep. We make no claim on them at all. You are at liberty to make any use of them that you like.’

‘But please,’ he said, ‘you have cut off all the end of the story: the whole conclusion is gone. The readers can’t possibly tell—’

I smiled at him with something approaching kindness.

‘My dear sir,’ I said, ‘they *never* get beyond three thousand words of the end of a magazine story. The end is of no consequence whatever. The beginning, I admit, may be, but the end! Come! Come! And in any case in our magazine we print the end of each story separately, distributed among the advertisements to break the type. But just at present we have plenty of these on hand. You see,’ I continued, for there was something in the man’s manner that almost touched me, ‘all that is needed is that the last words printed must have a look of finality. That’s all. Now, let me see,’ and I turned to the place where the story was cut, ‘what are the last words: here: ‘Dorothea sank into a chair. There we must leave her!’ Excellent! What better end could you want? She sank into a chair and you leave her. Nothing more natural.’

The contributor seemed about to protest. But I stopped him.

‘There is one other small thing,’ I said. ‘Our coming number is to be a Plumbers’ and Motor Number. I must ask you to introduce a certain amount of plumbing into your story.’ I rapidly turned over the pages. ‘I see,’ I said, ‘that your story as written is laid largely in Spain in the summer. I shall ask you to alter this to Switzerland and make it winter time to allow for the breaking of steam-pipes. Such things as these, however, are mere details; we can easily arrange them.’

I reached out my hand.

‘And now,’ I said, ‘I must wish you a good afternoon.’

The contributor seemed to pluck up courage.

‘What about remuneration’ – he faltered.

I waived the question gravely aside. ‘You will, of course, be duly paid at our usual rate. You receive a cheque two years after publication. It will cover all your necessary expenses, including ink, paper, string, sealing-wax and other incidentals, in addition to which we hope to be able to make you a compensation for your time on a reasonable basis per hour. Good-bye.’

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1 **tour de force** = amazing feat (*French*)

2 **qui vive** – alert, lookout, here: attention (*French*)

3 **brío** = brilliance (*French*)

He left, and I could hear them throwing him downstairs.

Then I sat down, while my mind was on it, and wrote the advance notice of the story. It ran like this:

NEXT MONTH'S NUMBER OF THE MEGALOMANIA  
MAGAZINE WILL CONTAIN A  
THRILLING STORY, ENTITLED

'DOROTHEA DASHAWAY, OR, THE  
QUICKSANDS OF SOCIETY.'

The author has lately leaped into immediate recognition as the greatest master of the short story in the American World. His style has a *brio*, a poise<sup>1</sup>, a *savoir faire*, a *je ne sais quoi*<sup>2</sup>, which stamps all his work with the cachet of literary superiority. The sum paid for the story of *Dorothea Dashaway* is said to be the largest ever paid for a single MS<sup>3</sup>. Every page palpitates with interest, and at the conclusion of this remarkable narrative the reader lays down the page in utter bewilderment, to turn perhaps to the almost equally marvellous illustration of Messrs. Spiggott and Fawcett's Home Plumbing Device Exposition which adorns the same number of the great review.

I wrote this out, rang the bell, and was just beginning to say to the secretary –

'My dear child, – pray pardon my forgetfulness. You must be famished for lunch. Will you permit me–'

And then I woke up – at the wrong minute, as one always does.

### **Simple Stories of Success, or How to Succeed in Life (Stephen Leacock)**

Let me begin with a sort of parable. Many years ago when I was on the staff of a great public school, we engaged a new swimming master.

He was the most successful man in that capacity that we had had for years.

Then one day it was discovered that he couldn't swim.

He was standing at the edge of the swimming tank explaining the breast stroke to the boys in the water.

He lost his balance and fell in. He was drowned.

Or no, he wasn't drowned, I remember, – he was rescued by some of the pupils whom he had taught to swim.

After he was resuscitated by the boys – it was one of the things he had taught them – the school dismissed him.

Then some of the boys who were sorry for him taught him how to swim, and he got a new job as a swimming master in another place.

But this time he was an utter failure. He swam well, but they said he couldn't *teach*.

So his friends looked about to get him a new job. This was just at the time when the bicycle craze came in. They soon found the man a position as an instructor in bicycle riding. As he had never been on a bicycle in his life, he made an admirable teacher. He stood fast on the ground and said, 'Now then, all you need is confidence.'

Then one day he got afraid that he might be found out. So he went out to a quiet place and got on a bicycle, at the top of a slope, to learn to ride it. The bicycle ran away with him. But for the skill and daring of one of his pupils, who saw him and rode after him, he would have been killed.

This story, as the reader sees, is endless. Suffice it to say that the man I speak of is now in an aviation school teaching people to fly. They say he is one of the best aviators that ever walked.

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1 **poise** = graceful bearing, composure (*French*)

2 **je ne sais quoi** – I don't know what (*French*)

3 **MS** = manuscript

According to all the legends and story books, the principal factor in success is perseverance. Personally, I think there is nothing in it. If anything, the truth lies the other way.

There is an old motto that runs, 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.' This is nonsense. It ought to read, 'If at first you don't succeed, quit, quit, at once.'

If you can't do a thing, more or less, the first time you try, you will never do it. Try something else while there is yet time.

Let me illustrate this with a story.

I remember, long years ago, at a little school that I attended in the country, we had a schoolmaster, who used perpetually to write on the blackboard, in a copperplate hand, the motto that I have just quoted:

'If at first you don't succeed,  
Try, try, again.'

He wore plain clothes and had a hard, determined face. He was studying for some sort of preliminary medical examination, and was saving money for a medical course. Every now and then he went away to the city and tried the examination: and he always failed. Each time he came back, he would write up on the blackboard:

'Try, try again.'

And always he looked grimmer and more determined than before. The strange thing was that, with all his industry and determination, he would break out every now and then into drunkenness, and lie round the tavern at the crossroads, and the school would be shut for two days. Then he came back, more fiercely resolute than ever. Even children could see that the man's life was a fight. It was like the battle between Good and Evil in Milton's<sup>1</sup> epics.

Well, after he had tried it four times, the schoolmaster at last passed the examination; and he went away to the city in a suit of store clothes, with eight hundred dollars that he had saved up, to study medicine. Now it happened that he had a brother who was not a bit like himself, but was a sort of ne'er-do-well, always hard-up and sponging on other people, and never working.

And when the schoolmaster came to the city and his brother knew that he had eight hundred dollars, he came to him and got him drinking and persuaded him to hand over the eight hundred dollars and to let him put it into the Louisiana State lottery. In those days the Louisiana Lottery had not yet been forbidden the use of the mails, and you could buy a ticket for anything from one dollar up. The Grand Prize was two hundred thousand dollars, and the Seconds were a hundred thousand each.

So the brother persuaded the schoolmaster to put the money in. He said he had a system for buying only the tickets with prime numbers, that won't divide by anything, and that it must win. He said it was a mathematical certainty, and he figured it out with the schoolmaster in the back room of a saloon, with a box of dominoes on the table to show the plan of it. He told the schoolmaster that he himself would only take ten per cent of what they made, as a commission for showing the system, and the schoolmaster could have the rest.

So, in a mad moment, the schoolmaster handed over his roll of money, and that was the last he ever saw of it.

The next morning when he was up he was fierce with rage and remorse for what he had done. He could not go back to the school, and he had no money to go forward. So he stayed where he was in the little hotel where he had got drunk, and went on drinking. He looked so fierce and unkempt that in the hotel they were afraid of him, and the bar-tenders watched him out of the corners of their eyes wondering what he would do; because they knew that there was only one end possible, and they waited for it to come. And presently it came. One of the bar-tenders went up to the schoolmaster's room to bring up a letter, and he found him lying on the bed with his face grey as

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<sup>1</sup> **Milton** – John Milton (1608–1674), an English poet and historian, the author of the famous 'Paradise Lost'

ashes, and his eyes looking up at the ceiling. He was stone dead. Life had beaten him.

And the strange thing was that the letter that the bartender carried up that morning was from the management of the Louisiana Lottery. It contained a draft on New York, signed by the treasurer of the State of Louisiana, for two hundred thousand dollars. The schoolmaster had won the Grand Prize.

The above story, I am afraid, is a little gloomy. I put it down merely for the moral it contained, and I became so absorbed in telling it that I almost forgot what the moral was that it was meant to convey. But I think the idea is that if the schoolmaster had long before abandoned the study of medicine, for which he was not fitted, and gone in, let us say, for playing the banjo, he might have become end-man in a minstrel show. Yes, that was it.

Let me pass on to other elements in success.

I suppose that anybody will admit that the peculiar quality that is called initiative – the ability to act promptly on one's own judgement – is a factor of the highest importance.

I have seen this illustrated two or three times in a very striking fashion.

I knew, in Toronto<sup>1</sup> – it is long years ago – a singularly bright young man whose name was Robinson. He had had some training in the iron and steel business, and when I knew him was on the lookout for an opening.

I met him one day in a great hurry, with a valise in his hand.

'Where are you going?' I asked.

'Over to England,' he said. 'There is a firm in Liverpool that have advertised that they want an agent here, and I'm going over to apply for the job.'

'Can't you do it by letter?' I asked.

'That's just it,' said Robinson, with a chuckle, 'all the other men will apply by letter. I'll go right over myself and get there as soon or sooner than the letters. I'll be the man on the spot, and I'll get the job.'

He was quite right. He went over to Liverpool, and was back in a fortnight with English clothes and a big salary.

But I cannot recommend his story to my friends. In fact, it should not be told too freely. It is apt to be dangerous.

I remember once telling this story of Robinson to a young man called Tomlinson who was out of a job. Tomlinson had a head two sizes too big, and a face like a bun. He had lost three jobs in a bank and two in a broker's office, but he knew his work, and on paper he looked a good man.

I told him about Robinson, to encourage him, and the story made a great impression.

'Say, that was a great scheme, eh?' he kept repeating. He had no command of words, and always said the same thing over and over.

A few days later I met Tomlinson in the street with a valise in his hand.

'Where are you going?' I asked.

'I'm off to Mexico,' he answered. 'They're advertising for a Canadian teller for a bank in Tuscupalco<sup>2</sup>. I've sent my credentials down, and I'm going to follow them right up in person. In a thing like this, the personal element is everything.'

So Tomlinson went down to Mexico and he travelled by sea to Mexico City<sup>3</sup>, and then with a mule train to Tuscupalco. But the mails, with his credentials, went by land and got there two days ahead of him.

When Tomlinson got to Tuscupalco he went into the bank and he spoke to the junior manager and told him what he came for. 'I'm awfully sorry,' the junior manager said, 'I'm afraid that this post has just been filled.' Then he went into an inner room to talk with the manager. 'The tellership that you wanted a Canadian for,' he asked, 'didn't you say that you have a man already?'

'Yes,' said the manager, 'a brilliant young fellow from Toronto; his name is Tomlinson, I have his credentials here – a first-class man. I've wired him to come right along, at our expense, and

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<sup>1</sup> **Toronto** – a city in southeastern Canada on the northern shore of Lake Ontario

<sup>2</sup> **Tuscupalco** – a town in Mexico

<sup>3</sup> **Mexico City** – the capital of Mexico, founded by the Spanish in 1521

we'll keep the job open for him ten days.'

'There's a young man outside,' said the junior, 'who wants to apply for the job.'

'Outside?' exclaimed the manager. 'How did he get here?'

'Came in on the mule train this morning: says he can do the work and wants the job.'

'What's he like?' asked the manager.

The junior shook his head.

'Pretty dusty looking customer,' he said. 'Shifty looking.'

'Same old story,' murmured the manager. 'It's odd how these fellows drift down here, isn't it? Up to something crooked at home, I suppose. Understands the working of a bank, eh? I guess he understands it a little too well for my taste. No, no,' he continued, tapping the papers that lay on the table, 'now that we've got a first-class man like Tomlinson, let's hang on to him. We can easily wait ten days, and the cost of the journey is nothing to the bank as compared with getting a man of Tomlinson's stamp. And, by the way, you might telephone to the Chief of Police and get him to see to it that this loafer gets out of town straight off.'

So the Chief of Police shut up Tomlinson in the calaboose and then sent him down to Mexico City under a guard. By the time the police were done with him he was dead broke, and it took him four months to get back to Toronto; when he got there, the place in Mexico had been filled long ago.

But I can imagine that some of my readers might suggest that I have hitherto been dealing only with success in a very limited way, and that more interest would lie in discussing how the really great fortunes are made.

Everybody feels an instinctive interest in knowing how our great captains of industry, our financiers and railroad magnates made their money.

Here the explanation is really a very simple one. There is, in fact, only one way to amass a huge fortune in business or railway management. One must begin at the bottom. One must mount the ladder from the lowest rung. But this lowest rung is everything. Any man who can stand upon it with his foot well poised, his head erect, his arms braced and his eye directed upward, will inevitably mount to the top.

But after all – I say this as a kind of afterthought in conclusion – why bother with success at all? I have observed that the successful people get very little real enjoyment out of life. In fact the contrary is true. If I had to choose – with an eye to having a really pleasant life – between success and ruin, I should prefer ruin every time. I have several friends who are completely ruined – some two or three times – in a large way of course; and I find that if I want to get a really good dinner, where the champagne is just as it ought to be, and where hospitality is unhindered by mean thoughts of expense, I can get it best at the house of a ruined man.

## **The Terrible Solomons (Jack London)**

There is no gainsaying that the Solomons<sup>1</sup> are a hard-bitten bunch of islands. On the other hand, there are worse places in the world. But to the new chum who has no constitutional understanding of men and life in the rough, the Solomons may indeed prove terrible.

It is true that fever and dysentery are perpetually on the walk-about, that loathsome skin diseases abound, that the air is saturated with a poison that bites into every pore, cut, or abrasion and plants malignant ulcers, and that many strong men who escape dying there return as wrecks to their own countries. It is also true that the natives of the Solomons are a wild lot, with a hearty appetite for human flesh and a fad for collecting human heads. Their highest instinct of sportsmanship is to catch a man with his back turned and to smite him a cunning blow with a tomahawk that severs the spinal column at the base of the brain. It is equally true that on some islands, such as Malaita, the profit and loss account of social intercourse is calculated in homicides. Heads are a medium of exchange, and white heads are extremely valuable. Very often a dozen villages make a jack-pot, which they fatten moon by moon, against the time when some brave

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<sup>1</sup> **the Solomons** – a group of islands in southwestern Pacific Ocean, discovered by the Spanish explorers in 1568

warrior presents a white man's head, fresh and gory, and claims the pot.

All the foregoing is quite true, and yet there are white men who have lived in the Solomons a score of years and who feel homesick when they go away from them. A man needs only to be careful – and lucky – to live a long time in the Solomons; but he must also be of the right sort. He must have the hallmark of the inevitable white man stamped upon his soul. He must be inevitable. He must have a certain grand carelessness of odds, a certain colossal self-satisfaction, and a racial egotism that convinces him that one white is better than a thousand niggers every day in the week, and that on Sunday he is able to clean out two thousand niggers. For such are the things that have made the white man inevitable. Oh, and one other thing – the white man who wishes to be inevitable, must not merely despise the lesser breeds and think a lot of himself; he must also fail to be too long on imagination. He must not understand too well the instincts, customs, and mental processes of the blacks, the yellows, and the browns; for it is not in such fashion that the white race has tramped its royal road around the world.

Bertie Arkwright was not inevitable. He was too sensitive, too finely strung, and he possessed too much imagination. The world was too much with him. He projected himself too quiveringly into his environment. Therefore, the last place in the world for him to come was the Solomons. He did not come, expecting to stay. A five weeks' stop-over between steamers, he decided, would satisfy the call of the primitive he felt thrumming the strings of his being. At least, so he told the lady tourists on the *makembo*, though in different terms; and they worshipped him as a hero, for they were lady tourists and they would know only the safety of the steamer's deck as she threaded her way through the Solomons.

There was another man on board, of whom the ladies took no notice. He was a little shriveled wisp of a man, with a withered skin the color of mahogany. His name on the passenger list does not matter, but his other name, Captain Malu, was a name for niggers to conjure with, and to scare naughty pickaninnies to righteousness from New Hanover to the New Hebrides. He had farmed savages and savagery, and from fever and hardship, the crack of Sniders and the lash of the overseers, had wrested five millions of money in the form of biche-de-mer, sandalwood, pearl-shell and turtle-shell, ivory nuts and copra, grasslands, trading stations, and plantations. Captain Malu's little finger, which was broken, had more inevitableness in it than Bertie Arkwright's whole carcass. But then, the lady tourists had nothing by which to judge save appearances, and Bertie certainly was a fine-looking man.

Bertie talked with Captain Malu in the smoking room, confiding to him his intention of seeing life red and bleeding in the Solomons. Captain Malu agreed that the intention was ambitious and honorable. It was not until several days later that he became interested in Bertie, when that young adventurer insisted on showing him an automatic 44-caliber pistol. Bertie explained the mechanism and demonstrated by slipping a loaded magazine up the hollow butt.

'It is so simple,' he said. He shot the outer barrel back along the inner one. 'That loads it and cocks it, you see. And then all I have to do is pull the trigger, eight times, as fast as I can quiver my finger. See that safety clutch. That's what I like about it. It is safe. It is positively fool-proof.' He slipped out the magazine. 'You see how safe it is.'

As he held it in his hand, the muzzle came in line with Captain Malu's stomach. Captain Malu's blue eyes looked at it unswervingly.

'Would you mind pointing it in some other direction?' he asked.

'It's perfectly safe,' Bertie assured him. 'I withdrew the magazine. It's not loaded now, you know.'

'A gun is always loaded.'

'But this one isn't.'

'Turn it away just the same.'

Captain Malu's voice was flat and metallic and low, but his eyes never left the muzzle until the line of it was drawn past him and away from him.

'I'll bet a fiver it isn't loaded,' Bertie proposed warmly.

The other shook his head.

‘Then I’ll show you.’

Bertie started to put the muzzle to his own temple with the evident intention of pulling the trigger.

‘Just a second,’ Captain Malu said quietly, reaching out his hand. ‘Let me look at it.’

He pointed it seaward and pulled the trigger. A heavy explosion followed, instantaneous with the sharp click of the mechanism that flipped a hot and smoking cartridge sideways along the deck.

Bertie’s jaw dropped in amazement.

‘I slipped the barrel back once, didn’t I?’ he explained. ‘It was silly of me, I must say.’

He giggled flabbily, and sat down in a steamer chair. The blood had ebbed from his face, exposing dark circles under his eyes. His hands were trembling and unable to guide the shaking cigarette to his lips. The world was too much with him, and he saw himself with dripping brains prone upon the deck.

‘Really,’ he said, ‘. . . really.’

‘It’s a pretty weapon,’ said Captain Malu, returning the automatic to him.

The Commissioner was on board the *Makembo*, returning from Sydney<sup>1</sup>, and by his permission a stop was made at Ugi to land a missionary. And at Ugi lay the ketch *Arla*, Captain Hansen, skipper. Now the *Arla* was one of many vessels owned by Captain Malu, and it was at his suggestion and by his invitation that Bertie went aboard the *Arla* as guest for a four days’ recruiting cruise on the coast of Malaita. Thereafter the *Arla* would drop him at Reminge Plantation (also owned by Captain Malu), where Bertie could remain for a week, and then be sent over to Tulagi, the seat of government, where he would become the Commissioner’s guest. Captain Malu was responsible for two other suggestions, which given, he disappears from this narrative. One was to Captain Hansen, the other to Mr. Harriwell, manager of Reminge Plantation. Both suggestions were similar in tenor, namely, to give Mr. Bertram Arkwright an insight into the rawness and redness of life in the Solomons. Also, it is whispered that Captain Malu mentioned that a case of Scotch would be coincidental with any particularly gorgeous insight Mr. Arkwright might receive...

‘Yes, Swartz always was too pig-headed. You see, he took four of his boat’s crew to Tulagi to be flogged – officially, you know – then started back with them in the whaleboat. It was pretty squally, and the boat capsized just outside. Swartz was the only one drowned. Of course, it was an accident.’

‘Was it? Really?’ Bertie asked, only half-interested, staring hard at the black man at the wheel.

Ugi had dropped astern, and the *Arla* was sliding along through a summer sea toward the wooded ranges of Malaita. The helmsman who so attracted Bertie’s eyes sported a ten penny nail, stuck skewerwise through his nose. About his neck was a string of pants buttons. Thrust through holes in his ears were a can opener, the broken handle of a toothbrush, a clay pipe, the brass wheel of an alarm clock, and several Winchester rifle<sup>2</sup> cartridges.

On his chest, suspended from around his neck hung the half of a china plate. Some forty similarly appareled blacks lay about the deck, fifteen of which were boat’s crew, the remainder being fresh labor recruits.

‘Of course it was an accident,’ spoke up the *Arla*’s mate, Jacobs, a slender, dark-eyed man who looked more a professor than a sailor. ‘Johnny Bedip nearly had the same kind of accident. He was bringing back several from a flogging, when they capsized him. But he knew how to swim as well as they, and two of them were drowned. He used a boat stretcher and a revolver. Of course it was an accident.’

‘Quite common, them accidents,’ remarked the skipper. ‘You see that man at the wheel, Mr. Arkwright? He’s a man eater. Six months ago, he and the rest of the boat’s crew drowned the then captain of the *Arla*. They did it on deck, sir, right aft there by the mizzen-traveler.’

‘The deck was in a shocking state,’ said the mate.

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<sup>1</sup> **Sydney** – a city and port on the southeastern coast of Australia

<sup>2</sup> **Winchester rifle** – a famous rifle developed by Oliver Winchester (1810–1880), an American manufacturer of guns



‘Do I understand –?’ Bertie began.

‘Yes, just that,’ said Captain Hansen. ‘It was an accidental drowning.’

‘But on deck –?’

‘Just so. I don’t mind telling you, in confidence, of course, that they used an axe.’

‘This present crew of yours?’

Captain Hansen nodded.

‘The other skipper always was too careless,’ explained the mate. He but just turned his back, when they let him have it.’

‘We haven’t any show down here,’ was the skipper’s complaint. ‘The government protects a nigger against a white every time. You can’t shoot first. You’ve got to give the nigger first shot, or else the government calls it murder and you go to Fiji. That’s why there’s so many drowning accidents.’

Dinner was called, and Bertie and the skipper went below, leaving the mate to watch on deck.

‘Keep an eye out for that black devil, Auiki,’ was the skipper’s parting caution. ‘I haven’t liked his looks for several days.’

‘Right O,’ said the mate.

Dinner was part way along, and the skipper was in the middle of his story of the cutting out of the Scottish Chiefs.

‘Yes,’ he was saying, ‘she was the finest vessel on the coast. But when she missed stays, and before ever she hit the reef, the canoes started for her. There were five white men, a crew of twenty Santa Cruz<sup>1</sup> boys and Samoans<sup>2</sup>, and only the supercargo escaped. Besides, there were sixty recruits. They were all kai-kai’d. Kai-kai? – oh, I beg your pardon. I mean they were eaten. Then there was the *James Edwards*, a dandy-rigged–’

But at that moment there was a sharp oath from the mate on deck and a chorus of savage cries. A revolver went off three times, and then was heard a loud splash. Captain Hansen had sprung up the companionway on the instant, and Bertie’s eyes had been fascinated by a glimpse of him drawing his revolver as he sprang.

Bertie went up more circumspectly, hesitating before he put his head above the companionway slide. But nothing happened. The mate was shaking with excitement, his revolver in his hand. Once he startled, and half-jumped around, as if danger threatened his back.

‘One of the natives fell overboard,’ he was saying, in a queer tense voice. ‘He couldn’t swim.’

‘Who was it?’ the skipper demanded.

‘Auiki,’ was the answer.

‘But I say, you know, I heard shots,’ Bertie said, in trembling eagerness, for he scented adventure, and adventure that was happily over with.

The mate whirled upon him, snarling:

‘It’s a damned lie. There ain’t been a shot fired. The nigger fell overboard.’

Captain Hansen regarded Bertie with unblinking, lack-luster eyes.

‘I-I thought–’ Bertie was beginning.

‘Shots?’ said Captain Hansen, dreamily. ‘Shots? Did you hear any shots, Mr. Jacobs?’

‘Not a shot,’ replied Mr. Jacobs.

The skipper looked at his guest triumphantly, and said:

‘Evidently an accident. Let us go down, Mr. Arkwright, and finish dinner.’

Bertie slept that night in the captain’s cabin, a tiny stateroom off the main cabin. The fore’ard bulkhead was decorated with a stand of rifles. Over the bunk were three more rifles. Under the bunk was a big drawer, which, when he pulled it out, he found filled with ammunition, dynamite, and several boxes of detonators. He elected to take the settee on the opposite side. Lying conspicuously on the small table, was the *Arla*’s log. Bertie did not know that it had been especially prepared for the occasion by Captain Malu, and he read therein how on September 21, two boat’s crew had fallen overboard and been drowned. Bertie read between the lines and knew better. He read how the

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1 **Santa Cruz** – a group of volcanic islands in the Solomon Islands

2 **Samoans** – residents of Samoa, an island in the Pacific northwest of New Zealand

*Arla*’s whale boat had been bushwhacked at Su’u and had lost three men; of how the skipper discovered the cook stewing human flesh on the galley fire – flesh purchased by the boat’s crew ashore in Fui; of how an accidental discharge of dynamite, while signaling, had killed another boat’s crew; of night attacks; ports fled from between the dawns; attacks by bushmen in mangrove swamps and by fleets of salt-water men in the larger passages. One item that occurred with monotonous frequency was death by dysentery. He noticed with alarm that two white men had so died – guests, like himself, on the *Arla* .

‘I say, you know,’ Bertie said next day to Captain Hansen. ‘I’ve been glancing through your log.’

The skipper displayed quick vexation that the log had been left lying about.

‘And all that dysentery, you know, that’s all rot, just like the accidental drownings,’ Bertie continued. ‘What does dysentery really stand for?’

The skipper openly admired his guest’s acumen, stiffened himself to make indignant denial, then gracefully surrendered.

‘You see, it’s like this, Mr. Arkwright. These islands have got a bad enough name as it is. It’s getting harder every day to sign on white men. Suppose a man is killed. The company has to pay through the nose for another man to take the job. But if the man merely dies of sickness, it’s all right. The new chums don’t mind disease. What they draw the line at is being murdered. I thought the skipper of the *Arla* had died of dysentery when I took his billet. Then it was too late. I’d signed the contract.’

‘Besides,’ said Mr. Jacobs, ‘there’s altogether too many accidental drownings anyway. It don’t look right. It’s the fault of the government. A white man hasn’t a chance to defend himself from the niggers.’

‘Yes, look at the *Princess* and that Yankee mate,’ the skipper took up the tale. ‘She carried five white men besides a government agent. The captain, the agent, and the supercargo were ashore in the two boats. They were killed to the last man. The mate and boson, with about fifteen of the crew – Samoans and Tongans<sup>1</sup> – were on board. A crowd of niggers came off from shore. First thing the mate knew, the boson and the crew were killed in the first rush. The mate grabbed three cartridge belts and two Winchesters and skinned up to the cross-trees. He was the sole survivor, and you can’t blame him for being mad. He pumped one rifle till it got so hot he couldn’t hold it, then he pumped the other. The deck was black with niggers. He cleaned them out. He dropped them as they went over the rail, and he dropped them as fast as they picked up their paddles. Then they jumped into the water and started to swim for it, and being mad, he got half a dozen more. And what did he get for it?’

‘Seven years in Fiji<sup>2</sup>,’ snapped the mate.

‘The government said he wasn’t justified in shooting after they’d taken to the water,’ the skipper explained.

‘And that’s why they die of dysentery nowadays,’ the mate added.

‘Just fancy,’ said Bertie, as he felt a longing for the cruise to be over.

Later on in the day he interviewed the black who had been pointed out to him as a cannibal. This fellow’s name was Sumasai. He had spent three years on a Queensland<sup>3</sup> plantation. He had been to Samoa, and Fiji, and Sydney; and as a boat’s crew had been on recruiting schooners through New Britain, New Ireland<sup>4</sup>, New Guinea<sup>5</sup>, and the Admiralties<sup>6</sup>. Also, he was a wag, and he had taken a line on his skipper’s conduct. Yes, he had eaten many men. How many? He could not remember the tally. Yes, white men, too; they were very good, unless they were sick. He had once eaten a sick one.

‘My word!’ he cried, at the recollection. ‘Me sick plenty along him. My belly walk about too

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1 **Tongans** – residents of Tonga, an island in the South Pacific Ocean

2 **Fiji** – an island group of Melanesia in the Pacific Ocean, west of Samoa and Tonga

3 **Queensland** – a state in northeastern Australia

4 **New Britain, New Ireland** – islands of the Bismarck Archipelago in the southwestern Pacific Ocean

5 **New Guinea** – an island of the Malay Archipelago in the Pacific Ocean north of Australia

6 **the Admiralties** – the island group of 40 islands in Papua New Guinea in the southwestern Pacific Ocean

much.'

Bertie shuddered, and asked about heads. Yes, Sumasai had several hidden ashore, in good condition, sun-dried, and smoke-cured. One was of the captain of a schooner. It had long whiskers. He would sell it for two quid. Black men's heads he would sell for one quid. He had some pickaninny heads, in poor condition that he would let go for ten bob.

Five minutes afterward, Bertie found himself sitting on the companionway-slide alongside a black with a horrible skin disease. He sheered off, and on inquiry was told that it was leprosy. He hurried below and washed himself with antiseptic soap. He took many antiseptic washes in the course of the day, for every native on board was afflicted with malignant ulcers of one sort or another.

As the *Arla* drew in to an anchorage in the midst of mangrove swamps, a double row of barbed wire was stretched around above her rail. That looked like business, and when Bertie saw the shore canoes alongside, armed with spears, bows and arrows, and Sniders, he wished more earnestly than ever that the cruise was over.

That evening the natives were slow in leaving the ship at sundown. A number of them checked the mate when he ordered them ashore. 'Never mind, I'll fix them,' said Captain Hansen, diving below.

When he came back, he showed Bertie a stick of dynamite attached to a fish hook. Now it happens that a paper-wrapped bottle of chlorodyne with a piece of harmless fuse projecting can fool anybody. It fooled Bertie, and it fooled the natives. When Captain Hansen lighted the fuse and hooked the fish hook into the tail end of a native's loin cloth, that native was smitten with so an ardent a desire for the shore that he forgot to shed the loin cloth. He started for'ard, the fuse sizzling and spluttering at his rear, the natives in his path taking headers over the barbed wire at every jump. Bertie was horror-stricken. So was Captain Hansen. He had forgotten his twenty-five recruits, on each of which he had paid thirty shillings advance. They went over the side along with the shore-dwelling folk and followed by him who trailed the sizzling chlorodyne bottle.

Bertie did not see the bottle go off; but the mate opportunely discharging a stick of real dynamite aft where it would harm nobody, Bertie would have sworn in any admiralty court to a nigger blown to flinders. The flight of the twenty-five recruits had actually cost the *Arla* forty pounds, and, since they had taken to the bush, there was no hope of recovering them. The skipper and his mate proceeded to drown their sorrow in cold tea.

The cold tea was in whiskey bottles, so Bertie did not know it was cold tea they were mopping up. All he knew was that the two men got very drunk and argued eloquently and at length as to whether the exploded nigger should be reported as a case of dysentery or as an accidental drowning. When they snored off to sleep, he was the only white man left, and he kept a perilous watch till dawn, in fear of an attack from shore and an uprising of the crew.

Three more days the *Arla* spent on the coast, and three more nights the skipper and the mate drank overfondly of cold tea, leaving Bertie to keep the watch. They knew he could be depended upon, while he was equally certain that if he lived, he would report their drunken conduct to Captain Malu. Then the *Arla* dropped anchor at Reminge Plantation, on Guadalcanal<sup>1</sup>, and Bertie landed on the beach with a sigh of relief and shook hands with the manager. Mr. Harriwell was ready for him.

'Now you mustn't be alarmed if some of our fellows seem downcast,' Mr. Harriwell said, having drawn him aside in confidence. 'There's been talk of an outbreak, and two or three suspicious signs I'm willing to admit, but personally I think it's all poppycock.'

'How – how many blacks have you on the plantation?' Bertie asked, with a sinking heart.

'We're working four hundred just now,' replied Mr. Harriwell, cheerfully; 'but the three of us, with you, of course, and the skipper and mate of the *Arla*, can handle them all right.'

Bertie turned to meet one McTavish, the storekeeper, who scarcely acknowledged the introduction, such was his eagerness to present his resignation.

'It being that I'm a married man, Mr. Harriwell, I can't very well afford to remain on longer.'

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<sup>1</sup> **Guadalcanal** – the largest island of the Solomon Islands in the southeastern Pacific Ocean

Trouble is working up, as plain as the nose on your face. The niggers are going to break out, and there'll be another Hohono horror here.'

'What's a Hohono horror?' Bertie asked, after the storekeeper had been persuaded to remain until the end of the month.

'Oh, he means Hohono Plantation, on Ysabel,' said the manager. 'The niggers killed the five white men ashore, captured the schooner, killed the captain and mate, and escaped in a body to Malaita. But I always said they were careless on Hohono. They won't catch us napping here. Come along, Mr. Arkwright, and see our view from the veranda.'

Bertie was too busy wondering how he could get away to Tulagi to the Commissioner's house, to see much of the view. He was still wondering, when a rifle exploded very near to him, behind his back. At the same moment his arm was nearly dislocated, so eagerly did Mr. Harriwell drag him indoors.

'I say, old man, that was a close shave,' said the manager, pawing him over to see if he had been hit. 'I can't tell you how sorry I am. But it was broad daylight, and I never dreamed.'

Bertie was beginning to turn pale.

'They got the other manager that way,' McTavish vouchsafed. 'And a dashed fine chap he was. Blew his brains out all over the veranda. You noticed that dark stain there between the steps and the door?'

Bertie was ripe for the cocktail which Mr. Harriwell pitched in and compounded for him; but before he could drink it, a man in riding trousers and puttees entered.

'What's the matter now?' the manager asked, after one look at the newcomer's face. 'Is the river up again?'

'River be blowed – it's the niggers. Stepped out of the cane grass, not a dozen feet away, and whopped at me. It was a Snider, and he shot from the hip. Now what I want to know is where'd he get that Snider? – Oh, I beg pardon. Glad to know you, Mr. Arkwright.'

'Mr. Brown is my assistant,' explained Mr. Harriwell. 'And now let's have that drink.'

'But where'd he get that Snider?' Mr. Brown insisted. 'I always objected to keeping those guns on the premises.'

'They're still there,' Mr. Harriwell said, with a show of heat.

Mr. Brown smiled incredulously.

'Come along and see,' said the manager.

Bertie joined the procession into the office, where Mr. Harriwell pointed triumphantly at a big packing case in a dusty corner.

'Well, then where did the beggar get that Snider?' harped Mr. Brown.

But just then McTavish lifted the packing case. The manager started, then tore off the lid. The case was empty. They gazed at one another in horrified silence. Harriwell drooped wearily.

Then McVeigh cursed.

'What I contended all along – the house-boys are not to be trusted.'

'It does look serious,' Harriwell admitted, 'but we'll come through it all right. What the sanguinary niggers need is a shaking up. Will you gentlemen please bring your rifles to dinner, and will you, Mr. Brown, kindly prepare forty or fifty sticks of dynamite. Make the fuses good and short. We'll give them a lesson. And now, gentlemen, dinner is served.'

One thing that Bertie detested was rice and curry, so it happened that he alone partook of an inviting omelet. He had quite finished his plate, when Harriwell helped himself to the omelet. One mouthful he tasted, then spat out vociferously.

'That's the second time,' McTavish announced ominously.

Harriwell was still hawking and spitting.

'Second time, what?' Bertie quavered.

'Poison,' was the answer. 'That cook will be hanged yet.'

'That's the way the bookkeeper went out at Cape March,' Brown spoke up. 'Died horribly. They said on the Jessie that they heard him screaming three miles away.'

'I'll put the cook in irons,' sputtered Harriwell. 'Fortunately we discovered it in time.'

Bertie sat paralyzed. There was no color in his face. He attempted to speak, but only an inarticulate gurgle resulted. All eyed him anxiously.

‘Don’t say it, don’t say it,’ McTavish cried in a tense voice.

‘Yes, I ate it, plenty of it, a whole plateful!’ Bertie cried explosively, like a diver suddenly regaining breath.

The awful silence continued half a minute longer, and he read his fate in their eyes.

‘Maybe it wasn’t poison after all,’ said Harriwell, dismally.

‘Call in the cook,’ said Brown.

In came the cook, a grinning black boy, nose-spiked and ear-plugged.

‘Here, you, Wi-wi, what name that?’ Harriwell bellowed, pointing accusingly at the omelet.

Wi-wi was very naturally frightened and embarrassed.

‘Him good fella kai-kai,’ he murmured apologetically.

‘Make him eat it,’ suggested McTavish. ‘That’s a proper test.’

Harriwell filled a spoon with the stuff and jumped for the cook, who fled in panic.

‘That settles it,’ was Brown’s solemn pronouncement. ‘He won’t eat it.’

‘Mr. Brown, will you please go and put the irons on him?’ Harriwell turned cheerfully to Bertie. ‘It’s all right, old man, the Commissioner will deal with him, and if you die, depend upon it, he will be hanged.’

‘Don’t think the government’ll do it,’ objected McTavish.

‘But gentlemen, gentlemen,’ Bertie cried. ‘In the meantime think of me.’

Harriwell shrugged his shoulders pityingly.

‘Sorry, old man, but it’s a native poison, and there are no known antidotes for native poisons. Try and compose yourself and if—’

Two sharp reports of a rifle from without, interrupted the discourse, and Brown, entering, reloaded his rifle and sat down to table.

‘The cook’s dead,’ he said. ‘Fever. A rather sudden attack.’

‘I was just telling Mr. Arkwright that there are no antidotes for native poisons—’

‘Except gin,’ said Brown.

Harriwell called himself an absent-minded idiot and rushed for the gin bottle.

‘Neat, man, neat,’ he warned Bertie, who gulped down a tumbler two-thirds full of the raw spirits, and coughed and choked from the angry bite of it till the tears ran down his cheeks.

Harriwell took his pulse and temperature, made a show of looking out for him, and doubted that the omelet had been poisoned. Brown and McTavish also doubted; but Bertie discerned an insincere ring in their voices. His appetite had left him, and he took his own pulse stealthily under the table. There was no question but what it was increasing, but he failed to ascribe it to the gin he had taken. McTavish, rifle in hand, went out on the veranda to reconnoiter.

‘They’re massing up at the cook-house,’ was his report. ‘And they’ve no end of Sniders. My idea is to sneak around on the other side and take them in flank. Strike the first blow, you know. Will you come along, Brown?’

Harriwell ate on steadily, while Bertie discovered that his pulse had leaped up five beats. Nevertheless, he could not help jumping when the rifles began to go off. Above the scattering of Sniders could be heard the pumping of Brown’s and McTavish’s Winchesters – all against a background of demoniacal screeching and yelling.

‘They’ve got them on the run,’ Harriwell remarked, as voices and gunshots faded away in the distance.

Scarcely were Brown and McTavish back at the table when the latter reconnoitered.

‘They’ve got dynamite,’ he said.

‘Then let’s charge them with dynamite,’ Harriwell proposed.

Thrusting half a dozen sticks each into their pockets and equipping themselves with lighted cigars, they started for the door. And just then it happened. They blamed McTavish for it afterward, and he admitted that the charge had been a trifle excessive. But at any rate it went off under the house, which lifted up cornerwise and settled back on its foundations. Half the china on the table

was shattered, while the eight-day clock stopped. Yelling for vengeance, the three men rushed out into the night, and the bombardment began.

When they returned, there was no Bertie. He had dragged himself away to the office, barricaded himself in, and sunk upon the floor in a gin-soaked nightmare, wherein he died a thousand deaths while the valorous fight went on around him. In the morning, sick and headachey from the gin, he crawled out to find the sun still in the sky and God presumable in heaven, for his hosts were alive and uninjured.

Harriwell pressed him to stay on longer, but Bertie insisted on sailing immediately on the *Arla* for Tulagi, where, until the following steamer day, he stuck close by the Commissioner's house. There were lady tourists on the outgoing steamer, and Bertie was again a hero, while Captain Malu, as usual, passed unnoticed. But Captain Malu sent back from Sydney two cases of the best Scotch whiskey on the market, for he was not able to make up his mind as to whether it was Captain Hansen or Mr Harriwell who had given Bertie Arkwright the more gorgeous insight into life in the Solomons.

## To Build a Fire (Jack London)

Day had broken cold and gray, exceedingly cold and gray, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earth-bank, where a dim and little traveled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland. It was a steep bank, and he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock. There was no sun nor hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of sun. This fact did not worry the man. He was used to the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun, and he knew that a few more-days must pass before that cheerful orb, due south, would just peep above the sky-line and dip immediately from view.

The man flung a look back along the way he had come. The Yukon<sup>1</sup> lay a mile wide and hidden under three feet of ice. On top of this ice were as many feet of snow. It was all pure white, rolling in gentle, undulations where the ice jams of the freeze-up had formed. North and south, as far as his eye could see, it was unbroken white, save for a dark hair-line that curved and twisted from around the spruce-covered island to the south, and that curved and twisted away into the north, where it disappeared behind another spruce-covered island. This dark hair-line was the trail – the main trail – that led south five hundred miles to the Chilcoot Pass<sup>2</sup>, Dyea<sup>3</sup>, and salt water; and that led north seventy miles to Dawson<sup>4</sup>, and still on to the north a thousand miles to Nulato<sup>5</sup>, and finally to St. Michael<sup>6</sup> on Bering Sea<sup>7</sup>, a thousand miles and half a thousand more.

But all this – the mysterious, far-reaching hair-line trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all – made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a chechaquo, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe.

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1 **the Yukon** – a river in North America; it flows through northwestern Canada and the central regions of Alaska, US.

2 **the Chilcoot Pass** – a pass in the Rocky Mountains used as a way to the lands rich in gold

3 **Dyea** – a river and town in the Rocky Mountains in Canada

4 **Dawson** – a city in Canada on the border with Alaska, at the confluence of the Klondike and the Yukon Rivers, named for geologist George Dawson

5 **Nulato** – a settlement on the Yukon River in Alaska

6 **St. Michael** – an island on the Yukon River

7 **Bering Sea** – a part of the Pacific Ocean in the north; it separates Asia from Alaska in North America.

Fifty degrees below zero stood for the bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear-flaps, warm moccasins, and thick socks. Fifty degrees below zero was to him just precisely fifty degrees below zero. That there should be anything more to it than that was a thought that never entered his head.

As he turned to go on, he spat speculatively. There was a sharp, explosive crackle that startled him. He spat again. And again, in the air, before it could fall to the snow, the spittle crackled. He knew that at fifty below spittle crackled on the snow, but this spittle had crackled in the air. Undoubtedly it was colder than fifty below – how much colder he did not know. But the temperature did not matter. He was bound for the old claim on the left fork of Henderson Creek, where the boys were already. They had come over across the divide from the Indian Creek country, while he had come the roundabout way to take a look at the possibilities of getting out logs in the spring from the islands in the Yukon. He would be in to camp by six o'clock; a bit after dark, it was true, but the boys would be there, a fire would be going, and a hot supper would be ready. As for lunch, he pressed his hand against the protruding bundle under his jacket. It was also under his shirt, wrapped up in a handkerchief and lying against the naked skin. It was the only way to keep the biscuits from freezing. He smiled agreeably to himself as he thought of those biscuits, each cut open and sopped in bacon grease, and each enclosing a generous slice of fried bacon.

He plunged in among the big spruce trees. The trail was faint. A foot of snow had fallen since the last sled had passed over, and he was glad he was without a sled, traveling light. In fact, he carried nothing but the lunch wrapped in the handkerchief. He was surprised, however, at the cold. It certainly was cold, he concluded as he rubbed his numb nose and cheek-bones with his mittened hand. He was a warm-whiskered man, but the hair on his face did not protect the high cheek-bones and the eager nose that thrust itself aggressively into the frosty air.

At the man's heels trotted a dog, a big native husky, the proper wolf-dog, gray-coated and without any visible or temperamental difference from its brother, the wild wolf. The animal was depressed by the tremendous cold. It knew that it was no time for traveling. Its instinct told it a truer tale than was told to the man by the man's judgment. In reality, it was not merely colder than fifty below zero; it was colder than sixty below, than seventy below. It was seventy-five below zero. Since the freezing point is thirty-two above zero, it meant that one hundred and seven degrees of frost obtained. The dog did not know anything about thermometers. Possibly in its brain there was no sharp consciousness of a condition of very cold such as was in the man's brain. But the brute had its instinct. It experienced a vague but menacing apprehension that subdued it and made it slink along at the man's heels, and that made it question eagerly every unwonted movement of the man as if expecting him to go into camp or to seek shelter somewhere and build a fire. The dog had learned fire, and it wanted fire, or else to burrow under the snow and cuddle its warmth away from the air.

The frozen moisture of its breathing had settled on its fur in a fine powder of frost, and especially were its jowls, muzzle, and eyelashes whitened by its crystallized breath. The man's red beard and mustache were likewise frosted, but more solidly, the deposit taking the form of ice and increasing with every warm, moist breath he exhaled. Also, the man was chewing tobacco, and the muzzle of ice held his lips so rigidly that he was unable to clear his chin when he expelled the juice. The result was that a crystal beard of the color and solidity of amber was increasing its length on his chin. If he fell down it would shatter itself, like glass, into brittle fragments. But he did not mind the appendage. It was the penalty all tobacco-chewers paid in that country, and he had been out before in two cold snaps. They had not been so cold as this, he knew, but by the spirit thermometer at Sixty Mile<sup>1</sup> he knew they had been registered at fifty below and at fifty-five.

He held on through the level stretch of woods for several miles, crossed a wide flat of rigger-heads, and dropped down a bank to the frozen bed of a small stream. This was Henderson Creek, and he knew he was ten miles from the forks. He looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. He was making four miles an hour, and he calculated that he would arrive at the forks at half-past twelve. He decided to celebrate that event by eating his lunch there.

The dog dropped in again at his heels, with a tail drooping discouragement, as the man swung

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<sup>1</sup> Sixty Mile – a fort on the Yukon River

along the creek-bed. The furrow of the old sled-trail was plainly visible, but a dozen inches of snow covered the marks of the last runners. In a month no man had come up or down that silent creek. The man held steadily on. He was not much given to thinking, and just then particularly he had nothing to think about save that he would eat lunch at the forks and that at six o'clock he would be in camp with the boys. There was nobody to talk to; and, had there been, speech would have been impossible because of the ice-muzzle on his mouth. So he continued monotonously to chew tobacco and to increase the length of his amber beard.

Once in a while the thought reiterated itself that it was very cold and that he had never experienced such cold. As he walked along he rubbed his cheek-bones and nose with the back of his mittened hand. He did this automatically, now and again changing hands. But rub as he would, the instant he stopped his cheek-bones went numb, and the following instant the end of his nose went numb. He was sure to frost his cheeks; he knew that, and experienced a pang of regret that he had not devised a nose-strap of the sort Bud wore in cold snaps. Such a strap passed across the cheeks, as well, and saved them. But it didn't matter much, after all. What were frosted cheeks? A bit painful, that was all; they were never serious.

Empty as the man's mind was of thoughts, he was keenly observant, and he noticed the changes in the creek, the curves and bends and timber jams, and always he sharply noted where he placed his feet. Once coming around a bend, he shied abruptly, like a startled horse, curved away from the place where he had been walking, and retreated several paces back along the trail. The creek he knew was frozen clear to the bottom, – no creek could contain water in that arctic winter, – but he knew also that there were springs that bubbled out from the hillsides and ran along under the snow and on top the ice of the creek. He knew that the coldest snaps never froze these springs, and he knew likewise their danger. They were traps. They hid pools of water under the snow that might be three inches deep, or three feet. Sometimes a skin of ice half an inch thick covered them, and in turn was covered by the snow. Sometimes there were alternate layers of water and ice-skin, so that when one broke through he kept on breaking through for a while, sometimes wetting himself to the waist.

That was why he had shied in such panic. He had felt the give under his feet and heard the crackle of a snow-hidden ice-skin. And to get his feet wet in such a temperature meant trouble and danger. At the very least it meant delay, for he would be forced to stop and build a fire, and under its protection to bare his feet while he dried his socks and moccasins. He stood and studied the creek-bed and its banks, and decided that the flow of water came from the right. He reflected a while, rubbing his nose and cheeks, then skirted to the left, stepping gingerly and testing the footing for each step. Once clear of the danger, he took a fresh chew of tobacco and swung along at his four-mile gait.

In the course of the next two hours he came upon several similar traps. Usually the snow above the hidden pools had a sunken, candied appearance that advertised the danger. Once again, however, he had a close call; and once, suspecting danger, he compelled the dog to go on in front. The dog did not want to go. It hung back until the man shoved it forward, and then it went quickly across the white, unbroken surface. Suddenly it broke through, floundered to one side, and got away to firmer footing. It had wet its forefeet and legs, and almost immediately the water that clung to it turned to ice. It made quick efforts to lick the ice off its legs, then dropped down in the snow and began to bite out the ice that had formed between the toes. This was a matter of instinct. To permit the ice to remain would mean sore feet. It did not know this. It merely obeyed the mysterious prompting that arose from the deep crypts of its being. But the man knew, having achieved a judgment on the subject, and he removed the mitten from his right hand and helped tear out the ice-particles. He did not expose his fingers more than a minute, and was astonished at the swift numbness that smote them. It certainly was cold. He pulled on the mitten hastily, and beat the hand savagely across his chest.

At twelve o'clock the day was at its brightest. Yet the sun was too far south in its winter journey to clear the horizon. The bulge of the earth intervened between it and Henderson Creek, where the man walked under a clear sky at noon and cast no shadow. At half-past twelve, to the



minute, he arrived at the forks of the creek. He was pleased at the speed he had made. If he kept it up, he would certainly be with the boys by six. He unbuttoned his jacket and shirt and drew forth his lunch. The action consumed no more than a quarter of a minute, yet in that brief moment the numbness laid hold of the exposed fingers. He did not put the mitten on, but instead struck the fingers a dozen sharp smashes against his leg. Then he sat down on a snow-covered log to eat. The sting that followed upon the striking of his fingers against his leg ceased so quickly that he was startled. He had had no chance to take a bite of biscuit. He struck the fingers repeatedly and returned them to the mitten, baring the other hand for the purpose of eating. He tried to take a mouthful, but the ice-muzzle prevented. He had forgotten to build a fire and thaw out. He chuckled at his foolishness, and as he chuckled he noted the numbness creeping into the exposed fingers. Also, he noted that the stinging which had first come to his toes when he sat down was already passing away. He wondered whether the toes were warm or numb. He moved them inside the moccasins and decided that they were numb.

He pulled the mitten on hurriedly and stood up. He was a bit frightened. He stamped up and down until the stinging returned into the feet. It certainly was cold, was his thought. That man from Sulphur Creek had spoken the truth when telling how cold it sometimes got in the country. And he had laughed at him at the time! That showed one must not be too sure of things. There was no mistake about it, it was cold. He strode up and down, stamping his feet and threshing his arms, until reassured by the returning warmth. Then he got out matches and proceeded to make a fire. From the undergrowth, where high water of the previous spring had lodged a supply of seasoned twigs, he got his firewood. Working carefully from a small beginning, he soon had a roaring fire, over which he thawed the ice from his face and in the protection of which he ate his biscuits. For the moment the cold of space was outwitted. The dog took satisfaction in the fire, stretching out close enough for warmth and far enough away to escape being singed.

When the man had finished, he filled his pipe and took his comfortable time over a smoke. Then he pulled on his mittens, settled the ear-flaps of his cap firmly about his ears, and took the creek trail up the left fork. The dog was disappointed and yearned back toward the fire. This man did not know cold. Possibly all the generations of his ancestry had been ignorant of cold, of real cold, of cold one hundred and seven degrees below freezing point. But the dog knew; all its ancestry knew, and it had inherited the knowledge. And it knew that it was not good to walk abroad in such fearful cold. It was the time to lie snug in a hole in the snow and wait for a curtain of cloud to be drawn across the face of outer space whence this cold came. On the other hand, there was no keen intimacy between the dog and the man. The one was the toil-slave of the other, and the only caresses it had ever received were the caresses of the whiplash and of harsh and menacing throat-sounds that threatened the whiplash. So, the dog made no effort to communicate its apprehension to the man. It was not concerned in the welfare of the man, it was for its own sake that it yearned back toward the fire. But the man whistled, and spoke to it with the sound of whiplashes and the dog swung in at the man's heel and followed after.

The man took a chew of tobacco and proceeded to start a new amber beard. Also, his moist breath quickly powdered with white his mustache, eyebrows, and lashes. There did not seem to be so many springs on the left fork of the Henderson, and for half an hour the man saw no signs of any. And then it happened. At a place where there were no signs, where the soft, unbroken snow seemed to advertise solidity beneath, the man broke through. It was not deep. He wet himself halfway to the knees before he floundered out to the firm crust.

He was angry, and cursed his luck aloud. He had hoped to get into camp with the boys at six o'clock, and this would delay him an hour, for he would have to build a fire and dry out his foot-gear. This was imperative at that low temperature – he knew that much; and he turned aside to the bank, which he climbed. On top, tangled in the underbrush about the trunks of several small spruce trees, was a high-water deposit of dry firewood – sticks and twigs, principally, but also larger portions of seasoned branches and fine, dry, last-year's grasses. He threw down several large pieces on top of the snow. This served for a foundation and prevented the young flame from drowning itself in the snow it otherwise would melt. The flame he got by touching a match to a

small shred of birch bark that he took from his pocket. This burned even more readily than paper. Placing it on the foundation, he fed the young flame with wisps of dry grass and with the tiniest dry twigs.

He worked slowly and carefully, keenly aware of his danger. Gradually, as the flame grew stronger, he increased the size of the twigs with which he fed it. He squatted in the snow, pulling the twigs out from their entanglement in the brush and feeding directly to the flame. He knew there must be no failure. When it is seventy-five below zero, a man must not fail in his first attempt to build a fire – that is, if his feet are wet. If his feet are dry, and he fails, he can run along the trail for half a mile and restore his circulation. But the circulation of wet and freezing feet cannot be restored by running when it is seventy-five below. No matter how fast he runs, the wet feet will freeze the harder.

All this the man knew. The old-timer on Sulphur Creek had told him about it the previous fall, and now he was appreciating the advice. Already all sensation had gone out of his feet. To build the fire he had been forced to remove his mittens, and the fingers had quickly gone numb. His pace of four miles an hour had kept his heart pumping blood to the surface of his body and to all the extremities. But the instant he stopped, the action of the pump eased down. The cold of space smote the unprotected tip of the planet, and he, being on that unprotected tip, received the full force of the blow. The blood of his body recoiled before it. The blood was alive, like the dog, and like the dog it wanted to hide away and cover itself up from the fearful cold. So long as he walked four miles an hour, he pumped that blood, willy-nilly, to the surface; but now it ebbed away and sank down into the recesses of his body. The extremities were the first to feel its absence. His wet feet froze the faster, and his exposed fingers numbed the faster, though they had not yet begun to freeze. Nose and cheeks were already freezing, while the skin of all his body chilled as it lost its blood.

But he was safe. Toes and nose and cheeks would be only touched by the frost, for the fire was beginning to burn with strength. He was feeding it with twigs the size of his finger. In another minute he would be able to feed it with branches the size of his wrist, and then he could remove his wet foot-gear, and, while it dried, he could keep his naked feet warm by the fire, rubbing them at first, of course, with snow. The fire was a success. He was safe. He remembered the advice of the old timer on Sulphur Creek, and smiled. The old-timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below. Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone; and he had saved himself. Those old-timers were rather womanish, some of them, he thought. All a man had to do was to keep his head, and he was all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone. But it was surprising, the rapidity with which his cheeks and nose were freezing. And he had not thought his fingers could go lifeless in so short a time. Lifeless they were, for he could scarcely make them move together to grip a twig, and they seemed remote from his body and from him. When he touched a twig, he had to look and see whether or not he had hold of it. The wires were pretty well down between him and his finger-ends.

All of which counted for little. There was the fire, snapping and crackling and promising life with every dancing flame. He started to untie his moccasins. They were coated with ice; the thick German socks were like sheaths of iron halfway to the knees; and the moccasin strings were like rods of steel all twisted and knotted as by some conflagration. For a moment he tugged with his numb fingers, then, realizing the folly of it, he drew his sheath-knife.

But before he could cut the strings, it happened. It was his own fault or, rather, his mistake. He should not have built the fire under the spruce tree. He should have built it in the open. But it had been easier to pull the twigs from the brush and drop them directly on the fire. Now the tree under which he had done this carried a weight of snow on its boughs. No wind had blown for weeks, and each bough was fully freighted. Each time he had pulled a twig he had communicated a slight agitation to the tree – an imperceptible agitation, so far as he was concerned, but an agitation sufficient to bring about the disaster. High up in the tree one bough capsized its load of snow. This fell on the boughs beneath, capsizing them. This process continued, spreading out and involving the whole tree. It grew like an avalanche, and it descended without warning upon the man and the fire, and the fire was blotted out! Where it had burned was a mantle of fresh and disordered snow.

The man was shocked. It was as though he had just heard his own sentence of death. For a moment he sat and stared at the spot where the fire had been. Then he grew very calm. Perhaps the old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right. If he had only had a trail-mate he would have been in no danger now. The trail-mate could have built the fire. Well, it was up to him to build the fire over again, and this second time there must be no failure. Even if he succeeded, he would most likely lose some toes. His feet must be badly frozen by now, and there would be some time before the second fire was ready.

Such were his thoughts, but he did not sit and think them. He was busy all the time they were passing through his mind. He made a new foundation for a fire, this time in the open, where no treacherous tree could blot it out. Next, he gathered dry grasses and tiny twigs from the high-water flotsam. He could not bring his fingers together to pull them out, but he was able to gather them by the handful. In this way he got many rotten twigs and bits of green moss that were undesirable, but it was the best he could do. He worked methodically, even collecting an armful of the larger branches to be used later when the fire gathered strength. And all the while the dog sat and watched him, a certain yearning wistfulness in its eyes, for it looked upon him as the fire-provider, and the fire was slow in coming.

When all was ready, the man reached in his pocket for a second piece of birch bark. He knew the bark was there, and, though he could not feel it with his fingers, he could hear its crisp rustling as he fumbled for it. Try as he would, he could not clutch hold of it. And all the time in his consciousness, was the knowledge that each instant his feet were freezing. This thought tended to put him in a panic, but he fought against it and kept calm. He pulled on his mittens with his teeth, and threshed his arms back and forth, beating his hands with all his might against his sides. He did this sitting down, and he stood up to do it; and all the while the dog sat in the snow, its wolf-brush of a tail curled around warmly over its forefeet, its sharp wolf-ears pricked forward intently as it watched the man. And the man, as he beat and threshed with his arms and hands, felt a great surge of envy as he regarded the creature that was warm and secure in its natural covering.

After a time he was aware of the first far-away signals of sensation in his beaten fingers. The faint tingling grew stronger till it evolved into a stinging ache that was excruciating, but which the man hailed with satisfaction. He stripped the mitten from his right hand and fetched forth the birch bark. The exposed fingers were quickly going numb again. Next he brought out his bunch of sulphur matches. But the tremendous cold had already driven the life out of his fingers. In his effort to separate one match from the others, the whole bunch fell in the snow. He tried to pick it out of the snow, but failed. The dead fingers could neither touch nor clutch. He was very careful. He drove the thought of his freezing feet, and nose, and cheeks, out of his mind, devoting his whole soul to the matches. He watched, using the sense of vision in place of that of touch, and when he saw his fingers on each side the bunch, he closed them – that is, he willed to close them, for the wires were down, and the fingers did not obey. He pulled the mitten on the right hand and beat it fiercely against his knee. Then, with both mittened hands, he scooped the bunch of matches, along with much snow, into his lap. Yet he was no better off.

After some manipulation he managed to get the bunch between the heels of his mittened hands. In this fashion he carried it to his mouth. The ice crackled and snapped when by a violent effort he opened his mouth. He drew the lower jaw in, curled the upper lip out of the way, and scraped the bunch with his upper teeth in order to separate a match. He succeeded in getting one, which he dropped on his lap. He was no better off. He could not pick it up. Then he devised a way. He picked it up in his teeth and scratched it on his leg. Twenty times he scratched before he succeeded in lighting it. As it flamed he held it with his teeth to the birch bark. But the burning brimstone went up his nostrils and into his lungs, causing him to cough spasmodically. The match fell into the snow and went out.

The old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right, he thought in the moment of controlled despair that ensued after fifty below, a man should travel with a partner. He beat his hands, but failed in exciting any sensation. Suddenly he bared both hands, removing the mittens with his teeth. He caught the whole bunch between the heels of his hands. His arm muscles not being frozen enabled

him to press the hand-heels tightly against the matches. Then he scratched the bunch along his leg. It flared into flame, seventy sulphur matches at once! There was no wind to blow them out. He kept his head to one side to escape the strangling fumes, and held the blazing bunch to the birch bark. As he so held it, he became aware of sensation in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it. Deep down below the surface he could feel it. The sensation developed into pain that grew acute. And still he endured it, holding the flame of the matches clumsily to the bark that would not light readily because his own burning hands were in the way, absorbing most of the flame.

At last, when he could endure no more, he jerked his hands apart. The blazing matches fell sizzling into the snow, but the birch bark was alight. He began laying dry grasses and the tiniest twigs on the flame. He could not pick and choose, for he had to lift the fuel between the heels of his hands. Small pieces of rotten wood and green moss clung to the twigs, and he bit them off as well as he could with his teeth. He cherished the flame carefully and awkwardly. It meant life, and it must not perish. The withdrawal of blood from the surface of his body now made him begin to shiver, and he grew more awkward. A large piece of green moss fell squarely on the little fire. He tried to poke it out with his fingers, but his shivering frame made him poke too far and he disrupted the nucleus of the little fire, the burning grasses and tiny twigs separating and scattering. He tried to poke them together again, but in spite of the tenseness of the effort, his shivering got away with him, and the twigs were hopelessly scattered. Each twig gushed a puff of smoke and went out. The fire-provider had failed. As he looked apathetically about him, his eyes chanced on the dog, sitting across the ruins of the fire from him, in the snow, making restless, hunching movements, slightly lifting one forefoot and then the other, shifting its weight back and forth on them with wistful eagerness.

The sight of the dog put a wild idea into his head. He remembered the tale of the man, caught in a blizzard, who killed a steer and crawled inside the carcass, and so was saved. He would kill the dog and bury his hands in the warm body until the numbness went out of them. Then he could build another fire. He spoke to the dog, calling it to him; but in his voice was a strange note of fear that frightened the animal, who had never known the man to speak in such way before. Something was the matter, and its suspicious nature sensed danger – it knew not what danger, but somewhere, somehow, in its brain arose an apprehension of the man. It flattened its ears down at the sound of the man's voice, and its restless, hunching movements and the liftings and shiftings of its forefeet became more pronounced; but it would not come to the man. He got on his hands and knees and crawled toward the dog. This unusual posture again excited suspicion, and the animal sidled mincingly away.

The man sat up in the snow for a moment and struggled for calmness. Then he pulled on his mittens, by means of his teeth, and got upon his feet. He glanced down at first in order to assure himself that he was really standing up, for the absence of sensation in his feet left him unrelated to the earth. His erect position in itself started to drive the webs of suspicion from the dog's mind; and when he spoke peremptorily, with the sound of whiplashes in his voice, the dog rendered its customary allegiance and came to him. As it came within reaching distance, the man lost his control. His arms flashed out to the dog, and he experienced genuine surprise when he discovered that his hands could not clutch, that there was neither bend nor feeling in the fingers. He had forgotten for the moment that they were frozen and that they were freezing more and more. All this happened quickly, and before the animal could get away, he encircled its body with his arms. He sat down in the snow, and in this fashion held the dog, while it snarled and whined and struggled.

But it was all he could do, hold its body encircled in his arms and sit there. He realized that he could not kill the dog. There was no way to do it. With his helpless hands he could neither draw nor hold his sheath knife nor throttle the animal. He released it, and it plunged wildly away, with tail between its legs, and still snarling. It halted forty feet away and surveyed him curiously, with ears sharply pricked forward. The man looked down at his hands in order to locate them, and found them hanging on the ends of his arms. It struck him as curious that one should have to use his eyes in order to find out where his hands were. He began threshing his arms back and forth, beating the mittened hands against his sides. He did this for five minutes, violently, and his heart pumped

enough blood up to the surface to put a stop to his shivering. But no sensation was aroused in the hands. He had an impression that they hung like weights on the ends of his arms, but when he tried to run the impression down, he could not find it.

A certain fear of death, dull and oppressive, came to him. This fear quickly became poignant as he realized that it was no longer a mere matter of freezing his fingers and toes, or of losing his hands and feet, but that it was a matter of life and death with the chances against him. This threw him into a panic, and he turned and ran up the creek-bed along the old, dim trail. The dog joined in behind and kept up with him. He ran blindly, without intention, in fear such as he had never known in his life. Slowly, as he plowed and floundered through the snow, he began to see things again, the banks of the creek, the old timber-jams, the leafless aspens, and the sky. The running made him feel better. He did not shiver. Maybe, if he ran on, his feet would thaw out; and, anyway, if he ran far enough, he would reach camp and the boys. Without doubt he would lose some fingers and toes and some of his face; but the boys would take care of him, and save the rest of him when he got there. And at the same time there was another thought in his mind that said he would never get to the camp and the boys; that it was too many miles away, that the freezing had too great a start on him, and that he would soon be stiff and dead. This thought he kept in the background and refused to consider. Sometimes it pushed itself forward and demanded to be heard, but he thrust it back and strove to think of other things.

It struck him as curious that he could run at all on feet so frozen that he could not feel them when they struck the earth and took the weight of his body. He seemed to himself to skim along above the surface, and to have no connection with the earth. Somewhere he had once seen a winged Mercury<sup>1</sup>, and he wondered if Mercury felt as he felt when skimming over the earth.

His theory of running until he reached camp and the boys had one flaw in it: he lacked the endurance. Several times he stumbled, and finally he tottered, crumpled up, and fell. When he tried to rise, he failed. He must sit and rest, he decided, and next time he would merely walk and keep on going. As he sat and regained his breath, he noted that he was feeling quite warm and comfortable. He was not shivering, and it even seemed that a warm glow had come to his chest and trunk. And yet, when he touched his nose or cheeks, there was no sensation. Running would not thaw them out. Nor would it thaw out his hands and feet. Then the thought came to him that the frozen portions of his body must be extending. He tried to keep this thought down, to forget it, to think of something else; he was aware of the panicky feeling that it caused, and he was afraid of the panic. But the thought asserted itself, and persisted, until it produced a vision of his body totally frozen. This was too much, and he made another wild run along the trail. Once he slowed down to a walk, but the thought of the freezing extending itself made him run again.

And all the time the dog ran with him, at his heels. When he fell down a second time, it curled its tail over its forefeet and sat in front of him, facing him, curiously eager and intent. The warmth and security of the animal angered him, and he cursed it till it flattened down its ears appealingly. This time the shivering came more quickly upon the man. He was losing in his battle with the frost. It was creeping into his body from all sides. The thought of it drove him on, but he ran no more than a hundred feet, when he staggered and pitched headlong. It was his last panic. When he had recovered his breath and control, he sat up and entertained in his mind the conception of meeting death with dignity. However, the conception did not come to him in such terms. His idea of it was that he had been making a fool of himself, running around like a chicken with its head cut off – such was the simile that occurred to him. Well, he was bound to freeze anyway, and he might as well take it decently. With this new-found peace of mind came the first glimmerings of drowsiness. A good idea, he thought, to sleep off to death. It was like taking an anaesthetic<sup>2</sup>. Freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die.

He pictured the boys finding his body next day. Suddenly he found himself with them, coming along the trail and looking for himself. And, still with them, he came around a turn in the trail and found himself lying in the snow. He did not belong with himself any more, for even then

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<sup>1</sup> **Mercury** – the closest to the Sun planet of the solar system

<sup>2</sup> **anaesthetic** – medicine that relieves pain or produces general loss of sensation

he was out of himself, standing with the boys and looking at himself in the snow. It certainly was cold, was his thought. When he got back to the States he could tell the folks what real cold was. He drifted on from this to a vision of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek. He could see him quite clearly, warm and comfortable, and smoking a pipe.

‘You were right, old hoss; you were right,’ the man mumbled to the old-timer of Sulphur Creek.

Then the man drowsed off into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known. The dog sat facing him and waiting. The brief day drew to a close in a long, slow twilight. There were no signs of a fire to be made, and, besides, never in the dog’s experience had it known a man to sit like that in the snow and make no fire. As the twilight drew on, its eager yearning for the fire mastered it, and with a great lifting and shifting of forefeet, it whined softly, then flattened its ears down in anticipation of being chidden by the man. But the man remained silent. Later, the dog whined loudly. And still later it crept close to the man and caught the scent of death. This made the animal bristle and back away. A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky. Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where were the other food-providers and fire-providers.

## **Dagon<sup>1</sup> (Howard Phillips Lovecraft)**

I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more. Penniless, and at the end of my supply of the drug which alone makes life endurable, I can bear the torture no longer; and shall cast myself from this garret window into the squalid street below. Do not think from my slavery to morphine that I am a weakling or a degenerate. When you have read these hastily scrawled pages you may guess, though never fully realise, why it is that I must have forgetfulness or death.

It was in one of the most open and least frequented parts of the broad Pacific that the packet of which I was supercargo fell a victim to the German sea-raider. The Great War<sup>2</sup> was then at its very beginning, and the ocean forces of the Hun<sup>3</sup> had not completely sunk to their later degradation; so that our vessel was made legitimate prize, whilst we of her crew were treated with all the fairness and consideration due us as naval prisoners. So liberal, indeed, was the discipline of our captors that five days after we were taken I managed to escape alone in a small boat with water and provisions for a good length of time.

When I finally found myself adrift and free, I had but little idea of my surroundings. Never a competent navigator, I could only guess vaguely by the sun and stars that I was somewhat south of the equator. Of the longitude I knew nothing, and no island or coast-line was in sight. The weather kept fair, and for uncounted days I drifted aimlessly beneath the scorching sun; waiting either for some passing ship, or to be cast on the shores of some habitable land. But neither ship nor land appeared, and I began to despair in my solitude upon the heaving vastnesses of unbroken blue.

The change happened whilst I slept. Its details I shall never know; for my slumber, though troubled and dream-infested, was continuous. When at last I awaked, it was to discover myself half sucked into a slimy expanse of hellish black mire which extended about me in monotonous undulations as far as I could see, and in which my boat lay grounded some distance away.

Though one might well imagine that my first sensation would be of wonder at so prodigious and unexpected a transformation of scenery, I was in reality more horrified than astonished; for there was in the air and in the rotting soil a sinister quality which chilled me to the very core. The region was putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish, and of other less describable things which I saw protruding from the nasty mud of the unending plain. Perhaps I should not hope to convey in mere words the unutterable hideousness that can dwell in absolute silence and barren immensity. There was nothing within hearing, and nothing in sight save a vast reach of black slime; yet the very

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1 **Dagon** – in the Middle East, the Semitic god of fertility, the legendary inventor of the plow

2 **the Great War** – World War I of 1914–1918

3 **the Hun(s)** – primitive nomadic people who invaded Europe in the 4th century and built an enormous empire

completeness of the stillness and homogeneity of the landscape oppressed me with a nauseating fear.

The sun was blazing down from a sky which seemed to me almost black in its cloudless cruelty; as though reflecting the inky marsh beneath my feet. As I crawled into the stranded boat I realised that only one theory could explain my position. Through some unprecedented volcanic upheaval, a portion of the ocean floor must have been thrown to the surface, exposing regions which for innumerable millions of years had lain hidden under unfathomable watery depths. So great was the extent of the new land which had risen beneath me, that I could not detect the faintest noise of the surging ocean, strain my ears as I might. Nor were there any sea-fowl to prey upon the dead things.

For several hours I sat thinking or brooding in the boat, which lay upon its side and afforded a slight shade as the sun moved across the heavens. As the day progressed, the ground lost some of its stickiness, and seemed likely to dry sufficiently for travelling purposes in a short time. That night I slept but little, and the next day I made for myself a pack containing food and water, preparatory to an overland journey in search of the vanished sea and possible rescue.

On the third morning I found the soil dry enough to walk upon with ease. The odour of the fish was maddening; but I was too much concerned with graver things to mind so slight an evil, and set out boldly for an unknown goal. All day I forged steadily westward, guided by a far-away hummock which rose higher than any other elevation on the rolling desert. That night I encamped, and on the following day still travelled toward the hummock, though that object seemed scarcely nearer than when I had first espied it. By the fourth evening I attained the base of the mound which turned out to be much higher than it had appeared from a distance, an intervening valley setting it out in sharper relief from the general surface. Too weary to ascend, I slept in the shadow of the hill.

I know not why my dreams were so wild that night; but ere the waning and fantastically gibbous moon had risen far above the eastern plain, I was awake in a cold perspiration, determined to sleep no more. Such visions as I had experienced were too much for me to endure again. And in the glow of the moon I saw how unwise I had been to travel by day. Without the glare of the parching sun, my journey would have cost me less energy; indeed, I now felt quite able to perform the ascent which had deterred me at sunset. Picking up my pack, I started for the crest of the eminence.

I have said that the unbroken monotony of the rolling plain was a source of vague horror to me; but I think my horror was greater when I gained the summit of the mound and looked down the other side into an immeasurable pit or canyon, whose black recesses the moon had not yet soared high enough to illuminate. I felt myself on the edge of the world; peering over the rim into a fathomless chaos of eternal night. Through my terror ran curious reminiscences of *Paradise Lost*<sup>1</sup>, and of Satan's hideous climb through the unfashioned realms of darkness.

As the moon climbed higher in the sky, I began to see that the slopes of the valley were not quite so perpendicular as I had imagined. Ledges and outcroppings of rock afforded fairly easy foot-holds for a descent, whilst after a drop of a few hundred feet, the declivity became very gradual. Urged on by an impulse which I cannot definitely analyse, I scrambled with difficulty down the rocks and stood on the gentler slope beneath, gazing into the Stygian<sup>2</sup> deeps where no light had yet penetrated.

All at once my attention was captured by a vast and singular object on the opposite slope, which rose steeply about an hundred yards ahead of me; an object that gleamed whitely in the newly bestowed rays of the ascending moon. That it was merely a gigantic piece of stone, I soon assured myself; but I was conscious of a distinct impression that its contour and position were not altogether the work of Nature. A closer scrutiny filled me with sensations I cannot express; for despite its enormous magnitude, and its position in an abyss which had yawned at the bottom of the sea since the world was young, I perceived beyond a doubt that the strange object was a

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<sup>1</sup> **Paradise Lost** – a famous poem by John Milton

<sup>2</sup> **Stygian** – 1) related to Styx, in Greek mythology, the river of the underworld, the symbol of death; 2) dark, gloomy.

well-shaped monolith whose massive bulk had known the workmanship and perhaps the worship of living and thinking creatures.

Dazed and frightened, yet not without a certain thrill of the scientist's or archaeologist's delight, I examined my surroundings more closely. The moon, now near the zenith, shone weirdly and vividly above the towering steepes that hemmed in the chasm, and revealed the fact that a far-flung body of water flowed at the bottom, winding out of sight in both directions, and almost lapping my feet as I stood on the slope. Across the chasm, the wavelets washed the base of the Cyclopean<sup>1</sup> monolith; on whose surface I could now trace both inscriptions and crude sculptures. The writing was in a system of hieroglyphics<sup>2</sup> unknown to me, and unlike anything I had ever seen in books; consisting for the most part of conventionalised aquatic symbols such as fishes, eels, octopi, crustaceans, molluscs, whales, and the like. Several characters obviously represented marine things which are unknown to the modern world, but whose decomposing forms I had observed on the ocean-risen plain.

It was the pictorial carving, however, that did most to hold me spellbound. Plainly visible across the intervening water on account of their enormous size, were an array of bas-reliefs whose subjects would have excited the envy of Doré<sup>3</sup>. I think that these things were supposed to depict men – at least, a certain sort of men; though the creatures were shewn disporting like fishes in waters of some marine grotto, or paying homage at some monolithic shrine which appeared to be under the waves as well. Of their faces and forms I dare not speak in detail; for the mere remembrance makes me grow faint. Grotesque beyond the imagination of a Poe or a Bulwer, they were damnably human in general outline despite webbed hands and feet, shockingly wide and flabby lips, glassy, bulging eyes, and other features less pleasant to recall. Curiously enough, they seemed to have been chiselled badly out of proportion with their scenic background; for one of the creatures was shewn in the act of killing a whale represented as but little larger than himself. I remarked, as I say, their grotesqueness and strange size, but in a moment decided that they were merely the imaginary gods of some primitive fishing or seafaring tribe; some tribe whose last descendant had perished eras before the first ancestor of the Piltdown<sup>4</sup> or Neanderthal Man<sup>5</sup> was born. Awestruck at this unexpected glimpse into a past beyond the conception of the most daring anthropologist, I stood musing whilst the moon cast queer reflections on the silent channel before me.

Then suddenly I saw it. With only a slight churning to mark its rise to the surface, the thing slid into view above the dark waters. Vast, Polyphemus<sup>6</sup>-like, and loathsome, it darted like a stupendous monster of nightmares to the monolith, about which it flung its gigantic scaly arms, the while it bowed its hideous head and gave vent to certain measured sounds. I think I went mad then.

Of my frantic ascent of the slope and cliff, and of my delirious journey back to the stranded boat, I remember little. I believe I sang a great deal, and laughed oddly when I was unable to sing. I have indistinct recollections of a great storm some time after I reached the boat; at any rate, I know that I heard peals of thunder and other tones which Nature utters only in her wildest moods.

When I came out of the shadows I was in a San Francisco hospital; brought thither by the captain of the American ship which had picked up my boat in mid-ocean. In my delirium I had said much, but found that my words had been given scant attention. Of any land upheaval in the Pacific, my rescuers knew nothing; nor did I deem it necessary to insist upon a thing which I knew they could not believe. Once I sought out a celebrated ethnologist<sup>7</sup>, and amused him with peculiar

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1 **Cyclopean** – in Greek mythology, Cyclops are one-eyed giants and cannibals living a rude primitive life in a distant land

2 **hieroglyphics** – a system of writing in the form of pictures which are used as symbols for words or syllables

3 **Doré** – Gustave Doré (1832–1883), a famous French printmaker and book illustrator

4 **Piltdown (man)** – an extinct man whose remains were discovered in 1910 by Charles Dawson, an English lawyer and geologist

5 **Neanderthal man** – an archaic man who appeared 300 000 years ago and was replaced by modern humans 25 000–30 000 years ago

6 **Polyphemus** – in Greek mythology, the most famous of the Cyclops

7 **ethnologist** – a scientist who studies ethnology, a division of anthropology that deals with culture of different peoples of the world



questions regarding the ancient Philistine<sup>8</sup> legend of Dagon, the Fish-God; but soon perceiving that he was hopelessly conventional, I did not press my inquiries.

It is at night, especially when the moon is gibbous and waning, that I see the thing. I tried morphine; but the drug has given only transient surcease, and has drawn me into its clutches as a hopeless slave. So now I am to end it all, having written a full account for the information or the contemptuous amusement of my fellow-men. Often I ask myself if it could not all have been a pure phantasm – a mere freak of fever as I lay sun-stricken and raving in the open boat after my escape from the German man-of-war. This I ask myself, but ever does there come before me a hideously vivid vision in reply. I cannot think of the deep sea without shuddering at the nameless things that may at this very moment be crawling and floundering on its slimy bed, worshipping their ancient stone idols and carving their own detestable likenesses on submarine obelisks of water-soaked granite. I dream of a day when they may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind – of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium.

The end is near. I hear a noise at the door, as of some immense slippery body lumbering against it. It shall not find me. God, *that hand!* The window! The window!

## The Picture in the House (Howard Phillips Lovecraft)

Searchers after horror haunt strange, far places. For them are the catacombs of Ptolemais<sup>3</sup>, and the carven mausolea<sup>4</sup> of the nightmare countries. They climb to the moonlit towers of ruined Rhine castles, and falter down black cobwebbed steps beneath the scattered stones of forgotten cities in Asia. The haunted wood and the desolate mountain are their shrines, and they linger around the sinister monoliths on uninhabited islands. But the true epicure in the terrible, to whom a new thrill of unutterable ghastliness is the chief end and justification of existence, esteems most of all the ancient, lonely farmhouses of backwoods New England; for there the dark elements of strength, solitude, grotesqueness and ignorance combine to form the perfection of the hideous.

Most horrible of all sights are the little unpainted wooden houses remote from travelled ways, usually squatted upon some damp grassy slope or leaning against some gigantic outcropping of rock. Two hundred years and more they have leaned or squatted there, while the vines have crawled and the trees have swelled and spread. They are almost hidden now in lawless luxuriances of green and guardian shrouds of shadow; but the small-paned windows still stare shockingly, as if blinking through a lethal stupor which wards off madness by dulling the memory of unutterable things.

In such houses have dwelt generations of strange people, whose like the world has never seen. Seized with a gloomy and fanatical belief which exiled them from their kind, their ancestors sought the wilderness for freedom. There the scions of a conquering race indeed flourished free from the restrictions of their fellows, but cowered in an appalling slavery to the dismal phantasms of their own minds. Divorced from the enlightenment of civilization, the strength of these Puritans<sup>5</sup> turned into singular channels; and in their isolation, morbid self-repression, and struggle for life with relentless Nature, there came to them dark furtive traits from the prehistoric depths of their cold Northern heritage. By necessity practical and by philosophy stern, these folks were not beautiful in their sins. Erring as all mortals must, they were forced by their rigid code to seek concealment above all else; so that they came to use less and less taste in what they concealed. Only the silent, sleepy, staring houses in the backwoods can tell all that has lain hidden since the early days, and they are not communicative, being loath to shake off the drowsiness which helps them forget. Sometimes one feels that it would be merciful to tear down these houses, for they must often dream.

It was to a time-battered edifice of this description that I was driven one afternoon in

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<sup>8</sup> **Philistine(s)** – a people who lived in Palestine in the 12th century BC

<sup>3</sup> **Ptolemais** – two ancient cities of the same name: one – in Upper Egypt, founded by Ptolemy I, and the other – in Libya, founded by Ptolemy III

<sup>4</sup> **mausolea** – *pl. from* mausoleum

<sup>5</sup> **Puritans** – followers of Puritanism, a religious movement of the 16th–17th centuries aimed at purifying the Church of England

November, 1896, by a rain of such chilling copiousness that any shelter was preferable to exposure. I had been travelling for some time amongst the people of the Miskatonic Valley in quest of certain genealogical data; and from the remote, devious, and problematical nature of my course, had deemed it convenient to employ a bicycle despite the lateness of the season. Now I found myself upon an apparently abandoned road which I had chosen as the shortest cut to Arkham, overtaken by the storm at a point far from any town, and confronted with no refuge save the antique and repellent wooden building which blinked with bleared windows from between two huge leafless elms near the foot of a rocky hill. Distant though it is from the remnant of a road, this house none the less impressed me unfavorably the very moment I espied it. Honest, wholesome structures do not stare at travellers so slyly and hauntingly, and in my genealogical researches I had encountered legends of a century before which biased me against places of this kind. Yet the force of the elements was such as to overcome my scruples, and I did not hesitate to wheel my machine up the weedy rise to the closed door which seemed at once so suggestive and secretive.

I had somehow taken it for granted that the house was abandoned, yet as I approached it I was not so sure, for though the walks were indeed overgrown with weeds, they seemed to retain their nature a little too well to argue complete desertion. Therefore instead of trying the door I knocked, feeling as I did so a trepidation I could scarcely explain. As I waited on the rough, mossy rock which served as a door-step, I glanced at the neighboring windows and the panes of the transom above me, and noticed that although old, rattling, and almost opaque with dirt, they were not broken. The building, then, must still be inhabited, despite its isolation and general neglect. However, my rapping evoked no response, so after repeating the summons I tried the rusty latch and found the door unfastened. Inside was a little vestibule with walls from which the plaster was falling, and through the doorway came a faint but peculiarly hateful odor. I entered, carrying my bicycle, and closed the door behind me. Ahead rose a narrow staircase, flanked by a small door probably leading to the cellar, while to the left and right were closed doors leading to rooms on the ground floor.

Leaning my cycle against the wall I opened the door at the left, and crossed into a small low-ceiled chamber but dimly lighted by its two dusty windows and furnished in the barest and most primitive possible way. It appeared to be a kind of sitting-room, for it had a table and several chairs, and an immense fireplace above which ticked an antique clock on a mantel. Books and papers were very few, and in the prevailing gloom I could not readily discern the titles. What interested me was the uniform air of archaism as displayed in every visible detail. Most of the houses in this region I had found rich in relics of the past, but here the antiquity was curiously complete; for in all the room I could not discover a single article of definitely post-revolutionary date. Had the furnishings been less humble, the place would have been a collector's paradise.

As I surveyed this quaint apartment, I felt an increase in that aversion first excited by the bleak exterior of the house. Just what it was that I feared or loathed, I could by no means define; but something in the whole atmosphere seemed redolent of unhallowed age, of unpleasant crudeness, and of secrets which should be forgotten. I felt disinclined to sit down, and wandered about examining the various articles which I had noticed. The first object of my curiosity was a book of medium size lying upon the table and presenting such an antediluvian aspect that I marvelled at beholding it outside a museum or library. It was bound in leather with metal fittings, and was in an excellent state of preservation; being altogether an unusual sort of volume to encounter in an abode so lowly. When I opened it to the title page my wonder grew even greater, for it proved to be nothing less rare than Pigafetta's<sup>1</sup> account of the Congo region, written in Latin from the notes of the sailor Lopex and printed at Frankfurt in 1598. I had often heard of this work, with its curious illustrations by the brothers De Bry<sup>2</sup>, hence for a moment forgot my uneasiness in my desire to turn the pages before me. The engravings were indeed interesting, drawn wholly from imagination and careless descriptions, and represented negroes with white skins and Caucasian features; nor would I

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1 **Pigafetta** – Antonio Pigafetta, the Italian chronicler of the Magellan expedition in 1519–1522; he was also the author of two small dictionaries of Austronesian family of languages

2 **De Bry** – Flemish engravers of German origin of the 16th century

soon have closed the book had not an exceedingly trivial circumstance upset my tired nerves and revived my sensation of disquiet. What annoyed me was merely the persistent way in which the volume tended to fall open of itself at Plate XII, which represented in gruesome detail a butcher's shop of the cannibal Anziques<sup>1</sup>. I experienced some shame at my susceptibility to so slight a thing, but the drawing nevertheless disturbed me, especially in connection with some adjacent passages descriptive of Anzique gastronomy.

I had turned to a neighboring shelf and was examining its meagre literary contents – an eighteenth century Bible, a 'Pilgrim's Progress' of like period, illustrated with grotesque woodcuts and printed by the almanack-maker Isaiah Thomas<sup>2</sup>, the rotting bulk of Cotton Mather's 'Magnalia Christi Americana,' and a few other books of evidently equal age – when my attention was aroused by the unmistakable sound of walking in the room overhead. At first astonished and startled, considering the lack of response to my recent knocking at the door, I immediately afterward concluded that the walker had just awakened from a sound sleep, and listened with less surprise as the footsteps sounded on the creaking stairs. The tread was heavy, yet seemed to contain a curious quality of cautiousness; a quality which I disliked the more because the tread was heavy. When I had entered the room I had shut the door behind me. Now, after a moment of silence during which the walker may have been inspecting my bicycle in the hall, I heard a fumbling at the latch and saw the paneled portal swing open again.

In the doorway stood a person of such singular appearance that I should have exclaimed aloud but for the restraints of good breeding. Old, white-bearded, and ragged, my host possessed a countenance and physique which inspired equal wonder and respect. His height could not have been less than six feet, and despite a general air of age and poverty he was stout and powerful in proportion. His face, almost hidden by a long beard which grew high on the cheeks, seemed abnormally ruddy and less wrinkled than one might expect; while over a high forehead fell a shock of white hair little thinned by the years. His blue eyes, though a trifle bloodshot, seemed inexplicably keen and burning. But for his horrible unkemptness the man would have been as distinguished-looking as he was impressive. This unkemptness, however, made him offensive despite his face and figure. Of what his clothing consisted I could hardly tell, for it seemed to me no more than a mass of tatters surmounting a pair of high, heavy boots; and his lack of cleanliness surpassed description.

The appearance of this man, and the instinctive fear he inspired, prepared me for something like enmity; so that I almost shuddered through surprise and a sense of uncanny incongruity when he motioned me to a chair and addressed me in a thin, weak voice full of fawning respect and ingratiating hospitality. His speech was very curious, an extreme form of Yankee dialect I had thought long extinct; and I studied it closely as he sat down opposite me for conversation.

'Ketched in the rain, be ye?' he greeted. 'Glad ye was nigh the haouse en' hed the sense ta come right in. I calc'late I was aleep, else I'd a heerd ye – I ain't as young as I uster be, an' I need a paowerful sight o' naps naowadays. Trav'lin fur? I hain't seed many folks 'long this rud sence they tuk off the Arkham stage.'

I replied that I was going to Arkham, and apologized for my rude entry into his domicile, whereupon he continued.

'Glad ta see ye, young Sir – new faces is scurce around here, an' I hain't got much ta cheer me up these days. Guess yew hail from Bosting, don't ye? I never ben thar, but I kin tell a taown man when I see 'im – we hed one fer deestrick schoolmaster in 'eighty-four, but he quit suddent an' no one never heerd on 'im sence–' here the old man lapsed into a kind of chuckle, and made no explanation when I questioned him. He seemed to be in an aboundingly good humor, yet to possess those eccentricities which one might guess from his grooming. For some time he rambled on with an almost feverish geniality, when it struck me to ask him how he came by so rare a book as Pigafetta's 'Regnum Congo.' The effect of this volume had not left me, and I felt a certain hesitancy in speaking of it, but curiosity overmastered all the vague fears which had steadily

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1 **Anziques** – Kingdom of Anziku, a historic African state on the Congo River

2 **Isaiah Thomas** (1749–1831) – an American journalist and printer

accumulated since my first glimpse of the house. To my relief, the question did not seem an awkward one, for the old man answered freely and volubly.

‘Oh, that Afriky book? Cap’n Ebenezer Holt traded me thet in ’sixty-eight – him as was kilt in the war.’ Something about the name of Ebenezer Holt caused me to look up sharply. I had encountered it in my genealogical work, but not in any record since the Revolution. I wondered if my host could help me in the task at which I was laboring, and resolved to ask him about it later on. He continued.

‘Ebenezer was on a Salem merchantman for years, an’ picked up a sight o’ queer stuff in every port. He got this in London, I guess – he uster like ter buy things at the shops. I was up ta his haouse onct, on the hill, tradin’ hosses, when I see this book. I relished the picters, so he give it in on a swap. ’Tis a queer book ’ here, leave me git on my spectacles–’ The old man fumbled among his rags, producing a pair of dirty and amazingly antique glasses with small octagonal lenses and steel bows. Donning these, he reached for the volume on the table and turned the pages lovingly.

‘Ebenezer cud read a leetle o’ this – ’tis Latin – but I can’t. I had two er three schoolmasters read me a bit, and Passon Clark, him they say got draownded in the pond – kin yew make anything outen it?’ I told him that I could, and translated for his benefit a paragraph near the beginning. If I erred, he was not scholar enough to correct me; for he seemed childishly pleased at my English version. His proximity was becoming rather obnoxious, yet I saw no way to escape without offending him. I was amused at the childish fondness of this ignorant old man for the pictures in a book he could not read, and wondered how much better he could read the few books in English which adorned the room. This revelation of simplicity removed much of the ill-defined apprehension I had felt, and I smiled as my host rambled on:

‘Queer haow picters kin set a body thinkin’. Take this un here near the front. Hey yew ever seed trees like thet, with big leaves a floppin’ over an’ daown? And them men – them can’t be niggers – they dew beat all. Kinder like Injuns, I guess, even ef they be in Afriky. Some o’ these here critters looks like monkeys, or half monkeys an’ half men, but I never heerd o’ nothin’ like this un.’ Here he pointed to a fabulous creature of the artist, which one might describe as a sort of dragon with the head of an alligator.

‘But naow I’ll show ye the best un – over here nigh the middle–’ The old man’s speech grew a trifle thicker and his eyes assumed a brighter glow; but his fumbling hands, though seemingly clumsier than before, were entirely adequate to their mission. The book fell open, almost of its own accord and as if from frequent consultation at this place, to the repellent twelfth plate showing a butcher’s shop amongst the Anzique cannibals. My sense of restlessness returned, though I did not exhibit it. The especially bizarre thing was that the artist had made his Africans look like white men – the limbs and quarters hanging about the walls of the shop were ghastly, while the butcher with his axe was hideously incongruous. But my host seemed to relish the view as much as I disliked it.

‘What d’ye think o’ this – ain’t never see the like hereabouts, eh? When I see this I telled Eb Holt, “That’s suthin’ ta stir ye up an’ make yer blood tickle.” When I read in Scriptor about slayin’ – like them Midianites was slew – I kinder think things, but I ain’t got no picter of it. Here a body kin see all they is to it – I s’pose ’tis sinful, but ain’t we all born an’ livin’ in sin? – Thet feller bein’ chopped up gives me a tickle every time I look at ’im – I hey ta keep lookin’ at ’im – see whar the butcher cut off his feet? Thar’s his head on thet bench, with one arm side of it, an’ t’other arm’s on the other side o’ the meat block.’

As the man mumbled on in his shocking ecstasy the expression on his hairy, spectacled face became indescribable, but his voice sank rather than mounted. My own sensations can scarcely be recorded. All the terror I had dimly felt before rushed upon me actively and vividly, and I knew that I loathed the ancient and abhorrent creature so near me with an infinite intensity. His madness, or at least his partial perversion, seemed beyond dispute. He was almost whispering now, with a huskiness more terrible than a scream, and I trembled as I listened.

‘As I says, ’tis queer haow picters sets ye thinkin’. D’ye know, young Sir, I’m right sot on this un here. Arter I got the book off Eb I uster look at it a lot, especial when I’d heerd Passon Clark rant o’ Sundays in his big wig. Onct I tried suthin’ funny – here, young Sir, don’t git skeert – all I done

was ter look at the picter afore I kilt the sheep for market – killin’ sheep was kinder more fun arter lookin’ at it–’ The tone of the old man now sank very low, sometimes becoming so faint that his words were hardly audible. I listened to the rain, and to the rattling of the bleared, small-paned windows, and marked a rumbling of approaching thunder quite unusual for the season. Once a terrific flash and peal shook the frail house to its foundations, but the whisperer seemed not to notice it.

‘Killin’ sheep was kinder more fun – but d’ye know, ’twan’t quite satisfyin’. Queer haow a cravin’ gits a holt on ye – As ye love the Almighty, young man, don’t tell nobody, but I swar ter Gawd thet picter begun to make me hungry fer victuals I couldn’t raise nor buy – here, set still, what’s ailin’ ye? – I didn’t do nothin’, only I wondered haow ’twud be ef I did – They say meat makes blood an’ flesh, an’ gives ye new life, so I wondered ef ’twudn’t make a man live longer an’ longer ef ’twas more the same–’ But the whisperer never continued. The interruption was not produced by my fright, nor by the rapidly increasing storm amidst whose fury I was presently to open my eyes on a smoky solitude of blackened ruins. It was produced by a very simple though somewhat unusual happening.

The open book lay flat between us, with the picture staring repulsively upward. As the old man whispered the words ‘more the same’ a tiny splattering impact was heard, and something showed on the yellowed paper of the upturned volume. I thought of the rain and of a leaky roof, but rain is not red. On the butcher’s shop of the Anzique cannibals a small red spattering glistened picturesquely, lending vividness to the horror of the engraving. The old man saw it, and stopped whispering even before my expression of horror made it necessary; saw it and glanced quickly toward the floor of the room he had left an hour before. I followed his glance, and beheld just above us on the loose plaster of the ancient ceiling a large irregular spot of wet crimson which seemed to spread even as I viewed it. I did not shriek or move, but merely shut my eyes. A moment later came the titanic thunderbolt of thunderbolts; blasting that accursed house of unutterable secrets and bringing the oblivion which alone saved my mind.

## **The Gray Wolf (George MacDonald)**

One evening-twilight in spring, a young English student, who had wandered northwards as far as the outlying fragments of Scotland called the Orkney<sup>1</sup> and Shetland Islands<sup>2</sup>, found himself on a small island of the latter group, caught in a storm of wind and hail, which had come on suddenly. It was in vain to look about for any shelter; for not only did the storm entirely obscure the landscape, but there was nothing around him save a desert moss.

At length, however, as he walked on for mere walking’s sake, he found himself on the verge of a cliff, and saw, over the brow of it, a few feet below him, a ledge of rock, where he might find some shelter from the blast, which blew from behind. Letting himself down by his hands, he alighted upon something that crunched beneath his tread, and found the bones of many small animals scattered about in front of a little cave in the rock, offering the refuge he sought. He went in, and sat upon a stone. The storm increased in violence, and as the darkness grew he became uneasy, for he did not relish the thought of spending the night in the cave. He had parted from his companions on the opposite side of the island, and it added to his uneasiness that they must be full of apprehension about him. At last there came a lull in the storm, and the same instant he heard a footfall, stealthy and light as that of a wild beast, upon the bones at the mouth of the cave. He started up in some fear, though the least thought might have satisfied him that there could be no very dangerous animals upon the island. Before he had time to think, however, the face of a woman appeared in the opening. Eagerly the wanderer spoke. She started at the sound of his voice. He could not see her well, because she was turned towards the darkness of the cave.

‘Will you tell me how to find my way across the moor to Shielness?’ he asked.

‘You cannot find it to-night,’ she answered, in a sweet tone, and with a smile that bewitched

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1 **the Orkney (islands)** – a group of more than 70 islands in northern Scotland

2 **the Shetland Islands** – a group of about 100 islands in the north of Scotland

him, revealing the whitest of teeth.

‘What am I to do, then?’

‘My mother will give you shelter, but that is all she has to offer.’

‘And that is far more than I expected a minute ago,’ he replied. ‘I shall be most grateful.’

She turned in silence and left the cave. The youth followed.

She was barefooted, and her pretty brown feet went catlike over the sharp stones, as she led the way down a rocky path to the shore. Her garments were scanty and torn, and her hair blew tangled in the wind. She seemed about five and twenty, lithe and small. Her long fingers kept clutching and pulling nervously at her skirts as she went. Her face was very gray in complexion, and very worn, but delicately formed, and smooth-skinned. Her thin nostrils were tremulous as eyelids, and her lips, whose curves were faultless, had no colour to give sign of indwelling blood. What her eyes were like he could not see, for she had never lifted the delicate films of her eyelids.

At the foot of the cliff, they came upon a little hut leaning against it, and having for its inner apartment a natural hollow within. Smoke was spreading over the face of the rock, and the grateful odour of food gave hope to the hungry student. His guide opened the door of the cottage; he followed her in, and saw a woman bending over a fire in the middle of the floor. On the fire lay a large fish broiling. The daughter spoke a few words, and the mother turned and welcomed the stranger. She had an old and very wrinkled, but honest face, and looked troubled. She dusted the only chair in the cottage, and placed it for him by the side of the fire, opposite the one window, whence he saw a little patch of yellow sand over which the spent waves spread themselves out listlessly. Under this window there was a bench, upon which the daughter threw herself in an unusual posture, resting her chin upon her hand. A moment after, the youth caught the first glimpse of her blue eyes. They were fixed upon him with a strange look of greed, amounting to craving, but, as if aware that they belied or betrayed her, she dropped them instantly. The moment she veiled them, her face, notwithstanding its colourless complexion, was almost beautiful.

When the fish was ready, the old woman wiped the deal table, steadied it upon the uneven floor, and covered it with a piece of fine table-linen. She then laid the fish on a wooden platter, and invited the guest to help himself. Seeing no other provision, he pulled from his pocket a hunting knife, and divided a portion from the fish, offering it to the mother first.

‘Come, my lamb,’ said the old woman; and the daughter approached the table. But her nostrils and mouth quivered with disgust.

The next moment she turned and hurried from the hut.

‘She doesn’t like fish,’ said the old woman, ‘and I haven’t anything else to give her.’

‘She does not seem in good health,’ he rejoined.

The woman answered only with a sigh, and they ate their fish with the help of a little rye bread. As they finished their supper, the youth heard the sound as of the pattering of a dog’s feet upon the sand close to the door; but ere he had time to look out of the window, the door opened, and the young woman entered. She looked better, perhaps from having just washed her face. She drew a stool to the corner of the fire opposite him. But as she sat down, to his bewilderment, and even horror, the student spied a single drop of blood on her white skin within her torn dress. The woman brought out a jar of whisky, put a rusty old kettle on the fire, and took her place in front of it. As soon as the water boiled, she proceeded to make some toddy in a wooden bowl.

Meantime the youth could not take his eyes off the young woman, so that at length he found himself fascinated, or rather bewitched. She kept her eyes for the most part veiled with the loveliest eyelids fringed with darkest lashes, and he gazed entranced; for the red glow of the little oil-lamp covered all the strangeness of her complexion. But as soon as he met a stolen glance out of those eyes unveiled, his soul shuddered within him. Lovely face and craving eyes alternated fascination and repulsion.

The mother placed the bowl in his hands. He drank sparingly, and passed it to the girl. She lifted it to her lips, and as she tasted – only tasted it – looked at him. He thought the drink must have been drugged and have affected his brain. Her hair smoothed itself back, and drew her forehead backwards with it; while the lower part of her face projected towards the bowl, revealing, ere she

sipped, her dazzling teeth in strange prominence. But the same moment the vision vanished; she returned the vessel to her mother, and rising, hurried out of the cottage.

Then the old woman pointed to a bed of heather in one corner with a murmured apology; and the student, wearied both with the fatigues of the day and the strangeness of the night, threw himself upon it, wrapped in his cloak. The moment he lay down, the storm began afresh, and the wind blew so keenly through the crannies of the hut, that it was only by drawing his cloak over his head that he could protect himself from its currents. Unable to sleep, he lay listening to the uproar which grew in violence, till the spray was dashing against the window. At length the door opened, and the young woman came in, made up the fire, drew the bench before it, and lay down in the same strange posture, with her chin propped on her hand and elbow, and her face turned towards the youth. He moved a little; she dropped her head, and lay on her face, with her arms crossed beneath her forehead. The mother had disappeared.

Drowsiness crept over him. A movement of the bench roused him, and he fancied he saw some four-footed creature as tall as a large dog trot quietly out of the door. He was sure he felt a rush of cold wind. Gazing fixedly through the darkness, he thought he saw the eyes of the damsel encountering his, but a glow from the falling together of the remnants of the fire revealed clearly enough that the bench was vacant. Wondering what could have made her go out in such a storm, he fell fast asleep.

In the middle of the night he felt a pain in his shoulder, came broad awake, and saw the gleaming eyes and grinning teeth of some animal close to his face. Its claws were in his shoulder, and its mouth in the act of seeking his throat. Before it had fixed its fangs, however, he had its throat in one hand, and sought his knife with the other. A terrible struggle followed; but regardless of the tearing claws, he found and opened his knife. He had made one futile stab, and was drawing it for a surer, when, with a spring of the whole body, and one wildly contorted effort, the creature twisted its neck from his hold, and with something betwixt a scream and a howl, darted from him. Again he heard the door open; again the wind blew in upon him, and it continued blowing; a sheet of spray dashed across the floor, and over his face. He sprung from his couch and bounded to the door.

It was a wild night – dark, but for the flash of whiteness from the waves as they broke within a few yards of the cottage; the wind was raving, and the rain pouring down the air. A gruesome sound as of mingled weeping and howling came from somewhere in the dark. He turned again into the hut and closed the door, but could find no way of securing it.

The lamp was nearly out, and he could not be certain whether the form of the young woman was upon the bench or not. Overcoming a strong repugnance, he approached it, and put out his hands – there was nothing there. He sat down and waited for the daylight: he dared not sleep any more.

When the day dawned at length, he went out yet again, and looked around. The morning was dim and gusty and gray. The wind had fallen, but the waves were tossing wildly. He wandered up and down the little strand, longing for more light.

At length he heard a movement in the cottage. By and by the voice of the old woman called to him from the door.

‘You’re up early, sir. I doubt you didn’t sleep well.’

‘Not very well,’ he answered. ‘But where is your daughter?’

‘She’s not awake yet,’ said the mother. ‘I’m afraid I have but a poor breakfast for you. But you’ll take a dram and a bit of fish. It’s all I’ve got.’

Unwilling to hurt her, though hardly in good appetite, he sat down at the table. While they were eating, the daughter came in, but turned her face away and went to the farther end of the hut. When she came forward after a minute or two, the youth saw that her hair was drenched, and her face whiter than before. She looked ill and faint, and when she raised her eyes, all their fierceness had vanished, and sadness had taken its place. Her neck was now covered with a cotton handkerchief. She was modestly attentive to him, and no longer shunned his gaze. He was gradually yielding to the temptation of braving another night in the hut, and seeing what would follow, when

the old woman spoke.

‘The weather will be broken all day, sir,’ she said. ‘You had better be going, or your friends will leave without you.’

Ere he could answer, he saw such a beseeching glance on the face of the girl, that he hesitated, confused. Glancing at the mother, he saw the flash of wrath in her face. She rose and approached her daughter, with her hand lifted to strike her. The young woman stooped her head with a cry. He darted round the table to interpose between them. But the mother had caught hold of her; the handkerchief had fallen from her neck; and the youth saw five blue bruises on her lovely throat – the marks of the four fingers and the thumb of a left hand. With a cry of horror he darted from the house, but as he reached the door he turned. His hostess was lying motionless on the floor, and a huge gray wolf came bounding after him.

There was no weapon at hand; and if there had been, his inborn chivalry would never have allowed him to harm a woman even under the guise of a wolf. Instinctively, he set himself firm, leaning a little forward, with half outstretched arms, and hands curved ready to clutch again at the throat upon which he had left those pitiful marks. But the creature as she sprung eluded his grasp, and just as he expected to feel her fangs, he found a woman weeping on his bosom, with her arms around his neck. The next instant, the gray wolf broke from him, and bounded howling up the cliff. Recovering himself as he best might, the youth followed, for it was the only way to the moor above, across which he must now make his way to find his companions.

All at once he heard the sound of a crunching of bones – not as if a creature was eating them, but as if they were ground by the teeth of rage and disappointment; looking up, he saw close above him the mouth of the little cavern in which he had taken refuge the day before. Summoning all his resolution, he passed it slowly and softly. From within came the sounds of a mingled moaning and growling.

Having reached the top, he ran at full speed for some distance across the moor before venturing to look behind him. When at length he did so, he saw, against the sky, the girl standing on the edge of the cliff, wringing her hands. One solitary wail crossed the space between. She made no attempt to follow him, and he reached the opposite shore in safety.

## **The Garden-party (Katherine Mansfield)**

And after all the weather was ideal. They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden-party if they had ordered it. Windless, warm, the sky without a cloud. Only the blue was veiled with a haze of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer. The gardener had been up since dawn, mowing the lawns and sweeping them, until the grass and the dark flat rosettes where the daisy plants had been seemed to shine. As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden-parties; the only flowers that everybody is certain of knowing. Hundreds, yes, literally hundreds, had come out in a single night; the green bushes bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels.

Breakfast was not yet over before the men came to put up the marquee.

‘Where do you want the marquee put, mother?’

‘My dear child, it’s no use asking me. I’m determined to leave everything to you children this year. Forget I am your mother. Treat me as an honoured guest.’

But Meg could not possibly go and supervise the men. She had washed her hair before breakfast, and she sat drinking her coffee in a green turban, with a dark wet curl stamped on each cheek. Jose, the butterfly, always came down in a silk petticoat and a kimono jacket.

‘You’ll have to go, Laura; you’re the artistic one.’

Away Laura flew, still holding her piece of bread-and-butter. It’s so delicious to have an excuse for eating out of doors, and besides, she loved having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else.

Four men in their shirt-sleeves stood grouped together on the garden path. They carried staves covered with rolls of canvas, and they had big tool-bags slung on their backs. They looked



impressive. Laura wished now that she had not got the bread-and-butter, but there was nowhere to put it, and she couldn't possibly throw it away. She blushed and tried to look severe and even a little bit short-sighted as she came up to them.

'Good morning,' she said, copying her mother's voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, and stammered like a little girl, 'Oh – er – have you come – is it about the marquee?'

'That's right, miss,' said the tallest of the men, a lanky, freckled fellow, and he shifted his tool-bag, knocked back his straw hat and smiled down at her. 'That's about it.'

His smile was so easy, so friendly that Laura recovered. What nice eyes he had, small, but such a dark blue! And now she looked at the others, they were smiling too. 'Cheer up, we won't bite,' their smile seemed to say. How very nice workmen were! And what a beautiful morning! She mustn't mention the morning; she must be business-like. The marquee.

'Well, what about the lily-lawn? Would that do?'

And she pointed to the lily-lawn with the hand that didn't hold the bread-and-butter. They turned, they stared in the direction. A little fat chap thrust out his under-lip, and the tall fellow frowned.

'I don't fancy it,' said he. 'Not conspicuous enough. You see, with a thing like a marquee,' and he turned to Laura in his easy way, 'you want to put it somewhere where it'll give you a bang slap in the eye, if you follow me.'

Laura's upbringing made her wonder for a moment whether it was quite respectful of a workman to talk to her of bangs slap in the eye. But she did quite follow him.

'A corner of the tennis-court,' she suggested. 'But the band's going to be in one corner.'

'H'm, going to have a band, are you?' said another of the workmen. He was pale. He had a haggard look as his dark eyes scanned the tennis-court. What was he thinking?

'Only a very small band,' said Laura gently. Perhaps he wouldn't mind so much if the band was quite small. But the tall fellow interrupted.

'Look here, miss, that's the place. Against those trees. Over there. That'll do fine.'

Against the karakas. Then the karaka-trees would be hidden. And they were so lovely, with their broad, gleaming leaves, and their clusters of yellow fruit. They were like trees you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary, lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour. Must they be hidden by a marquee?

They must. Already the men had shouldered their staves and were making for the place. Only the tall fellow was left. He bent down, pinched a sprig of lavender, put his thumb and forefinger to his nose and snuffed up the smell. When Laura saw that gesture she forgot all about the karakas in her wonder at him caring for things like that – caring for the smell of lavender. How many men that she knew would have done such a thing? Oh, how extraordinarily nice workmen were, she thought. Why couldn't she have workmen for her friends rather than the silly boys she danced with and who came to Sunday night supper? She would get on much better with men like these.

It's all the fault, she decided, as the tall fellow drew something on the back of an envelope, something that was to be looped up or left to hang, of these absurd class distinctions. Well, for her part, she didn't feel them. Not a bit, not an atom... And now there came the chock-chock of wooden hammers. Someone whistled, someone sang out, 'Are you right there, matey?' 'Matey!' The friendliness of it, the – the – Just to prove how happy she was, just to show the tall fellow how at home she felt, and how she despised stupid conventions, Laura took a big bite of her bread-and-butter as she stared at the little drawing. She felt just like a work-girl.

'Laura, Laura, where are you? Telephone, Laura!' a voice cried from the house.

'Coming!' Away she skimmed, over the lawn, up the path, up the steps, across the veranda, and into the porch. In the hall her father and Laurie were brushing their hats ready to go to the office.

'I say, Laura,' said Laurie very fast, 'you might just give a squeeze at my coat before this afternoon. See if it wants pressing.'

'I will,' said she. Suddenly she couldn't stop herself. She ran at Laurie and gave him a small,

quick squeeze. 'Oh, I do love parties, don't you?' gasped Laura.

'Ra-ther,' said Laurie's warm, boyish voice, and he squeezed his sister too, and gave her a gentle push. 'Dash off to the telephone, old girl.'

The telephone. 'Yes, yes; oh yes. Kitty? Good morning, dear. Come to lunch? Do, dear. Delighted of course. It will only be a very scratch meal – just the sandwich crusts and broken meringue-shells and what's left over. Yes, isn't it a perfect morning? Your white? Oh, I certainly should. One moment – hold the line. Mother's calling.' And Laura sat back. 'What, mother? Can't hear.'

Mrs. Sheridan's voice floated down the stairs. 'Tell her to wear that sweet hat she had on last Sunday.'

'Mother says you're to wear that sweet hat you had on last Sunday. Good. One o'clock. Bye-bye.'

Laura put back the receiver, flung her arms over her head, took a deep breath, stretched and let them fall. 'Huh,' she sighed, and the moment after the sigh she sat up quickly. She was still, listening. All the doors in the house seemed to be open. The house was alive with soft, quick steps and running voices. The green baize door that led to the kitchen regions swung open and shut with a muffled thud. And now there came a long, chuckling absurd sound. It was the heavy piano being moved on its stiff castors. But the air! If you stopped to notice, was the air always like this? Little faint winds were playing chase, in at the tops of the windows, out at the doors. And there were two tiny spots of sun, one on the inkpot, one on a silver photograph frame, playing too. Darling little spots. Especially the one on the inkpot lid. It was quite warm. A warm little silver star. She could have kissed it.

The front door bell pealed, and there sounded the rustle of Sadie's print skirt on the stairs. A man's voice murmured; Sadie answered, careless, 'I'm sure I don't know. Wait. I'll ask Mrs. Sheridan.'

'What is it, Sadie?' Laura came into the hall.

'It's the florist, Miss Laura.'

It was, indeed. There, just inside the door, stood a wide, shallow tray full of pots of pink lilies. No other kind. Nothing but lilies – canna lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant, almost frighteningly alive on bright crimson stems.

'O-oh, Sadie!' said Laura, and the sound was like a little moan. She crouched down as if to warm herself at that blaze of lilies; she felt they were in her fingers, on her lips, growing in her breast.

'It's some mistake,' she said faintly. 'Nobody ever ordered so many. Sadie, go and find mother.'

But at that moment Mrs. Sheridan joined them.

'It's quite right,' she said calmly. 'Yes, I ordered them. Aren't they lovely?' She pressed Laura's arm. 'I was passing the shop yesterday, and I saw them in the window. And I suddenly thought for once in my life I shall have enough canna lilies. The garden-party will be a good excuse.'

'But I thought you said you didn't mean to interfere,' said Laura. Sadie had gone. The florist's man was still outside at his van. She put her arm round her mother's neck and gently, very gently, she bit her mother's ear.

'My darling child, you wouldn't like a logical mother, would you? Don't do that. Here's the man.'

He carried more lilies still, another whole tray.

'Bank them up, just inside the door, on both sides of the porch, please,' said Mrs. Sheridan. 'Don't you agree, Laura?'

'Oh, I do, mother.'

In the drawing-room Meg, Jose and good little Hans had at last succeeded in moving the piano.

'Now, if we put this chesterfield against the wall and move everything out of the room except

the chairs, don't you think?'

'Quite.'

'Hans, move these tables into the smoking-room, and bring a sweeper to take these marks off the carpet and – one moment, Hans–' Jose loved giving orders to the servants, and they loved obeying her. She always made them feel they were taking part in some drama. 'Tell mother and Miss Laura to come here at once.

'Very good, Miss Jose.'

She turned to Meg. 'I want to hear what the piano sounds like, just in case I'm asked to sing this afternoon. Let's try over 'This life is Weary.'

Pom! Ta-ta-ta Tee-ta! The piano burst out so passionately that Jose's face changed. She clasped her hands. She looked mournfully and enigmatically at her mother and Laura as they came in.

*'This Life is Wee-ary,  
A Tear – a Sigh.  
A Love that Chan-ges,  
This Life is Wee-ary,  
A Tear – a Sigh.  
A Love that Chan-ges,  
And then... Good-bye!'*

But at the word 'Good-bye,' and although the piano sounded more desperate than ever, her face broke into a brilliant, dreadfully unsympathetic smile.

'Aren't I in good voice, mummy?' she beamed.

*'This Life is Wee-ary,  
Hope comes to Die.  
A Dream – a Wa-kening.'*

But now Sadie interrupted them. 'What is it, Sadie?'

'If you please, m'm, cook says have you got the flags for the sandwiches?'

'The flags for the sandwiches, Sadie?' echoed Mrs. Sheridan dreamily. And the children knew by her face that she hadn't got them. 'Let me see.' And she said to Sadie firmly, 'Tell cook I'll let her have them in ten minutes.'

Sadie went.

'Now, Laura,' said her mother quickly, 'come with me into the smoking-room. I've got the names somewhere on the back of an envelope. You'll have to write them out for me. Meg, go upstairs this minute and take that wet thing off your head. Jose, run and finish dressing this instant. Do you hear me, children, or shall I have to tell your father when he comes home to-night? And – and, Jose, pacify cook if you do go into the kitchen, will you? I'm terrified of her this morning.'

The envelope was found at last behind the dining-room clock, though how it had got there Mrs. Sheridan could not imagine.

'One of you children must have stolen it out of my bag, because I remember vividly – cream cheese and lemon-curd. Have you done that?'

'Yes.'

'Egg and–' Mrs. Sheridan held the envelope away from her. 'It looks like mice. It can't be mice, can it?'

'Olive, pet,' said Laura, looking over her shoulder.

'Yes, of course, olive. What a horrible combination it sounds. Egg and olive.'

They were finished at last, and Laura took them off to the kitchen. She found Jose there pacifying the cook, who did not look at all terrifying.

'I have never seen such exquisite sandwiches,' said Jose's rapturous voice. 'How many kinds

did you say there were, cook? Fifteen?’

‘Fifteen, Miss Jose.’

‘Well, cook, I congratulate you.’

Cook swept up crusts with the long sandwich knife, and smiled broadly.

‘Godber’s has come,’ announced Sadie, issuing out of the pantry. She had seen the man pass the window.

That meant the cream puffs had come. Godber’s were famous for their cream puffs. Nobody ever thought of making them at home.

‘Bring them in and put them on the table, my girl,’ ordered cook.

Sadie brought them in and went back to the door. Of course Laura and Jose were far too grown-up to really care about such things. All the same, they couldn’t help agreeing that the puffs looked very attractive. Very. Cook began arranging them, shaking off the extra icing sugar.

‘Don’t they carry one back to all one’s parties?’ said Laura.

‘I suppose they do,’ said practical Jose, who never liked to be carried back. ‘They look beautifully light and feathery, I must say.’

‘Have one each, my dears,’ said cook in her comfortable voice. ‘Yer ma won’t know.’

Oh, impossible. Fancy cream puffs so soon after breakfast. The very idea made one shudder. All the same, two minutes later Jose and Laura were licking their fingers with that absorbed inward look that only comes from whipped cream.

‘Let’s go into the garden, out by the back way,’ suggested Laura. ‘I want to see how the men are getting on with the marquee. They’re such awfully nice men.’

But the back door was blocked by cook, Sadie, Godber’s man and Hans.

Something had happened.

‘Tuk-tuk-tuk,’ clucked cook like an agitated hen. Sadie had her hand clapped to her cheek as though she had toothache. Hans’s face was screwed up in the effort to understand. Only Godber’s man seemed to be enjoying himself; it was his story.

‘What’s the matter? What’s happened?’

‘There’s been a horrible accident,’ said cook. ‘A man killed.’

‘A man killed! Where? How? When?’

But Godber’s man wasn’t going to have his story snatched from under his very nose.

‘Know those little cottages just below here, miss?’ Know them? Of course, she knew them. ‘Well, there’s a young chap living there, name of Scott, a carter. His horse shied at a traction-engine, corner of Hawke Street this morning, and he was thrown out on the back of his head. Killed.’

‘Dead!’ Laura stared at Godber’s man.

‘Dead when they picked him up,’ said Godber’s man with relish. ‘They were taking the body home as I come up here.’ And he said to the cook, ‘He’s left a wife and five little ones.’

‘Jose, come here.’ Laura caught hold of her sister’s sleeve and dragged her through the kitchen to the other side of the green baize door. There she paused and leaned against it. ‘Jose!’ she said, horrified, ‘however are we going to stop everything?’

‘Stop everything, Laura!’ cried Jose in astonishment. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Stop the garden-party, of course.’ Why did Jose pretend?

But Jose was still more amazed. ‘Stop the garden-party? My dear Laura, don’t be so absurd. Of course we can’t do anything of the kind. Nobody expects us to. Don’t be so extravagant.’

‘But we can’t possibly have a garden-party with a man dead just outside the front gate.’

That really was extravagant, for the little cottages were in a lane to themselves at the very bottom of a steep rise that led up to the house. A broad road ran between. True, they were far too near. They were the greatest possible eyesore, and they had no right to be in that neighbourhood at all. They were little mean dwellings painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks, sick hens and tomato cans. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridans’ chimneys. Washerwomen lived in the lane and sweeps and a

cobbler, and a man whose house-front was studded all over with minute bird-cages. Children swarmed. When the Sheridans were little they were forbidden to set foot there because of the revolting language and of what they might catch. But since they were grown up, Laura and Laurie on their prowls sometimes walked through. It was disgusting and sordid. They came out with a shudder. But still one must go everywhere; one must see everything. So through they went.

‘And just think of what the band would sound like to that poor woman,’ said Laura.

‘Oh, Laura!’ Jose began to be seriously annoyed. ‘If you’re going to stop a band playing every time someone has an accident, you’ll lead a very strenuous life. I’m every bit as sorry about it as you. I feel just as sympathetic.’ Her eyes hardened. She looked at her sister just as she used to when they were little and fighting together. ‘You won’t bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental,’ she said softly.

‘Drunk! Who said he was drunk?’ Laura turned furiously on Jose. She said, just as they had used to say on those occasions, ‘I’m going straight up to tell mother.’

‘Do, dear,’ cooed Jose.

‘Mother, can I come into your room?’ Laura turned the big glass door-knob.

‘Of course, child. Why, what’s the matter? What’s given you such a colour?’ And Mrs. Sheridan turned round from her dressing-table. She was trying on a new hat.

‘Mother, a man’s been killed,’ began Laura.

‘Not in the garden?’ interrupted her mother.

‘No, no!’

‘Oh, what a fright you gave me!’ Mrs. Sheridan sighed with relief, and took off the big hat and held it on her knees.

‘But listen, mother,’ said Laura. Breathless, half-choking, she told the dreadful story. ‘Of course, we can’t have our party, can we?’ she pleaded. ‘The band and everybody arriving. They’d hear us, mother; they’re nearly neighbours!’

To Laura’s astonishment her mother behaved just like Jose; it was harder to bear because she seemed amused. She refused to take Laura seriously.

‘But, my dear child, use your common sense. It’s only by accident we’ve heard of it. If someone had died there normally – and I can’t understand how they keep alive in those poky little holes – we should still be having our party, shouldn’t we?’

Laura had to say ‘yes’ to that, but she felt it was all wrong. She sat down on her mother’s sofa and pinched the cushion frill.

‘Mother, isn’t it terribly heartless of us?’ she asked.

‘Darling!’ Mrs. Sheridan got up and came over to her, carrying the hat. Before Laura could stop her she had popped it on. ‘My child!’ said her mother, ‘the hat is yours. It’s made for you. It’s much too young for me. I have never seen you look such a picture. Look at yourself!’ And she held up her hand-mirror.

‘But, mother,’ Laura began again. She couldn’t look at herself; she turned aside.

This time Mrs. Sheridan lost patience just as Jose had done.

‘You are being very absurd, Laura,’ she said coldly. ‘People like that don’t expect sacrifices from us. And it’s not very sympathetic to spoil everybody’s enjoyment as you’re doing now.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Laura, and she walked quickly out of the room into her own bedroom. There, quite by chance, the first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with gold daisies, and a long black velvet ribbon. Never had she imagined she could look like that. Is mother right? she thought. And now she hoped her mother was right. Am I being extravagant? Perhaps it was extravagant. Just for a moment she had another glimpse of that poor woman and those little children, and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper. I’ll remember it again after the party’s over, she decided. And somehow that seemed quite the best plan...

Lunch was over by half-past one. By half-past two they were all ready for the fray. The green-coated band had arrived and was established in a corner of the tennis-court.

‘My dear!’ trilled Kitty Maitland, ‘aren’t they too like frogs for words? You ought to have

arranged them round the pond with the conductor in the middle on a leaf.'

Laurie arrived and hailed them on his way to dress. At the sight of him Laura remembered the accident again. She wanted to tell him. If Laurie agreed with the others, then it was bound to be all right. And she followed him into the hall.

'Laurie!'

'Hallo!' He was half-way upstairs, but when he turned round and saw Laura he suddenly puffed out his cheeks and goggled his eyes at her. 'My word, Laura! You do look stunning,' said Laurie. 'What an absolutely topping hat!'

Laura said faintly 'Is it?' and smiled up at Laurie, and didn't tell him after all.

Soon after that people began coming in streams. The band struck up; the hired waiters ran from the house to the marquee. Wherever you looked there were couples strolling, bending to the flowers, greeting, moving on over the lawn. They were like bright birds that had alighted in the Sheridans' garden for this one afternoon, on their way to – where? Ah, what happiness it is to be with people who all are happy, to press hands, press cheeks, smile into eyes.

'Darling Laura, how well you look!'

'What a becoming hat, child!'

'Laura, you look quite Spanish. I've never seen you look so striking.'

And Laura, glowing, answered softly, 'Have you had tea? Won't you have an ice? The passion-fruit ices really are rather special.' She ran to her father and begged him. 'Daddy darling, can't the band have something to drink?'

And the perfect afternoon slowly ripened, slowly faded, slowly its petals closed.

'Never a more delightful garden-party...' 'The greatest success...' 'Quite the most...'

Laura helped her mother with the good-byes. They stood side by side in the porch till it was all over.

'All over, all over, thank heaven,' said Mrs. Sheridan. 'Round up the others, Laura. Let's go and have some fresh coffee. I'm exhausted. Yes, it's been very successful. But oh, these parties, these parties! Why will you children insist on giving parties!' And they all of them sat down in the deserted marquee.

'Have a sandwich, daddy dear. I wrote the flag.'

'Thanks.' Mr. Sheridan took a bite and the sandwich was gone. He took another. 'I suppose you didn't hear of a beastly accident that happened to-day?' he said.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Sheridan, holding up her hand, 'we did. It nearly ruined the party. Laura insisted we should put it off.'

'Oh, mother!' Laura didn't want to be teased about it.

'It was a horrible affair all the same,' said Mr. Sheridan. 'The chap was married too. Lived just below in the lane, and leaves a wife and half a dozen kiddies, so they say.'

An awkward little silence fell. Mrs. Sheridan fidgeted with her cup. Really, it was very tactless of father...

Suddenly she looked up. There on the table were all those sandwiches, cakes, puffs, all uneaten, all going to be wasted. She had one of her brilliant ideas.

'I know,' she said. 'Let's make up a basket. Let's send that poor creature some of this perfectly good food. At any rate, it will be the greatest treat for the children. Don't you agree? And she's sure to have neighbours calling in and so on. What a point to have it all ready prepared. Laura!' She jumped up. 'Get me the big basket out of the stairs cupboard.'

'But, mother, do you really think it's a good idea?' said Laura.

Again, how curious, she seemed to be different from them all. To take scraps from their party. Would the poor woman really like that?

'Of course! What's the matter with you to-day? An hour or two ago you were insisting on us being sympathetic, and now—'

Oh well! Laura ran for the basket. It was filled, it was heaped by her mother.

'Take it yourself, darling,' said she. 'Run down just as you are. No, wait, take the arum lilies too. People of that class are so impressed by arum lilies.'

‘The stems will ruin her lace frock,’ said practical Jose.

So they would. Just in time. ‘Only the basket, then. And, Laura!’ – her mother followed her out of the marquee – ‘don’t on any account–’

‘What mother?’

No, better not put such ideas into the child’s head! ‘Nothing! Run along.’

It was just growing dusky as Laura shut their garden gates. A big dog ran by like a shadow. The road gleamed white, and down below in the hollow the little cottages were in deep shade. How quiet it seemed after the afternoon. Here she was going down the hill to somewhere where a man lay dead, and she couldn’t realize it. Why couldn’t she? She stopped a minute. And it seemed to her that kisses, voices, tinkling spoons, laughter, the smell of crushed grass were somehow inside her. She had no room for anything else. How strange! She looked up at the pale sky, and all she thought was, ‘Yes, it was the most successful party.’

Now the broad road was crossed. The lane began, smoky and dark. Women in shawls and men’s tweed caps hurried by. Men hung over the palings; the children played in the doorways. A low hum came from the mean little cottages. In some of them there was a flicker of light, and a shadow, crab-like, moved across the window. Laura bent her head and hurried on. She wished now she had put on a coat. How her frock shone! And the big hat with the velvet streamer – if only it was another hat! Were the people looking at her? They must be. It was a mistake to have come; she knew all along it was a mistake. Should she go back even now?

No, too late. This was the house. It must be. A dark knot of people stood outside. Beside the gate an old, old woman with a crutch sat in a chair, watching. She had her feet on a newspaper. The voices stopped as Laura drew near. The group parted. It was as though she was expected, as though they had known she was coming here.

Laura was terribly nervous. Tossing the velvet ribbon over her shoulder, she said to a woman standing by, ‘Is this Mrs. Scott’s house?’ and the woman, smiling queerly, said, ‘It is, my lass.’

Oh, to be away from this! She actually said, ‘Help me, God,’ as she walked up the tiny path and knocked. To be away from those staring eyes, or to be covered up in anything, one of those women’s shawls even. I’ll just leave the basket and go, she decided. I shan’t even wait for it to be emptied.

Then the door opened. A little woman in black showed in the gloom.

Laura said, ‘Are you Mrs. Scott?’ But to her horror the woman answered, ‘Walk in please, miss,’ and she was shut in the passage.

‘No,’ said Laura, ‘I don’t want to come in. I only want to leave this basket. Mother sent–’

The little woman in the gloomy passage seemed not to have heard her. ‘Step this way, please, miss,’ she said in an oily voice, and Laura followed her.

She found herself in a wretched little low kitchen, lighted by a smoky lamp. There was a woman sitting before the fire.

‘Em,’ said the little creature who had let her in. ‘Em! It’s a young lady.’ She turned to Laura. She said meaningly, ‘I’m ’er sister, miss. You’ll excuse ’er, won’t you?’

‘Oh, but of course!’ said Laura. ‘Please, please don’t disturb her. I–I only want to leave–’

But at that moment the woman at the fire turned round. Her face, puffed up, red, with swollen eyes and swollen lips, looked terrible. She seemed as though she couldn’t understand why Laura was there. What did it mean? Why was this stranger standing in the kitchen with a basket? What was it all about? And the poor face puckered up again.

‘All right, my dear,’ said the other. ‘I’ll thenk the young lady.’

And again she began, ‘You’ll excuse her, miss, I’m sure,’ and her face, swollen too, tried an oily smile.

Laura only wanted to get out, to get away. She was back in the passage. The door opened. She walked straight through into the bedroom, where the dead man was lying.

‘You’d like a look at ’im, wouldn’t you?’ said Em’s sister, and she brushed past Laura over to the bed. ‘Don’t be afraid, my lass,’ – and now her voice sounded fond and sly, and fondly she drew down the sheet – ‘’e looks a picture. There’s nothing to show. Come along, my dear.’

Laura came.

There lay a young man, fast asleep – sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids. He was given up to his dream. What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane. Happy... happy... All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content.

But all the same you had to cry, and she couldn't go out of the room without saying something to him. Laura gave a loud childish sob.

'Forgive my hat,' she said.

And this time she didn't wait for Em's sister. She found her way out of the door, down the path, past all those dark people. At the corner of the lane she met Laurie.

He stepped out of the shadow. 'Is that you, Laura?'

'Yes.'

'Mother was getting anxious. Was it all right?'

'Yes, quite. Oh, Laurie!' She took his arm, she pressed up against him.

'I say, you're not crying, are you?' asked her brother.

Laura shook her head. She was.

Laurie put his arm round her shoulder. 'Don't cry,' he said in his warm, loving voice. 'Was it awful?'

'No,' sobbed Laura. 'It was simply marvellous. But Laurie–' She stopped, she looked at her brother. 'Isn't life,' she stammered, 'isn't life–' But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

'Isn't it, darling?' said Laurie.

## **Marriage à la Mode<sup>1</sup> (Katherine Mansfield)**

On his way to the station William remembered with a fresh pang of disappointment that he was taking nothing down to the kiddies. Poor little chaps! It was hard lines on them. Their first words always were as they ran to greet him, 'What have you got for me, daddy?' and he had nothing. He would have to buy them some sweets at the station. But that was what he had done for the past four Saturdays; their faces had fallen last time when they saw the same old boxes produced again.

And Paddy had said, 'I had red ribbing on mine bee-fore!'

And Johnny had said, 'It's always pink on mine. I hate pink.'

But what was William to do? The affair wasn't so easily settled. In the old days, of course, he would have taken a taxi off to a decent toyshop and chosen them something in five minutes. But nowadays they had Russian toys, French toys, Serbian toys – toys from God knows where. It was over a year since Isabel had scrapped the old donkeys and engines and so on because they were so 'dreadfully sentimental' and 'so appallingly bad for the babies' sense of form.'

'It's so important,' the new Isabel had explained, 'that they should like the right things from the very beginning. It saves so much time later on. Really, if the poor pets have to spend their infant years staring at these horrors, one can imagine them growing up and asking to be taken to the Royal Academy.'

And she spoke as though a visit to the Royal Academy was certain immediate death to any one...

'Well, I don't know,' said William slowly. 'When I was their age I used to go to bed hugging an old towel with a knot in it.'

The new Isabel looked at him, her eyes narrowed, her lips apart.

'Dear William! I'm sure you did!' She laughed in the new way.

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<sup>1</sup> **à la Mode** = in the latest fashion (*French*)



Sweets it would have to be, however, thought William gloomily, fishing in his pocket for change for the taxi-man. And he saw the kiddies handing the boxes round – they were awfully generous little chaps – while Isabel's precious friends didn't hesitate to help themselves...

What about fruit? William hovered before a stall just inside the station. What about a melon each? Would they have to share that, too? Or a pineapple, for Pad, and a melon for Johnny? Isabel's friends could hardly go sneaking up to the nursery at the children's meal-times. All the same, as he bought the melon William had a horrible vision of one of Isabel's young poets lapping up a slice, for some reason, behind the nursery door.

With his two very awkward parcels he strode off to his train. The platform was crowded, the train was in. Doors banged open and shut. There came such a loud hissing from the engine that people looked dazed as they scurried to and fro. William made straight for a first-class smoker, stowed away his suit-case and parcels, and taking a huge wad of papers out of his inner pocket, he flung down in the corner and began to read.

'Our client moreover is positive... We are inclined to reconsider... in the event of-' Ah, that was better. William pressed back his flattened hair and stretched his legs across the carriage floor. The familiar dull gnawing in his breast quietened down. 'With regard to our decision-' He took out a blue pencil and scored a paragraph slowly.

Two men came in, stepped across him, and made for the farther corner. A young fellow swung his golf clubs into the rack and sat down opposite. The train gave a gentle lurch, they were off. William glanced up and saw the hot, bright station slipping away. A red-faced girl raced along by the carriages, there was something strained and almost desperate in the way she waved and called. 'Hysterical!' thought William dully. Then a greasy, black-faced workman at the end of the platform grinned at the passing train. And William thought, 'A filthy life!' and went back to his papers.

When he looked up again there were fields, and beasts standing for shelter under the dark trees. A wide river, with naked children splashing in the shallows, glided into sight and was gone again. The sky shone pale, and one bird drifted high like a dark fleck in a jewel.

'We have examined our client's correspondence files...' The last sentence he had read echoed in his mind. 'We have examined...' William hung on to that sentence, but it was no good; it snapped in the middle, and the fields, the sky, the sailing bird, the water, all said, 'Isabel.' The same thing happened every Saturday afternoon. When he was on his way to meet Isabel there began those countless imaginary meetings. She was at the station, standing just a little apart from everybody else; she was sitting in the open taxi outside; she was at the garden gate; walking across the parched grass; at the door, or just inside the hall.

And her clear, light voice said, 'It's William,' or 'Hillo, William!' or 'So William has come!' He touched her cool hand, her cool cheek.

The exquisite freshness of Isabel! When he had been a little boy, it was his delight to run into the garden after a shower of rain and shake the rose-bush over him. Isabel was that rose-bush, petal-soft, sparkling and cool. And he was still that little boy. But there was no running into the garden now, no laughing and shaking. The dull, persistent gnawing in his breast started again. He drew up his legs, tossed the papers aside, and shut his eyes.

'What is it, Isabel? What is it?' he said tenderly. They were in their bedroom in the new house. Isabel sat on a painted stool before the dressing-table that was strewn with little black and green boxes.

'What is what, William?' And she bent forward, and her fine light hair fell over her cheeks.

'Ah, you know!' He stood in the middle of the room and he felt a stranger. At that Isabel wheeled round quickly and faced him.

'Oh, William!' she cried imploringly, and she held up the hair-brush: 'Please! Please don't be so dreadfully stuffy and – tragic. You're always saying or looking or hinting that I've changed. Just because I've got to know really congenial people, and go about more, and am frightfully keen on – on everything, you behave as though I'd–' Isabel tossed back her hair and laughed – 'killed our love or something. It's so awfully absurd' – she bit her lip – 'and it's so maddening, William. Even this

new house and the servants you grudge me.'

'Isabel!'

'Yes, yes, it's true in a way,' said Isabel quickly. 'You think they are another bad sign. Oh, I know you do. I feel it,' she said softly, 'every time you come up the stairs. But we couldn't have gone on living in that other poky little hole, William. Be practical, at least! Why, there wasn't enough room for the babies even.'

No, it was true. Every morning when he came back from chambers it was to find the babies with Isabel in the back drawing-room. They were having rides on the leopard skin thrown over the sofa back, or they were playing shops with Isabel's desk for a counter, or Pad was sitting on the hearthrug rowing away for dear life with a little brass fire shovel, while Johnny shot at pirates with the tongs. Every evening they each had a pick-a-back up the narrow stairs to their fat old Nanny.

Yes, he supposed it was a poky little house. A little white house with blue curtains and a window-box of petunias. William met their friends at the door with 'Seen our petunias? Pretty terrific for London, don't you think?'

The train stopped at another station. Bettingford. Good heavens But the imbecile thing, the absolutely extraordinary thing was that he hadn't the slightest idea that Isabel wasn't as happy as he. God, what blindness! He hadn't the remotest notion in those days that she really hated that inconvenient little house that she thought the fat Nanny was ruining the babies that she was desperately lonely, pining for new people and new music and pictures and so on. If they hadn't gone to that studio party at Moira Morrison's – if Moira Morrison hadn't said as they were leaving, 'I'm going to rescue your wife, selfish man. She's like an exquisite little Titania'<sup>1</sup> – if Isabel hadn't gone with Moira to Paris – if – if...

They'd be there in ten minutes. William stuffed that papers back into his pockets; the young man opposite had long since disappeared. Now the other two got out. The late afternoon sun shone on women in cotton frocks and little sunburnt, barefoot children. It blazed on a silky yellow flower with coarse leaves which sprawled over a bank of rock. The air ruffling through the window smelled of the sea. Had Isabel the same crowd with her this week-end, wondered William?

And he remembered the holidays they used to have, the four of them, with a little farm girl, Rose, to look after the babies. Isabel wore a jersey and her hair in a plait; she looked about fourteen. Lord! how his nose used to peel! And the amount they ate, and the amount they slept in that immense feather bed with their feet locked together... William couldn't help a grim smile as he thought of Isabel's horror if she knew the full extent of his sentimentality.

'Hillo, William!' She was at the station after all, standing just as he had imagined, apart from the others, and – William's heart leapt – she was alone.

'Hallo, Isabel!' William stared. He thought she looked so beautiful that he had to say something, 'You look very cool.'

'Do I?' said Isabel. 'I don't feel very cool. Come along, your horrid old train is late. The taxi's outside.' She put her hand lightly on his arm as they passed the ticket collector. 'We've all come to meet you,' she said. 'But we've left Bobby Kane at the sweet shop, to be called for.'

'Oh!' said William. It was all he could say for the moment.

There in the glare waited the taxi, with Bill Hunt and Dennis Green sprawling on one side, their hats tilted over their faces, while on the other, Moira Morrison, in a bonnet like a huge strawberry, jumped up and down.

'No ice! No ice! No ice!' she shouted gaily.

And Dennis chimed in from under his hat. 'Only to be had from the fishmonger's.'

And Bill Hunt, emerging, added, 'With whole fish in it.'

'Oh, what a bore!' wailed Isabel. And she explained to William how they had been chasing round the town for ice while she waited for him. 'Simply everything is running down the steep cliffs into the sea, beginning with the butter.'

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<sup>1</sup> **Titania** – in Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', a fictional character, the queen of fairies who opposes her husband

‘We shall have to anoint ourselves with butter,’ said Dennis. ‘May thy head, William, lack not ointment.’

‘Look here,’ said William, ‘how are we going to sit? I’d better get up by the driver.’

‘No, Bobby Kane’s by the driver,’ said Isabel. ‘You’re to sit between Moira and me.’ The taxi started. ‘What have you got in those mysterious parcels?’

‘De-cap-it-ated heads!’ said Bill Hunt, shuddering beneath his hat.

‘Oh, fruit!’ Isabel sounded very pleased. ‘Wise William! A melon and a pineapple. How too nice!’

‘No, wait a bit,’ said William, smiling. But he really was anxious. ‘I brought them down for the kiddies.’

‘Oh, my dear!’ Isabel laughed, and slipped her hand through his arm. ‘They’d be rolling in agonies if they were to eat them. No’ – she patted his hand – ‘you must bring them something next time. I refuse to part with my pineapple.’

‘Cruel Isabel! Do let me smell it!’ said Moira. She flung her arms across William appealingly. ‘Oh!’ The strawberry bonnet fell forward: she sounded quite faint.

‘A Lady in Love with a Pineapple,’ said Dennis, as the taxi drew up before a little shop with a striped blind. Out came Bobby Kane, his arms full of little packets.

‘I do hope they’ll be good. I’ve chosen them because of the colours. There are some round things which really look too divine. And just look at this nougat,’ he cried ecstatically, ‘just look at it! It’s a perfect little ballet.’

But at that moment the shop-man appeared. ‘Oh, I forgot. They’re none of them paid for,’ said Bobby, looking frightened. Isabel gave the shop-man a note, and Bobby was radiant again. ‘Hallo, William! I’m sitting by the driver.’ And bareheaded, all in white, with his sleeves rolled up to the shoulders, he leapt into his place. ‘Avanti!’ he cried...

After tea the others went off to bathe, while William stayed and made his peace with the kiddies. But Johnny and Paddy were asleep, the rose-red glow had paled, bats were flying, and still the bathers had not returned. As William wandered downstairs, the maid crossed the hall carrying a lamp. He followed her into the sitting-room. It was a long room, coloured yellow. On the wall opposite William someone had painted a young man, over life-size, with very wobbly legs, offering a wide-eyed daisy to a young woman who had one very short arm and one very long, thin one. Over the chairs and sofa there hung strips of black material, covered with big splashes like broken eggs, and everywhere one looked there seemed to be an ash-tray full of cigarette ends. William sat down in one of the arm-chairs. Nowadays, when one felt with one hand down the sides, it wasn’t to come upon a sheep with three legs or a cow that had lost one horn, or a very fat dove out of the Noah’s Ark. One fished up yet another little paper-covered book of smudged-looking poems... He thought of the wad of papers in his pocket, but he was too hungry and tired to read. The door was open; sounds came from the kitchen. The servants were talking as if they were alone in the house. Suddenly there came a loud screech of laughter and an equally loud ‘Sh!’ They had remembered him. William got up and went through the French windows into the garden, and as he stood there in the shadow he heard the bathers coming up the sandy road; their voices rang through the quiet.

‘I think it’s up to Moira to use her little arts and wiles.’

A tragic moan from Moira.

‘We ought to have a gramophone for the weekends that played “The Maid of the Mountains.”’

‘Oh no! Oh no!’ cried Isabel’s voice. ‘That’s not fair to William. Be nice to him, my children! He’s only staying until tomorrow evening.’

‘Leave him to me,’ cried Bobby Kane. ‘I’m awfully good at looking after people.’

The gate swung open and shut. William moved on the terrace; they had seen him. ‘Hallo, William!’ And Bobby Kane, flapping his towel, began to leap and pirouette on the parched lawn. ‘Pity you didn’t come, William. The water was divine. And we all went to a little pub afterwards and had sloe gin.’

The others had reached the house. ‘I say, Isabel,’ called Bobby, ‘would you like me to wear

my Nijinsky dress to-night?’

‘No,’ said Isabel, ‘nobody’s going to dress. We’re all starving. William’s starving, too. Come along, mes amis<sup>1</sup>, let’s begin with sardines.’

‘I’ve found the sardines,’ said Moira, and she ran into the hall, holding a box high in the air.

‘A Lady with a Box of Sardines,’ said Dennis gravely.

‘Well, William, and how’s London?’ asked Bill Hunt, drawing the cork out of a bottle of whisky.

‘Oh, London’s not much changed,’ answered William.

‘Good old London,’ said Bobby, very hearty, spearing a sardine.

But a moment later William was forgotten. Moira Morrison began wondering what colour one’s legs really were under water.

‘Mine are the palest, palest mushroom colour.’

Bill and Dennis ate enormously. And Isabel filled glasses, and changed plates, and found matches, smiling blissfully. At one moment, she said, ‘I do wish, Bill, you’d paint it.’

‘Paint what?’ said Bill loudly, stuffing his mouth with bread.

‘Us,’ said Isabel, ‘round the table. It would be so fascinating in twenty years’ time.’

Bill screwed up his eyes and chewed. ‘Light’s wrong,’ he said rudely, ‘far too much yellow’; and went on eating. And that seemed to charm Isabel, too.

But after supper they were all so tired they could do nothing but yawn until it was late enough to go to bed...

It was not until William was waiting for his taxi the next afternoon that he found himself alone with Isabel. When he brought his suit-case down into the hall, Isabel left the others and went over to him. She stooped down and picked up the suit-case. ‘What a weight!’ she said, and she gave a little awkward laugh. ‘Let me carry it! To the gate.’

‘No, why should you?’ said William. ‘Of course, not. Give it to me.’

‘Oh, please, do let me,’ said Isabel. ‘I want to, really.’ They walked together silently. William felt there was nothing to say now.

‘There,’ said Isabel triumphantly, setting the suit-case down, and she looked anxiously along the sandy road. ‘I hardly seem to have seen you this time,’ she said breathlessly. ‘It’s so short, isn’t it? I feel you’ve only just come. Next time—’ The taxi came into sight. ‘I hope they look after you properly in London. I’m so sorry the babies have been out all day, but Miss Neil had arranged it. They’ll hate missing you. Poor William, going back to London.’ The taxi turned. ‘Good-bye!’ She gave him a little hurried kiss; she was gone.

Fields, trees, hedges streamed by. They shook through the empty, blind-looking little town, ground up the steep pull to the station.

The train was in. William made straight for a first-class smoker, flung back into the corner, but this time he let the papers alone. He folded his arms against the dull, persistent gnawing, and began in his mind to write a letter to Isabel.

The post was late as usual. They sat outside the house in long chairs under coloured parasols. Only Bobby Kane lay on the turf at Isabel’s feet. It was dull, stifling; the day drooped like a flag.

‘Do you think there will be Mondays in Heaven?’ asked Bobby childishly.

And Dennis murmured, ‘Heaven will be one long Monday.’

But Isabel couldn’t help wondering what had happened to the salmon they had for supper last night. She had meant to have fish mayonnaise for lunch and now...

Moira was asleep. Sleeping was her latest discovery. ‘It’s so wonderful. One simply shuts one’s eyes, that’s all. It’s so delicious.’

When the old ruddy postman came beating along the sandy road on his tricycle one felt the handle-bars ought to have been oars.

Bill Hunt put down his book. ‘Letters,’ he said complacently, and they all waited. But, heartless postman – O malignant world! There was only one, a fat one for Isabel. Not even a paper.

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<sup>1</sup> **mes amis** = my friends (*French*)

‘And mine’s only from William,’ said Isabel mournfully.

‘From William – already?’

‘He’s sending you back your marriage lines as a gentle reminder.’

‘Does everybody have marriage lines? I thought they were only for servants.’

‘Pages and pages! Look at her! A Lady reading a Letter,’ said Dennis.

‘My darling, precious Isabel.’ Pages and pages there were. As Isabel read on her feeling of astonishment changed to a stifled feeling. What on earth had induced William...? How extraordinary it was... What could have made him...? She felt confused, more and more excited, even frightened. It was just like William. Was it? It was absurd, of course, it must be absurd, ridiculous. ‘Ha, ha, ha! Oh dear!’ What was she to do? Isabel flung back in her chair and laughed till she couldn’t stop laughing.

‘Do, do tell us,’ said the others. ‘You must tell us.’

‘I’m longing to,’ gurgled Isabel. She sat up, gathered the letter, and waved it at them. ‘Gather round,’ she said. ‘Listen, it’s too marvellous. A love-letter!’

‘A love-letter! But how divine!’ ‘Darling, precious Isabel.’ But she had hardly begun before their laughter interrupted her.

‘Go on, Isabel, it’s perfect.’

‘It’s the most marvellous find.’

‘Oh, do go on, Isabel!’

‘God forbid, my darling, that I should be a drag on your happiness.’

‘Oh! oh! oh!’

‘Sh! sh! sh!’

And Isabel went on. When she reached the end they were hysterical: Bobby rolled on the turf and almost sobbed.

‘You must let me have it just as it is, entire, for my new book,’ said Dennis firmly. ‘I shall give it a whole chapter.’

‘Oh, Isabel,’ moaned Moira, ‘that wonderful bit about holding you in his arms!’

‘I always thought those letters in divorce cases were made up. But they pale before this.’

‘Let me hold it. Let me read it, mine own self,’ said Bobby Kane.

But, to their surprise, Isabel crushed the letter in her hand. She was laughing no longer. She glanced quickly at them all; she looked exhausted. ‘No, not just now. Not just now,’ she stammered.

And before they could recover she had run into the house, through the hall, up the stairs into her bedroom. Down she sat on the side of the bed. ‘How vile, odious, abominable, vulgar,’ muttered Isabel. She pressed her eyes with her knuckles and rocked to and fro. And again she saw them, but not four, more like forty, laughing, sneering, jeering, stretching out their hands while she read them William’s letter. Oh, what a loathsome thing to have done. How could she have done it! ‘God forbid, my darling, that I should be a drag on your happiness.’ William! Isabel pressed her face into the pillow. But she felt that even the grave bedroom knew her for what she was, shallow, tinkling, vain...

Presently from the garden below there came voices.

‘Isabel, we’re all going for a bathe. Do come!’

‘Come, thou wife of William!’

‘Call her once before you go, call once yet!’

Isabel sat up. Now was the moment, now she must decide. Would she go with them, or stay here and write to William. Which, which should it be? ‘I must make up my mind.’ Oh, but how could there be any question? Of course she would stay here and write.

‘Titania!’ piped Moira.

‘Isa-bel?’

No, it was too difficult. ‘I’ll – I’ll go with them, and write to William later. Some other time. Later. Not now. But I shall certainly write,’ thought Isabel hurriedly.

And, laughing, in the new way, she ran down the stairs.

## The Fiddler (Herman Melville)

So my poem is damned, and immortal fame is not for me! I am nobody forever and ever. Intolerable fate!

Snatching my hat, I dashed down the criticism and rushed out into Broadway, where enthusiastic throngs were crowding to a circus in a side-street nearby, very recently started, and famous for a capital clown.

Presently my old friend Standard rather boisterously accosted me.

'Well met, Helmstone, my boy! Ah! what's the matter? Haven't been committing murder? Ain't flying justice? You look wild!'

'You have seen it, then!' said I, of course referring to the criticism.

'Oh, yes; I was there at the morning performance. Great clown, I assure you. But here comes Hautboy. Hautboy – Helmstone.'

Without having time or inclination to resent so mortifying a mistake, I was instantly soothed as I gazed on the face of the new acquaintance so unceremoniously introduced. His person was short and full, with a juvenile, animated cast to it. His complexion rurally ruddy; his eye sincere, cheery, and gray. His hair alone betrayed that he was not an overgrown boy. From his hair I set him down as forty or more.

'Come, Standard,' he gleefully cried to my friend, 'are you not going to the circus? The clown is inimitable, they say. Come, Mr. Helmstone, too – come both; and circus over, we'll take a nice stew and punch at Taylor's.'

The sterling content, good-humor, and extraordinary ruddy, sincere expression of this most singular new acquaintance acted upon me like magic. It seemed mere loyalty to human nature to accept an invitation from so unmistakably kind and honest a heart.

During the circus performance I kept my eye more on Hautboy than on the celebrated clown. Hautboy was the sight for me. Such genuine enjoyment as his struck me to the soul with a sense of the reality of the thing called happiness. The jokes of the clown he seemed to roll under his tongue as ripe magnum-bonums. Now the foot, now the hand, was employed to attest his grateful applause. At any hit more than ordinary, he turned upon Standard and me to see if his rare pleasure was shared. In a man of forty I saw a boy of twelve; and this too without the slightest abatement of my respect. Because all was so honest and natural, every expression and attitude so graceful with genuine good-nature, that the marvelous juvenility of Hautboy assumed a sort of divine and immortal air, like that of some forever youthful god of Greece.

But much as I gazed upon Hautboy, and much as I admired his air, yet that desperate mood in which I had first rushed from the house had not so entirely departed as not to molest me with momentary returns. But from these relapses I would rouse myself, and swiftly glance round the broad amphitheatre of eagerly interested and all-applauding human faces. Hark! claps, thumps, deafening huzzas; the vast assembly seemed frantic with acclamation; and what, mused I, has caused all this? Why, the clown only comically grinned with one of his extra grins.

Then I repeated in my mind that sublime passage in my poem, in which Cleothemes the Argive vindicates the justice of the war. Ay, ay, thought I to myself, did I now leap into the ring there, and repeat that identical passage, nay, enact the whole tragic poem before them, would they applaud the poet as they applaud the clown? No! They would hoot me, and call me doting or mad. Then what does this prove? Your infatuation or their insensibility? Perhaps both; but indubitably the first. But why wail? Do you seek admiration from the admirers of a buffoon? Call to mind the saying of the Athenian, who, when the people vociferously applauded in the forum, asked his friend in a whisper, what foolish thing had he said?

Again my eye swept the circus, and fell on the ruddy radiance of the countenance of Hautboy. But its clear honest cheeriness disdained my disdain. My intolerant pride was rebuked. And yet Hautboy dreamed not what magic reproof to a soul like mine sat on his laughing brow. At the very instant I felt the dart of the censure, his eye twinkled, his hand waved, his voice was lifted in jubilant delight at another joke of the inexhaustible clown.

Circus over, we went to Taylor's. Among crowds of others, we sat down to our stews and punches at one of the small marble tables. Hautboy sat opposite to me. Though greatly subdued from its former hilarity, his face still shone with gladness. But added to this was a quality not so prominent before; a certain serene expression of leisurely, deep good sense. Good sense and good humor in him joined hands. As the conversation proceeded between the brisk Standard and him – for I said little or nothing – I was more and more struck with the excellent judgment he evinced. In most of his remarks upon a variety of topics Hautboy seemed intuitively to hit the exact line between enthusiasm and apathy. It was plain that while Hautboy saw the world pretty much as it was, yet he did not theoretically espouse its bright side nor its dark side. Rejecting all solutions, he but acknowledged facts. What was sad in the world he did not superficially gainsay; what was glad in it he did not cynically slur; and all which was to him personally enjoyable, he gratefully took to his heart. It was plain, then – so it seemed at that moment, at least – that his extraordinary cheerfulness did not arise either from deficiency of feeling or thought.

Suddenly remembering an engagement, he took up his hat, bowed pleasantly, and left us.

'Well, Helmstone,' said Standard, inaudibly drumming on the slab, 'what do you think of your new acquaintance?'

The last two words tingled with a peculiar and novel significance.

'New acquaintance indeed,' echoed I.

'Standard, I owe you a thousand thanks for introducing me to one of the most singular men I have ever seen. It needed the optical sight of such a man to believe in the possibility of his existence.'

'You rather like him, then,' said Standard, with ironical dryness.

'I hugely love and admire him, Standard. I wish I were Hautboy.'

'Ah? That's a pity now. There's only one Hautboy in the world.'

This last remark set me to pondering again, and somehow it revived my dark mood.

'His wonderful cheerfulness, I suppose,' said I, sneering with spleen, 'originates not less in a felicitous fortune than in a felicitous temper. His great good sense is apparent; but great good sense may exist without sublime endowments. Nay, I take it, in certain cases, that good sense is simply owing to the absence of those. Much more, cheerfulness. Unpossessed of genius, Hautboy is eternally blessed.'

'Ah? You would not think him an extraordinary genius then?'

'Genius? What! Such a short, fat fellow a genius! Genius, like Cassius<sup>1</sup>, is lank.'

'Ah? But could you not fancy that Hautboy might formerly have had genius, but luckily getting rid of it, at last fatted up?'

'For a genius to get rid of his genius is as impossible as for a man in the galloping consumption to get rid of that.'

'Ah? You speak very decidedly.'

'Yes, Standard,' cried I, increasing in spleen, 'your cheery Hautboy, after all, is no pattern, no lesson for you and me. With average abilities; opinions clear, because circumscribed; passions docile, because they are feeble; a temper hilarious, because he was born to it – how can your Hautboy be made a reasonable example to a heady fellow like you, or an ambitious dreamer like me? Nothing tempts him beyond common limit; in himself he has nothing to restrain. By constitution he is exempted from all moral harm. Could ambition but prick him; had he but once heard applause, or endured contempt, a very different man would your Hautboy be. Acquiescent and calm from the cradle to the grave, he obviously slides through the crowd.'

'Ah?'

'Why do you say *ah* to me so strangely whenever I speak?'

'Did you ever hear of Master Betty?'

'The great English prodigy, who long ago ousted the Siddons and the Kembles from Drury

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<sup>1</sup> **Cassius** – 1) an active participant of the conspiracy against Julius Caesar in 44 BC; 2) a fictional character in 'Julius Caesar' by William Shakespeare.

Lane<sup>2</sup>, and made the whole town run mad with acclamation?’

‘The same,’ said Standard, once more inaudibly drumming on the slab.

I looked at him perplexed. He seemed to be holding the master-key of our theme in mysterious reserve; seemed to be throwing out his Master Betty too, to puzzle me only the more.

‘What under heaven can Master Betty, the great genius and prodigy, an English boy twelve years old, have to do with the poor commonplace plodder Hautboy, an American of forty?’

‘Oh, nothing in the least. I don’t imagine that they ever saw each other. Besides, Master Betty must be dead and buried long ere this.’

‘Then why cross the ocean, and rifle the grave to drag his remains into this living discussion?’

‘Absent-mindedness, I suppose. I humbly beg pardon. Proceed with your observations on Hautboy. You think he never had genius, quite too contented and happy, and fat for that, ah? You think him no pattern for men in general? affording no lesson of value to neglected merit, genius ignored, or impotent presumption rebuked? all of which three amount to much the same thing. You admire his cheerfulness, while scorning his commonplace soul. Poor Hautboy, how sad that your very cheerfulness should, by a by-blow, bring you despoil!’

‘I don’t say I scorn him; you are unjust. I simply declare that he is no pattern for me.’

A sudden noise at my side attracted my ear. Turning, I saw Hautboy again, who very blithely reseated himself on the chair he had left.

‘I was behind time with my engagement,’ said Hautboy, ‘so thought I would run back and rejoin you. But come, you have sat long enough here. Let us go to my rooms. It is only five minutes’ walk.’

‘If you will promise to fiddle for us, we will,’ said Standard.

Fiddle! thought I – he’s a jigembob<sup>2</sup> *fiddler* then? No wonder genius declines to measure its pace to a fiddler’s bow. My spleen was very strong on me now.

‘I will gladly fiddle you your fill,’ replied Hautboy to Standard. ‘Come on.’

In a few minutes we found ourselves in the fifth story of a sort of storehouse, in a lateral street to Broadway. It was curiously furnished with all sorts of odd furniture which seemed to have been obtained, piece by piece, at auctions of old-fashioned household stuff. But all was charmingly clean and cosy.

Pressed by Standard, Hautboy forthwith got out his dented old fiddle, and sitting down on a tall rickety stool, played away right merrily at Yankee Doodle<sup>3</sup> and other off-handed, dashing, and disdainfully care-free airs. But common as were the tunes, I was transfixed by something miraculously superior in the style. Sitting there on the old stool, his rusty hat sideways cocked on his head, one foot dangling adrift, he plied the bow of an enchanter. All my moody discontent, every vestige of peevishness fled. My whole splenetic soul capitulated to the magical fiddle.

‘Something of an Orpheus<sup>4</sup>, ah?’ said Standard, archly nudging me beneath the left rib.

‘And I, the charmed Bruin,’ murmured I.

The fiddle ceased. Once more, with redoubled curiosity, I gazed upon the easy, indifferent Hautboy. But he entirely baffled inquisition.

When, leaving him, Standard and I were in the street once more, I earnestly conjured him to tell me who, in sober truth, this marvelous Hautboy was.

‘Why, haven’t you seen him? And didn’t you yourself lay his whole anatomy open on the marble slab at Taylor’s? What more can you possibly learn? Doubtless your own masterly insight has already put you in possession of all.’

‘You mock me, Standard. There is some mystery here. Tell me, I entreat you, who is Hautboy?’

‘An extraordinary genius, Helmstone,’ said Standard, with sudden ardor, ‘who in boyhood

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<sup>2</sup> **Drury Lane** – a London theatre famous for its musicals, founded in 1663 and officially known as the Theatre Royal

<sup>2</sup> **jigembob** = jig and bob; *jig* – a solo folk dance popular in Scotland, northern England and Ireland in the 16th–18th centuries; *bob* – an old Scottish dance.

<sup>3</sup> **Yankee Doodle** – a popular song of the time of the American Revolution, written by Richard Shuckburgh

<sup>4</sup> **Orpheus** – in Greek mythology, a legendary hero with outstanding musical gift



drained the whole flagon of glory; whose going from city to city was a going from triumph to triumph. One who has been an object of wonder to the wisest, been caressed by the loveliest, received the open homage of thousands on thousands of the rabble. But today he walks Broadway and no man knows him. With you and me, the elbow of the hurrying clerk, and the pole of the remorseless omnibus, shove him. He who has a hundred times been crowned with laurels, now wears, as you see, a bunged beaver. Once fortune poured showers of gold into his lap, as showers of laurel leaves upon his brow. To-day, from house to house he hies, teaching fiddling for a living. Crammed once with fame, he is now hilarious without it. With genius and without fame, he is happier than a king. More a prodigy now than ever.'

'His true name?'

'Let me whisper it in your ear.'

'What! O Standard, myself, as a child, I have shouted myself hoarse applauding that very name in the theatre.'

'I have heard your poem was not very handsomely received,' said Standard, now suddenly shifting the subject.

'Not a word of that, for heaven's sake!' cried I. 'If Cicero<sup>1</sup>, traveling in the East, found sympathetic solace for his grief in beholding the arid overthrow of a once gorgeous city, shall not my petty affair be as nothing, when I behold in Hautboy the vine and the rose climbing the shattered shafts of his tumbled temple of Fame?'

Next day I tore all my manuscripts, bought me a fiddle, and went to take regular lessons of Hautboy.

## **The Ghost-Ship (Richard Middleton)**

Fairfield is a little village lying near the Portsmouth Road about half-way between London and the sea. Strangers who find it by accident now and then, call it a pretty, old-fashioned place; we who live in it and call it home don't find anything very pretty about it, but we should be sorry to live anywhere else. Our minds have taken the shape of the inn and the church and the green, I suppose. At all events we never feel comfortable out of Fairfield.

Of course the Cockneys<sup>2</sup>, with their vasty houses and noise-ridden streets, can call us rustics if they choose, but for all that Fairfield is a better place to live in than London. Doctor says that when he goes to London his mind is bruised with the weight of the houses, and he was a Cockney born. He had to live there himself when he was a little chap, but he knows better now. You gentlemen may laugh – perhaps some of you come from London way – but it seems to me that a witness like that is worth a gallon of arguments.

Dull? Well, you might find it dull, but I assure you that I've listened to all the London yarns you have spun tonight, and they're absolutely nothing to the things that happen at Fairfield. It's because of our way of thinking and minding our own business. If one of your Londoners were set down on the green of a Saturday night when the ghosts of the lads who died in the war keep tryst with the lasses who lie in the church-yard, he couldn't help being curious and interfering, and then the ghosts would go somewhere where it was quieter. But we just let them come and go and don't make any fuss, and in consequence Fairfield is the ghostiest place in all England. Why, I've seen a headless man sitting on the edge of the well in broad daylight, and the children playing about his feet as if he were their father. Take my word for it, spirits know when they are well off as much as human beings.

Still, I must admit that the thing I'm going to tell you about was queer even for our part of the world, where three packs of ghost-hounds hunt regularly during the season, and blacksmith's great-grandfather is busy all night shoeing the dead gentlemen's horses. Now that's a thing that wouldn't happen in London, because of their interfering ways, but blacksmith he lies up aloft and sleeps as quiet as a lamb. Once when he had a bad head he shouted down to them not to make so

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<sup>1</sup> **Cicero** (106 BC–43 BC) – the greatest Roman orator, statesman, lawyer and writer

<sup>2</sup> **the Cockneys** – here: native Londoners

much noise, and in the morning he found an old guinea left on the anvil as an apology. He wears it on his watch-chain now. But I must get on with my story; if I start telling you about the queer happenings at Fairfield I'll never stop.

It all came of the great storm in the spring of '97, the year that we had two great storms. This was the first one, and I remember it very well, because I found in the morning that it had lifted the thatch of my pigsty into the widow's garden as clean as a boy's kite. When I looked over the hedge, widow – Tom Lamport's widow that was – was prodding for her nasturtiums with a daisy-grubber. After I had watched her for a little I went down to the 'Fox and Grapes' to tell landlord what she had said to me. Landlord he laughed, being a married man and at ease with the sex. 'Come to that,' he said, 'the tempest has blowed something into my field. A kind of a ship I think it would be.'

I was surprised at that until he explained that it was only a ghost-ship and would do no hurt to the turnips. We argued that it had been blown up from the sea at Portsmouth<sup>1</sup>, and then we talked of something else. There were two slates down at the parsonage and a big tree in Lumley's meadow. It was a rare storm.

I reckon the wind had blown our ghosts all over England. They were coming back for days afterwards with foundered horses and as footsore as possible, and they were so glad to get back to Fairfield that some of them walked up the street crying like little children. Squire said that his great-grandfather's great-grandfather hadn't looked so dead-beat since the battle of Naseby<sup>2</sup>, and he's an educated man.

What with one thing and another, I should think it was a week before we got straight again, and then one afternoon I met the landlord on the green and he had a worried face. 'I wish you'd come and have a look at that ship in my field,' he said to me; 'it seems to me it's leaning real hard on the turnips. I can't bear thinking what the missus will say when she sees it.'

I walked down the lane with him, and sure enough there was a ship in the middle of his field, but such a ship as no man had seen on the water for three hundred years, let alone in the middle of a turnip-field. It was all painted black and covered with carvings, and there was a great bay window in the stern for all the world like the Squire's drawing-room. There was a crowd of little black cannon on deck and looking out of her port-holes, and she was anchored at each end to the hard ground. I have seen the wonders of the world on picture-postcards, but I have never seen anything to equal that.

'She seems very solid for a ghost-ship,' I said, seeing the landlord was bothered.

'I should say it's a betwixt and between,' he answered, puzzling it over, 'but it's going to spoil a matter of fifty turnips, and missus she'll want it moved.' We went up to her and touched the side, and it was as hard as a real ship. 'Now there's folks in England would call that very curious,' he said.

Now I don't know much about ships, but I should think that that ghost-ship weighed a solid two hundred tons, and it seemed to me that she had come to stay, so that I felt sorry for landlord, who was a married man. 'All the horses in Fairfield won't move her out of my turnips,' he said, frowning at her.

Just then we heard a noise on her deck, and we looked up and saw that a man had come out of her front cabin and was looking down at us very peaceably. He was dressed in a black uniform set out with rusty gold lace, and he had a great cutlass by his side in a brass sheath. 'I'm Captain Bartholomew Roberts,' he said, in a gentleman's voice, 'put in for recruits. I seem to have brought her rather far up the harbour.'

'Harbour!' cried landlord; 'why, you're fifty miles from the sea.'

Captain Roberts didn't turn a hair. 'So much as that, is it?' he said coolly. 'Well, it's of no consequence.'

Landlord was a bit upset at this. 'I don't want to be unneighbourly,' he said, 'but I wish you hadn't brought your ship into my field. You see, my wife sets great store on these turnips.'

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<sup>1</sup> **Portsmouth** – a city on Portsea Island in the historic county of Hampshire, a naval base and a resort

<sup>2</sup> **the battle of Naseby** – the battle between the Parliamentary Army under Oliver Cromwell and the royalists in June, 1645

The captain took a pinch of snuff out of a fine gold box that he pulled out of his pocket, and dusted his fingers with a silk handkerchief in a very genteel fashion. 'I'm only here for a few months,' he said; 'but if a testimony of my esteem would pacify your good lady I should be content,' and with the words he loosed a great gold brooch from the neck of his coat and tossed it down to landlord.

Landlord blushed as red as a strawberry. 'I'm not denying she's fond of jewellery,' he said, 'but it's too much for half a sackful of turnips.' And indeed it was a handsome brooch.

The captain laughed. 'Tut, man,' he said, 'it's a forced sale, and you deserve a good price. Say no more about it;' and nodding good-day to us, he turned on his heel and went into the cabin. Landlord walked back up the lane like a man with a weight off his mind. 'That tempest has blowed me a bit of luck,' he said; 'the missus will be much pleased with that brooch. It's better than blacksmith's guinea, any day.'

Ninety-seven was Jubilee year, the year of the second Jubilee, you remember, and we had great doings at Fairfield, so that we hadn't much time to bother about the ghost-ship though anyhow it isn't our way to meddle in things that don't concern us. Landlord, he saw his tenant once or twice when he was hoeing his turnips and passed the time of day, and landlord's wife wore her new brooch to church every Sunday. But we didn't mix much with the ghosts at any time, all except an idiot lad there was in the village, and he didn't know the difference between a man and a ghost, poor innocent! On Jubilee Day, however, somebody told Captain Roberts why the church bells were ringing, and he hoisted a flag and fired off his guns like a loyal Englishman. 'Tis true the guns were shotted, and one of the round shot knocked a hole in Farmer Johnstone's barn, but nobody thought much of that in such a season of rejoicing.

It wasn't till our celebrations were over that we noticed that anything was wrong in Fairfield. 'Twas shoemaker who told me first about it one morning at the "Fox and Grapes." 'You know my great-uncle?' he said to me.

'You mean Joshua, the quiet lad,' I answered, knowing him well.

'Quiet!' said shoemaker indignantly. 'Quiet you call him, coming home at three o'clock every morning as drunk as a magistrate and waking up the whole house with his noise.'

'Why, it can't be Joshua!' I said, for I knew him for one of the most respectable young ghosts in the village.

'Joshua it is,' said shoemaker; 'and one of these nights he'll find himself out in the street if he isn't careful.'

This kind of talk shocked me, I can tell you, for I don't like to hear a man abusing his own family, and I could hardly believe that a steady youngster like Joshua had taken to drink. But just then in came butcher Aylwin in such a temper that he could hardly drink his beer. 'The young puppy! the young puppy!' he kept on saying; and it was some time before shoemaker and I found out that he was talking about his ancestor that fell at Senlac<sup>1</sup>.

'Drink?' said shoemaker hopefully, for we all like company in our misfortunes, and butcher nodded grimly.

'The young noodle,' he said, emptying his tankard.

Well, after that I kept my ears open, and it was the same story all over the village. There was hardly a young man among all the ghosts of Fairfield who didn't roll home in the small hours of the morning the worse for liquor. I used to wake up in the night and hear them stumble past my house, singing outrageous songs. The worst of it was that we couldn't keep the scandal to ourselves and the folk at Greenhill began to talk of 'sodden Fairfield' and taught their children to sing a song about us:

'Sodden Fairfield, sodden Fairfield, has no use for  
bread-and-butter,  
Rum for breakfast, rum for dinner, rum for tea, and rum for

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<sup>1</sup> **Senlac** – the place of the famous battle in which the English were defeated by the Normans under William the Conqueror in 1066

supper!’

We are easy-going in our village, but we didn’t like that.

Of course we soon found out where the young fellows went to get the drink, and landlord was terribly cut up that his tenant should have turned out so badly, but his wife wouldn’t hear of parting with the brooch, so that he couldn’t give the Captain notice to quit. But as time went on, things grew from bad to worse, and at all hours of the day you would see those young reprobates sleeping it off on the village green. Nearly every afternoon a ghost-wagon used to jolt down to the ship with a lading of rum, and though the older ghosts seemed inclined to give the Captain’s hospitality the go-by, the youngsters were neither to hold nor to bind.

So one afternoon when I was taking my nap I heard a knock at the door, and there was parson looking very serious, like a man with a job before him that he didn’t altogether relish. ‘I’m going down to talk to the Captain about all this drunkenness in the village, and I want you to come with me,’ he said straight out.

I can’t say that I fancied the visit much, myself, and I tried to hint to parson that as, after all, they were only a lot of ghosts it didn’t very much matter.

‘Dead or alive, I’m responsible for the good conduct,’ he said, ‘and I’m going to do my duty and put a stop to this continued disorder. And you are coming with me John Simmons.’ So I went, parson being a persuasive kind of man.

We went down to the ship, and as we approached her I could see the Captain tasting the air on deck. When he saw parson he took off his hat very politely and I can tell you that I was relieved to find that he had a proper respect for the cloth. Parson acknowledged his salute and spoke out stoutly enough. ‘Sir, I should be glad to have a word with you.’

‘Come on board, sir; come on board,’ said the Captain, and I could tell by his voice that he knew why we were there. Parson and I climbed up an uneasy kind of ladder, and the Captain took us into the great cabin at the back of the ship, where the bay-window was. It was the most wonderful place you ever saw in your life, all full of gold and silver plate, swords with jewelled scabbards, carved oak chairs, and great chests that look as though they were bursting with guineas. Even parson was surprised, and he did not shake his head very hard when the Captain took down some silver cups and poured us out a drink of rum. I tasted mine, and I don’t mind saying that it changed my view of things entirely. There was nothing betwixt and between about that rum, and I felt that it was ridiculous to blame the lads for drinking too much of stuff like that. It seemed to fill my veins with honey and fire.

Parson put the case squarely to the Captain, but I didn’t listen much to what he said; I was busy sipping my drink and looking through the window at the fishes swimming to and fro over landlord’s turnips. Just then it seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should be there, though afterwards, of course, I could see that that proved it was a ghost-ship.

But even then I thought it was queer when I saw a drowned sailor float by in the thin air with his hair and beard all full of bubbles. It was the first time I had seen anything quite like that at Fairfield.

All the time I was regarding the wonders of the deep parson was telling Captain Roberts how there was no peace or rest in the village owing to the curse of drunkenness, and what a bad example the youngsters were setting to the older ghosts. The Captain listened very attentively, and only put in a word now and then about boys being boys and young men sowing their wild oats. But when parson had finished his speech he filled up our silver cups and said to parson, with a flourish, ‘I should be sorry to cause trouble anywhere where I have been made welcome, and you will be glad to hear that I put to sea tomorrow night. And now you must drink me a prosperous voyage.’ So we all stood up and drank the toast with honour, and that noble rum was like hot oil in my veins.

After that Captain showed us some of the curiosities he had brought back from foreign parts, and we were greatly amazed, though afterwards I couldn’t clearly remember what they were. And then I found myself walking across the turnips with parson, and I was telling him of the glories of the deep that I had seen through the window of the ship. He turned on me severely. ‘If I were you,

John Simmons,' he said, 'I should go straight home to bed.' He has a way of putting things that wouldn't occur to an ordinary man, has parson, and I did as he told me.

Well, next day it came on to blow, and it blew harder and harder, till about eight o'clock at night I heard a noise and looked out into the garden. I dare say you won't believe me, it seems a bit tall even to me, but the wind had lifted the thatch of my pigsty into the widow's garden a second time. I thought I wouldn't wait to hear what widow had to say about it, so I went across the green to the 'Fox and Grapes', and the wind was so strong that I danced along on tiptoe like a girl at the fair. When I got to the inn landlord had to help me shut the door; it seemed as though a dozen goats were pushing against it to come in out of the storm.

'It's a powerful tempest,' he said, drawing the beer. 'I hear there's a chimney down at Dickory End.'

'It's a funny thing how these sailors know about the weather,' I answered. 'When Captain said he was going tonight, I was thinking it would take a capful of wind to carry the ship back to sea, but now here's more than a capful.'

'Ah, yes,' said landlord, 'it's tonight he goes true enough, and, mind you, though he treated me handsome over the rent, I'm not sure it's a loss to the village. I don't hold with gentrifice who fetch their drink from London instead of helping local traders to get their living.'

'But you haven't got any rum like his,' I said, to draw him out.

His neck grew red above his collar, and I was afraid I'd gone too far; but after a while he got his breath with a grunt.

'John Simmons,' he said, 'if you've come down here this windy night to talk a lot of fool's talk, you've wasted a journey.'

Well, of course, then I had to smooth him down with praising his rum, and Heaven forgive me for swearing it was better than Captain's. For the like of that rum no living lips have tasted save mine and parson's. But somehow or other I brought landlord round, and presently we must have a glass of his best to prove its quality.

'Beat that if you can!' he cried, and we both raised our glasses to our mouths, only to stop half-way and look at each other in amaze. For the wind that had been howling outside like an outrageous dog had all of a sudden turned as melodious as the carol-boys of a Christmas Eve.

'Surely that's not my Martha,' whispered landlord; Martha being his great-aunt that lived in the loft overhead.

We went to the door, and the wind burst it open so that the handle was driven clean into the plaster of the wall. But we didn't think about that at the time; for over our heads, sailing very comfortably through the windy stars, was the ship that had passed the summer in landlord's field. Her portholes and her bay-window were blazing with lights, and there was a noise of singing and fiddling on her decks. 'He's gone,' shouted landlord above the storm, 'and he's taken half the village with him!' I could only nod in answer, not having lungs like bellows of leather.

In the morning we were able to measure the strength of the storm, and over and above my pigsty there was damage enough wrought in the village to keep us busy. True it is that the children had to break down no branches for the firing that autumn, since the wind had strewn the woods with more than they could carry away. Many of our ghosts were scattered abroad, but this time very few came back, all the young men having sailed with Captain; and not only ghosts, for a poor half-witted lad was missing, and we reckoned that he had stowed himself away or perhaps shipped as cabin-boy, not knowing any better.

What with the lamentations of the ghost-girls and the grumbling of families who had lost an ancestor, the village was upset for a while, and the funny thing was that it was the folk who had complained most of the carryings-on of the youngsters, who made most noise now that they were gone. I hadn't any sympathy with shoemaker or butcher, who ran about saying how much they missed their lads, but it made me grieve to hear the poor bereaved girls calling their lovers by name on the village green at nightfall. It didn't seem fair to me that they should have lost their men a second time, after giving up life in order to join them, as like as not. Still, not even a spirit can be sorry for ever, and after a few months we made up our mind that the folk who had sailed in the ship

were never coming back, and we didn't talk about it anymore.

And then one day, I dare say it would be a couple of years after, when the whole business was quite forgotten, who should come trapesing along the road from Portsmouth but the daft lad who had gone away with the ship, without waiting till he was dead to become a ghost. You never saw such a boy as that in all your life. He had a great rusty cutlass hanging to a string at his waist, and he was tattooed all over in fine colours, so that even his face looked like a girl's sampler. He had a handkerchief in his hand full of foreign shells and old-fashioned pieces of small money, very curious, and he walked up to the well outside his mother's house and drew himself a drink as if he had been nowhere in particular.

The worst of it was that he had come back as soft-headed as he went, and try as we might we couldn't get anything reasonable out of him. He talked a lot of gibberish about keel-hauling and walking the plank and crimson murders – things which a decent sailor should know nothing about, so that it seemed to me that for all his manners Captain had been more of a pirate than a gentleman mariner. But to draw sense out of that boy was as hard as picking cherries off a crab-tree. One silly tale he had that he kept on drifting back to, and to hear him you would have thought that it was the only thing that happened to him in his life. 'We was at anchor,' he would say, 'off an island called the Basket of Flowers, and the sailors had caught a lot of parrots and we were teaching them to swear. Up and down the decks, up and down the decks, and the language they used was dreadful. Then we looked up and saw the masts of the Spanish ship outside the harbour. Outside the harbour they were, so we threw the parrots into the sea and sailed out to fight. And all the parrots were drowned in the sea and the language they used was dreadful.' That's the sort of boy he was, nothing but silly talk of parrots when we asked him about the fighting. And we never had a chance of teaching him better, for two days after he ran away again, and hasn't been seen since.

That's my story, and I assure you that things like that are happening at Fairfield all the time. The ship has never come back, but somehow as people grow older they seem to think that one of these windy nights she'll come sailing in over the hedges with all the lost ghosts on board. Well, when she comes, she'll be welcome. There's one ghost-lass that has never grown tired of waiting for her lad to return. Every night you'll see her out on the green, straining her poor eyes with looking for the mast-lights among the stars. A faithful lass you'd call her, and I'm thinking you'd be right.

Landlord's field wasn't a penny the worse for the visit, but they do say that since then the turnips that have been grown in it have tasted of rum.

## The Tachypomp (Edward Page Mitchell)

### A Mathematical Demonstration

There was nothing mysterious about Professor Surd's dislike for me. I was the only poor mathematician in an exceptionally mathematical class. The old gentleman sought the lecture-room every morning with eagerness, and left it reluctantly. For was it not a thing of joy to find seventy young men who, individually and collectively, preferred  $x$  to  $XX$ ; who had rather differentiate than dissipate; and for whom the limbs of the heavenly bodies had more attractions than those of earthly stars upon the spectacular stage?

So affairs went on swimmingly between the Professor of Mathematics and the junior Class at Polyp University. In every man of the seventy the sage saw the logarithm of a possible La Place<sup>1</sup>, of a Sturm<sup>2</sup>, or of a Newton<sup>3</sup>. It was a delightful task for him to lead them through the pleasant valleys of conic sections, and beside the still waters of the integral calculus. Figuratively speaking, his

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1 **La Place** – Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1827), a French mathematician and astronomer, best known for his study of the solar system

2 **Sturm** – Charles François Sturm (1803–1855), a French mathematician who made important contribution to the theory of equations

3 **Newton** – Isaac Newton (1643–1727), a great English physicist and mathematician, the major figure in the scientific revolution of the 17th century

problem was not a hard one. He had only to manipulate, and eliminate, and to raise to a higher power, and the triumphant result of examination day was assured.

But I was a disturbing element, a perplexing unknown quantity, which had somehow crept into the work, and which seriously threatened to impair the accuracy of his calculations. It was a touching sight to behold the venerable mathematician as he pleaded with me not so utterly to disregard precedent in the use of cotangents; or as he urged, with eyes almost tearful, that ordinates were dangerous things to trifle with. All in vain. More theorems went on to my cuff than into my head. Never did chalk do so much work to so little purpose. And, therefore, it came that Furnace Second was reduced to zero in Professor Surd's estimation. He looked upon me with all the horror which an unalgebraic nature could inspire. I have seen the professor walk around an entire square rather than meet the man who had no mathematics in his soul.

For Furnace Second were no invitations to Professor Surd's house. Seventy of the class supped in delegations around the periphery of the professor's tea-table. The seventy-first knew nothing of the charms of that perfect ellipse, with its twin bunches of fuchsias and geraniums in gorgeous precision at the two foci.

This, unfortunately enough, was no trifling deprivation. Not that I longed especially for segments of Mrs. Surd's justly celebrated lemon pies; not that the spheroidal damsons of her excellent preserving had any marked allurements; not even that I yearned to hear the professor's jocose table-talk about binomials, and chatty illustrations of abstruse paradoxes. The explanation is far different. Professor Surd had a daughter. Twenty years before, he made a proposition of marriage to the present Mrs. S. He added a little corollary to his proposition not long after. The corollary was a girl.

Abscissa Surd was as perfectly symmetrical as Giotto's<sup>1</sup> circle, and as pure, withal, as the mathematics her father taught. It was just when spring was coming to extract the roots of frozen-up vegetation that I fell in love with the corollary. That she herself was not indifferent I soon had reason to regard as a self-evident truth.

The sagacious reader will already recognize nearly all the elements necessary to a well-ordered plot. We have introduced a heroine, inferred a hero, and constructed a hostile parent after the most approved model. A movement for the story, a *Deus ex machina*<sup>2</sup>, is alone lacking. With considerable satisfaction I can promise a perfect novelty in this line, a *Deus ex machina* never before offered to the public.

It would be discounting ordinary intelligence to say that I sought with unwearied assiduity to figure my way into the stern father's good-will; that never did dullard apply himself to mathematics more patiently than I; that never did faithfulness achieve such meagre reward. Then I engaged a private tutor. His instructions met with no better success.

My tutor's name was Jean Marie Rivarol. He was a unique Alsatian<sup>3</sup> – though Gallic<sup>4</sup> in name, thoroughly Teuton<sup>5</sup> in nature; by birth a Frenchman, by education a German. His age was thirty; his profession, omniscience; the wolf at his door, poverty; the skeleton in his closet, a consuming but unrequited passion. The most recondite principles of practical science were his toys; the deepest intricacies of abstract science his diversions. Problems which were foreordained mysteries to me were to him as clear as Tahoe<sup>6</sup> water. Perhaps this very fact will explain our lack of success in the relation of tutor and pupil; perhaps the failure is alone due to my own unmitigated stupidity. Rivarol had hung about the skirts of the University for several years; supplying his few wants by writing for scientific journals, or by giving assistance to students who, like myself, were characterized by a plethora of purse and a paucity of ideas; cooking, studying and sleeping in his attic lodgings; and prosecuting queer experiments all by himself.

We were not long discovering that even this eccentric genius could not transplant brains into

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1 **Giotto** (1266–1337) – the greatest Italian painter of the 14th century

2 **Deus ex machina** = God from the machine (*Latin*); unexpected help.

3 **Alsatian** – born in Alsace, a region of France on the German border

4 **Gallic** – here: French

5 **Teuton** – here: German

6 **Tahoe** – Lake Tahoe in northern Sierra Nevada, on California-Nevada border in the USA

my deficient skull. I gave over the struggle in despair. An unhappy year dragged its slow length around. A gloomy year it was, brightened only by occasional interviews with Abscissa, the Abbie of my thoughts and dreams.

Commencement day was coming on apace. I was soon to go forth, with the rest of my class, to astonish and delight a waiting world. The professor seemed to avoid me more than ever. Nothing but the conventionalities, I think kept him from shaping his treatment of me on the basis of unconcealed disgust.

At last, in the very recklessness of despair, I resolved to see him, plead with him, threaten him if need be, and risk all my fortunes on one desperate chance. I wrote him a somewhat defiant letter, stating my aspirations, and, as I flattered myself, shrewdly giving him a week to get over the first shock of horrified surprise. Then I was to call and learn my fate.

During the week of suspense I nearly worried myself into a fever. It was first crazy hope, and then saner despair. On Friday evening, when I presented myself at the professor's door, I was such a haggard, sleepy, dragged-out spectre, that even Miss Jocasta, the harsh-favored maiden sister of the Surd's, admitted me with commiserate regard, and suggested pennyroyal tea.

Professor Surd was at a faculty meeting. Would I wait?

Yes, till all was blue, if need be. Miss Abbie?

Abscissa had gone to Wheelborough to visit a school friend. The aged maiden hoped I would make myself comfortable, and departed to the unknown haunts which knew Jocasta's daily walk.

Comfortable! But I settled myself in a great uneasy chair and waited, with the contradictory spirit common to such junctures, dreading every step lest it should herald the man whom, of all men, I wished to see.

I had been there at least an hour, and was growing right drowsy.

At length Professor Surd came in. He sat down in the dusk opposite me, and I thought his eyes glinted with malignant pleasure as he said, abruptly:

'So, young man, you think you are a fit husband for my girl?'

I stammered some inanity about making up in affection what I lacked in merit; about my expectations, family and the like. He quickly interrupted me.

'You misapprehend me, sir. Your nature is destitute of those mathematical perceptions and acquirements which are the only sure foundations of character. You have no mathematics in you.'

'You are fit for treason, stratagems, and spoils. – Shakespeare. Your narrow intellect cannot understand and appreciate a generous mind. There is all the difference between you and a Surd, if I may say it, which intervenes between an infinitesimal and an infinite. Why, I will even venture to say that you do not comprehend the Problem of the Couriers!'

I admitted that the Problem of the Couriers should be classed rather without my list of accomplishments than within it. I regretted this fault very deeply, and suggested amendment. I faintly hoped that my fortune would be such –

'Money!' he impatiently exclaimed. 'Do you seek to bribe a Roman senator with a penny whistle? Why, boy, do you parade your paltry wealth, which, expressed in mills, will not cover ten decimal places, before the eyes of a man who measures the planets in their orbits, and close crowds infinity itself?'

I hastily disclaimed any intention of obtruding my foolish dollars, and he went on:

'Your letter surprised me not a little. I thought you would be the last person in the world to presume to an alliance here. But having a regard for you personally' – and again I saw malice twinkle in his small eyes – 'and still more regard for Abscissa's happiness, I have decided that you shall have her – upon conditions. Upon conditions,' he repeated, with a half-smothered sneer.

'What are they?' cried I, eagerly enough. 'Only name them.'

'Well, sir,' he continued, and the deliberation of his speech seemed the very refinement of cruelty, 'you have only to prove yourself worthy an alliance with a mathematical family. You have only to accomplish a task which I shall presently give you. Your eyes ask me what it is. I will tell you. Distinguish yourself in that noble branch of abstract science in which, you cannot but acknowledge, you are at present sadly deficient. I will place Abscissa's hand in yours whenever you



shall come before me and square the circle to my satisfaction. No! That is too easy a condition. I should cheat myself. Say perpetual motion. How do you like that? Do you think it lies within the range of your mental capabilities? You don't smile. Perhaps your talents don't run in the way of perpetual motion. Several people have found that theirs didn't. I'll give you another chance. We were speaking of the Problem of the Couriers, and I think you expressed a desire to know more of that ingenious question. You shall have the opportunity. Sit down some day, when you have nothing else to do, and discover the principle of infinite speed. I mean the law of motion which shall accomplish an infinitely great distance in an infinitely short time. You may mix in a little practical mechanics, if you choose. Invent some method of taking the tardy Courier over his road at the rate of sixty miles a minute. Demonstrate me this discovery (when you have made it!) mathematically, and approximate it practically, and Abscissa is yours. Until you can, I will thank you to trouble neither myself nor her.'

I could stand his mocking no longer. I stumbled mechanically out of the room, and out of the house. I even forgot my hat and gloves. For an hour I walked in the moonlight. Gradually I succeeded to a more hopeful frame of mind. This was due to my ignorance of mathematics. Had I understood the real meaning of what he asked, I should have been utterly despondent.

Perhaps this problem of sixty miles a minute was not so impossible after all. At any rate I could attempt, though I might not succeed. And Rivarol came to my mind. I would ask him. I would enlist his knowledge to accompany my own devoted perseverance. I sought his lodgings at once.

The man of science lived in the fourth story, back. I had never been in his room before. When I entered, he was in the act of filling a beer mug from a carboy labelled *aqua fortis*<sup>1</sup>.

'Seat you,' he said. 'No, not in that chair. That is my Petty Cash Adjuster.' But he was a second too late. I had carelessly thrown myself into a chair of seductive appearance. To my utter amazement it reached out two skeleton arms and clutched me with a grasp against which I struggled in vain. Then a skull stretched itself over my shoulder and grinned with ghastly familiarity close to my face.

Rivarol came to my aid with many apologies. He touched a spring somewhere and the Petty Cash Adjuster relaxed its horrid hold. I placed myself gingerly in a plain cane-bottomed rocking-chair, which Rivarol assured me was a safe location.

'That seat,' he said, 'is an arrangement upon which I much felicitate myself. I made it at Heidelberg. It has saved me a vast deal of small annoyance. I consign to its embraces the friends who bore, and the visitors who exasperate me. But it is never so useful as when terrifying some tradesman with an insignificant account. Hence the pet name which I have facetiously given it. They are invariably too glad to purchase release at the price of a bill receipted. Do you well apprehend the idea?'

While the Alsatian diluted his glass of *aqua fortis*, shook into it an infusion of bitters, and tossed off the bumper with apparent relish, I had time to look around the strange apartment.

The four corners of the room were occupied respectively by a turning lathe, a Rhumkorff Coil, a small steam engine and an orrery<sup>2</sup> in stately motion. Tables, shelves, chairs and floor supported an odd aggregation of tools, retorts, chemicals, gas receivers, philosophical instruments, boots, flasks, paper-collar boxes, books diminutive and books of preposterous size. There were plaster busts of Aristotle<sup>3</sup>, Archimedes<sup>4</sup>, and Comte<sup>5</sup>, while a great drowsy owl was blinking away, perched on the benign brow of Martin Farquhar Tupper<sup>6</sup>. 'He always roosts there when he proposes to slumber,' explained my tutor. 'You are a bird of no ordinary mind. Schlafen Sie wohl<sup>7</sup>.'

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1 **aqua fortis** = strong water (*Latin*)

2 **orrery** – a model of the solar system

3 **Aristotle** (384 BC–322 BC) – an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, one of the greatest philosophers of all time

4 **Archimedes** (290 BC–212 BC) – a famous ancient Greek mathematician and inventor

5 **Comte** – Auguste Comte (1798–1857), a French philosopher, the founder of sociology as a science and the philosophy of positivism

6 **Martin Farquhar Tupper** (1810–1889) – an English writer and poet

7 **Schlafen Sie wohl.** = Have a good sleep. (*German*)

Through a closet door, half open, I could see a humanlike form covered with a sheet. Rivarol caught my glance.

‘That,’ said he, ‘will be my masterpiece. It is a Microcosm, an Android, as yet only partially complete. And why not? Albertus Magnus constructed an image perfect to talk metaphysics and confute the schools. So did Sylvester II<sup>1</sup>; so did Robertus Greathead. Roger Bacon<sup>2</sup> made a brazen head that held discourses. But the first named of these came to destruction. Thomas Aquinas<sup>3</sup> got wrathful at some of its syllogisms and smashed its head. The idea is reasonable enough. Mental action will yet be reduced to laws as definite as those which govern the physical. Why should not I accomplish a manikin which shall preach as original discourses as the Reverend Dr. Allchin, or talk poetry as mechanically as Paul Anapest? My android can already work problems in vulgar fractions and compose sonnets. I hope to teach it the Positive Philosophy.’

Out of the bewildering confusion of his effects Rivarol produced two pipes and filled them. He handed one to me.

‘And here,’ he said, ‘I live and am tolerably comfortable. When my coat wears out at the elbows I seek the tailor and am measured for another. When I am hungry I promenade myself to the butcher’s and bring home a pound or so of steak, which I cook very nicely in three seconds by this oxy-hydrogen flame. Thirsty, perhaps, I send for a carboy of *aqua fortis*. But I have it charged, all charged. My spirit is above any small pecuniary transaction. I loathe your dirty greenbacks, and never handle what they call scrip.’

‘But are you never pestered with bills?’ I asked. ‘Don’t the creditors worry your life out?’

‘Creditors!’ gasped Rivarol. ‘I have learned no such word in your very admirable language. He who will allow his soul to be vexed by creditors is a relic of an imperfect civilization. Of what use is science if it cannot avail a man who has accounts current? Listen. The moment you or anyone else enters the outside door this little electric bell sounds me warning. Every successive step on Mrs. Grimler’s staircase is a spy and informer vigilant for my benefit. The first step is trod upon. That trusty first step immediately telegraphs your weight. Nothing could be simpler. It is exactly like any platform scale. The weight is registered up here upon this dial. The second step records the size of my visitor’s feet. The third his height, the fourth his complexion, and so on. By the time he reaches the top of the first flight I have a pretty accurate description of him right here at my elbow, and quite a margin of time for deliberation and action. Do you follow me? It is plain enough. Only the ABC of my science.’

‘I see all that,’ I said, ‘but I don’t see how it helps you any. The knowledge that a creditor is coming won’t pay his bill. You can’t escape unless you jump out of the window.’

Rivarol laughed softly. ‘I will tell you. You shall see what becomes of any poor devil who goes to demand money of me – of a man of science. Ha! ha! It pleases me. I was seven weeks perfecting my Dun Suppressor. Did you know’ – he whispered exultingly – ‘did you know that there is a hole through the earth’s center? Physicists have long suspected it; I was the first to find it. You have read how Huyghens<sup>4</sup>, the Dutch navigator, discovered in Kerguelen’s Land<sup>5</sup> an abysmal pit which fourteen hundred fathoms of plumb-line failed to sound. Herr Tom, that hole has no bottom! It runs from one surface of the earth to the antipodal surface. It is diametric. But where is the antipodal spot? You stand upon it. I learned this by the merest chance. I was deep-digging in Mrs. Grimler’s cellar, to bury a poor cat I had sacrificed in a galvanic experiment, when the earth under my spade crumbled, caved in, and wonder-stricken I stood upon the brink of a yawning shaft. I dropped a coal-hod in. It went down, down, down, bounding and rebounding. In two hours and a quarter that coal-hod came up again. I caught it and restored it to the angry Grimler. Just think a minute. The coal-hod went down, faster and faster, till it reached the center of the earth. There it would stop, were it not for acquired momentum. Beyond the center its journey was relatively

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1 **Sylvester II** (945–1003) – the head of the Roman Catholic church of France who later became Pope Sylvester II

2 **Roger Bacon** (1220–1292) – a great English philosopher and scientist of the 13th century

3 **Thomas Aquinas** (1224–1274) – an Italian theologian and philosopher, canonized in July, 1323

4 **Huyghens** – Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695), a Dutch mathematician, astronomer and physicist

5 **Kerguelen’s Land** – Kerguelen Islands in the southern Indian Ocean, discovered by de Kerguelen-Trémarec and later explored by Captain James Cook

upward, toward the opposite surface of the globe. So, losing velocity, it went slower and slower till it reached that surface. Here it came to rest for a second and then fell back again, eight thousand odd miles, into my hands. Had I not interfered with it, it would have repeated its journey, time after time, each trip of shorter extent, like the diminishing oscillations of a pendulum, till it finally came to eternal rest at the center of the sphere. I am not slow to give a practical application to any such grand discovery. My Dun Suppressor was born of it. A trap, just outside my chamber door: a spring in here: a creditor on the trap: need I say more?’

‘But isn’t it a trifle inhuman?’ I mildly suggested. ‘Plunging an unhappy being into a perpetual journey to and from Kerguelen’s Land, without a moment’s warning.’

‘I give them a chance. When they come up the first time I wait at the mouth of the shaft with a rope in hand. If they are reasonable and will come to terms, I fling them the line. If they perish, ’tis their own fault. Only,’ he added, with a melancholy smile, ‘the center is getting so plugged up with creditors that I am afraid there soon will be no choice whatever for ’em.’

By this time I had conceived a high opinion of my tutor’s ability. If anybody could send me waltzing through space at an infinite speed, Rivarol could do it. I filled my pipe and told him the story. He heard with grave and patient attention. Then, for full half an hour, he whiffed away in silence. Finally he spoke.

‘The ancient cipher has overreached himself. He has given you a choice of two problems, both of which he deems insoluble. Neither of them is insoluble. The only gleam of intelligence Old Cotangent showed was when he said that squaring the circle was too easy. He was right. It would have given you your Liebchen<sup>1</sup> in five minutes. I squared the circle before I discarded pantalets. I will show you the work – but it would be a digression, and you are in no mood for digressions. Our first chance, therefore, lies in perpetual motion. Now, my good friend, I will frankly tell you that, although I have compassed this interesting problem, I do not choose to use it in your behalf. I too, Herr Tom, have a heart. The loveliest of her sex frowns upon me. Her somewhat mature charms are not for Jean Marie Rivarol. She has cruelly said that her years demand of me filial rather than connubial regard. Is love a matter of years or of eternity? This question did I put to the cold, yet lovely Jocasta.’

‘Jocasta Surd!’ I remarked in surprise, ‘Abscissa’s aunt!’

‘The same,’ he said, sadly. ‘I will not attempt to conceal that upon the maiden Jocasta my maiden heart has been bestowed. Give me your hand, my nephew in affliction as in affection!’

Rivarol dashed away a not discreditable tear, and resumed:

‘My only hope lies in this discovery of perpetual motion. It will give me the fame, the wealth. Can Jocasta refuse these? If she can, there is only the trap-door and – Kerguelen’s Land!’

I bashfully asked to see the perpetual-motion machine. My uncle in affliction shook his head.

‘At another time,’ he said. ‘Suffice it at present to say, that it is something upon the principle of a woman’s tongue. But you see now why we must turn in your case to the alternative condition – infinite speed. There are several ways in which this may be accomplished, theoretically. By the lever, for instance. Imagine a lever with a very long and a very short arm. Apply power to the shorter arm which will move it with great velocity. The end of the long arm will move much faster. Now keep shortening the short arm and lengthening the long one, and as you approach infinity in their difference of length, you approach infinity in the speed of the long arm. It would be difficult to demonstrate this practically to the professor. We must seek another solution. Jean Marie will meditate. Come to me in a fortnight. Good-night. But stop! Have you the money – *das Geld?*’

‘Much more than I need.’

‘Good! Let us strike hands. Gold and Knowledge; Science and Love. What may not such a partnership achieve? We go to conquer thee, Abscissa. Vorwärts!’<sup>2</sup>

When, at the end of a fortnight; I sought Rivarol’s chamber, I passed with some little trepidation over the terminus of the Air Line to Kerguelen’s Land, and evaded the extended arms of the Petty Cash Adjuster. Rivarol drew a mug of ale for me, and filled himself a retort of his own

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1 **Liebchen** = sweetheart (*German*)

2 **Vorwärts!** = Forward! (*German*)

peculiar beverage.

‘Come,’ he said at length. ‘Let us drink success to the TACHYPOMP.’

‘The TACHYPOMP?’

‘Yes. Why not? *Tachu*, quickly, and *pempo*, *pepompa*, to send. May it send you quickly to your wedding-day. Abcissa is yours. It is done. When shall we start for the prairies?’

‘Where is it?’ I asked, looking in vain around the room for any contrivance which might seem calculated to advance matrimonial prospects.

‘It is here,’ and he gave his forehead a significant tap. Then he held forth didactically.

‘There is force enough in existence to yield us a speed of sixty miles a minute, or even more. All we need is the knowledge how to combine and apply it. The wise man will not attempt to make some great force yield some great speed. He will keep adding the little force to the little force, making each little force yield its little speed, until an aggregate of little forces shall be a great force, yielding an aggregate of little speeds, a great speed. The difficulty is not in aggregating the forces; it lies in the corresponding aggregation of the speeds. One musket ball will go, say a mile. It is not hard to increase the force of muskets to a thousand, yet the thousand musket balls will go no farther, and no faster, than the one. You see, then, where our trouble lies. We cannot readily add speed to speed, as we add force to force. My discovery is simply the utilization of a principle which extorts an increment of speed from each increment of power. But this is the metaphysics of physics. Let us be practical or nothing.

‘When you have walked forward, on a moving train, from the rear car, toward the engine, did you ever think what you were really doing?’

‘Why, yes, I have generally been going to the smoking car to have a cigar.’

‘Tut, tut – not that! I mean, did it ever occur to you on such an occasion, that absolutely you were moving faster than the train? The train passes the telegraph poles at the rate of thirty miles an hour, say. You walk toward the smoking car at the rate of four miles an hour. Then you pass the telegraph poles at the rate of thirty-four miles. Your absolute speed is the speed of the engine, plus the speed of your own locomotion. Do you follow me?’

I began to get an inkling of his meaning, and told him so.

‘Very well. Let us advance a step. Your addition to the speed of the engine is trivial, and the space in which you can exercise it, limited. Now suppose two stations, A and B, two miles distant by the track. Imagine a train of platform cars, the last car resting at station A. The train is a mile long, say. The engine is therefore within a mile of station B. Say the train can move a mile in ten minutes. The last car, having two miles to go, would reach B in twenty minutes, but the engine, a mile ahead, would get there in ten. You jump on the last car, at A, in a prodigious hurry to reach Abcissa, who is at B. If you stay on the last car it will be twenty long minutes before you see her. But the engine reaches B and the fair lady in ten. You will be a stupid reasoner, and an indifferent lover, if you don’t put for the engine over those platform cars, as fast as your legs will carry you. You can run a mile, the length of the train, in ten minutes. Therefore, you reach Abcissa when the engine does, or in ten minutes – ten minutes sooner than if you had lazily sat down upon the rear car and talked politics with the brakeman. You have diminished the time by one half. You have added your speed to that of the locomotive to some purpose. Nicht wahr?<sup>2</sup>’

I saw it perfectly; much plainer, perhaps, for his putting in the clause about Abcissa.

He continued, ‘This illustration, though a slow one, leads up to a principle which may be carried to any extent. Our first anxiety will be to spare your legs and wind. Let us suppose that the two miles of track are perfectly straight, and make our train one platform car, a mile long, with parallel rails laid upon its top. Put a little dummy engine on these rails, and let it run to and fro along the platform car, while the platform car is pulled along the ground track. Catch the idea? The dummy takes your place. But it can run its mile much faster. Fancy that our locomotive is strong enough to pull the platform car over the two miles in two minutes. The dummy can attain the same speed. When the engine reaches B in one minute, the dummy, having gone a mile a-top the platform car, reaches B also. We have so combined the speeds of those two engines as to accomplish two

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2 Nicht wahr? = Isn’t it? (German )

miles in one minute. Is this all we can do? Prepare to exercise your imagination.'

I lit my pipe.

'Still two miles of straight track, between A and B. On the track a long platform car, reaching from A to within a quarter of a mile of B. We will now discard ordinary locomotives and adopt as our motive power a series of compact magnetic engines, distributed underneath the platform car, all along its length.'

'I don't understand those magnetic engines.'

'Well, each of them consists of a great iron horseshoe, rendered alternately a magnet and not a magnet by an intermittent current of electricity from a battery, this current in its turn regulated by clock-work. When the horseshoe is in the circuit, it is a magnet, and it pulls its clapper toward it with enormous power. When it is out of the circuit, the next second, it is not a magnet, and it lets the clapper go. The clapper, oscillating to and fro, imparts a rotatory motion to a fly wheel, which transmits it to the drivers on the rails. Such are our motors. They are no novelty, for trial has proved them practicable.

'With a magnetic engine for every truck of wheels, we can reasonably expect to move our immense car, and to drive it along at a speed, say, of a mile a minute.

'The forward end, having but a quarter of a mile to go, will reach B in fifteen seconds. We will call this platform car number 1. On top of number 1 are laid rails on which another platform car, number 2, a quarter of a mile shorter than number 1, is moved in precisely the same way. Number 2, in its turn, is surmounted by number 3, moving independently of the tiers beneath, and a quarter of a mile shorter than number 2. Number 2 is a mile and a half long; number 3 a mile and a quarter. Above, on successive levels, are number 4, a mile long; number 5, three quarters of a mile; number 6, half a mile; number 7, a quarter of a mile, and number 8, a short passenger car, on top of all.

'Each car moves upon the car beneath it, independently of all the others, at the rate of a mile a minute. Each car has its own magnetic engines. Well, the train being drawn up with the latter end of each car resting against a lofty bumping-post at A, Tom Furnace, the gentlemanly conductor, and Jean Marie Rivarol, engineer, mount by a long ladder to the exalted number 8. The complicated mechanism is set in motion. What happens?

'Number 8 runs a quarter of a mile in fifteen seconds and reaches the end of number 7. Meanwhile number 7 has run a quarter of a mile in the same time and reached the end of number 6; number 6, a quarter of a mile in fifteen seconds, and reached the end of number 5; number 5, the end of number 4; number 4, of number 3; number 3, of number 2; number 2, of number 1. And number 1, in fifteen seconds, has gone its quarter of a mile along the ground track, and has reached station B. All this has been done in fifteen seconds. Wherefore, numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 come to rest against the bumping-post at B, at precisely the same second. We, in number 8, reach B just when number 1 reaches it. In other words, we accomplish two miles in fifteen seconds. Each of the eight cars, moving at the rate of a mile a minute, has contributed a quarter of a mile to our journey, and has done its work in fifteen seconds. All the eight did their work at once, during the same fifteen seconds. Consequently we have been whizzed through the air at the somewhat startling speed of seven and a half seconds to the mile. This is the Tachypomp. Does it justify the name?'

Although a little bewildered by the complexity of cars, I apprehended the general principle of the machine. I made a diagram, and understood it much better. 'You have merely improved on the idea of my moving faster than the train when I was going to the smoking car?'

'Precisely. So far we have kept within the bounds of the practicable. To satisfy the professor, you can theorize in something after this fashion: If we double the number of cars, thus decreasing by one half the distance which each has to go, we shall attain twice the speed. Each of the sixteen cars will have but one eighth of a mile to go. At the uniform rate we have adopted, the two miles can be done in seven and a half instead of fifteen seconds. With thirty-two cars, and a sixteenth of a mile, or twenty rods difference in their length, we arrive at the speed of a mile in less than two seconds; with sixty-four cars, each travelling but ten rods, a mile under the second. More than sixty miles a minute! If this isn't rapid enough for the professor, tell him to go on, increasing the number

of his cars and diminishing the distance each one has to run. If sixty-four cars yield a speed of a mile inside the second, let him fancy a Tachypomp of six hundred and forty cars, and amuse himself calculating the rate of car number 640. Just whisper to him that when he has an infinite number of cars with an infinitesimal difference in their lengths, he will have obtained that infinite speed for which he seems to yearn. Then demand Abscissa.'

I wrung my friend's hand in silent and grateful admiration. I could say nothing.

'You have listened to the man of theory,' he said proudly. 'You shall now behold the practical engineer. We will go to the west of the Mississippi and find some suitably level locality. We will erect thereon a model Tachypomp. We will summon thereunto the professor, his daughter, and why not his fair sister Jocasta, as well? We will take them a journey which shall much astonish the venerable Surd. He shall place Abscissa's digits in yours and bless you both with an algebraic formula. Jocasta shall contemplate with wonder the genius of Rivarol. But we have much to do. We must ship to St. Joseph the vast amount of material to be employed in the construction of the Tachypomp. We must engage a small army of workmen to effect that construction, for we are to annihilate time and space. Perhaps you had better see your bankers.'

I rushed impetuously to the door. There should be no delay. 'Stop! stop! Um Gottes Willen<sup>1</sup>, stop!' shrieked Rivarol. 'I launched my butcher this morning and I haven't bolted the—'

But it was too late. I was upon the trap. It swung open with a crash, and I was plunged down, down, down! I felt as if I were falling through illimitable space. I remember wondering, as I rushed through the darkness, whether I should reach Kerguelen's Land or stop at the center. It seemed an eternity. Then my course was suddenly and painfully arrested.

I opened my eyes. Around me were the walls of Professor Surd's study. Under me was a hard, unyielding plane which I knew too well was Professor Surd's study floor. Behind me was the black, slippery, haircloth chair which had belched me forth, much as the whale served Jonah. In front of me stood Professor Surd himself, looking down with a not unpleasant smile.

'Good evening, Mr. Furnace. Let me help you up. You look tired, sir. No wonder you fell asleep when I kept you so long waiting. Shall I get you a glass of wine? No? By the way, since receiving your letter I find that you are a son of my old friend, Judge Furnace. I have made inquiries, and see no reason why you should not make Abscissa a good husband.'

Still I can see no reason why the Tachypomp should not have succeeded. Can you?

## Proof of the Pudding (O. Henry)

Spring winked a vitreous optic at Editor Westbrook of the *Minerva Magazine*, and deflected him from his course. He had lunched in his favorite corner of a Broadway hotel, and was returning to his office when his feet became entangled in the lure of the vernal coquette. Which is by way of saying that he turned eastward in Twenty-sixth Street, safely forded the spring freshet of vehicles in Fifth Avenue, and meandered along the walks of budding Madison Square<sup>2</sup>.

The lenient air and the settings of the little park almost formed a pastoral; the color motif was green – the presiding shade at the creation of man and vegetation.

The callow grass between the walks was the color of verdigris, a poisonous green, reminiscent of the horde of derelict humans that had breathed upon the soil during the summer and autumn. The bursting tree buds looked strangely familiar to those who had botanized among the garnishings of the fish course of a forty-cent dinner. The sky above was of that pale aquamarine<sup>3</sup> tint that ballroom poets rhyme with 'true' and 'Sue' and 'coo.' The one natural and frank color visible was the ostensible green of the newly painted benches – a shade between the color of a pickled cucumber and that of a last year's fast-black cravenette raincoat. But, to the city-bred eye of Editor Westbrook, the landscape appeared a masterpiece.

And now, whether you are of those who rush in, or of the gentle concourse that fears to tread,

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1 **Um Gottes Willen** = for God's sake (*German*)

2 **Madison Square** – a square in central New York

3 **aquamarine** (colour) – blue or green-blue

you must follow in a brief invasion of the editor's mind.

Editor Westbrook's spirit was contented and serene. The April number of the *Minerva* had sold its entire edition before the tenth day of the month – a newsdealer in Keokuk had written that he could have sold fifty copies more if he had 'em. The owners of the magazine had raised his (the editor's) salary; he had just installed in his home a jewel of a recently imported cook who was afraid of policemen; and the morning papers had published in full a speech he had made at a publishers' banquet. Also there were echoing in his mind the jubilant notes of a splendid song that his charming young wife had sung to him before he left his up-town apartment that morning. She was taking enthusiastic interest in her music of late, practising early and diligently. When he had complimented her on the improvement in her voice she had fairly hugged him for joy at his praise. He felt, too, the benign, tonic medicament of the trained nurse, Spring, tripping softly adown the wards of the convalescent city.

While Editor Westbrook was sauntering between the rows of park benches (already filling with vagrants and the guardians of lawless childhood) he felt his sleeve grasped and held. Suspecting that he was about to be panhandled, he turned a cold and unprofitable face, and saw that his captor was – Dawe – Shackleford Dawe, dingy, almost ragged, the genteel scarcely visible in him through the deeper lines of the shabby.

While the editor is pulling himself out of his surprise, a flashlight biography of Dawe is offered.

He was a fiction writer, and one of Westbrook's old acquaintances. At one time they might have called each other old friends. Dawe had some money in those days, and lived in a decent apartment house near Westbrook's. The two families often went to theatres and dinners together. Mrs. Dawe and Mrs. Westbrook became 'dearest' friends. Then one day a little tentacle of the octopus, just to amuse itself, ingurgitated Dawe's capital, and he moved to the Gramercy Park neighborhood where one, for a few groats per week, may sit upon one's trunk under eight-branched chandeliers and opposite Carrara<sup>1</sup> marble mantels and watch the mice play upon the floor. Dawe thought to live by writing fiction. Now and then he sold a story. He submitted many to Westbrook. The *Minerva* printed one or two of them; the rest were returned. Westbrook sent a careful and conscientious personal letter with each rejected manuscript, pointing out in detail his reasons for considering it unavailable. Editor Westbrook had his own clear conception of what constituted good fiction. So had Dawe. Mrs. Dawe was mainly concerned about the constituents of the scanty dishes of food that she managed to scrape together. One day Dawe had been spouting to her about the excellencies of certain French writers. At dinner they sat down to a dish that a hungry schoolboy could have encompassed at a gulp. Dawe commented.

'It's Maupassant<sup>2</sup> hash,' said Mrs. Dawe. 'It may not be art, but I do wish you would do a five-course Marion Crawford<sup>3</sup> serial with an Ella Wheeler Wilcox<sup>4</sup> sonnet for dessert. I'm hungry.'

As far as this from success was Shackleford Dawe when he plucked Editor Westbrook's sleeve in Madison Square. That was the first time the editor had seen Dawe in several months.

'Why, Shack, is this you?' said Westbrook, somewhat awkwardly, for the form of his phrase seemed to touch upon the other's changed appearance.

'Sit down for a minute,' said Dawe, tugging at his sleeve. 'This is my office. I can't come to yours, looking as I do. Oh, sit down – you won't be disgraced. Those half-plucked birds on the other benches will take you for a swell porch-climber. They won't know you are only an editor.'

'Smoke, Shack?' said Editor Westbrook, sinking cautiously upon the virulent green bench. He always yielded gracefully when he did yield.

Dawe snapped at the cigar as a kingfisher darts at a sun-perch, or a girl pecks at a chocolate cream.

'I have just–' began the editor.

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1 **Carrara** – a city in Toscana region in north-central Italy, famous for the world's best marble of the same name

2 **Maupassant** – Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893), a French writer and novelist who is considered the best French short-story writer

3 **Marion Crawford** – Francis Marion Crawford (1854–1909), an American novelist, poet and journalist

4 **Ella Wheeler Wilcox** (1850–1919) – an American poet and journalist

'Oh, I know; don't finish,' said Dawe. 'Give me a match. You have just ten minutes to spare. How did you manage to get past my office-boy and invade my sanctum? There he goes now, throwing his club at a dog that couldn't read the "Keep off the Grass" signs.'

'How goes the writing?' asked the editor.

'Look at me,' said Dawe, 'for your answer. Now don't put on that embarrassed, friendly-but-honest look and ask me why I don't get a job as a wine agent or a cab driver. I'm in the fight to a finish. I know I can write good fiction and I'll force you fellows to admit it yet. I'll make you change the spelling of 'regrets' to "c-h-e-q-u-e" before I'm done with you.'

Editor Westbrook gazed through his nose-glasses with a sweetly sorrowful, omniscient, sympathetic, skeptical expression – the copyrighted expression of the editor beleaguered by the unavailable contributor.

'Have you read the last story I sent you – "The Alarum of the Soul"?' asked Dawe.

'Carefully. I hesitated over that story, Shack, really I did. It had some good points. I was writing you a letter to send with it when it goes back to you. I regret—'

'Never mind the regrets,' said Dawe, grimly. 'There's neither salve nor sting in 'em any more. What I want to know is *why*. Come now; out with the good points first.'

'The story,' said Westbrook, deliberately, after a suppressed sigh, 'is written around an almost original plot. Characterization – the best you have done. Construction – almost as good, except for a few weak joints which might be strengthened by a few changes and touches. It was a good story, except—'

'I can write English, can't I?' interrupted Dawe.

'I have always told you,' said the editor, 'that you had a style.'

'Then the trouble is—'

'Same old thing,' said Editor Westbrook. 'You work up to your climax like an artist. And then you turn yourself into a photographer. I don't know what form of obstinate madness possesses you, but that is what you do with everything that you write. No, I will retract the comparison with the photographer. Now and then photography, in spite of its impossible perspective, manages to record a fleeting glimpse of truth. But you spoil every denouement by those flat, drab, obliterating strokes of your brush that I have so often complained of. If you would rise to the literary pinnacle of your dramatic senses, and paint them in the high colors that art requires, the postman would leave fewer bulky, self-addressed envelopes at your door.'

'Oh, fiddles and footlights!' cried Dawe, derisively. 'You've got that old sawmill drama kink in your brain yet. When the man with the black mustache kidnaps golden-haired Bessie you are bound to have the mother kneel and raise her hands in the spotlight and say: "May high heaven witness that I will rest neither night nor day till the heartless villain that has stolen me child feels the weight of another's vengeance!"'

Editor Westbrook conceded a smile of impervious complacency.

'I think,' said he, 'that in real life the woman would express herself in those words or in very similar ones.'

'Not in a six hundred nights' run anywhere but on the stage,' said Dawe hotly. 'I'll tell you what she'd say in real life. She'd say: "What! Bessie led away by a strange man? Good Lord! It's one trouble after another! Get my other hat, I must hurry around to the police-station. Why wasn't somebody looking after her, I'd like to know? For God's sake, get out of my way or I'll never get ready. Not that hat – the brown one with the velvet bows. Bessie must have been crazy; she's usually shy of strangers. Is that too much powder? Lordy! How I'm upset!"'

'That's the way she'd talk,' continued Dawe. 'People in real life don't fly into heroics and blank verse at emotional crises. They simply can't do it. If they talk at all on such occasions they draw from the same vocabulary that they use every day, and muddle up their words and ideas a little more, that's all.'

'Shack,' said Editor Westbrook impressively, 'did you ever pick up the mangled and lifeless form of a child from under the fender of a street car, and carry it in your arms and lay it down before the distracted mother? Did you ever do that and listen to the words of grief and despair as



they flowed spontaneously from her lips?’

‘I never did,’ said Dawe. ‘Did you?’

‘Well, no,’ said Editor Westbrook, with a slight frown. ‘But I can well imagine what she would say.’

‘So can I,’ said Dawe.

And now the fitting time had come for Editor Westbrook to play the oracle and silence his opinionated contributor. It was not for an unrivaled fictionist to dictate words to be uttered by the heroes and heroines of the *Minerva Magazine*, contrary to the theories of the editor thereof.

‘My dear Shack,’ said he, ‘if I know anything of life I know that every sudden, deep and tragic emotion in the human heart calls forth an apposite, concordant, conformable and proportionate expression of feeling. How much of this inevitable accord between expression and feeling should be attributed to nature, and how much to the influence of art, it would be difficult to say. The sublimely terrible roar of the lioness that has been deprived of her cubs is dramatically as far above her customary whine and purr as the kingly and transcendent utterances of Lear are above the level of his senile vaporings. But it is also true that all men and women have what may be called a sub-conscious dramatic sense that is awakened by a sufficiently deep and powerful emotion – a sense unconsciously acquired from literature and the stage that prompts them to express those emotions in language befitting their importance and histrionic value.’

‘And in the name of the seven sacred saddle-blankets of Sagittarius, where did the stage and literature get the stunt?’ asked Dawe.

‘From life,’ answered the editor, triumphantly.

The story writer rose from the bench and gesticulated eloquently but dumbly. He was beggared for words with which to formulate adequately his dissent.

On a bench nearby a frowzy loafer opened his red eyes and perceived that his moral support was due a downtrodden brother.

‘Punch him one, Jack,’ he called hoarsely to Dawe. ‘W’at’s he come makin’ a noise like a penny arcade for amongst gen’lemen that comes in the square to set and think?’

Editor Westbrook looked at his watch with an affected show of leisure.

‘Tell me,’ asked Dawe, with truculent anxiety, ‘what especial faults in “The Alarum of the Soul” caused you to throw it down?’

‘When Gabriel Murray,’ said Westbrook, ‘goes to his telephone and is told that his fiancée has been shot by a burglar, he says – I do not recall the exact words, but–’

‘I do,’ said Dawe. ‘He says: “Damn Central; she always cuts me off.” (And then to his friend) “Say, Tommy, does a thirty-two bullet make a big hole? It’s kind of hard luck, ain’t it? Could you get me a drink from the sideboard, Tommy? No; straight; nothing on the side.”’

‘And again,’ continued the editor, without pausing for argument, ‘when Berenice opens the letter from her husband informing her that he has fled with the manicure girl, her words are – let me see–’

‘She says,’ interposed the author: ““Well, what do you think of that!””

‘Absurdly inappropriate words,’ said Westbrook, ‘presenting an anti-climax – plunging the story into hopeless bathos. Worse yet; they mirror life falsely. No human being ever uttered banal colloquialisms when confronted by sudden tragedy.’

‘Wrong,’ said Dawe, closing his unshaven jaws doggedly. ‘I say no man or woman ever spouts “high-falutin” talk when they go up against a real climax. They talk naturally and a little worse.’

The editor rose from the bench with his air of indulgence and inside information.

‘Say, Westbrook,’ said Dawe, pinning him by the lapel, ‘would you have accepted “The Alarum of the Soul” if you had believed that the actions and words of the characters were true to life in the parts of the story that we discussed?’

‘It is very likely that I would, if I believed that way,’ said the editor. ‘But I have explained to you that I do not.’

‘If I could prove to you that I am right?’

'I'm sorry, Shack, but I'm afraid I haven't time to argue any further just now.'

'I don't want to argue,' said Dawe. 'I want to demonstrate to you from life itself that my view is the correct one.'

'How could you do that?' asked Westbrook, in a surprised tone.

'Listen,' said the writer, seriously. 'I have thought of a way. It is important to me that my theory of true-to-life fiction be recognized as correct by the magazines. I've fought for it for three years, and I'm down to my last dollar, with two months' rent due.'

'I have applied the opposite of your theory,' said the editor, 'in selecting the fiction for the *Minerva Magazine*. The circulation has gone up from ninety thousand to—'

'Four hundred thousand,' said Dawe. 'Whereas it should have been boosted to a million.'

'You said something to me just now about demonstrating your pet theory.'

'I will. If you'll give me about half an hour of your time I'll prove to you that I am right. I'll prove it by Louise.'

'Your wife!' exclaimed Westbrook. 'How?'

'Well, not exactly by her, but *with* her,' said Dawe. 'Now, you know how devoted and loving Louise has always been. She thinks I'm the only genuine preparation on the market that bears the old doctor's signature. She's been fonder and more faithful than ever, since I've been cast for the neglected genius part.'

'Indeed, she is a charming and admirable life companion,' agreed the editor. 'I remember what inseparable friends she and Mrs. Westbrook once were. We are both lucky chaps, Shack, to have such wives. You must bring Mrs. Dawe up some evening soon, and we'll have one of those informal chafing-dish suppers that we used to enjoy so much.'

'Later,' said Dawe. 'When I get another shirt. And now I'll tell you my scheme. When I was about to leave home after breakfast – if you can call tea and oatmeal breakfast – Louise told me she was going to visit her aunt in Eighty-ninth Street. She said she would return at three o'clock. She is always on time to a minute. It is now—'

Dawe glanced toward the editor's watch pocket.

'Twenty-seven minutes to three,' said Westbrook, scanning his time-piece.

'We have just enough time,' said Dawe. 'We will go to my flat at once. I will write a note, address it to her and leave it on the table where she will see it as she enters the door. You and I will be in the dining-room concealed by the portières. In that note I'll say that I have fled from her forever with an affinity who understands the needs of my artistic soul as she never did. When she reads it we will observe her actions and hear her words. Then we will know which theory is the correct one – yours or mine.'

'Oh, never!' exclaimed the editor, shaking his head. 'That would be inexcusably cruel. I could not consent to have Mrs. Dawe's feelings played upon in such a manner.'

'Brace up,' said the writer. 'I guess I think as much of her as you do. It's for her benefit as well as mine. I've got to get a market for my stories in some way. It won't hurt Louise. She's healthy and sound. Her heart goes as strong as a ninety-eight-cent watch. It'll last for only a minute, and then I'll step out and explain to her. You really owe it to me to give me the chance, Westbrook.'

Editor Westbrook at length yielded, though but half willingly. And in the half of him that consented lurked the vivisectionist that is in all of us. Let him who has not used the scalpel rise and stand in his place. Pity 'tis that there are not enough rabbits and guinea-pigs to go around.

The two experimenters in Art left the Square and hurried eastward and then to the south until they arrived in the Gramercy neighborhood. Within its high iron railings the little park had put on its smart coat of vernal green, and was admiring itself in its fountain mirror. Outside the railings the hollow square of crumbling houses, shells of a bygone gentry, leaned as if in ghostly gossip over the forgotten doings of the vanished quality. Sic transit gloria urbis<sup>1</sup>.

A block or two north of the Park, Dawe steered the editor again eastward, then, after covering a short distance, into a lofty but narrow flat-house burdened with a floridly over-decorated facade. To the fifth story they toiled, and Dawe, panting, pushed his latch-key into the door of one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Sic transit gloria urbis. – So passes the glory of the town. (*Latin*)

front flats.

When the door opened Editor Westbrook saw, with feelings of pity, how meanly and meagerly the rooms were furnished.

‘Get a chair, if you can find one,’ said Dawe, ‘while I hunt up pen and ink. Hello, what’s this? Here’s a note from Louise. She must have left it there when she went out this morning.’

He picked up an envelope that lay on the centre-table and tore it open. He began to read the letter that he drew out of it; and once having begun it aloud he so read it through to the end. These are the words that Editor Westbrook heard:

‘Dear Shackleford:

‘By the time you get this I will be about a hundred miles away and still a-going. I’ve got a place in the chorus of the Occidental Opera Co., and we start on the road to-day at twelve o’clock. I didn’t want to starve to death, and so I decided to make my own living. I’m not coming back. Mrs. Westbrook is going with me. She said she was tired of living with a combination phonograph, iceberg and dictionary, and she’s not coming back, either. We’ve been practising the songs and dances for two months on the quiet. I hope you will be successful, and get along all right! Good-bye.

‘Louise.’

Dawe dropped the letter, covered his face with his trembling hands, and cried out in a deep, vibrating voice:

*‘My God, why hast thou given me this cup to drink? Since she is false, then let Thy Heaven’s fairest gifts, faith and love, become the jesting by-words of traitors and fiends!’*

Editor Westbrook’s glasses fell to the floor. The fingers of one hand fumbled with a button on his coat as he blurted between his pale lips:

*‘Say, Shack, ain’t that a hell of a note? Wouldn’t that knock you off your perch, Shack? Ain’t it hell, now, Shack – ain’t it?’*

## **Next to Reading Matter (O. Henry)**

He compelled my interest as he stepped from the ferry at Desbrosses Street. He had the air of being familiar with hemispheres and worlds, and of entering New York as the lord of a demesne who revisited it in after years of absence. But I thought that, with all his air, he had never before set foot on the slippery cobblestones of the City of Too Many Caliphs<sup>2</sup>.

He wore loose clothes of a strange bluish drab colour, and a conservative, round Panama hat without the cock-a-loop indentations and cants with which Northern fanciers disfigure the tropic head-gear. Moreover, he was the homeliest man I have ever seen. His ugliness was less repellent than startling – arising from a sort of Lincolnian ruggedness and irregularity of feature that spellbound you with wonder and dismay. So may have looked afrites or the shapes metamorphosed from the vapour of the fisherman’s vase. As he afterward told me, his name was Judson Tate; and he may as well be called so at once. He wore his green silk tie through a topaz ring; and he carried a cane made of the vertebrae of a shark.

Judson Tate accosted me with some large and casual inquiries about the city’s streets and hotels, in the manner of one who had but for the moment forgotten the trifling details. I could think of no reason for disparaging my own quiet hotel in the downtown district; so the mid-morning of the night found us already victualled and dranked (at my expense), and ready to be chaired and tobaccoed in a quiet corner of the lobby.

There was something on Judson Tate’s mind, and, such as it was, he tried to convey it to me. Already he had accepted me as his friend; and when I looked at his great, snuff-brown first-mate’s hand, with which he brought emphasis to his periods, within six inches of my nose, I wondered if, by any chance, he was as sudden in conceiving enmity against strangers.

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<sup>2</sup> **Caliphs** – here: rulers; *caliph* is a ruler in a Moslem community.

When this man began to talk I perceived in him a certain power. His voice was a persuasive instrument, upon which he played with a somewhat specious but effective art. He did not try to make you forget his ugliness; he flaunted it in your face and made it part of the charm of his speech. Shutting your eyes, you would have trailed after this rat-catcher's pipes at least to the walls of Hamelin. Beyond that you would have had to be more childish to follow. But let him play his own tune to the words set down, so that if all is too dull, the art of music may bear the blame.

'Women,' said Judson Tate, 'are mysterious creatures.'

My spirits sank. I was not there to listen to such a world-old hypothesis – to such a time-worn, long-ago-refuted, bald, feeble, illogical, vicious, patent sophistry – to an ancient, baseless, wearisome, ragged, unfounded, insidious, falsehood originated by women themselves, and by them insinuated, foisted, thrust, spread, and ingeniously promulgated into the ears of mankind by underhanded, secret and deceptive methods, for the purpose of augmenting, furthering, and reinforcing their own charms and designs.

'Oh, I don't know!' said I, vernacularly.

'Have you ever heard of Oratama<sup>1</sup>?' he asked.

'Possibly,' I answered. 'I seem to recall a toe dancer – or a suburban addition – or was it a perfume? – of some such name.'

'It is a town,' said Judson Tate, 'on the coast of a foreign country of which you know nothing and could understand less. It is a country governed by a dictator and controlled by revolutions and insubordination. It was there that a great life-drama was played, with Judson Tate, the homeliest man in America, and Fergus McMahan, the handsomest adventurer in history or fiction, and Señorita Anabela Zamora, the beautiful daughter of the *alcalde*<sup>2</sup> of Oratama, as chief actors. And, another thing – nowhere else on the globe except in the department of Trienta y tres in Uruguay does the *chuchula* plant grow. The products of the country I speak of are valuable woods, dyestuffs, gold, rubber, ivory, and cocoa.'

'I was not aware,' said I, 'that South America produced any ivory.'

'There you are twice mistaken,' said Judson Tate, distributing the words over at least an octave of his wonderful voice. 'I did not say that the country I spoke of was in South America – I must be careful, my dear man; I have been in politics there, you know. But, even so – I have played chess against its president with a set carved from the nasal bones of the tapir – one of our native specimens of the order of *perissodactyle ungulates* inhabiting the Cordilleras<sup>3</sup> – which was as pretty ivory as you would care to see.'

'But it was of romance and adventure and the ways of women that was I going to tell you, and not of zoological animals.'

'For fifteen years I was the ruling power behind old Sancho Benavides, the Royal High Thumbscrew of the republic. You've seen his picture in the papers – a mushy black man with whiskers like the notes on a Swiss music-box cylinder, and a scroll in his right hand like the ones they write births on in the family Bible. Well, that chocolate potentate used to be the biggest item of interest anywhere between the colour line and the parallels of latitude. It was three throws, horses, whether he was to wind up in the Hall of Fame or the Bureau of Combustibles. He'd have been sure called the Roosevelt<sup>4</sup> of the Southern Continent if it hadn't been that Grover Cleveland<sup>5</sup> was President at the time. He'd hold office a couple of terms, then he'd sit out for a hand – always after appointing his own successor for the interims.'

'But it was not Benavides, the Liberator, who was making all this fame for himself. Not him. It was Judson Tate. Benavides was only the chip over the bug. I gave him the tip when to declare war and increase import duties and wear his state trousers. But that wasn't what I wanted to tell you.'

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1 **Oratama** – a Spanish town invented by the author

2 **alcalde** – the head (both administrative and judicial) of a town or village in Spain

3 **the Cordilleras** – also called the Andes, a mountain system of South America

4 **Roosevelt** – Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), president of the United States in 1901–1909; he got the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1906.

5 **Grover Cleveland** (1837–1908) – an honest and principled politician, president of the USA in 1885–1889 and 1893–1897

How did I get to be It? I'll tell you. Because I'm the most gifted talker that ever made vocal sounds since Adam<sup>1</sup> first opened his eyes, pushed aside the smelling-salts, and asked: "Where am I?"

'As you observe, I am about the ugliest man you ever saw outside the gallery of photographs of the New England early Christian Scientists. So, at an early age, I perceived that what I lacked in looks I must make up in eloquence. That I've done. I get what I go after. As the back-stop and still small voice of old Benavides I made all the great historical powers-behind-the-throne, such as Talleyrand<sup>2</sup>, Mrs. De Pompadour<sup>3</sup>, and Loeb<sup>4</sup>, look as small as the minority report of a Duma. I could talk nations into or out of debt, harangue armies to sleep on the battlefield, reduce insurrections, inflammations, taxes, appropriations or surpluses with a few words, and call up the dogs of war or the dove of peace with the same bird-like whistle. Beauty and epaulettes and curly moustaches and Grecian profiles in other men were never in my way. When people first look at me they shudder. Unless they are in the last stages of *angina pectoris* they are mine in ten minutes after I begin to talk. Women and men – I win 'em as they come. Now, you wouldn't think women would fancy a man with a face like mine, would you?'

'Oh, yes, Mr. Tate,' said I. 'History is bright and fiction dull with homely men who have charmed women. There seems—'

'Pardon me,' interrupted Judson Tate, 'but you don't quite understand. You have yet to hear my story.'

'Fergus McMahan was a friend of mine in the capital. For a handsome man I'll admit he was the duty-free merchandise. He had blond curls and laughing blue eyes and was featured regular. They said he was a ringer for the statue they call Herr Mees, the god of speech and eloquence resting in some museum at Rome. Some German anarchist, I suppose. They are always resting and talking.'

'But Fergus was no talker. He was brought up with the idea that to be beautiful was to make good. His conversation was about as edifying as listening to a leak dropping in a tin dish-pan at the head of the bed when you want to go to sleep. But he and me got to be friends – maybe because we was so opposite, don't you think? Looking at the Hallowe'en mask that I call my face when I'm shaving seemed to give Fergus pleasure; and I'm sure that whenever I heard the feeble output of throat noises that he called conversation I felt contented to be a gargoyle with a silver tongue.'

'One time I found it necessary to go down to this coast town of Oratama to straighten out a lot of political unrest and chop off a few heads in the customs and military departments. Fergus, who owned the ice and sulphur-match concessions of the republic, says he'll keep me company.'

'So, in a jangle of mule-train bells, we gallops into Oratama, and the town belonged to us as much as Long Island Sound<sup>5</sup> doesn't belong to Japan when T. R. is at Oyster Bay<sup>6</sup>. I say us; but I mean me. Everybody for four nations, two oceans, one bay and isthmus, and five archipelagoes around had heard of Judson Tate. Gentleman adventurer, they called me. I had been written up in five columns of the yellow journals, 40,000 words (with marginal decorations) in a monthly magazine, and a stickful on the twelfth page of the *New York Times*. If the beauty of Fergus McMahan gained any part of our reception in Oratama, I'll eat the price-tag in my Panama. It was me that they hung out paper flowers and palm branches for. I am not a jealous man; I am stating facts. The people were Nebuchadnezzars<sup>7</sup>; they bit the grass before me; there was no dust in the town for them to bite. They bowed down to Judson Tate. They knew that I was the power behind Sancho Benavides. A word from me was more to them than a whole deckle-edged library from East

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1 **Adam** – a biblical figure, the first man on Earth created by God 'in His own image' on the sixth day of Creation

2 **Talleyrand** (1754–1858) – Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, a French statesman and diplomat during the French Revolution, under Napoleon, and later at the Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy

3 **Mrs. De Pompadour** – Marquise de Pompadour (1721–1764), an influential figure at the court of Louis XV of France and since 1745 his mistress

4 **Loeb** – Jacques Loeb (1859–1924), a famous American biologist

5 **Long Island Sound** – the arm of the North Atlantic Ocean between the New York shore and Long Island

6 **Oyster bay** – a town in the state of New York on central Long Island, founded in 1653–1660

7 **Nebuchadnezzars** – here: barbarians, savages; Nebuchadnezzar II (630 BC–561 BC) was the great king of Babylonia, famous for his military expeditions to the Middle East where he, at different time, conquered Syria and Palestine, and crushed the Egyptian army.

Aurora in sectional bookcases was from anybody else. And yet there are people who spend hours fixing their faces – rubbing in cold cream and massaging the muscles (always toward the eyes) and taking in the slack with tincture of benzoin and electrolyzing moles – to what end? Looking handsome. Oh, what a mistake! It's the larynx that the beauty doctors ought to work on. It's words more than warts, talk more than talcum, palaver more than powder, blarney more than bloom that counts – the phonograph instead of the photograph. But I was going to tell you.

'The local Astors put me and Fergus up at the Centipede Club, a frame building built on posts sunk in the surf. The tide's only nine inches. The Little Big High Low Jack-in-the-game of the town came around and kowtowed. Oh, it wasn't to Herr Mees. They had heard about Judson Tate.

'One afternoon me and Fergus McMahan was sitting on the seaward gallery of the Centipede, drinking iced rum and talking.

"Judson," says Fergus, "there's an angel in Oratama."

"So long," says I, "as it ain't Gabriel, why talk as if you had heard a trump blow?"

"It's the Señorita Anabela Zamora," says Fergus. "She's – she's – she's as lovely as – as hell!"

"Bravo!" says I, laughing heartily. "You have a true lover's eloquence to paint the beauties of your inamorata. You remind me," says I, "of Faust's wooing of Marguerite – that is, if he wooed her after he went down the trap-door of the stage."

"Judson," says Fergus, "you know you are as beautiless as a rhinoceros. You can't have any interest in women. I'm awfully gone in Miss Anabela. And that's why I'm telling you."

"Oh, seguramente<sup>1</sup>," says I. "I know I have a front elevation like an Aztec<sup>2</sup> god that guards a buried treasure that never did exist in Jefferson County, Yucatan<sup>3</sup>. But there are compensations. For instance, I am It in this country as far as the eye can reach, and then a few perches and poles. And again," says I, "when I engage people in a set-to of oral, vocal, and laryngeal utterances, I do not usually confine my side of the argument to what may be likened to a cheap phonographic reproduction of the ravings of a jellyfish."

"Oh, I know," says Fergus, amiable, "that I'm not handy at small talk. Or large, either. That's why I'm telling you. I want you to help me."

"How can I do it?" I asked.

"I have subsidized," says Fergus, "the services of Señorita Anabela's duenna, whose name is Francesca. You have a reputation in this country, Judson," says Fergus, "of being a great man and a hero."

"I have," says I. "And I deserve it."

"And I," says Fergus, "am the best-looking man between the Arctic circle and Antarctic ice pack."

"With limitations," says I, "as to physiognomy and geography, I freely concede you to be."

"Between the two of us," says Fergus, "we ought to land the Señorita Anabela Zamora. The lady, as you know, is of an old Spanish family, and further than looking at her driving in the family carruaje<sup>4</sup> of afternoons around the plaza, or catching a glimpse of her through a barred window of evenings, she is as unapproachable as a star."

"Land her for which one of us?" says I.

"For me of course," says Fergus. "You've never seen her. Now, I've had Francesca point me out to her as being you on several occasions. When she sees me on the plaza, she thinks she's looking at Don Judson Tate, the greatest hero, statesman, and romantic figure in the country. With your reputation and my looks combined in one man, how can she resist him? She's heard all about your thrilling history, of course. And she's seen me. Can any woman want more?" asks Fergus McMahan.

"Can she do with less?" I ask. "How can we separate our mutual attractions, and how shall

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1 **seguramente** = of course, certainly (*Spanish*)

2 **Aztec** – an ancient civilization that formed an enormous empire in the 15th–16th centuries in what is now Mexico

3 **Yucatan** – Yucatan Peninsula between the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea

4 **carruaje** = carriage (*Spanish*)

we apportion the proceeds?”

‘Then Fergus tells me his scheme.

‘The house of the alcalde, Don Luis Zamora, he says, has a *patio*, of course – a kind of inner courtyard opening from the street. In an angle of it is his daughter’s window – as dark a place as you could find. And what do you think he wants me to do? Why, knowing my freedom, charm, and skilfulness of tongue, he proposes that I go into the *patio* at midnight, when the hobgoblin face of me cannot be seen, and make love to her for him – for the pretty man that she has seen on the plaza, thinking him to be Don Judson Tate.

‘Why shouldn’t I do it for him – for my friend, Fergus McMahan? For him to ask me was a compliment – an acknowledgment of his own shortcomings.

“‘You little, lily white, fine-haired, highly polished piece of dumb sculpture,” says I, “I’ll help you. Make your arrangements and get me in the dark outside her window and my stream of conversation opened up with the moonlight tremolo stop turned on, and she’s yours.”

“‘Keep your face hid, Jud,” says Fergus. “For heaven’s sake, keep your face hid. I’m a friend of yours in all kinds of sentiment, but this is a business deal. If I could talk I wouldn’t ask you. But seeing me and listening to you I don’t see why she can’t be landed.”

“‘By you?” says I.

“‘By me,” says Fergus.

Well, Fergus and the duenna, Francesca, attended to the details. And one night they fetched me a long black cloak with a high collar, and led me to the house at midnight. I stood by the window in the *patio* until I heard a voice as soft and sweet as an angel’s whisper on the other side of the bars. I could see only a faint, white clad shape inside; and, true to Fergus, I pulled the collar of my cloak high up, for it was July in the wet seasons, and the nights were chilly. And, smothering a laugh as I thought of the tongue-tied Fergus, I began to talk.

‘Well, sir, I talked an hour at the Señorita Anabela. I say “at” because it was not “with.” Now and then she would say: “Oh, Señor,” or “Now, ain’t you foolin’?” or “I know you don’t mean that,” and such things as women will when they are being rightly courted. Both of us knew English and Spanish; so in two languages I tried to win the heart of the lady for my friend Fergus. But for the bars to the window I could have done it in one. At the end of the hour she dismissed me and gave me a big, red rose. I handed it over to Fergus when I got home.

‘For three weeks every third or fourth night I impersonated my friend in the *patio* at the window of Señorita Anabela. At last she admitted that her heart was mine, and spoke of having seen me every afternoon when she drove in the plaza. It was Fergus she had seen, of course. But it was my talk that won her. Suppose Fergus had gone there, and tried to make a hit in the dark with his beauty all invisible, and not a word to say for himself!

‘On the last night she promised to be mine – that is, Fergus’s. And she put her hand between the bars for me to kiss. I bestowed the kiss and took the news to Fergus.

“‘You might have left that for me to do,” says he.

“‘That’ll be your job hereafter,” says I. “Keep on doing that and don’t try to talk. Maybe after she thinks she’s in love she won’t notice the difference between real conversation and the inarticulate sort of droning that you give forth.”

‘Now, I had never seen Señorita Anabela. So, the next day Fergus asks me to walk with him through the plaza and view the daily promenade and exhibition of Oratama society, a sight that had no interest for me. But I went; and children and dogs took to the banana groves and mangrove swamps as soon as they had a look at my face.

“‘Here she comes,” said Fergus, twirling his moustache – “the one in white, in the open carriage with the black horse.”

‘I looked and felt the ground rock under my feet. For Señorita Anabela Zamora was the most beautiful woman in the world, and the only one from that moment on, so far as Judson Tate was concerned. I saw at a glance that I must be hers and she mine forever. I thought of my face and nearly fainted; and then I thought of my other talents and stood upright again. And I had been wooing her for three weeks for another man!

‘As Señorita Anabela’s carriage rolled slowly past, she gave Fergus a long, soft glance from the corners of her night-black eyes, a glance that would have sent Judson Tate up into heaven in a rubber-tired chariot. But she never looked at me. And that handsome man only ruffles his curls and smirks and prances like a lady-killer at my side.

“‘What do you think of her, Judson?’” asks Fergus, with an air.

“‘This much,’” says I. “She is to me Mrs. Judson Tate. I am no man to play tricks on a friend. So take your warning.”

‘I thought Fergus would die laughing.

“‘Well, well, well,’” said he, “you old doughface! Struck too, are you? That’s great! But you’re too late. Francesca tells me that Anabela talks of nothing but me, day and night. Of course, I’m awfully obliged to you for making that chin-music to her of evenings. But, do you know, I’ve an idea that I could have done it as well myself.”

“‘Mrs. Judson Tate,’” says I. “Don’t forget the name. You’ve had the use of my tongue to go with your good looks, my boy. You can’t lend me your looks; but hereafter my tongue is my own. Keep your mind on the name that’s to be on the visiting cards two inches by three and a half – ‘Mrs. Judson Tate.’ That’s all.”

“‘All right,’” says Fergus, laughing again. “I’ve talked with her father, the *alcalde*, and he’s willing. He’s to give a *baile*<sup>1</sup> to-morrow evening in his new warehouse. If you were a dancing man, Jud, I’d expect you around to meet the future Mrs. McMahan.”

‘But on the next evening, when the music was playing loudest at the Alcade Zamora’s *baile*, into the room steps Judson Tate in a new white linen clothes as if he were the biggest man in the whole nation, which he was.

‘Some of the musicians jumped off the key when they saw my face, and one or two of the timidest *senoritas* let out a screech or two. But up prances the *alcalde* and almost wipes the dust off my shoes with his forehead. No mere good looks could have won me that sensational entrance.

“‘I hear much, Señor Zamora,’” says I, “of the charm of your daughter. It would give me great pleasure to be presented to her.”

‘There were about six dozen willow rocking-chairs, with pink tidies tied on to them, arranged against the walls. In one of them sat Señorita Anabela in white Swiss and red slippers, with pearls and fireflies in her hair. Fergus was at the other end of the room trying to break away from two maroons and a claybank girl.

‘The *alcalde* leads me up to Anabela and presents me. When she took the first look at my face she dropped her fan and nearly turned her chair over from the shock. But I’m used to that.

‘I sat down by her, and began to talk. When she heard me speak she jumped, and her eyes got as big as alligator pears. She couldn’t strike a balance between the tones of my voice and face I carried. But I kept on talking in the key of C, which is the ladies’ key; and presently she sat still in her chair and a dreamy look came into her eyes. She was coming my way. She knew of Judson Tate, and what a big man he was, and the big things he had done; and that was in my favour. But, of course, it was some shock to her to find out that I was not the pretty man that had been pointed out to her as the great Judson. And then I took the Spanish language, which is better than English for certain purposes, and played on it like a harp of a thousand strings. I ranged from the second G below the staff up to F-sharp above it. I set my voice to poetry, art, romance, flowers, and moonlight. I repeated some of the verses that I had murmured to her in the dark at her window; and I knew from a sudden soft sparkle in her eye that she recognized in my voice the tones of her midnight mysterious wooer.

‘Anyhow, I had Fergus McMahan going. Oh, the vocal is the true art – no doubt about that. Handsome is as handsome palavers. That’s the renovated proverb.

‘I took Señorita Anabela for a walk in the lemon grove while Fergus, disfiguring himself with an ugly frown, was waltzing with the clay-bank girl. Before we returned I had permission to come to her window in the *patio* the next evening at midnight and talk some more.

‘Oh, it was easy enough. In two weeks Anabela was engaged to me, and Fergus was out. He

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<sup>1</sup> **baile** = ball, dance (*Spanish*)



took it calm, for a handsome man, and told me he wasn't going to give in.

"Talk may be all right in its place, Judson," he says to me, "although I've never thought it worth cultivating. But," says he, "to expect mere words to back up successfully a face like yours in a lady's good graces is like expecting a man to make a square meal on the ringing of a dinner-bell."

'But I haven't begun on the story I was going to tell you yet.

'One day I took a long ride in the hot sunshine, and then took a bath in the cold waters of a lagoon on the edge of the town before I'd cooled off.

'That evening after dark I called at the alcalde's to see Anabela. I was calling regular every evening then, and we were to be married in a month. She was looking like a bulbul, a gazelle, and a tea-rose, and her eyes were as soft and bright as two quarts of cream skimmed off from the Milky Way. She looked at my rugged features without any expression of fear or repugnance. Indeed, I fancied that I saw a look of deep admiration and affection, such as she had cast at Fergus on the plaza.

'I sat down, and opened my mouth to tell Anabela what she loved to hear – that she was a trust, monopolizing all the loveliness of earth. I opened my mouth, and instead of the usual vibrating words of love and compliment, there came forth a faint wheeze such as a baby with croup might emit. Not a word – not a syllable – not an intelligible sound. I had caught cold in my laryngeal regions when I took my injudicious bath.

'For two hours I sat trying to entertain Anabela. She talked a certain amount, but it was perfunctory and diluted. The nearest approach I made to speech was to formulate a sound like a clam trying to sing "A Life on the Ocean Wave" at low tide. It seemed that Anabela's eyes did not rest upon me as often as usual. I had nothing with which to charm her ears. We looked at pictures and she played the guitar occasionally, very badly. When I left, her parting manner seemed cool – or at least thoughtful.

'This happened for five evenings consecutively.

'On the sixth day she ran away with Fergus McMahan.

'It was known that they fled in a sailing yacht bound for Belize. I was only eight hours behind them in a small steam launch belonging to the Revenue Department.

'Before I sailed, I rushed into the botica<sup>1</sup> of old Manuel Iquito, a half-breed Indian druggist. I could not speak, but I pointed to my throat and made a sound like escaping steam. He began to yawn. In an hour, according to the customs of the country, I would have been waited on. I reached across the counter, seized him by the throat, and pointed again to my own. He yawned once more, and thrust into my hand a small bottle containing a black liquid.

"Take one small spoonful every two hours," says he.

'I threw him a dollar and skinned for the steamer.

'I steamed into the harbour at Belize<sup>2</sup> thirteen seconds behind the yacht that Anabela and Fergus were on. They started for the shore in a dory just as my skiff was lowered over the side. I tried to order my sailormen to row faster, but the sounds died in my larynx before they came to the light. Then I thought of old Iquito's medicine, and I got out his bottle and took a swallow of it.

'The two boats landed at the same moment. I walked straight up to Anabela and Fergus. Her eyes rested upon me for an instant; then she turned them, full of feeling and confidence, upon Fergus. I knew I could not speak, but I was desperate. In speech lay my only hope. I could not stand beside Fergus and challenge comparison in the way of beauty. Purely involuntarily, my larynx and epiglottis attempted to reproduce the sounds that my mind was calling upon my vocal organs to send forth.

'To my intense surprise and delight the words rolled forth beautifully clear, resonant, exquisitely modulated, full of power, expression, and long-repressed emotion.

"Señorita Anabela," says I, "may I speak with you aside for a moment?"

'You don't want details about that, do you? Thanks. The old eloquence had come back all right. I led her under a cocoanut palm and put my old verbal spell on her again.

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1 **botica** = drugstore (*Spanish*)

2 **Belize** – a river in Central America, and a town and seaport on the Caribbean coast

“Judson,” says she, “when you are talking to me I can hear nothing else – I can see nothing else – there is nothing and nobody else in the world for me.”

‘Well, that’s about all of the story. Anabela went back to Oratama in the steamer with me. I never heard what became of Fergus. I never saw him anymore. Anabela is now Mrs. Judson Tate. Has my story bored you much?’

‘No,’ said I. ‘I am always interested in psychological studies. A human heart – and especially a woman’s – is a wonderful thing to contemplate.’

‘It is,’ said Judson Tate. ‘And so are the trachea and bronchial tubes of man. And the larynx too. Did you ever make a study of the windpipe?’

‘Never,’ said I. ‘But I have taken much pleasure in your story. May I ask after Mrs. Tate, and inquire of her present health and whereabouts?’

‘Oh, sure,’ said Judson Tate. ‘We are living in Bergen Avenue, Jersey City. The climate down in Oratama didn’t suit Mrs. T. I don’t suppose you ever dissected the arytenoid cartilages of the epiglottis, did you?’

‘Why, no,’ said I, ‘I am no surgeon.’

‘Pardon me,’ said Judson Tate, ‘but every man should know enough of anatomy and therapeutics to safeguard his own health. A sudden cold may set up capillary bronchitis or inflammation of the pulmonary vesicles, which may result in a serious affection of the vocal organs.’

‘Perhaps so,’ said I, with some impatience; ‘but that is neither here nor there. Speaking of the strange manifestations of the affection of women, I—’

‘Yes, yes,’ interrupted Judson Tate; ‘they have peculiar ways. But, as I was going to tell you: when I went back to Oratama I found out from Manuel Iquito what was in that mixture he gave me for my lost voice. I told you how quick it cured me. He made that stuff from the *chuchula* plant. Now, look here.’

Judson Tate drew an oblong, white pasteboard box from his pocket.

‘For any cough,’ he said, ‘or cold, or hoarseness, or bronchial affection whatsoever, I have here the greatest remedy in the world. You see the formula, printed on the box. Each tablet contains licorice, 2 grains; balsam tolu, 1/10 grain; oil of anise, 1/20 minim; oil of tar, 1/60 minim; oleo-resin of cubebs, 1/100 minim; fluid extract of *chuchula*, 1/10 minim.’

‘I am in New York,’ went on Judson Tate, ‘for the purpose of organizing a company to market the greatest remedy for throat affections ever discovered. At present I am introducing the lozenges in a small way. I have here a box containing four dozen, which I am selling for the small sum of fifty cents. If you are suffering—’

\* \* \* \* \*

I got up and went away without a word. I walked slowly up to the little park near my hotel, leaving Judson Tate alone with his conscience. My feelings were lacerated. He had poured gently upon me a story that I might have used. There was a little of the breath of life in it, and some of the synthetic atmosphere that passes, when cunningly tinkered, in the marts. And, at the last it had proven to be a commercial pill, deftly coated with the sugar of fiction. The worst of it was that I could not offer it for sale. Advertising departments and counting-rooms look down upon me. And it would never do for the literary. Therefore I sat upon a bench with other disappointed ones until my eyelids drooped.

I went to my room, and, as my custom is, read for an hour stories in my favourite magazines. This was to get my mind back to art again.

And as I read each story, I threw the magazines sadly and hopelessly, one by one, upon the floor. Each author, without one exception to bring balm to my heart, wrote liltingly and sprightly a story of some particular make of motor-car that seemed to control the sparking plug of his genius.

And when the last one was hurled from me I took heart.

‘If readers can swallow so many proprietary automobiles,’ I said to myself, ‘they ought not to

strain at one of Tate's Compound Magic Chuchula Bronchial Lozenges.'

And so if you see this story in print you will understand that business is business, and that if Art gets very far ahead of Commerce, she will have to get up and hustle.

I may as well add, to make a clean job of it, that you can't buy the *chuchula* plant in the drug stores.

## The Guilty Party (O. Henry)

### An East Side Tragedy

A red-haired, unshaven, untidy man sat in a rocking chair by a window. He had just lighted a pipe, and was puffing blue clouds with great satisfaction. He had removed his shoes and donned a pair of blue, faded carpet-slippers. With the morbid thirst of the confirmed daily news drinker, he awkwardly folded back the pages of an evening paper, eagerly gulping down the strong, black headlines, to be followed as a chaser by the milder details of the smaller type.

In an adjoining room a woman was cooking supper. Odors from strong bacon and boiling coffee contended against the cut-plug fumes from the vespertine pipe.

Outside was one of those crowded streets of the east side, in which, as twilight falls, Satan sets up his recruiting office. A mighty host of children danced and ran and played in the street. Some in rags, some in clean white and beribboned, some wild and restless as young hawks, some gentle-faced and shrinking, some shrieking rude and sinful words, some listening, awed, but soon, grown familiar, to embrace – here were the children playing in the corridors of the House of Sin. Above the playground forever hovered a great bird. The bird was known to humorists as the stork. But the people of Chrystie street were better ornithologists. They called it a vulture.

A little girl of twelve came up timidly to the man reading and resting by the window, and said:

'Papa, won't you play a game of checkers with me if you aren't too tired?'

The red-haired, unshaven, untidy man sitting shoeless by the window answered, with a frown.

'Checkers. No, I won't. Can't a man who works hard all day have a little rest when he comes home? Why don't you go out and play with the other kids on the sidewalk?'

The woman who was cooking came to the door.

'John,' she said, 'I don't like for Lizzie to play in the street. They learn too much there that ain't good for 'em. She's been in the house all day long. It seems that you might give up a little of your time to amuse her when you come home.'

'Let her go out and play like the rest of 'em if she wants to be amused,' said the red-haired, unshaven, untidy man, 'and don't bother me.'

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'You're on,' said Kid Mullaly. 'Fifty dollars to \$25 I take Annie to the dance. Put up.'

The Kid's black eyes were snapping with the fire of the baited and challenged. He drew out his 'roll' and slapped five tens upon the bar. The three or four young fellows who were thus 'taken' more slowly produced their stake. The bartender, ex-officio stakeholder, took the money, laboriously wrapped it, recorded the bet with an inch-long pencil and stuffed the whole into a corner of the cash register.

'And, oh, what'll be done to you'll be a plenty,' said a bettor, with anticipatory glee.

'That's my lookout,' said the 'Kid,' sternly. 'Fill 'em up all around, Mike.'

After the round Burke, the 'Kid's' sponge, sponge-holder, pal, Mentor and Grand Vizier, drew him out to the bootblack stand at the saloon corner where all the official and important matters of the Small Hours Social Club were settled. As Tony polished the light tan shoes of the club's President and Secretary for the fifth time that day, Burke spake words of wisdom to his chief.

'Cut that blond out, "Kid,"' was his advice, 'or there'll be trouble. What do you want to throw

down that girl of yours for? You'll never find one that'll freeze to you like Liz has. She's worth a hallful of Annies.'

'I'm no Annie admirer!' said the 'Kid,' dropping a cigarette ash on his polished toe, and wiping it off on Tony's shoulder. 'But I want to teach Liz a lesson. She thinks I belong to her. She's been bragging that I daren't speak to another girl. Liz is all right – in some ways. She's drinking a little too much lately. And she uses language that a lady oughtn't.'

'You're engaged, ain't you?' asked Burke.

'Sure. We'll get married next year, maybe.'

'I saw you make her drink her first glass of beer,' said Burke. 'That was two years ago, when she used to come down to the corner of Chrystie bare-headed to meet you after supper. She was a quiet sort of a kid then, and couldn't speak without blushing.'

'She's a little spitfire, sometimes, now,' said the Kid. 'I hate jealousy. That's why I'm going to the dance with Annie. It'll teach her some sense.'

'Well, you better look a little out,' were Burke's last words. 'If Liz was my girl and I was to sneak out to a dance coupled up with an Annie, I'd want a suit of chain armor on under my gladsome rags, all right.'

Through the land of the stork-vulture wandered Liz. Her black eyes searched the passing crowds fierily but vaguely. Now and then she hummed bars of foolish little songs. Between times she set her small, white teeth together and spake crisp words that the east side has added to language.

Liz's skirt was green silk. Her waist was a large brown-and-pink plaid, well-fitting and not without style. She wore a cluster ring of huge imitation rubies, and a locket that banged her knees at the bottom of a silver chain. Her shoes were run down over twisted high heels, and were strangers to polish. Her hat would scarcely have passed into a flour barrel.

The 'Family Entrance' of the Blue Jay Cafe received her. At a table she sat, and punched the button with the air of milady ringing for her carriage. The waiter came with his large-chinned, low-voiced manner of respectful familiarity. Liz smoothed her silken skirt with a satisfied wriggle. She made the most of it. Here she could order and be waited upon. It was all that her world offered her of the prerogative of woman.

'Whiskey, Tommy,' she said as her sisters further uptown murmur, 'Champagne, James.'

'Sure, Miss Lizzie. What'll the chaser be?'

'Seltzer. And say, Tommy, has the Kid been around to-day?'

'Why, no, Miss Lizzie, I haven't saw him to-day.'

Fluently came the 'Miss Lizzie,' for the Kid was known to be one who required rigid upholdment of the dignity of his fiancée. 'I'm lookin' for 'm,' said Liz, after the chaser had sputtered under her nose. 'It's got to me that he says he'll take Annie Karlson to the dance. Let him. The pink-eyed white rat! I'm lookin' for 'm. You know me, Tommy. Two years me and the Kid's been engaged. Look at that ring. Five hundred, he said it cost. Let him take her to the dance. What'll I do? I'll cut his heart out. Another whiskey, Tommy.'

'I wouldn't listen to no such reports, Miss Lizzie,' said the waiter smoothly, from the narrow opening above his chin. 'Kid Mullaly's not the guy to throw a lady like you down. Seltzer on the side?'

'Two years,' repeated Liz, softening a little to sentiment under the magic of the distiller's art. 'I always used to play out on the street of evenin's 'cause there was nothin' doin' for me at home. For a long time I just sat on doorsteps and looked at the lights and the people goin' by. And then the Kid came along one evenin' and sized me up, and I was mashed on the spot for fair. The first drink he made me take I cried all night at home, and got a lickin' for makin' a noise. And now – say, Tommy, you ever see this Annie Karlson? If it wasn't for peroxide the chloroform limit would have put her out long ago. Oh, I'm lookin' for 'm. You tell the Kid if he comes in. Me? I'll cut his heart out. Leave it to me. Another whiskey, Tommy.'

A little unsteadily, but with watchful and brilliant eyes, Liz walked up the avenue. On the doorstep of a brick tenement a curly-haired child sat, puzzling over the convolutions of a tangled

string. Liz flopped down beside her, with a crooked, shifting smile on her flushed face. But her eyes had grown clear and artless of a sudden.

‘Let me show you how to make a cat’s-cradle, kid,’ she said, tucking her green silk skirt under her rusty shoes.

And while they sat there the lights were being turned on for the dance in the hall of the Small Hours Social Club. It was the bi-monthly dance, a dress affair in which the members took great pride and bestirred themselves huskily to further and adorn.

At 9 o’clock the President, Kid Mullaly, paced upon the floor with a lady on his arm. As the Loreley’s was her hair golden. Her ‘yes’ was softened to a ‘yah,’ but its quality of assent was patent to the most Milesian ears. She stepped upon her own train and blushed, and – she smiled into the eyes of Kid Mullaly.

And then, as the two stood in the middle of the waxed floor, the thing happened to prevent which many lamps are burning nightly in many studies and libraries.

Out from the circle of spectators in the hall leaped Fate in a green silk skirt, under the *nom de guerre* of ‘Liz.’ Her eyes were hard and blacker than jet. She did not scream or waver. Most unwomanly, she cried out one oath – the Kid’s own favorite oath – and in his own deep voice; and then while the Small Hours Social Club went frantically to pieces, she made good her boast to Tommy, the waiter – made good as far as the length of her knife blade and the strength of her arm permitted.

And next came the primal instinct of self-preservation – or was it self-annihilation, the instinct that society has grafted on the natural branch?

Liz ran out and down the street swift and true as a woodcock flying through a grove of saplings at dusk.

And then followed the big city’s biggest shame, its most ancient and rotten surviving canker, its pollution and disgrace, its blight and perversion, its forever infamy and guilt, fostered, unproved and cherished, handed down from a long-ago century of the basest barbarity – the Hue and Cry. Nowhere but in the big cities does it survive, and here most of all, where the ultimate perfection of culture, citizenship and alleged superiority joins, bawling, in the chase.

They pursued – a shrieking mob of fathers, mothers, lovers and maidens – howling, yelling, calling, whistling, crying for blood. Well may the wolf in the big city stand outside the door. Well may his heart, the gentler, falter at the siege.

Knowing her way, and hungry for her surcease, she darted down the familiar ways until at last her feet struck the dull solidity of the rotting pier. And then it was but a few more panting steps – and good mother East River took Liz to her bosom, soothed her muddily but quickly, and settled in five minutes the problem that keeps lights burning o’ nights in thousands of pastorates and colleges.

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It’s mighty funny what kind of dreams one has sometimes. Poets call them visions, but a vision is only a dream in blank verse. I dreamed the rest of this story.

I thought I was in the next world. I don’t know how I got there; I suppose I had been riding on the Ninth avenue elevated or taking patent medicine or trying to pull Jim Jeffries’s nose, or doing some such little injudicious stunt. But, anyhow, there I was, and there was a great crowd of us outside the courtroom where the judgments were going on. And every now and then a very beautiful and imposing court-officer angel would come outside the door and call another case.

While I was considering my own worldly sins and wondering whether there would be any use of my trying to prove an alibi by claiming that I lived in New Jersey<sup>1</sup>, the bailiff angel came to the door and sang out:

‘Case No. 99,852,743.’

Up stepped a plain-clothes man – there were lots of ’em there, dressed exactly like preachers and hustling us spirits around just like cops do on earth – and by the arm he dragged – whom, do

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<sup>1</sup> New Jersey – the US state (19 479 square km) on the Atlantic coast

you think? Why, Liz!

The court officer took her inside and closed the door. I went up to Mr. Fly-Cop and inquired about the case.

‘A very sad one,’ says he, laying the points of his manicured fingers together. ‘An utterly incorrigible girl. I am Special Terrestrial Officer the Reverend Jones. The case was assigned to me. The girl murdered her fiancé and committed suicide. She had no defense. My report to the court relates the facts in detail, all of which are substantiated by reliable witnesses. The wages of sin is death. Praise the Lord.’

The court officer opened the door and stepped out.

‘Poor girl,’ said Special Terrestrial Officer the Reverend Jones, with a tear in his eye. ‘It was one of the saddest cases that I ever met with. Of course she was’ –

‘Discharged,’ said the court officer. ‘Come here, Jonesy. First thing you know you’ll be switched to the pot-pie squad. How would you like to be on the missionary force in the South Sea Islands<sup>2</sup>– hey? Now, you quit making these false arrests, or you’ll be transferred – see? The guilty party you’ve not to look for in this case is a red-haired, unshaven, untidy man, sitting by the window reading, in his stocking feet, while his children play in the streets. Get a move on you.’

Now, wasn’t that a silly dream?

## The Fall of the House of Usher (Edgar Allan Poe)

*Son cœur est un luth suspendu;  
Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne.*<sup>3</sup>  
**De Béranger.**<sup>4</sup>

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was – but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveler upon opium – the bitter lapse into every-day life – the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it – I paused to think – what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled luster by the dwelling, and gazed down – but with a shudder even more thrilling than before – upon the remodeled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.

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<sup>2</sup> **the South Sea Islands** – the Marquesas Islands, Gilbert Islands, Tahiti, Samoa, etc.

<sup>3</sup> **Son cœur est un luth suspendu; Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne** . – His heart is a hanging lute; As soon as one touches it, it sounds out. (*French* )

<sup>4</sup> **De Béranger** – Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780–1857), a French poet, the author of many popular, lyrical and tender songs

Nevertheless, in this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks. Its proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been one of my boon companions in boyhood; but many years had elapsed since our last meeting. A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant part of the country – a letter from him – which, in its wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply. The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness – of a mental disorder which oppressed him, and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best, and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady. It was the manner in which all this, and much more, was said – it was the apparent *heart* that went with his request – which allowed me no room for hesitation; and I accordingly obeyed forthwith what I still considered a very singular summons.

Although, as boys, we had been even intimate associates, yet I really knew little of my friend. His reserve had been always excessive and habitual. I was aware, however, that his very ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art, and manifested, of late, in repeated deeds of munificent, yet unobtrusive charity, as well as in a passionate devotion to the intricacies, perhaps even more than to the orthodox and easily recognizable beauties, of musical science. I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain. It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other – it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the ‘House of Usher’ – an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion.

I have said that the sole effect of my somewhat childish experiment of looking down within the tarn had been to deepen the first singular impression. There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition – for why should I not so term it? – served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis. And it might have been for this reason only, that, when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy – a fancy so ridiculous, indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity – an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn – a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.

Shaking off from my spirit what must have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine, tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old woodwork which has rotted for years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.

Noticing these things, I rode over a short causeway to the house. A servant in waiting took my

horse, and I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio of his master. Much that I encountered on the way contributed, I know not how, to heighten the vague sentiments of which I have already spoken. While the objects around me – while the carvings of the ceilings, the somber tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy – while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this – I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up. On one of the staircases I met the physician of the family. His countenance, I thought, wore a mingled expression of low cunning and perplexity. He accosted me with trepidation and passed on. The valet now threw open a door and ushered me into the presence of his master.

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.

Upon my entrance, Usher arose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had much in it, I at first thought, of an overdone cordiality – of the constrained effort of the ennuyé<sup>1</sup> man of the world. A glance, however, at his countenance convinced me of his perfect sincerity. We sat down; and for some moments, while he spoke not, I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe. Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely molded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten. And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much of change that I doubted to whom I spoke. The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous luster of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its arabesque<sup>2</sup> expression with any idea of simple humanity.

In the manner of my friend I was at once struck with an incoherence – an inconsistency; and I soon found this to arise from a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy, an excessive nervous agitation. For something of this nature I had indeed been prepared, no less by his letter than by reminiscences of certain boyish traits, and by conclusions deduced from his peculiar physical conformation and temperament. His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision (when the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance) to that species of energetic concision – that abrupt, weighty, unhurried, and hollow-sounding enunciation – that leaden, self-balanced, and perfectly modulated guttural utterance, which may be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement.

It was thus that he spoke of the object of my visit, of his earnest desire to see me, and of the

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1 **ennuyé** = bored, disappointed (*French*)

2 **arabesque** – here: of elaborate design



solace he expected me to afford him. He entered, at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady. It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy – a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass off. It displayed itself in a host of unnatural sensations. Some of these, as he detailed them, interested and bewildered me; although, perhaps, the terms and the general manner of the narration had their weight. He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses. The most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror.

To an anomalous species of terror I found him a bounden slave. ‘I shall perish,’ said he, ‘I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect – in terror. In this unnerved – in this pitiable condition – I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, Fear.’

I learned, moreover, at intervals, and through broken and equivocal hints, another singular feature of his mental condition. He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth – in regard to an influence whose supposititious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy here to be restated – an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion, had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit – an effect which the physique of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the morale<sup>1</sup> of his existence.

He admitted, however, although with hesitation, that much of the peculiar gloom which thus afflicted him could be traced to a more natural and far more palpable origin – to the severe and long-continued illness – indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution – of a tenderly beloved sister, his sole companion for long years, his last and only relative on earth. ‘Her decease,’ he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, ‘would leave him (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers.’ While he spoke, the lady Madeline (for so was she called) passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared. I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread; and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings. A sensation of stupor oppressed me, as my eyes followed her retreating steps. When a door, at length, closed upon her, my glance sought instinctively and eagerly the countenance of the brother; but he had buried his face in his hands, and I could only perceive that a far more than ordinary wanness had overspread the emaciated fingers through which trickled many passionate tears.

The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical<sup>2</sup> character, were the unusual diagnosis. Hitherto she had steadily borne up against the pressure of her malady, and had not betaken herself finally to bed; but on the closing in the evening of my arrival at the house, she succumbed (as her brother told me at night with inexpressible agitation) to the prostrating power of the destroyer; and I learned that the glimpse I had obtained of her person would thus probably be the last I should obtain – that the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me no more.

For several days ensuing her name was unmentioned by either Usher or myself; and during this period I was busied in earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together; or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar. And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which

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<sup>1</sup> **morale** = moral state

<sup>2</sup> **cataleptical** – suffering from periods of unconsciousness and rigidity of muscles; unstable.

darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom.

I shall ever bear about me a memory of the many solemn hours I thus spent alone with the master of the House of Usher. Yet I should fail in any attempt to convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the occupations in which he involved me, or led me the way. An excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphurous luster over all. His long, improvised dirges will ring forever in my ears. Among other things, I hold painfully in mind a certain singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of Von Weber. From the paintings over which his elaborate fancy brooded, and which grew, touch by touch, into vaguenesses at which I shuddered the more thrillingly because I shuddered knowing not why, – from these paintings (vivid as their images now are before me) I would in vain endeavor to deduce more than a small portion which should lie within the compass of merely written words. By the utter simplicity, by the nakedness of his designs, he arrested and overawed attention. If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher. For me, at least – in the circumstances then surrounding me – there arose out of the pure abstractions which the hypochondriac contrived to throw upon his canvas, an intensity of intolerable awe, no shadow of which I ever yet in the contemplation of the certainly glowing yet too concrete reveries of Fuseli<sup>1</sup>.

One of the phantasmagoric conceptions of my friend, partaking not so rigidly of the spirit of abstraction, may be shadowed forth, although feebly, in words. A small picture presented the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch or other artificial source of light was discernible; yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendor.

I have just spoken of that morbid condition of the auditory nerve which rendered all music intolerable to the sufferer, with the exception of certain effects of stringed instruments. It was, perhaps, the narrow limits to which he thus confined himself upon the guitar, which gave birth, in great measure, to the fantastic character of his performances. But the fervid facility of his impromptus<sup>2</sup> could not be so accounted for. They must have been, and were, in the notes, as well as in the words of his wild fantasias (for he not unfrequently accompanied himself with rimed verbal improvisations), the result of that intense mental collectedness and concentration to which I have previously alluded as observable only in particular moments of the highest artificial excitement. The words of one of these rhapsodies I have easily remembered. I was, perhaps, the more forcibly impressed with it, as he gave it, because, in the under or mystic current of its meaning, I fancied that I perceived, and for the first time, a full consciousness on the part of Usher, of the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne. The verses, which were entitled ‘The Haunted Palace,’ ran very nearly, if not accurately, thus:

I.  
In the greenest of our valleys,  
By good angels tenanted,  
Once a fair and stately palace –  
Radiant palace – reared its head.  
In the monarch Thought’s dominion –  
It stood there!  
Never seraph spread a pinion  
Over fabric half so fair.

II.

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1 **Fuseli** – Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), a Swiss painter known for his dramatic and original works

2 **impromptus** = improvisations (*Latin* )

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,  
On its roof did float and flow;  
(This – all this – was in the olden  
Time long ago)  
And every gentle air that dallied,  
In that sweet day,  
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,  
A wingèd odor went away.

III.

Wanderers in that happy valley  
Through two luminous windows saw  
Spirits moving musically  
To a lute's well-tuned law,  
Round about a throne, where sitting  
(Porphyrogene!)  
In state his glory well befitting,  
The ruler of the realm was seen.

IV.

And all with pearl and ruby glowing  
Was the fair palace door,  
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing  
And sparkling evermore,  
A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty  
Was but to sing,  
In voices of surpassing beauty,  
The wit and wisdom of their king.

V.

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,  
Assailed the monarch's high estate  
(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow  
Shall dawn upon him, desolate!);  
And, round about his home, the glory  
That blushed and bloomed  
Is but a dim-remembered story  
Of the old time entombed.

VI.

And travelers now within that valley,  
Through the red-litten windows, see  
Vast forms that move fantastically  
To a discordant melody;  
While, like a rapid ghastly river,  
Through the pale door,  
A hideous throng rush out forever,

And laugh – but smile no more.

I well remember that suggestions arising from this ballad led us into a train of thought wherein there became manifest an opinion of Usher's which I mention not so much on account of its novelty (for other men have thought thus) as on account of the pertinacity with which he maintained it. This opinion, in its general form, was that of the sentience of all vegetable things. But, in his disordered fancy, the idea had assumed a more daring character, and trespassed, under certain conditions, upon the kingdom of inorganization. I lack words to express the full extent or the earnest *abandon* of his persuasion. The belief, however, was connected (as I have previously hinted) with the gray stones of the home of his forefathers. The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones – in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many fungi which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around – above all, in the long-undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn. Its evidence – the evidence of the sentience – was to be seen, he said (and I here started as he spoke), in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls. The result was discoverable, he added, in that silent, yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries had molded the destinies of his family, and which made *him* what I now saw him – what he was. Such opinions need no comment, and I will make none.

Our books – the books which, for years, had formed no small portion of the mental existence of the invalid – were, as might be supposed, in strict keeping with this character of phantasm. We pored together over such works as the *Vervet et Chartreuse* of Gresset<sup>1</sup>; the *Belphegor* of Machiavelli<sup>2</sup>; the *Heaven and Hell* of Swedenborg<sup>3</sup>; the *Subterranean Voyage of Nicholas Klimm* by Holberg<sup>4</sup>; the *Chiromancy* of Robert Flud<sup>5</sup>, of Jean D'Indaginé, and of De la Chambre; the *Journey into the Blue Distance* of Tieck<sup>6</sup>; and the *City of the Sun* of Campanella<sup>7</sup>. One favorite volume was a small octavo edition of the *Directorium Inquisitorium*, by the Dominican Eymeric de Cironne<sup>8</sup>; and there were passages in Pomponius Mela<sup>9</sup>, about the old African Satyrs<sup>10</sup> and Ægipans<sup>11</sup>, over which Usher would sit dreaming for hours. His chief delight, however, was found in the perusal of an exceedingly rare and curious book in quarto Gothic – the manual of a forgotten church – the *Vigiliae Mortuorum secundum Chorum Ecclesiae Maguntinae*.

I could not help thinking of the wild ritual of this work, and of its probable influence upon the hypochondriac, when, one evening, having informed me abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more, he stated his intention of preserving her corpse for a fortnight (previously to its final interment) in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building. The worldly reason, however, assigned for this singular proceeding, was one which I did not feel at liberty to dispute. The brother had been led to his resolution, so he told me, by consideration of the unusual character of the malady of the deceased, of certain obtrusive and eager inquiries on the part of her medical men, and of the remote and exposed situation of the burial ground of the family. I will not deny that when I called to mind the sinister countenance of the person whom I met upon the staircase, on the

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1 **Gresset** – Jean-Baptiste-Louis Gresset (1709–1777), a French poet and dramatist

2 **Machiavelli** – Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1521), a political philosopher and statesman of the Italian Renaissance

3 **Swedenborg** – Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), a scientist, philosopher, theologian and Christian mystic of Swedish origin

4 **Holberg** – Ludwig Holberg (1684–1754), a prominent Scandinavian writer and philosopher of the Enlightenment period

5 **Robert Flud(d)** (1574–1637) – an English philosopher, physician, occultist and author

6 **Tieck** – Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), a German writer and critic of the early Romantic period

7 **Campanella** – Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639), an Italian philosopher and writer, the author of the famous 'The City of the Sun'

8 **Eymeric de Cironne** – Nicholas Eymerich (1320–1399), a Roman Catholic theologian, the great inquisitor of Aragon

9 **Pomponius Mela** – a Roman author and geographer of the 1st century

10 **Satyr** – in ancient mythology, a mythical being, part man part goat

11 **Ægipans** – in mythology, a mythical creature in a bestial rather than human form

day of my arrival at the house, I had no desire to oppose what I regarded as at best but a harmless, and by no means an unnatural precaution.

At the request of Usher, I personally aided him in the arrangements for the temporary entombment. The body having been encoffined, we two alone bore it to its rest. The vault in which we placed it (and which had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation) was small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light; lying, at great depth, immediately beneath that portion of the building in which was my own sleeping apartment. It had been used, apparently, in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a donjon-keep, and in later days, as a place of deposit for powder, or some other highly combustible substance, as a portion of its floor, and the whole interior of a long archway through which we reached it, were carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, had been also similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an unusually sharp grating sound, as it moved upon its hinges.

Having deposited our mournful burden upon tressels within this region of horror, we partially turned aside the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of the tenant. A striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them. Our glances, however, rested not long upon the dead – for we could not regard her unawed. The disease which had thus entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death. We replaced and screwed down the lid, and having secured the door of iron, made our way, with toil, into the scarcely less gloomy apartments of the upper portion of the house.

And now, some days of bitter grief having elapsed, an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend. His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step. The pallor of his countenance had assumed, if possible, a more ghastly hue – but the luminousness of his eye had utterly gone out. The once occasional huskiness of his tone was heard no more; and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance. There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was laboring with some oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage. At times, again, I was obliged to resolve all into the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness; for I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound. It was no wonder that his condition terrified – that it infected me. I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influence of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions.

It was, especially, upon retiring to bed late in the night of the seventh or eighth day after the placing of the lady Madeline within the donjon, that I experienced the full power of such feelings. Sleep came not near my couch, while the hours waned and waned away. I struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over me. I endeavored to believe that much, if not all of what I felt, was due to the bewildering influence of the gloomy furniture of the room – of the dark and tattered draperies, which, tortured into motion by the breath of a rising tempest, swayed fitfully to and fro upon the walls, and rustled uneasily about the decorations of the bed. But my efforts were fruitless. An irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded my frame; and, at length, there sat upon my very heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm. Shaking this off with a gasp and a struggle, I uplifted myself upon the pillows, and peering earnestly within the intense darkness of the chamber, hearkened – I know not why, except that an instinctive spirit prompted me – to certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence. Overpowered by an intense sentiment of horror, unaccountable yet unendurable, I threw on my clothes with haste (for I felt that I should sleep no more during the night), and endeavored to arouse myself from the pitiable condition into which I had fallen, by pacing rapidly to and fro

through the apartment.

I had taken but few turns in this manner, when a light step on an adjoining staircase arrested my attention. I presently recognized it as that of Usher. In an instant afterward he rapped, with a gentle touch, at my door, and entered, bearing a lamp. His countenance was, as usual, cadaverously wan – but, moreover, there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes – and evidently restrained *hysteria* in his whole demeanor. His air appalled me – but anything was preferable to the solitude which I had so long endured, and I even welcomed his presence as a relief.

‘And you have not seen it?’ he said abruptly, after having stared about him for some moments in silence – ‘You have not then seen it? – but stay! you shall.’ Thus speaking, and having carefully shaded his lamp, he hurried to one of the casements, and threw it freely open to the storm.

The impetuous fury of the entering gust nearly lifted us from our feet. It was, indeed, a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night, and one wildly singular in its terror and its beauty. A whirlwind had apparently collected its force in our vicinity; for there were frequent and violent alterations in the direction of the wind; and the exceeding density of the clouds (which hung so low as to press upon the turrets of the house) did not prevent our perceiving the lifelike velocity with which they flew careering from all points against each other, without passing away into the distance. I say that even their exceeding density did not prevent our perceiving this – yet we had no glimpse of the moon or stars – nor was there any flashing forth of the lightning. But the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapor, as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion.

‘You must not – you shall not behold this!’ said I, shudderingly, to Usher, as I led him, with a gentle violence, from the window to a seat. ‘These appearances, which bewilder you, are merely electrical phenomena not uncommon – or it may be that they have their ghastly origin in the rank miasma of the tarn. Let us close this casement – the air is chilling and dangerous to your frame. Here is one of your favorite romances. I will read and you shall listen; – and so we will pass away this terrible night together.’

The antique volume which I had taken up was the ‘Mad Trist’ of Sir Launcelot Canning; but I had called it a favorite of Usher’s more in sad jest than in earnest; for, in truth, there is little in its uncouth and unimaginative prolixity which could have had interest for the lofty and spiritual ideality of my friend. It was, however, the only book immediately at hand; and I indulged a vague hope that the excitement which now agitated the hypochondriac, might find relief (for the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies) even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read. Could I have judged, indeed, by the wild, overstrained air of vivacity with which he hearkened, or apparently hearkened, to the words of the tale, I might well have congratulated myself upon the success of my design.

I had arrived at that well-known portion of the story where Ethelred, the hero of the Trist, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force. Here, it will be remembered, the words of the narrative run thus:

‘And Ethelred, who was by nature of a doughty heart, and who was now mighty withal, on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had drunken, waited no longer to hold parley with the hermit, who, in sooth, was of an obstinate and malicious turn; but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and, with blows, made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, that the noise of the dry and hollow-sounding wood alarummed and reverberated throughout the forest.’

At the termination of this sentence I started, and for a moment paused; for it appeared to me (although I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me) – it appeared to me that, from some very remote portion of the mansion, there came, indistinctly, to my ears what might have been, in its exact similarity of character, the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described. It was, beyond

doubt, the coincidence alone which had arrested my attention; for, amid the rattling of the sashes of the casements, and the ordinary commingled noises of the still increasing storm, the sound, in itself, had nothing, surely, which should have interested or disturbed me. I continued the story:

‘But the good champion Ethelred, now entering within the door, was sore enraged and amazed to perceive no signal of the malicious hermit; but, in the stead thereof, a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanor, and of a fiery tongue, which sat in guard before a palace of gold, with a floor of silver; and upon the wall there hung a shield of shining brass with this legend enwritten –

“Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin;  
Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win.”

‘And Ethelred uplifted his mace, and struck upon the head of the dragon, which fell before him, and gave up his pesty breath, with a shriek so horrid and harsh, and withal so piercing, that Ethelred had fain to close his ears with his hands against the dreadful noise of it, the like whereof was never before heard.’

Here again I paused abruptly, and now with a feeling of wild amazement – for there could be no doubt whatever that, in this instance, I did actually hear (although from what direction it proceeded I found it impossible to say) a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound – the exact counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon’s unnatural shriek as described by the romancer.

Oppressed, as I certainly was, upon the occurrence of this second and most extraordinary coincidence, by a thousand conflicting sensations, in which wonder and extreme terror were predominant, I still retained sufficient presence of mind to avoid exciting, by any observation, the sensitive nervousness of my companion. I was by no means certain that he had noticed the sounds in question; although, assuredly, a strange alteration had, during the last few minutes, taken place in his demeanor. From a position fronting my own, he had gradually brought round his chair, so as to sit with his face to the door of the chamber; and thus I could but partially perceive his features, although I saw that his lips trembled as if he were murmuring inaudibly. His head had dropped upon his breast – yet I knew that he was not asleep, from the wide and rigid opening of the eye as I caught a glance of it in profile. The motion of his body, too, was at variance with this idea – for he rocked from side to side with a gentle yet constant and uniform sway. Having rapidly taken notice of all this, I resumed the narrative of Sir Launcelot, which thus proceeded:

‘And now the champion, having escaped from the terrible fury of the dragon, bethinking himself of the brazen shield, and of the breaking up of the enchantment which was upon it, removed the carcass from out of the way before him, and approached valorously over the silver pavement of the castle to where the shield was upon the wall; which in sooth tarried not for his full coming, but fell down at his feet upon the silver floor, with a mighty great and terrible ringing sound.’

No sooner had these syllables passed my lips, than – as if a shield of brass had indeed, at the moment, fallen heavily upon a floor of silver – I became aware of a distinct, hollow, metallic and clangorous, yet apparently muffled reverberation. Completely unnerved, I leaped to my feet; but the measured rocking movement of Usher was undisturbed. I rushed to the chair in which he sat. His eyes were bent fixedly before him, and throughout his whole countenance there reigned a stony rigidity. But, as I placed my hand upon his shoulder, there came a strong shudder over his whole person; a sickly smile quivered about his lips; and I saw that he spoke in a low, hurried, and gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of my presence. Bending closely over him, I at length drank in the hideous import of his words.

‘Not hear it? – yes, I hear it, and *have* heard it. Long – long – long – many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it – yet I dared not – oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! – I dared not – I *dared* not speak! *We have put her living in the tomb!* Said I not that my senses were acute? I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them – many, many days ago – yet I dared not – I *dared not speak!* And now – to-night – Ethelred – ha! ha! – the breaking of the hermit’s door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangor of the

shield! – say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! Oh, whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? Have I not heard her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? Madman!’ – here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul – ‘*Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!*’

As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell – the huge antique pannels to which the speaker pointed threw slowly back, upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust – but then without those doors there did stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold – then, with a low, moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.

From that chamber, and from that mansion, I fled aghast. The storm was still abroad in all its wrath as I found myself crossing the old causeway. Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued; for the vast house and its shadows were alone behind me. The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon, which now shone vividly through that once barely discernible fissure, of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened – there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind – the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight – my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder – there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters – and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the ‘*House of Usher.*’

## **The Masque of the Red Death (Edgar Allan Poe)**

The ‘Red Death’ had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar<sup>1</sup> and its seal – the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince’s own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of ingress or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the ‘Red Death.’

It was toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

It was a voluptuous scene that masquerade. But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. There were seven – an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view

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<sup>1</sup> **Avatar** – incarnation (usually of a deity in a human or animal form)



of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was very different; as might have been expected from the duke's love of the bizarre. The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example in blue – and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange – the fifth with white – the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet – a deep blood color. Now in no one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum, amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay scattered to and fro or depended from the roof. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.

It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes, (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies,) there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.

But, in spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel. The tastes of the duke were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He disregarded the decora of mere fashion. His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be sure that he was not.

He had directed, in great part, the moveable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great fete; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm<sup>1</sup> – much of what has been since seen in 'Hernani'.<sup>2</sup> There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and

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<sup>1</sup> **phantasm** = phantom

<sup>2</sup> **'Hernani'** – a tragedy in five acts by Victor Hugo (1802–1885), a famous French novelist, dramatist and poet of the Romantic period

not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these – the dreams – writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away – they have endured but an instant – and a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods. But to the chamber which lies most westwardly of the seven, there are now none of the maskers who venture; for the night is waning away; and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-colored panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appalls; and to him whose foot falls upon the sable carpet, there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches their ears who indulge in the more remote gaieties of the other apartments.

But these other apartments were densely crowded, and in them beat feverishly the heart of life. And the revel went whirlingly on, until at length there commenced the sounding of midnight upon the clock. And then the music ceased, as I have told; and the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before. But now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the bell of the clock; and thus it happened, perhaps that more of thought crept, with more of time, into the meditations of the thoughtful among those who revelled. And thus too, it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had utterly sunk into silence, there were many individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before. And the rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise – then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust.

In an assembly of phantasms such as I have painted, it may well be supposed that no ordinary appearance could have excited such sensation. In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod<sup>3</sup>, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum. There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which cannot be touched without emotion. Even with the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters of which no jest can be made. The whole company, indeed, seemed now deeply to feel that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in blood – and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.

When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which with a slow and solemn movement, as if more fully to sustain its role, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow reddened with rage.

‘Who dares?’ he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him – ‘who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him and unmask him – that we may know whom we have to hang at sunrise, from the battlements!’

It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words. They rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly – for the prince was a bold and robust man, and the music had become hushed at the waving of his hand.

It was in the blue room where stood the prince, with a group of pale courtiers by his side. At first, as he spoke, there was a slight rushing movement of this group in the direction of the intruder,

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3 **out-Heroded Herod** – *idiom* to be worse than the worst person imaginable

who, at the moment was also near at hand, and now, with deliberate and stately step, made closer approach to the speaker. But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him; so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince's person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple – through the purple to the green – through the green to the orange – through this again to the white – and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him. It was then, however, that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized upon all. He bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his pursuer. There was a sharp cry – and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero. Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers at once threw themselves into the black apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpse-like mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form.

And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

## The Vampire (John Polidori)

It happened that in the midst of the dissipations attendant upon a London winter, there appeared at the various parties of the leaders of the ton a nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank. He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein. Apparently, the light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it, and throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness reigned. Those who felt this sensation of awe, could not explain whence it arose: some attributed it to the dead grey eye, which, fixing upon the object's face, did not seem to penetrate, and at one glance to pierce through to the inward workings of the heart; but fell upon the cheek with a leaden ray that weighed upon the skin it could not pass. His peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him, and those who had been accustomed to violent excitement, and now felt the weight of ennui, were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging their attention. In spite of the deadly hue of his face, which never gained a warmer tint, either from the blush of modesty, or from the strong emotion of passion, though its form and outline were beautiful, many of the female hunters after notoriety attempted to win his attentions, and gain, at least, some marks of what they might term affection: Lady Mercer, who had been the mockery of every monster shewn<sup>1</sup> in drawing-rooms since her marriage, threw herself in his way, and did all but put on the dress of a mountebank, to attract his notice: – though in vain: – when she stood before him, though his eyes were apparently fixed upon her's, still it seemed as if they were unperceived; – even her unappalled impudence was baffled, and she left, the field. But though the common adúlteress could not influence even the guidance of his eyes, it was not that the female sex was indifferent to him: yet such was the apparent caution with which he spoke to the virtuous wife and innocent daughter, that few knew he ever addressed himself to females. He had, however, the reputation of a winning tongue; and whether it was that it even overcame the dread of his singular character, or that they were moved by his apparent hatred of vice, he was as often among those females who form the boast of their sex

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<sup>1</sup> **shewn** = shown (seldom used)

from their domestic virtues, as among those who sully it by their vices.

About the same time, there came to London a young gentleman of the name of Aubrey: he was an orphan left with an only sister in the possession of great wealth, by parent who died while he was yet in childhood. Left also to himself by guardians, who thought it their duty merely to take care of his fortune, while they relinquished the more important charge of his mind to the care of mercenary subalterns, he cultivated more his imagination than his judgment. He had, hence, that high romantic feeling of honour and candour, which daily ruins so many milliners' apprentices. He believed all to sympathise with virtue, and thought that vice was thrown in by Providence merely for the picturesque effect of the scene, as we see in romances: he thought that the misery of a cottage merely consisted in the vesting of clothes, which were as warm, but which were better adapted to the painter's eye by their irregular folds and various coloured patches. He thought, in fine, that the dreams of poets were the realities of life. He was handsome, frank, and rich: for these reasons, upon his entering into the gay circles, many mothers surrounded him, striving which should describe with least truth their languishing or romping favourites: the daughters at the same time, by their brightening countenances when he approached, and by their sparkling eyes, when he opened his lips, soon led him into false notions of his talents and his merit. Attached as he was to the romance of his solitary hours, he was startled at finding, that, except in the tallow and wax candles that flickered, not from the presence of a ghost, but from want of snuffing, there was no foundation in real life for any of that congeries of pleasing pictures and descriptions contained in those volumes, from which he had formed his study. Finding, however, some compensation in his gratified vanity, he was about to relinquish his dreams, when the extraordinary being we have above described, crossed him in his career.

He watched him; and the very impossibility of forming an idea of the character of a man entirely absorbed in himself, who gave few other signs of his observation of external objects, than the tacit assent to their existence, implied by the avoidance of their contact: allowing his imagination to picture everything that flattered its propensity to extravagant ideas, he soon formed this object into the hero of a romance, and determined to observe the offspring of his fancy, rather than the person before him. He became acquainted with him, paid him attentions, and so far advanced upon his notice, that his presence was always recognised. He gradually learnt that Lord Ruthven's affairs were embarrassed, and soon found, from the notes of preparation in – Street, that he was about to travel. Desirous of gaining some information respecting this singular character, who, till now, had only whetted his curiosity, he hinted to his guardians, that it was time for him to perform the tour, which for many generations has been thought necessary to enable the young to take some rapid steps in the career of vice towards putting themselves upon an equality with the aged, and not allowing them to appear as if fallen from the skies, whenever scandalous intrigues are mentioned as the subjects of pleasantry or of praise, according to the degree of skill shewn in carrying them on. They consented: and Aubrey immediately mentioning his intentions to Lord Ruthven, was surprised to receive from him a proposal to join him. Flattered by such a mark of esteem from him, who, apparently, had nothing in common with other men, he gladly accepted it, and in a few days they hail passed the circling waters.

Hitherto, Aubrey had had no opportunity of studying Lord Ruthven's character, and now he found, that, though many more of his actions were exposed to his view, the results offered different conclusions from (lie apparent motives to his conduct. His companion was profuse in his liberality; – the idle, the vagabond, and the beggar, received from his hand more than enough to relieve their immediate wants. But Aubrey could not avoid remarking, that it was not upon the virtuous, reduced to indigence by the misfortunes attendant even upon virtue, that he bestowed his alms; – these were sent from the door with hardly suppressed sneers; but when the profligate came to ask something, not to relieve his wants, but to allow him to wallow in his lust, or to sink him still deeper in his iniquity, he was sent away with rich charity. This was, however, attributed by him to the greater importunity of the vicious, which generally prevails over the retiring bashfulness of the virtuous indigent. There was one circumstance about the charity of his Lordship, which was still more impressed upon his mind: all those upon whom it was bestowed, inevitably found that there was a

curse upon it, for they were all either led to the scaffold, or sunk to the lowest and the most abject misery. At Brussels and other towns through which they passed, Aubrey was surprized at the apparent eagerness with which his companion sought for the centres of all fashionable vice; there he entered into all the spirit of the faro table: he betted, and always gambled with success, except where the known sharper was his antagonist, and then he lost even more than he gained; but it was always with the same unchanging face, with which he generally watched the society around: it was not, however, so when he encountered the rash youthful novice, or the luckless father of a numerous family; then his very wish seemed fortune's law – this apparent abstractedness of mind was laid aside, and his eyes sparkled with more fire than that of the cat whilst dallying with lire half-dead mouse. In every town, he left the formerly affluent youth, torn from the circle he adorned, cursing, in the solitude of a dungeon, the fate that had drawn him within the reach of this fiend; whilst many a father sat frantic, amidst the speaking looks of mute hungry children, without a single farthing of his late immense wealth, wherewith to buy even sufficient to satisfy their present craving. Yet he took no money from the gambling table; but immediately lost, to the ruiner of many, the last gilder he had just snatched from the convulsive grasp of the innocent: this might but be the result of a certain degree of knowledge, which was not, however, capable of combating the cunning of the more experienced. Aubrey often wished to represent this to his friend, and beg him to resign that charity and pleasure which proved the ruin of all, and did not tend to his own profit; – but he delayed it – for each day he hoped his friend would give him some opportunity of speaking frankly and openly to him; however, this never occurred. Lord Ruthven in his carriage, and amidst the various wild and rich scenes of nature, was always the same: his eye spoke less than his lip; and though Aubrey was near the object of his curiosity, he obtained no greater gratification from it than the constant excitement of vainly wishing to break that mystery, which to his exalted imagination began to assume the appearance of something supernatural.

They soon arrived at Rome, and Aubrey for a time lost sight of his companion; he left him in daily attendance upon the morning circle of an Italian countess, whilst he went in search of the memorials of another almost deserted city. Whilst he was thus engaged, letters arrived from England, which he opened with eager impatience; the first was from his sister, breathing nothing but affection; the others were from his guardians, the latter astonished him; if it had before entered into his imagination that there was an evil power resident in his companion, these seemed to give him sufficient reason for the belief. His guardians insisted upon his immediately leaving his friend, and urged, that his character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society. It had been discovered, that his contempt for the adultress had not originated in hatred of her character; but that he had required, to enhance his gratification, that his victim, the partner of his guilt, should be hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation: in fine, that all those females whom he had sought, apparently on account of their virtue, had, since his departure, thrown even the mask aside, and had not scrupled to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze.

Aubrey determined upon leaving one, whose character had not yet shown a single bright point on which to rest the eye. He resolved to invent some plausible pretext for abandoning him altogether, purposing, in the mean while, to watch him more closely, and to let no slight circumstances pass by unnoticed. He entered into the same circle, and soon perceived, that his Lordship was endeavouring to work upon the inexperience of the daughter of the lady whose house he chiefly frequented. In Italy, it is seldom that an unmarried female is met with in society; he was therefore obliged to carry on his plans in secret; but Aubrey's eye followed him in all his windings, and soon discovered that an assignation had been appointed, which would most likely end in the ruin of an innocent, though thoughtless girl. Losing no time, he entered the apartment of Lord Ruthven, and abruptly asked him his intentions with respect to the lady, informing him at the same time that he was aware of his being about to meet her that very night. Lord Ruthven answered, that his intentions were such as he supposed all would have upon such an occasion; and upon being pressed whether he intended to marry her, merely laughed. Aubrey retired; and, immediately

writing a note, to say, that from that moment he must decline accompanying his Lordship in the remainder of their proposed tour, he ordered his servant to seek other apartments, and calling upon the mother of the lady, informed her of all he knew, not only with regard to her daughter, but also concerning the character of his Lordship. The assignation was prevented. Lord Ruthven next day merely sent his servant to notify his complete assent to a separation; but did not hint any suspicion of his plans having been foiled by Aubrey's interposition.

Having left Rome, Aubrey directed his steps towards Greece, and crossing the Peninsula, soon found himself at Athens. He then fixed his residence in the house of a Greek; and soon occupied himself in tracing the faded records of ancient glory upon monuments that apparently, ashamed of chronicling the deeds of freemen only before slaves, had hidden themselves beneath the sheltering soil or many coloured lichen. Under the same roof as himself, existed a being, so beautiful and delicate, that she might have formed the model for a painter, wishing; to portray oil canvass the promised hope of the faithful in Mahomet's<sup>1</sup> paradise, save that her eyes spoke too much mind for anyone to think she could belong to those who had no souls. As she danced upon the plain, or tripped along the mountain's side, one would have thought the gazelle a poor type of her beauties; for who would have exchanged her eye, apparently the eye of animated nature, for that sleepy luxurious look of the animal suited but to the taste of an epicure. The light step of Ianthe often accompanied Aubrey in his search after antiquities, and often would the unconscious girl, engaged in the pursuit of a Kashmere<sup>2</sup> butterfly, show the whole beauty of her form, floating as it were upon the wind, to the eager gaze of him, who forgot the letters he had just decyphered upon an almost effaced tablet, in the contemplation of her sylph-like<sup>3</sup> figure. Often would her tresses falling, as she flitted around, exhibit in the sun's ray such delicately brilliant and swiftly fading hues, its might well excuse the forgetfulness of the antiquary, who let escape from his mind the very object he had before thought of vital importance to the proper interpretation of a passage in Pausanias<sup>4</sup>. But why attempt to describe charms which all feel, but none can appreciate? – It was innocence, youth, and beauty, unaffected by crowded drawing-rooms and stifling – balls. Whilst he drew those remains of which he wished to preserve a memorial for his future hours, she would stand by, and watch the magic effects of his pencil, in tracing the scenes of her native place; she would then describe to him the circling dance upon the open plain, would paint, to him in all the glowing colours of youthful memory, the marriage pomp she remembered viewing in her infancy; and then, turning to subjects that had evidently made a greater impression upon her mind, would tell him all the supernatural tales of her nurse. Her earnestness and apparent belief of what she narrated, excited the interest even of Aubrey; and often as she told him the tale of the living vampyre, who had passed years amidst his friends, and dearest ties, forced every year, by feeding upon the life of a lovely female to prolong his existence for the ensuing months, his blood would run cold, whilst he attempted to laugh her out of such idle and horrible fantasies; but Ianthe cited to him the names of old men, who had at last detected one living among themselves, after several of their near relatives and children had been found marked with the stamp of the fiend's appetite, and when she found him so incredulous, she begged of him to believe her, for it had been, remarked, that those who had dared to question their existence, always had some proof given, which obliged them, with grief and heartbreaking, to confess it was true. She detailed to him the traditional appearance of these monsters, and his horror was increased, by hearing a pretty accurate description of Lord Ruthven; he, however, still persisted in persuading her, that there could be no truth in her fears, though at the same time he wondered at the many coincidences which had all tended to excite a belief in the supernatural power of Lord Ruthven.

Aubrey began to attach himself more and more to Ianthe; her innocence, so contrasted with all the affected virtues of the women among whom he had sought for his vision of romance, won his heart; and while he ridiculed the idea of a young man of English habits, marrying an uneducated

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1 **Mahomet** – Muhammad (530–632), Arab prophet of God, founder of the religion of Islam

2 **Kashmere** – Kashmir, a region in northwestern India

3 **sylph-like** – sylph, in folklore, is an imaginary mortal but soulless being that inhabits the air

4 **Pausanias** (2nd century) – a famous Greek traveller, geographer and writer of the past

Greek girl, still he found himself more and more attached to the almost fairy form before him. He would tear himself at times from her, and, forming a plan for some antiquarian research, he would depart, determined not to return until his object was attained; but he always found it impossible to fix his attention upon the ruins around him, whilst in his mind he retained an image that seemed alone the rightful possessor of his thoughts. Ianthe was unconscious of his love, and was ever the same frank infantile being he had known. She always seemed to part from him with reluctance; but it was because she had no longer any one with whom she could visit her favourite haunts, whilst her guardian was occupied in sketching or uncovering some fragment which had yet escaped the destructive hand of time. She had appealed to her parents on the subject of Vampires, and they both, with several present, affirmed their existence, pale with horror at the very name. Soon after, Aubrey determined to proceed upon one of his excursions, which was to detain him for a few hours; when they heard the name of the place, they all at once begged of him not to return at night, as he must necessarily pass through a wood, where no Greek would ever remain, after the day had closed, upon any consideration. They described it as the resort of the vampires in their nocturnal orgies, and denounced the most heavy evils as impending upon him who dared to cross their path. Aubrey made light of their representations, and tried to laugh them out of the idea; but when he saw them shudder at his daring thus to mock a superior, infernal power, the very name of which apparently made their blood freeze, he was silent.

Next morning Aubrey set off upon his excursion unattended; he was surprised to observe the melancholy face of his host, and was concerned to find that his words, mocking the belief of those horrible fiends, had inspired them with such terror. When he was about to depart, Ianthe came to the side of his horse, and earnestly begged of him to return, one night allowed the power of these beings to be put in action; – he promised. He was, however, so occupied in his research, that he did not perceive that day-light would soon end, and that in the horizon there was one of those specks which, in the warmer climates, so rapidly gather into a tremendous mass, and pour all their rage upon the devoted country. – He at last, however, mounted his horse, determined to make up by speed for his delay: but it was too late. Twilight, in these southern climates, is almost unknown; immediately the sun sets, night begins: and ere he had advanced far, the power of the storm was above – its echoing thunders had scarcely an interval of rest – its thick heavy rain forced its way through the canopied foliage, whilst the blue forked lightning seemed to fall and radiate at his very feet. Suddenly his horse took fright, and he was carried with dreadful rapidity through the entangled forest. The animal at last, through fatigue, stopped, and he found, by the glare of lightning, that he was in the neighbourhood of a hovel that hardly lifted itself up from the masses of dead leaves and brushwood which surrounded it. Dismounting, he approached, hoping to find someone to guide him to the town, or at least trusting to obtain shelter from the pelting of the storm. As he approached, the thunders, for a moment silent, allowed him to hear the dreadful shrieks of a woman mingling with the stifled, exultant mockery of a laugh, continued in one almost unbroken sound; – he was startled: but, roused by the thunder which again rolled over his head, he, with a sudden effort, forced open the door of the hut. He found himself in utter darkness: the sound, however, guided him. He was apparently unperceived; for, though he called, still the sounds continued, and no notice was taken of him. He found himself in contact with someone, whom he immediately seized; when a voice cried, “Again baffled!” to which a loud laugh succeeded; and he felt himself grappled by one whose strength seemed superhuman: determined to sell his life as dearly as he could, he struggled; but it was in vain: he was lifted from his feet and hurled with enormous force against the ground: – his enemy threw himself upon him, and kneeling upon his breast, had placed his hands upon his throat – when the glare of many torches penetrating through the hole that gave light in the day, disturbed him; – he instantly rose, and, leaving his prey, rushed through the door, and in a moment the crashing of the brandies, as he broke through the wood, was no longer heard. The storm was now still; and Aubrey, incapable of moving, was soon heard by those without. They entered; the light of their torches fell upon the mud walls, and the thatch loaded on every individual straw with heavy flakes of soot. At the desire of Aubrey they searched for her who had attracted him by her cries; he was again left in darkness; but what was his horror, when the light of the torches once more burst;

upon him, to perceive the airy form of his fair conductress brought in a lifeless corpse. He shut his eyes, hoping that it was but a vision arising from his disturbed imagination; but he again saw the same form, when he unclosed them, stretched by his side. There was no colour upon her cheek, not even upon her lip; yet there was a stillness about her face that seemed almost as attaching as the life that once dwelt there: – upon her neck and breast was blood, and upon her throat were the marks of teeth having opened the vein: – to this the men pointed, crying, simultaneously struck with horror, ‘A Vampire! a Vampire!’ A litter was quickly formed, and Aubrey was laid by the side of her who had lately been to him the object of so many bright and fairy visions, now fallen with the flower of life that had died within her. He knew not what his thoughts were – his mind was benumbed and seemed to shun reflection, and take refuge in vacancy – he held almost unconsciously in his hand a naked dagger of a particular construction, which had been found in the hut. They were soon met by different parties who had been engaged in the search of her whom a mother had missed. Their lamentable cries, as they approached the city, forewarned the parents of some dreadful catastrophe. – To describe their grief would be impossible; but when they ascertained the cause of their child’s death, they looked at Aubrey, and pointed to the corpse. They were inconsolable; both died broken-hearted.

Aubrey being put to bed was seized with a most violent fever, and was often delirious; in these intervals he would call upon Lord Ruthven and upon Ianthe – by some unaccountable combination he seemed to beg of his former companion to spare the being he loved. At other times he would imprecate maledictions upon his head, and curse him as her destroyer. Lord Ruthven, chanced at this time to arrive at Athens, and, from whatever motive, upon hearing of the state of Aubrey, immediately placed himself in the same house, and became his constant attendant. When the latter recovered from his delirium, he was horrified and startled at the sight of him whose image he had now combined with that of a Vampire; but Lord Ruthven, by his kind words, implying almost repentance for the fault that had caused their separation, and still more by the attention, anxiety, and care which he showed, soon reconciled him to his presence. His lordship seemed quite changed; he no longer appeared that apathetic being who had so astonished Aubrey; but as soon as his convalescence began to be rapid, he again gradually retired into the same state of mind, and Aubrey perceived no difference from the former man, except that at times he was surprised to meet his gaze fixed intently upon him, with a smile of malicious exultation playing upon his lips: he knew not why, but this smile haunted him. During the last stage of the invalid’s recovery, Lord Ruthven was apparently engaged in watching the tideless waves raised by the cooling breeze, or in marking the progress of those orbs, circling, like our world, the moveless sun; – indeed, he appeared to wish to avoid the eyes of all.

Aubrey’s mind, by this shock, was much weakened, and that elasticity of spirit which had once so distinguished him now seemed to have fled forever. He was now as much a lover of solitude and silence as Lord Ruthven; but much as he wished for solitude, his mind could not find it in the neighbourhood of Athens; if he sought it amidst the ruins he had formerly frequented, Ianthe’s form stood by his side – if he sought it in the woods, her light step would appear wandering amidst the underwood, in quest of the modest violet; then suddenly turning round, would show, to his wild imagination, her pale face and wounded throat, with a meek smile upon her lips. He determined to fly scenes, every feature of which created such bitter associations in his mind. He proposed to Lord Ruthven, to whom he held himself bound by the tender care he had taken of him during his illness, that they should visit those parts of Greece neither had yet seen. They travelled in every direction, and sought every spot to which a recollection could be attached: but though they thus hastened from place to place, yet they seemed not to heed what they gazed upon. They heard much of robbers, but they gradually began to slight these reports, which they imagined were only the invention of individuals, whose interest it was to excite the generosity of those whom they defended from pretended dangers. In consequence of thus neglecting the advice of the inhabitants, on one occasion they travelled with only a few guards, more to serve as guides than as a defence. Upon entering, however, a narrow defile, at the bottom of which was the bed of a torrent, with large masses of rock brought down from the neighbouring precipices, they had reason to repent their



negligence; for scarcely were the whole of the party engaged in the narrow pass, when they were startled by the whistling of bullets close to their heads, and by the echoed report of several guns. In an instant their guards had left them, and, placing themselves behind rocks, had begun to fire in the direction whence the report came. Lord Ruthven and Aubrey, imitating their example, retired for a moment behind the sheltering turn of the defile: but ashamed of being thus detained by a foe, who with insulting shouts bade them advance, and being exposed to unresisting slaughter, if any of the robbers should climb above and take them in the rear, they determined at once to rush forward in search of the enemy. Hardly had they lost the shelter of the rock, when Lord Ruthven received a shot in the shoulder, which brought him to the ground. Aubrey hastened to his assistance; and, no longer heeding the contest or his own peril, was soon surprised by seeing the robbers' faces around him – his guards having, upon Lord Ruthven's being wounded, immediately thrown up their arms and surrendered.

By promises of great reward, Aubrey soon induced them to convey his wounded friend to a neighbouring cabin; and having agreed upon a ransom, he was no more disturbed by their presence – they being content merely to guard the entrance till their comrade should return with the promised sum, for which he had an order. Lord Ruthven's strength rapidly decreased; in two days mortification ensued, and death seemed advancing with hasty steps. His conduct and appearance had not changed; he seemed as unconscious of pain as he had been of the objects about him: but towards the close of the last evening, his mind became apparently uneasy, and his eye often fixed upon Aubrey, who was induced to offer his assistance with more than usual earnestness – 'Assist me! you may save me – you may do more than that – I mean not my life, I heed the death of my existence as little as that of the passing day; but you may save my honour, your friend's honour.' – 'How? tell me how? I would do anything,' replied Aubrey. – 'I need but little – my life ebbs apace – I cannot explain the whole – but if you would conceal all you know of me, my honour were free from stain in the world's mouth – and if my death were unknown for some time in England – I – I – but life.' – 'It shall not be known.' – 'Swear!' cried the dying man, raising himself with exultant violence, 'Swear by all your soul reveres, by all your nature fears, swear that, for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see.' – His eyes seemed bursting from their sockets: 'I swear!' said Aubrey; he sunk laughing upon his pillow, and breathed no more.

Aubrey retired to rest, but did not sleep; the many circumstances attending his acquaintance with this man rose upon his mind, and he knew not why; when he remembered his oath a cold shivering came over him, as if from the presentiment of something horrible awaiting him. Rising early in the morning, he was about to enter the hovel in which he had left the corpse, when a robber met him, and informed him that it was no longer there, having been conveyed by himself and comrades, upon his retiring, to the pinnacle of a neighbouring mount, according to a promise they had given his lordship, that it should be exposed to the first cold ray of the moon that rose after his death. Aubrey astonished, and taking several of the men, determined to go and bury it upon the spot where it lay. But, when he had mounted to the summit he found no trace of either the corpse or the clothes, though the robbers swore they pointed out the identical rock: on which they had laid the body. For a time his mind was bewildered in conjectures, but he at last returned, convinced that they had buried the corpse for the sake of the clothes.

Weary of a country in which he had met with such terrible misfortunes, and in which all apparently conspired to heighten that superstitious melancholy that had seized upon his mind, he resolved to leave it, and soon arrived at Smyrna<sup>1</sup>. While waiting for a vessel to convey him to Otranto<sup>2</sup>, or to Naples, he occupied himself in arranging those effects he had with him belonging to Lord Ruthven. Amongst other things there was a case containing several weapons of offence, more or less adapted to ensure the death of the victim. There were several daggers and ataghans<sup>3</sup>. Whilst turning them over, and examining their curious forms, what was his surprise at finding a sheath

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<sup>1</sup> **Smyrna** – a large city and port in what is now Turkey

<sup>2</sup> **Otranto** – a town on the Mediterranean Sea in southeastern Italy

<sup>3</sup> **ataghans** – yataghans, sabres with a long curved blades

apparently ornamented in the same style as the dagger discovered in the fatal hut – he shuddered – hastening to gain further proof, he found the weapon, and his horror may be imagined when he discovered that it fitted, though peculiarly shaped, the sheath he held in his hand. His eyes seemed to need no further certainty – they seemed gazing to be bound to the dagger; yet still he wished to disbelieve; but the particular form, the same varying tints upon the haft and sheath were alike in splendour on both, and left no room for doubt; there were also drops of blood on each.

He left Smyrna, and on his way home, at Rome, his first inquiries were concerning the lady he had attempted to snatch from Lord Ruthven's seductive arts. Her parents were in distress, their fortune ruined, and she had not been heard of since the departure of his lordship. Aubrey's mind became almost broken under so many repeated horrors; he was afraid that this lady had fallen a victim to the destroyer of Ianthe. He became morose and silent; and his only occupation consisted in urging the speed of the postilions, as if he were going to save the life of someone he held dear. He arrived at Calais<sup>1</sup>; a breeze, which seemed obedient to his will, soon wafted him to the English shores; and he hastened to the mansion of his fathers, and there, for a moment, appeared to lose, in the embraces and caresses of his sister, all memory of the past. If she before, by her infantine caresses, had gained his affection, now that the woman began to appear, she was still more attaching as a companion.

Miss Aubrey had not that winning grace which gains the gaze and applause of the drawing-room assemblies. There was none of that light brilliancy which only exists in the heated atmosphere of a crowded apartment. Her blue eye was never lit up by the levity of the mind beneath. There was a melancholy charm about it which did not seem to arise from misfortune, but from some feeling within, that appeared to indicate a soul conscious of a brighter realm. Her step was not that light footing, which strays where'er a butterfly or a colour may attract – it was sedate and pensive. When alone, her face was never brightened by the smile of joy; but when her brother breathed to her his affection, and would in her presence forget those griefs she knew destroyed his rest, who would have exchanged her smile for that of the voluptuary? It seemed as if those eyes, – that face were then playing in the light of their own native sphere. She was yet only eighteen, and had not been presented to the world, it having been thought by her guardians more fit that her presentation should be delayed until her brother's return from the continent, when he might be her protector. It was now, therefore, resolved that the next drawing-room, which was fast approaching, should be the epoch of her entry into the "busy scene." Aubrey would rather have remained in the mansion of his fathers, and fed upon the melancholy which overpowered him. He could not feed interest about the frivolities of fashionable strangers, when his mind had been so torn by the events he had witnessed; but he determined to sacrifice his own comfort to the protection of his sister. They soon arrived in town, and prepared for the next day, which had been announced as a drawing-room.

The crowd was excessive – a drawing-room had not been held for a long time, and all who were anxious to bask in the smile of royalty, hastened thither. Aubrey was there with his sister. While he was standing in a corner by himself, heedless of all around him, engaged in the remembrance that the first time he had seen Lord Ruthven was in that very place – he felt himself suddenly seized by the arm, and a voice he recognized too well, sounded in his ear – 'Remember your oath.' He had hardly courage to turn, fearful of seeing a spectre that would blast him, when he perceived, at a little distance, the same figure which had attracted his notice on this spot upon his first entry into society. He gazed till his limbs almost refusing to bear their weight, he was obliged to take the arm of a friend, and forcing a passage through the crowd, he threw himself into his carriage, and was driven home. He paced the room with hurried steps, and fixed his hands upon his head, as if he were afraid his thoughts were bursting from his brain. Lord Ruthven again before him – circumstances started up in dreadful array – the dagger – his oath. – He roused himself, he could not believe it possible – the dead rise again! – He thought his imagination had conjured up the image, his mind was resting upon. It was impossible that it could be real – he determined, therefore, to go again into society; for though he attempted to ask concerning Lord Ruthven, the name hung

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<sup>1</sup> **Calais** – a city and seaport on the Strait of Dover in northern France

upon his lips, and he could not succeed in gaining information. He went a few nights after with his sister to the assembly of a near relation. Leaving her under the protection of a matron, he retired into a recess, and there gave himself up to his own devouring thoughts. Perceiving, at last, that many were leaving, he roused himself, and entering another room, found his sister surrounded by several, apparently in earnest conversation; he attempted to pass and get near her, when one, whom he requested to move, turned round, and revealed to him those features he most abhorred. He sprang forward, seized his sister's arm, and, with hurried step, forced her towards the street: at the door he found himself impeded by the crowd of servants who were waiting for their lords; and while he was engaged in passing them, he again heard that voice whisper close to him – 'Remember your oath!' – He did not dare to turn, but, hurrying his sister, soon reached home.

Aubrey became almost distracted. If before his mind had been absorbed by one subject, how much more completely was it engrossed, now that the certainty of the monster's living again pressed upon his thoughts. His sister's attentions were now unheeded, and it was in vain that she intreated him to explain to her what had caused his abrupt conduct. He only uttered a few words, and those terrified her. The more he thought, the more he was bewildered. His oath startled him; – was he then to allow this monster to roam, bearing ruin upon his breath, amidst all he held dear, and not avert its progress? His very sister might have been touched by him. But even if he were to break his oath, and disclose his suspicions, who would believe him? He thought of employing his own hand to free the world from such a wretch; but death, he remembered, had been already mocked. For days he remained in this state; shut up in his room, he saw no one, and eat only when his sister came, who, with eyes streaming with tears, besought him, for her sake, to support nature. At last, no longer capable of bearing stillness and solitude, he left his house, roamed from street to street, anxious to fly that image which haunted him. His dress became neglected, and he wandered, as often exposed to the noon-day sun as to the midnight damps. He was no longer to be recognized; at first he returned with the evening to the house; but at last he laid him down to rest wherever fatigue overtook him. His sister, anxious for his safety, employed people to follow him; but they were soon distanced by him who fled from a pursuer swifter than any – from thought. His conduct, however, suddenly changed. Struck with the idea that he left by his absence the whole of his friends, with a fiend amongst them, of whose presence they were unconscious, he determined to enter again into society, and watch him closely, anxious to forewarn, in spite of his oath, all whom Lord Ruthven approached with intimacy. But when he entered into a room, his haggard and suspicious looks were so striking, his inward shudderings so visible, that his sister was at last obliged to beg of him to abstain from seeking, for her sake, a society which affected him so strongly. When, however, remonstrance proved unavailing, the guardians thought proper to interpose, and, fearing that his mind was becoming alienated, they thought it high time to resume again that trust which had been before imposed upon them by Aubrey's parents.

Desirous of saving him from the injuries and sufferings he had daily encountered in his wanderings, and of preventing him from exposing to the general eye those marks of what they considered folly, they engaged a physician to reside in the house, and take constant care of him. He hardly appeared to notice it, so completely was his mind absorbed by one terrible subject. His incoherence became at last so great, that he was confined to his chamber. There he would often lie for days, incapable of being roused. He had become emaciated, his eyes had attained a glassy lustre; – the only sign of affection and recollection remaining displayed itself upon the entry of his sister; then he would sometimes start, and, seizing her hands, with looks that severely afflicted her, he would desire her not to touch him. 'Oh, do not touch him – if your love for me is aught, do not go near him!' When, however, she inquired to whom he referred, his only answer was, 'True! true!' and again he sank into a state, whence not even she could rouse him. This lasted many months: gradually, however, as the year was passing, his incoherences became less frequent, and his mind threw off a portion of its gloom, whilst his guardians observed, that several times in the day he would count upon his fingers a definite number, and then smile.

The time had nearly elapsed, when, upon the last day of the year, one of his guardians entering his room, began to converse with his physician upon the melancholy circumstance of

Aubrey's being in so awful a situation, when his sister was going next day to be married. Instantly Aubrey's attention was attracted; he asked anxiously to whom. Glad of this mark of returning intellect, of which they feared he had been deprived, they mentioned the name of the Earl of Marsden. Thinking this was a young Earl whom he had met with in society, Aubrey seemed pleased, and astonished them still more by his expressing his intention to be present at the nuptials, and desiring to see his sister. They answered not, but in a few minutes his sister was with him. He was apparently again capable of being affected by the influence of her lovely smile; for he pressed her to his breast, and kissed her cheek, wet with tears, flowing at the thought of her brother's being once more alive to the feelings of affection. He began to speak with all his wonted warmth, and to congratulate her upon her marriage with a person so distinguished for rank and every accomplishment; when he suddenly perceived a locket upon her breast; opening it, what was his surprise at beholding the features of the monster who had so long influenced his life. He seized the portrait in a paroxysm of rage, and trampled it under foot. Upon her asking him why he thus destroyed the resemblance of her future husband, he looked as if he did not understand her – then seizing her hands, and gazing on her with a frantic expression of countenance, he bade her swear that she would never wed this monster, for he – But he could not advance – it seemed as if that voice again bade him remember his oath – he turned suddenly round, thinking Lord Ruthven was near him but saw no one. In the meantime the guardians and physician, who had heard the whole, and thought this was but a return of his disorder, entered, and forcing him from Miss Aubrey, desired her to leave him. He fell upon his knees to them, he implored, he begged of them to delay but for one day. They, attributing this to the insanity they imagined had taken possession of his mind, endeavoured to pacify him, and retired.

Lord Ruthven had called the morning after the drawing-room, and had been refused with everyone else. When he heard of Aubrey's ill health, he readily understood himself to be the cause of it; but when he learned that he was deemed insane, his exultation and pleasure could hardly be concealed from those among whom he had gained this information. He hastened to the house of his former companion, and, by constant attendance, and the pretence of great affection for the brother and interest in his fate, he gradually won the care of Miss Aubrey. Who could resist his power? His tongue had dangers and toils to recount – could speak of himself as of an individual having no sympathy with any being on the crowded earth, save with her to whom he addressed himself; – could tell how, since he knew her, his existence, had begun to seem worthy of preservation, if it were merely that he might listen to her soothing accents; – in fine, he knew so well how to use the serpent's art, or such was the will of fate, that he gained her affections. The title of the elder branch falling at length to him, he obtained an important embassy, which served as an excuse for hastening the marriage, (in spite of her brother's deranged state,) which was to take place the very day before his departure for the continent.

Aubrey, when he was left by the physician and his guardians, attempted to bribe the servants, but in vain. He asked for pen and paper; it was given him; he wrote a letter to his sister, conjuring her, as she valued her own happiness, her own honour, and the honour of those now in the grave, who once held her in their arms as their hope and the hope of their house, to delay but for a few hours that marriage, on which he denounced the most heavy curses. The servants promised they would deliver it; but giving it to the physician, he thought it better not to harass any more the mind of Miss Aubrey by, what he considered, the ravings of a maniac. Night passed on without rest to the busy inmates of the house; and Aubrey heard, with a horror that may more easily be conceived than described, the notes of busy preparation. Morning came, and the sound of carriages broke upon his ear. Aubrey grew almost frantic. The curiosity of the servants at last overcame their vigilance, they gradually stole away, leaving him in the custody of an helpless old woman. He seized the opportunity, with one bound was out of the room, and in a moment found himself in the apartment where all were nearly assembled. Lord Ruthven was the first to perceive him: he immediately approached, and, taking his arm by force, hurried him from the room, speechless with rage. When on the staircase, Lord Ruthven whispered in his ear – 'Remember your oath, and know, if not my bride today, your sister is dishonoured. Women are frail!' So saying, he pushed him towards his

attendants, who, roused by the old woman, had come in search of him. Aubrey could no longer support himself; his rage not finding vent, had broken a blood-vessel, and he was conveyed to bed. This was not mentioned to his sister, who was not present when he entered, as the physician was afraid of agitating her. The marriage was solemnized, and the bride and bridegroom left London.

Aubrey's weakness increased; the effusion of blood produced symptoms of the near approach of death. He desired his sister's guardians might be called, and when the midnight hour had struck, he related composedly what the reader has perused – he died immediately after.

The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPIRE!

## **The Open Window (Saki)**

'My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel,' said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; 'in the meantime you must try and put up with me.'

Framton Nuttel endeavoured to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

'I know how it will be,' his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; 'you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice.'

Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the nice division.

'Do you know many of the people round here?' asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

'Hardly a soul,' said Framton. 'My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here.'

He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret.

'Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?' pursued the self-possessed young lady.

'Only her name and address,' admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An undefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation.

'Her great tragedy happened just three years ago,' said the child; 'that would be since your sister's time.'

'Her tragedy?' asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

'You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon,' said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

'It is quite warm for the time of the year,' said Framton; 'but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?'

'Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favourite snipe-shooting ground they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it.' Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human. 'Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back some day, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing "Bertie, why do you bound?" as he always did to tease her, because she said it got on her nerves. Do you know,

sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window—'

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance.

'I hope Vera has been amusing you?' she said.

'She has been very interesting,' said Framton.

'I hope you don't mind the open window,' said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; 'my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes to-day, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you men-folk, isn't it?'

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic; he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

'The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise,' announced Framton, who laboured under the tolerably widespread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. 'On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement,' he continued.

'No?' said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention – but not to what Framton was saying.

'Here they are at last!' she cried. 'Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!'

Framton shivered slightly and turned towards the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window; they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: 'I said, Bertie, why do you bound?'

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall-door, the gravel-drive, and the front gate were dimly-noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid an imminent collision.

'Here we are, my dear,' said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window; 'fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?'

'A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel,' said Mrs. Sappleton; 'could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost.'

'I expect it was the spaniel,' said the niece calmly; 'he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges<sup>1</sup> by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve.'

Romance at short notice was her speciality.

## **Reginald on Christmas Presents (Saki)**

I wish it to be distinctly understood (said Reginald) that I don't want a 'George, Prince of Wales' Prayer-book as a Christmas present. The fact cannot be too widely known.

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<sup>1</sup> the Ganges – a great river in India, flowing from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, the holy river in Hinduism

There ought (he continued) to be technical education classes on the science of present-giving. No one seems to have the faintest notion of what anyone else wants, and the prevalent ideas on the subject are not creditable to a civilised community.

There is, for instance, the female relative in the country who ‘knows a tie is always useful,’ and sends you some spotted horror that you could only wear in secret or in Tottenham Court Road<sup>1</sup>. It *might* have been useful had she kept it to tie up currant bushes with, when it would have served the double purpose of supporting the branches and frightening away the birds – for it is an admitted fact that the ordinary tomtit of commerce has a sounder æsthetic taste than the average female relative in the country.

Then there are aunts. They are always a difficult class to deal with in the matter of presents. The trouble is that one never catches them really young enough. By the time one has educated them to an appreciation of the fact that one does not wear red woollen mittens in the West End, they die, or quarrel with the family, or do something equally inconsiderate. That is why the supply of trained aunts is always so precarious.

There is my Aunt Agatha, *par exemple*, who sent me a pair of gloves last Christmas, and even got so far as to choose a kind that was being worn and had the correct number of buttons. But – *they were nines* ! I sent them to a boy whom I hated intimately: he didn’t wear them, of course, but he could have – that was where the bitterness of death came in. It was nearly as consoling as sending white flowers to his funeral. Of course I wrote and told my aunt that they were the one thing that had been wanting to make existence blossom like a rose; I am afraid she thought me frivolous – she comes from the North, where they live in the fear of Heaven and the Earl of Durham<sup>2</sup>. (Reginald affects an exhaustive knowledge of things political, which furnishes an excellent excuse for not discussing them.) Aunts with a dash of foreign extraction in them are the most satisfactory in the way of understanding these things; but if you can’t choose your aunt, it is wisest in the long-run to choose the present and send her the bill.

Even friends of one’s own set, who might be expected to know better, have curious delusions on the subject. I am *not* collecting copies of the cheaper editions of Omar Khayyam<sup>3</sup>. I gave the last four that I received to the lift-boy, and I like to think of him reading them, with FitzGerald’s notes<sup>4</sup>, to his aged mother. Lift-boys always have aged mothers; shows such nice feeling on their part, I think.

Personally, I can’t see where the difficulty in choosing suitable presents lies. No boy who had brought himself up properly could fail to appreciate one of those decorative bottles of liqueurs that are so reverently staged in Morel’s window – and it wouldn’t in the least matter if one did get duplicates. And there would always be the supreme moment of dreadful uncertainty whether it was crème de menthe<sup>5</sup> or Chartreuse – like the expectant thrill on seeing your partner’s hand turned up at bridge. People may say what they like about the decay of Christianity; the religious system that produced green Chartreuse can never really die.

And then, of course, there are liqueur glasses, and crystallised fruits, and tapestry curtains, and heaps of other necessities of life that make really sensible presents – not to speak of luxuries, such as having one’s bills paid, or getting something quite sweet in the way of jewellery. Unlike the alleged Good Woman of the Bible, I’m not above rubies. When found, by the way, she must have been rather a problem at Christmas-time; nothing short of a blank cheque would have fitted the situation. Perhaps it’s as well that she’s died out.

The great charm about me (concluded Reginald) is that I am so easily pleased. But I draw the line at a ‘Prince of Wales’ Prayer-book.

## Reginald’s Christmas Revel (Saki)

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1 **Tottenham Court Road** – a street in central London

2 **Durham** – a historic county in northeastern England, on the North Sea coast

3 **Omar Khayyam** (1048–1131) – a great Persian poet, mathematician, astronomer and philosopher

4 **FitzGerald’s notes** – Edward FitzGerald (1809–1883), an English poet and writer, famous for his translations of Omar Khayyam’s poetry and notes on it

5 **crème de menthe** – mint liqueur

They say (said Reginald) that there's nothing sadder than victory except defeat. If you've ever stayed with dull people during what is alleged to be the festive season, you can probably revise that saying. I shall never forget putting in a Christmas at the Babwolds'. Mrs. Babwold is some relation of my father's – a sort of to-be-left-till-called-for cousin – and that was considered sufficient reason for my having to accept her invitation at about the sixth time of asking; though why the sins of the father should be visited by the children – you won't find any notepaper in that drawer; that's where I keep old menus and first-night programmes.

Mrs. Babwold wears a rather solemn personality, and has never been known to smile, even when saying disagreeable things to her friends or making out the Stores list. She takes her pleasures sadly. A state elephant at a Durbar<sup>1</sup> gives one a very similar impression. Her husband gardens in all weathers. When a man goes out in the pouring rain to brush caterpillars off rose-trees, I generally imagine his life indoors leaves something to be desired; anyway, it must be very unsettling for the caterpillars.

Of course there were other people there. There was a Major Somebody who had shot things in Lapland<sup>2</sup>, or somewhere of that sort; I forget what they were, but it wasn't for want of reminding. We had them cold with every meal almost, and he was continually giving us details of what they measured from tip to tip, as though he thought we were going to make them warm under-things for the winter. I used to listen to him with a rapt attention that I thought rather suited me, and then one day I quite modestly gave the dimensions of an okapi I had shot in the Lincolnshire fens. The Major turned a beautiful Tyrian scarlet<sup>3</sup> (I remember thinking at the time that I should like my bathroom hung in that colour), and I think that at that moment he almost found it in his heart to dislike me. Mrs. Babwold put on a first-aid-to-the-injured expression, and asked him why he didn't publish a book of his sporting reminiscences; it would be *so* interesting. She didn't remember till afterwards that he had given her two fat volumes on the subject, with his portrait and autograph as a frontispiece and an appendix on the habits of the Arctic mussel.

It was in the evening that we cast aside the cares and distractions of the day and really lived. Cards were thought to be too frivolous and empty a way of passing the time, so most of them played what they called a book game. You went out into the hall – to get an inspiration, I suppose – then you came in again with a muffler tied round your neck and looked silly, and the others were supposed to guess that you were 'Wee MacGregor.' I held out against the inanity as long as I decently could, but at last, in a lapse of good-nature, I consented to masquerade as a book, only I warned them that it would take some time to carry out. They waited for the best part of forty minutes, while I went and played wineglass skittles with the page-boy in the pantry; you play it with a champagne cork, you know, and the one who knocks down the most glasses without breaking them wins. I won, with four unbroken out of seven; I think William suffered from over-anxiousness. They were rather mad in the drawing-room at my not having come back, and they weren't a bit pacified when I told them afterwards that I was 'At the end of the passage.'

'I never did like Kipling<sup>4</sup>,' was Mrs. Babwold's comment, when the situation dawned upon her. 'I couldn't see anything clever in *Earthworms out of Tuscany*<sup>5</sup> – or is that by Darwin<sup>6</sup>?'

Of course these games are very educational, but, personally, I prefer bridge.

On Christmas evening we were supposed to be specially festive in the Old English fashion. The hall was horribly draughty, but it seemed to be the proper place to revel in, and it was decorated with Japanese fans and Chinese lanterns, which gave it a very Old English effect. A young lady

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<sup>1</sup> **Durbar** – in India, an imperial assembly to mark some state occasion

<sup>2</sup> **Lapland** – an area in northern Europe, in Norway, Sweden and Finland, mainly within the Arctic Circle; it was named for the Lapp, or Sami, who inhabited the region for many centuries.

<sup>3</sup> **Tyrian scarlet** – a natural dye of darkred colour widely used in antiquity

<sup>4</sup> **Kipling** – Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), an English writer, poet and novelist, the Nobel Prize winner in Literature in 1907

<sup>5</sup> **Tuscany** – a region in westcentral Italy

<sup>6</sup> **Darwin** – Charles Darwin (1809–1882), an English naturalist, the author of the theory of evolution by natural selection



with a confidential voice favoured us with a long recitation about a little girl who died or did something equally hackneyed, and then the Major gave us a graphic account of a struggle he had with a wounded bear. I privately wished that the bears would win sometimes on these occasions; at least they wouldn't go vapouring about it afterwards. Before we had time to recover our spirits, we were indulged with some thought-reading by a young man whom one knew instinctively had a good mother and an indifferent tailor – the sort of young man who talks unflaggingly through the thickest soup, and smooths his hair dubiously as though he thought it might hit back. The thought-reading was rather a success; he announced that the hostess was thinking about poetry, and she admitted that her mind was dwelling on one of Austin's<sup>1</sup> odes. Which was near enough. I fancy she had been really wondering whether a scrag-end of mutton and some cold plum-pudding would do for the kitchen dinner next day. As a crowning dissipation, they all sat down to play progressive halma<sup>2</sup>, with milk-chocolate for prizes. I've been carefully brought up, and I don't like to play games of skill for milk-chocolate, so I invented a headache and retired from the scene. I had been preceded a few minutes earlier by Miss Langshan-Smith, a rather formidable lady, who always got up at some uncomfortable hour in the morning, and gave you the impression that she had been in communication with most of the European Governments before breakfast. There was a paper pinned on her door with a signed request that she might be called particularly early on the morrow. Such an opportunity does not come twice in a lifetime. I covered up everything except the signature with another notice, to the effect that before these words should meet the eye she would have ended a misspent life, was sorry for the trouble she was giving, and would like a military funeral. A few minutes later I violently exploded an air-filled paper bag on the landing, and gave a stage moan that could have been heard in the cellars. Then I pursued my original intention and went to bed. The noise those people made in forcing open the good lady's door was positively indecorous; she resisted gallantly, but I believe they searched her for bullets for about a quarter of an hour, as if she had been an historic battlefield.

I hate travelling on Boxing Day<sup>3</sup>, but one must occasionally do things that one dislikes.

### Reginald's Choir Treat (Saki)

'Never,' wrote Reginald to his most darling friend, 'be a pioneer. It's the Early Christian that gets the fattest lion.'

Reginald, in his way, was a pioneer.

None of the rest of his family had anything approaching Titian<sup>4</sup> hair or a sense of humour, and they used primroses as a table decoration.

It follows that they never understood Reginald, who came down late to breakfast, and nibbled toast, and said disrespectful things about the universe. The family ate porridge, and believed in everything, even the weather forecast.

Therefore the family was relieved when the vicar's daughter undertook the reformation of Reginald. Her name was Amabel; it was the vicar's one extravagance. Amabel was accounted a beauty and intellectually gifted; she never played tennis, and was reputed to have read Maeterlinck's<sup>5</sup> *Life of the Bee*. If you abstain from tennis *and* read Maeterlinck in a small country village, you are of necessity intellectual. Also she had been twice to Fécamp to pick up a good French accent from the Americans staying there; consequently she had a knowledge of the world which might be considered useful in dealings with a worldling.

Hence the congratulations in the family when Amabel undertook the reformation of its wayward member.

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1 **Austin** – Alfred Austin (1840–1921), a British poet and journalist, a Poet Laureate

2 **halma** – a board game, like checkers, invented in 1880

3 **Boxing Day** – December 26, the day after Christmas; traditionally boxes of gifts were given to servants, employees and the poor on this day.

4 **Titian** (1488–1576) – a great Italian Renaissance painter of the Venetian school

5 **Maeterlinck** – Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949), a famous Belgian poet and playwright, the Nobel Prize winner in Literature in 1911

Amabel commenced operations by asking her unsuspecting pupil to tea in the vicarage garden; she believed in the healthy influence of natural surroundings, never having been in Sicily<sup>1</sup>, where things are different.

And like every woman who has ever preached repentance to unregenerate youth, she dwelt on the sin of an empty life, which always seems so much more scandalous in the country, where people rise early to see if a new strawberry has happened during the night.

Reginald recalled the lilies of the field, 'which simply sat and looked beautiful, and defied competition.'

'But that is not an example for us to follow,' gasped Amabel.

'Unfortunately, we can't afford to. You don't know what a world of trouble I take in trying to rival the lilies in their artistic simplicity.'

'You are really indecently vain of your appearance. A good life is infinitely preferable to good looks.'

'You agree with me that the two are incompatible. I always say beauty is only sin deep.'

Amabel began to realise that the battle is not always to the strong-minded. With the immemorial resource of her sex, she abandoned the frontal attack, and laid stress on her unassisted labours in parish work, her mental loneliness, her discouragements – and at the right moment she produced strawberries and cream. Reginald was obviously affected by the latter, and when his preceptress suggested that he might begin the strenuous life by helping her to supervise the annual outing of the bucolic infants who composed the local choir, his eyes shone with the dangerous enthusiasm of a convert.

Reginald entered on the strenuous life alone, as far as Amabel was concerned. The most virtuous women are not proof against damp grass, and Amabel kept her bed with a cold. Reginald called it a dispensation; it had been the dream of his life to stage-manage a choir outing. With strategic insight, he led his shy, bullet-headed charges to the nearest woodland stream and allowed them to bathe; then he seated himself on their discarded garments and discoursed on their immediate future, which, he decreed, was to embrace a Bacchanalian procession<sup>2</sup> through the village. Forethought had provided the occasion with a supply of tin whistles, but the introduction of a he-goat from a neighbouring orchard was a brilliant afterthought. Properly, Reginald explained, there should have been an outfit of panther skins; as it was, those who had spotted handkerchiefs were allowed to wear them, which they did with thankfulness. Reginald recognised the impossibility, in the time at his disposal, of teaching his shivering neophytes a chant in honour of Bacchus<sup>3</sup>, so he started them off with a more familiar, if less appropriate, temperance hymn. After all, he said, it is the spirit of the thing that counts. Following the etiquette of dramatic authors on first nights, he remained discreetly in the background while the procession, with extreme diffidence and the goat, wound its way lugubriously towards the village. The singing had died down long before the main street was reached, but the miserable wailing of pipes brought the inhabitants to their doors. Reginald said he had seen something like it in pictures; the villagers had seen nothing like it in their lives, and remarked as much freely.

Reginald's family never forgave him. They had no sense of humour.

## **The Tapestry Chamber (Walter Scott)**

About the end of the American war, when the officers of Lord Cornwallis's<sup>4</sup> army, which surrendered at Yorktown<sup>5</sup>, and others, who had been made prisoners during the impolitic and ill-fated controversy, were returning to their own country, to relate their adventures and repose

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1 **Sicily** – the largest island in Italy, in the Mediterranean Sea

2 **Bacchanalian procession** – a procession of drunken people

3 **Bacchus** – in Roman mythology and religion, the god of wine and ecstasy

4 **Lord Cornwallis** – Charles Cornwallis, the 1st Marquis Cornwallis (1738–1805), a British soldier and statesman known for his defeat at Yorktown during the American Revolution

5 **Yorktown** – a historic town in southeastern Virginia, USA, noted for the siege of 1781 during the American Revolutionary War

themselves after their fatigues, there was amongst them a general officer, to whom Miss S. gave the name of Browne, but merely, as I understood, to save the inconvenience of introducing a nameless agent in the narrative. He was an officer of merit, as well as a gentleman of high consideration for family and attainments.

Some business had carried General Browne upon a tour through the western counties, when, in the conclusion of a morning stage, he found himself in the vicinity of a small country town, which presented a scene of uncommon beauty, and of a character peculiarly English.

The little town, with its stately old church, whose tower bore testimony to the devotion of ages long past, lay amidst pasture and corn-fields of small extent, but bounded and divided with hedgerow timber of great age and size. There were few marks of modern improvement. The environs of the place intimated neither the solitude of decay nor the bustle of novelty; the houses were old, but in good repair; and the beautiful little river murmured freely on its way to the left of the town, neither restrained by a dam nor bordered by a towing-path.

Upon a gentle eminence nearly a mile to the southward of the town were seen, amongst many venerable oaks and tangled thickets, the turrets of a castle as old as the wars of York and Lancaster<sup>3</sup>, but which seemed to have received important alterations during the age of Elizabeth<sup>4</sup> and her successors. It had not been a place of great size; but whatever accommodation it formerly afforded was, it must be supposed, still to be obtained within its walls; at least such was the inference which General Browne drew from observing the smoke arise merrily from several of the ancient wreathed and carved chimney-stalks. The wall of the park ran alongside of the highway for two or three hundred yards; and, through the different points by which the eye found glimpses into the woodland scenery, it seemed to be well stocked. Other points of view opened in succession, now a full one of the front of the old castle, and now a side glimpse at its particular towers; the former rich in all the bizarrerie<sup>5</sup> of the Elizabethan school, while the simple and solid strength of other parts of the building seemed to show that they had been raised more for defence than ostentation.

Delighted with the partial glimpses which he obtained of the castle through the woods and glades by which this ancient feudal fortress was surrounded, our military traveller was determined to inquire whether it might not deserve a nearer view, and whether it contained family pictures or other subjects of curiosity worthy of a stranger's visit; when, leaving the vicinity of the park, he rolled through a clean and well-paved street, and stopped at the door of a well-frequented inn.

Before ordering horses to proceed on his journey, General Browne made inquiries concerning the proprietor of the château which had so attracted his admiration, and was equally surprised and pleased at hearing in reply a nobleman named whom we shall call Lord Woodville. How fortunate! Much of Browne's early recollections, both at school and at college, had been connected with young Woodville, whom, by a few questions, he now ascertained to be the same with the owner of this fair domain. He had been raised to the peerage by the decease of his father a few months before, and, as the General learned from the landlord, the term of mourning being ended, was now taking possession of his paternal estate in the jovial season of merry autumn, accompanied by a select party of friends to enjoy the sports of a country famous for game.

This was delightful news to our traveller. Frank Woodville had been Richard Browne's fag at Eton, and his chosen intimate at Christ Church; their pleasures and their tasks had been the same; and the honest soldier's heart warmed to find his early friend in possession of so delightful a residence, and of an estate, as the landlord assured him with a nod and a wink, fully adequate to maintain and add to his dignity. Nothing was more natural than that the traveller should suspend a journey which there was nothing to render hurried, to pay a visit to an old friend under such agreeable circumstances.

The fresh horses, therefore, had only the brief task of conveying the General's travelling carriage to Woodville Castle. A porter admitted them at a modern Gothic lodge, built in that style to

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<sup>3</sup> **the wars of York and Lancaster** – also known as the Wars of the Roses, civil wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster for the English throne in 1455–1485

<sup>4</sup> **Elizabeth** – Elizabeth I (1533–1603), queen of England in 1558–1603; her reign is traditionally called the Elizabethan Age.

<sup>5</sup> **bizarrerie** = peculiarity (*German* )

correspond with the castle itself, and at the same time rang a bell to give warning of the approach of visitors. Apparently the sound of the bell had suspended the separation of the company bent on the various amusements of the morning; for, on entering the court of the chateau, several young men were lounging about in their sporting dresses, looking at and criticising the dogs which the keepers held in readiness to attend their pastime. As General Browne alighted, the young lord came to the gate of the hall, and for an instant gazed, as at a stranger, upon the countenance of his friend, on which war, with its fatigues and its wounds, had made a great alteration. But the uncertainty lasted no longer than till the visitor had spoken, and the hearty greeting which followed was such as can only be exchanged betwixt those who have passed together the merry days of careless boyhood or early youth.

‘If I could have formed a wish, my dear Browne,’ said Lord Woodville, ‘it would have been to have you here, of all men, upon this occasion, which my friends are good enough to hold as a sort of holiday. Do not think you have been unwatched during the years you have been absent from us. I have traced you through your dangers, your triumphs, your misfortunes, and was delighted to see that, whether in victory or defeat, the name of my old friend was always distinguished with applause.’

The General made a suitable reply, and congratulated his friend on his new dignities, and the possession of a place and domain so beautiful.

‘Nay, you have seen nothing of it as yet,’ said Lord Woodville, ‘and I trust you do not mean to leave us till you are better acquainted with it. It is true, I confess, that my present party is pretty large, and the old house, like other places of the kind, does not possess so much accommodation as the extent of the outward walls appears to promise. But we can give you a comfortable old-fashioned room; and I venture to suppose that your campaigns have taught you to be glad of worse quarters.’

The General shrugged his shoulders and laughed. ‘I presume,’ he said, ‘the worst apartment in your chateau is considerably superior to the old tobacco-cask in which I was fain to take up my night’s lodging when I was in the Bush, as the Virginians call it, with the light corps. There I Jay, like Diogenes<sup>1</sup> himself, so delighted with my covering from the elements that I made a vain attempt to have it rolled on to my next quarters; but my commander for the time would give way to no such luxurious provision, and I took farewell of my beloved cask with tears in my eyes.’

‘Well, then, since you do not fear your quarters,’ said Lord Woodville, ‘you will stay with me a week at least. Of guns, dogs, fishing-rods, flies, and means of sport by sea and land we have enough and to spare; you cannot pitch on an amusement but we will pitch on the means of pursuing it. But if you prefer the gun and pointers, I will go with you myself, and see whether you have mended your shooting since you have been amongst the Indians of the back settlements.’

The General gladly accepted his friendly host’s proposal in all its points. After a morning of manly exercise, the company met at dinner, where it was the delight of Lord Woodville to conduce to the display of the high properties of his recovered friend, so as to recommend him to his guests, most of whom were persons of distinction. He led General Browne to speak of the scenes he had witnessed; and as every word marked alike the brave officer and the sensible man, who retained possession of his cool judgment under the most imminent dangers, the company looked upon the soldier with general respect, as on one who had proved himself possessed of an uncommon portion of personal courage, that attribute, of all others, of which everybody desires to be thought possessed.

The day at Woodville Castle ended as usual in such mansions. The hospitality stopped within the limits of good order; music, in which the young lord was a proficient, succeeded to the circulation of the bottle; cards and billiards, for those who preferred such amusements, were in readiness; but the exercise of the morning required early hours, and not long after eleven o’clock the guests began to retire to their several apartments.

The young lord himself conducted his friend, General Browne, to the chamber destined for

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<sup>1</sup> **Diogenes** (the 4th century BC) – an ancient Greek philosopher known for his rejection of luxury and original way of life

him, which answered the description he had given of it, being comfortable, but old-fashioned. The bed was of the massive form used in the end of the seventeenth century, and the curtains of faded silk, heavily trimmed with tarnished gold. But then the sheets, pillows, and blankets looked delightful to the campaigner, when he thought of his mansion, the cask. There was an air of gloom in the tapestry hangings, which, with their worn-out graces, curtained the walls of the little chamber, and gently undulated as the autumnal breeze found its way through the ancient lattice-window, which pattered and whistled as the air gained entrance. The toilet, too, with its mirror, turbaned after the manner of the beginning of the century with a coiffure of murrey-coloured silk, and its hundred strange-shaped boxes, providing for arrangements which had been obsolete for more than fifty years, had an antique, and in so far a melancholy, aspect. But nothing could blaze more brightly and cheerfully than the two large wax candles; or, if aught could rival them, it was the flaming bickering faggots in the chimney, that sent at once their gleam and their warmth through the snug apartment; which, notwithstanding the general antiquity of its appearance, was not wanting in the least convenience that modern habits rendered either necessary or desirable.

‘This is an old-fashioned sleeping apartment, General,’ said the young lord; ‘but I hope you will find nothing that makes you envy your old tobacco-cask.’

‘I am not particular respecting my lodgings,’ replied the General; ‘yet, were I to make any choice, I would prefer this chamber by many degrees to the gayer and more modern rooms of your family mansion. Believe me, that when I unite its modern air of comfort with its venerable antiquity, and recollect that it is your lordship’s property, I shall feel in better quarters here than if I were in the best hotel London could afford.’

‘I trust I have no doubt that you will find yourself as comfortable as I wish you, my dear General,’ said the young nobleman; and once more bidding his guest good-night, he shook him by the hand and withdrew.

The General again looked round him, and internally congratulating himself on his return to peaceful life, the comforts of which were endeared by the recollection of the hardships and dangers he had lately sustained, undressed himself, and prepared himself for a luxurious night’s rest.

Here, contrary to the custom of this species of tale, we leave the General in possession of his apartment until the next morning.

The company assembled for breakfast at an early hour, but without the appearance of General Browne, who seemed the guest that Lord Woodville was desirous of honouring above all whom his hospitality had assembled around him. He more than once expressed surprise at the General’s absence, and at length sent a servant to make inquiry after him. The man brought back information that General Browne had been walking abroad since an early hour of the morning, in defiance of the weather, which was misty and ungenial.

‘The custom of a soldier,’ said the young nobleman to his friends; ‘many of them acquire habitual vigilance, and cannot sleep after the early hour at which their duty usually commands them to be alert.’

Yet the explanation which Lord Woodville thus offered to the company seemed hardly satisfactory to his own mind, and it was in a fit of silence and abstraction that he awaited the return of the General. It took place near an hour after the breakfast-bell had rung. He looked fatigued and feverish. His hair, the powdering and arrangement of which was at this time one of the most important occupations of a man’s whole day, and marked his fashion as much as in the present time the tying of a cravat or the want of one, was dishevelled, uncurled, void of powder, and dank with dew. His clothes were huddled on with a careless negligence, remarkable in a military man, whose real or supposed duties are usually held to include some attention to the toilet; and his looks were haggard and ghastly in a peculiar degree.

‘So you have stolen a march upon us this morning, my dear General,’ said Lord Woodville; ‘or you have not found your bed so much to your mind as I had hoped and you seemed to expect. How did you rest last night?’

‘Oh, excellently well! remarkably well! never better in my life,’ said General Browne rapidly, and yet with an air of embarrassment which was obvious to his friend. He then hastily swallowed a

cup of tea, and, neglecting or refusing whatever else was offered, seemed to fall into a fit of abstraction.

‘You will take the gun to-day, General?’ said his friend and host, but had to repeat the question twice ere he received the abrupt answer, ‘No, my lord; I am sorry I cannot have the honour of spending another day with your lordship; my post-horses are ordered, and will be here directly.’

All who were present showed surprise, and Lord Woodville immediately replied, ‘Post-horses, my good friend! what can you possibly want with them, when you promised to stay with me quietly for at least a week?’

‘I believe,’ said the General, obviously much embarrassed, ‘that I might, in the pleasure of my first meeting with your lordship, have said something about stopping here a few days; but I have since found it altogether impossible.’

‘That is very extraordinary,’ answered the young nobleman. ‘You seemed quite disengaged yesterday, and you cannot have had a summons to-day; for our post has not come up from the town, and therefore you cannot have received any letters.’

General Browne, without giving any further explanation, muttered something of indispensable business, and insisted on the absolute necessity of his departure in a manner which silenced all opposition on the part of his host, who saw that his resolution was taken, and forbore further importunity.

‘At least, however,’ he said, ‘permit me, my dear Browne, since go you will or must, to show you the view from the terrace, which the mist, that is now rising, will soon display.’

He threw open a sash window, and stepped down upon the terrace as he spoke. The General followed him mechanically, but seemed little to attend to what his host was saying, as, looking across an extended and rich prospect, he pointed out the different objects worthy of observation. Thus they moved on till Lord Woodville had attained his purpose of drawing his guest entirely apart from the rest of the company, when, turning round upon him with an air of great solemnity, he addressed him thus: ‘Richard Browne, my old and very dear friend, we are now alone. Let me conjure you to answer me upon the word of a friend and the honour of a soldier. How did you in reality rest during last night?’

‘Most wretchedly indeed, my lord,’ answered the General in the same tone of solemnity; ‘so miserably, that I would not run the risk of such a second night, not only for all the lands belonging to this castle, but for all the country which I see from this elevated point of view.’

‘This is most extraordinary,’ said the young lord, as if speaking to himself; ‘then there must be something in the reports concerning that apartment.’ Again turning to the General, he said, ‘For God’s sake, my dear friend, be candid with me, and let me know the disagreeable particulars which have befallen you under a roof where, with consent of the owner, you should have met nothing save comfort.’

The General seemed distressed by this appeal, and paused a moment before he replied. ‘My dear lord,’ he at length said, ‘what happened to me last night is of a nature so peculiar and so unpleasant that I could hardly bring myself to detail it even to your lordship, were it not that, independent of my wish to gratify any request of yours, I think that sincerity on my part may lead to some explanation about a circumstance equally painful and mysterious. To others the communication I am about to make might place me in the light of a weak-minded, superstitious fool, who suffered his own imagination to delude and bewilder him; but you have known me in childhood, and youth, and will not suspect me of having adopted in manhood the feelings and frailties from which my early years were free.’ Here he paused, and his friend replied, ‘Do not doubt my perfect confidence in the truth of your communication, however strange it may be,’ replied Lord Woodville; ‘I know your firmness of disposition too well to suspect you could be made the object of imposition, and am aware that your honour and your friendship will equally deter you from exaggerating whatever you may have witnessed.’

‘Well, then,’ said the General, ‘I will proceed with my story as well as I can, relying upon your candour, and yet distinctly feeling that I would rather face a battery than recall to my mind the odious recollections of last night.’

He paused a second time, and then, perceiving that Lord Woodville remained silent and in an attitude of attention, he commenced, though not without obvious reluctance, the history of his night's adventures in the Tapestry Chamber.

'I undressed and went to bed so soon as your lordship left me yesterday evening; but the wood in the chimney, which nearly fronted my bed, blazed brightly and cheerfully, and, aided by a hundred exciting recollections of my childhood and youth, which had been recalled by the unexpected pleasure of meeting your lordship, prevented me from falling immediately asleep. I ought, however, to say that these reflections were all of a pleasant and agreeable kind, grounded on a sense of having for a time exchanged the labour, fatigues, and dangers of my profession for the enjoyments of a peaceful life, and the reunion of those friendly and affectionate ties which I had torn asunder at the rude summons of war.

'While such pleasing reflections were stealing over my mind, and gradually lulling me to slumber, I was suddenly aroused by a sound like that of the rustling of a silken gown and the tapping of a pair of high-heeled shoes, as if a woman were walking in the apartment. Ere I could draw the curtain to see what the matter was, the figure of a little woman passed between the bed and the fire. The back of this form was turned to me, and I could observe from the shoulders and neck it was that of an old woman, whose dress was an old-fashioned gown which, I think, ladies call a *sacque*; that is, a sort of robe completely loose in the body, but gathered into broad plaits upon the neck and shoulders, which fall down to the ground and terminate in a species of train.

'I thought the intrusion singular enough, but never harboured for a moment the idea that what I saw was anything more than the mortal form of some old woman about the establishment, who had a fancy to dress like her grandmother, and who, having perhaps (as your lordship mentioned that you were rather straitened for room) been dislodged from her chamber for my accommodation, had forgotten the circumstance, and returned by twelve to her old haunt. Under this persuasion I moved myself in bed and coughed a little, to make the intruder sensible of my being in possession of the premises. She turned slowly round, but, gracious Heaven! my lord, what a countenance did she display to me! There was no longer any question what she was, or any thought of her being a living being. Upon a face which wore the fixed features of a corpse were imprinted the traces of the vilest and most hideous passions which had animated her while she lived. The body of some atrocious criminal seemed to have been given up from the grave and the soul restored from the penal fire, in order to form for a space a union with the ancient accomplice of its guilt. I started up in bed, and sat upright, supporting myself on my palms, as I gazed on this horrible spectre. The hag made, as it seemed, a single and swift stride to the bed where I lay, and squatted herself down upon it, in precisely the same attitude which I had assumed in the extremity of horror, advancing her diabolical countenance within half a yard of mine, with a grin which seemed to intimate the malice and the derision of an incarnate fiend.'

Here General Browne stopped, and wiped from his brow the cold perspiration with which the recollection of his horrible vision had covered it.

'My lord,' he said, 'I am no coward. I have been in all the mortal dangers incidental to my profession, and I may truly boast that no man ever knew Richard Browne dishonour the sword he wears; but in these horrible circumstances, under the eyes and, as it seemed, almost in the grasp of an incarnation of an evil spirit, all firmness forsook me, all manhood melted from me like wax in the furnace, and I felt my hair individually bristle. The current of my life-blood ceased to flow, and I sank back in a swoon, as very a victim to panic terror as ever was a village girl or a child of ten years old. How long I lay in this condition I cannot pretend to guess.

'But I was roused by the castle clock striking one, so loud that it seemed as if it were in the very room. It was some time before I dared open my eyes, lest they should again encounter the horrible spectacle. When, however, I summoned courage to look up, she was no longer visible. My first idea was to pull my bell, wake the servants, and remove to a garret or a hay-loft, to be insured against a second visitation. Nay, I will confess the truth that my resolution was altered, not by the shame of exposing myself, but by the fear that, as the bell-cord hung by the chimney, I might, in making my way to it, be again crossed by the fiendish hag, who, I figured to myself, might be still

lurking about some corner of the apartment.

‘I will not pretend to describe what hot and cold fever-fits tormented me for the rest of the night, through broken sleep, weary vigils, and that dubious state which forms the neutral ground between them. A hundred terrible objects appeared to haunt me; but there was the great difference betwixt the vision which I have described and those which followed, that I knew the last to be deceptions of my own fancy and over-excited nerves.

‘Day at last appeared, and I rose from my bed ill in health and humiliated in mind. I was ashamed of myself as a man and a soldier, and still more so at feeling my own extreme desire to escape from the haunted apartment, which, however, conquered all other considerations; so that, huddling on my clothes with the most careless haste, I made my escape from your lordship’s mansion, to seek in the open air some relief to my nervous system, shaken as it was by this horrible rencontre with a visitant – for such I must believe her – from the other world. Your lordship has now heard the cause of my discomposure, and of my sudden desire to leave your hospitable castle. In other places I trust we may often meet; but God protect me from ever spending a second night under that roof!’

Strange as the General’s tale was, he spoke with such a deep air of conviction that it cut short all the usual commentaries which are made on such stories. Lord Woodville never once asked him if he was sure he did not dream of the apparition, or suggested any of the possibilities by which it is fashionable to explain super-natural appearances, as wild vagaries of the fancy or deceptions of the optic nerves. On the contrary, he seemed deeply impressed with the truth and reality of what he had heard, and after a considerable pause regretted, with much appearance of sincerity, that his early friend should in his house have suffered so severely.

‘I am the more sorry for your pain, my dear Browne,’ he continued, ‘that it is the unhappy, though most unexpected, result of an experiment of my own! You must know that, for my father and grandfather’s time at least, the apartment which was assigned to you last night had been shut on account of reports that it was disturbed by supernatural sights and noises. When I came, a few weeks since, into possession of the estate, I thought the accommodation which the castle afforded for my friends was not extensive enough to permit the inhabitants of the invisible world to retain possession of a comfortable sleeping apartment. I therefore caused the Tapestry Chamber, as we call it, to be opened; and, without destroying its air of antiquity, I had such new articles of furniture placed in it as became the modern times. Yet, as the opinion that the room was haunted very strongly prevailed among the domestics, and was also known in the neighbourhood and to many of my friends, I feared some prejudice might be entertained by the first occupant of the Tapestry Chamber, which might tend to revive the evil report which it had laboured under, and so disappoint my purpose of rendering it a useful part of the house. I must confess, my dear Browne, that your arrival yesterday, agreeable to me for a thousand reasons besides, seemed the most favourable opportunity of removing the unpleasant rumours which attached to the room, since your courage was indubitable, and your mind free of any preoccupation on the subject. I could not, therefore, have chosen a more fitting subject for my experiment.’

‘Upon my life,’ said General Browne somewhat hastily, ‘I am infinitely obliged to your lordship – very particularly indebted indeed. I am likely to remember for some time the consequences of the experiment, as your lordship is pleased to call it.’

‘Nay, now you are unjust, my dear friend,’ said Lord Woodville. ‘You have only to reflect for a single moment, in order to be convinced that I could not augur the possibility of the pain to which you have been so unhappily exposed. I was yesterday morning a complete sceptic on the subject of supernatural appearances. Nay, I am sure that, had I told you what was said about that room, those very reports would have induced you, by your own choice, to select it for your accommodation. It was my misfortune, perhaps my error, but really cannot be termed my fault, that you have been afflicted so strangely.’

‘Strangely indeed!’ said the General, resuming his good temper; ‘and I acknowledge that I have no right to be offended with your lordship for treating me like what I used to think myself – a man of some firmness and courage. But I see my post-horses are arrived, and I must not detain your



lordship from your amusement.’

‘Nay, my old friend,’ said Lord Woodville, ‘since you cannot stay with us another day, which, indeed, I can no longer urge, give me at least half-an-hour more. You used to love pictures, and I have a gallery of portraits, some of them by Vandyke, representing ancestry to whom this property and castle formerly belonged. I think that several of them will strike you as possessing merit.’

General Browne accepted the invitation, though somewhat unwillingly. It was evident he was not to breathe freely or at ease till he left Woodville Castle far behind him. He could not refuse his friend’s invitation, however; and the less so that he was a little ashamed of the peevishness which he had displayed towards his well-meaning entertainer.

The General, therefore, followed Lord Woodville through several rooms into a long gallery hung with pictures, which the latter pointed out to his guest, telling the names and giving some account of the personages whose portraits presented themselves in progression. General Browne was but little interested in the details which these accounts conveyed to him. They were, indeed, of the kind which are usually found in an old family gallery. Here was a Cavalier who had ruined the estate in the royal cause; there a fine lady who had reinstated it by contracting a match with a wealthy Roundhead. There hung a gallant who had been in danger for corresponding with the exiled court at Saint Germain<sup>1</sup>; here one who had taken arms for William<sup>2</sup> at the Revolution; and there a third that had thrown his weight alternately into the scale of Whig and Tory<sup>3</sup>.

While Lord Woodville was cramming these words into his guest’s ear ‘against the stomach of his sense,’ they gained the middle of the gallery, when he beheld General Browne suddenly start, and assume an attitude of the utmost surprise, not unmingled with fear, as his eyes were caught and suddenly riveted by a portrait of an old lady in a *sacque*, the fashionable dress of the end of the seventeenth century.

‘There she is!’ he exclaimed; ‘there she is, in form and features, though inferior in demoniac expression to the accursed hag who visited me last night!’

‘If that be the case,’ said the young nobleman, ‘there can remain no longer any doubt of the horrible reality of your apparition. That is the picture of a wretched ancestress of mine, of whose crimes a black and fearful catalogue is recorded in a family history in my charter-chest. The recital of them would be too horrible; it is enough to say that in yon fatal apartment incest and unnatural murder were committed. I will restore it to the solitude to which the better judgment of those who preceded me had consigned it; and never shall any one, so long as I can prevent it, be exposed to a repetition of the supernatural horrors which could shake such courage as yours.’

Thus the friends, who had met with such glee, parted in a very different mood, Lord Woodville to command the Tapestry Chamber to be unmantled and the door built up, and General Browne to seek in some less beautiful country, and with some less dignified friend, forgetfulness of the painful night which he had passed in Woodville Castle.

## The Body-snatcher (Robert Louis Stevenson)

Every night in the year, four of us sat in the small parlour of the George at Debenham<sup>4</sup> – the undertaker, and the landlord, and Fettes, and myself. Sometimes there would be more; but blow high, blow low, come rain or snow or frost, we four would be each planted in his own particular arm-chair. Fettes was an old drunken Scotchman, a man of education obviously, and a man of some property, since he lived in idleness. He had come to Debenham years ago, while still young, and by a mere continuance of living had grown to be an adopted townsman. His blue camlet cloak was a

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<sup>1</sup> **Saint Germain(s)** – a western suburb of Paris, on the left bank of the Seine, with park and palace built for Louis XIV in 1673

<sup>2</sup> **William** – William IV (1765–1837), king of Great Britain and Ireland (1789–1830) who accepted the Reform Act of 1832 which reduced the power of the crown over the parliament and the government

<sup>3</sup> **Whig and Tory** – two main political parties of the 18th century; the term ‘Whig’, of Scottish origin, was applied to non-conformists who insisted on reducing the power of the king, and the Irish term ‘Tory’ was applied to those who supported hereditary rights to the throne.

<sup>4</sup> **Debenham** – a town in Suffolk, a historic county in eastern England

local antiquity, like the church-spire. His place in the parlour at the George, his absence from church, his old, crapulous, disreputable vices, were all things of course in Debenham. He had some vague Radical opinions and some fleeting infidelities, which he would now and again set forth and emphasise with tottering slaps upon the table. He drank rum – five glasses regularly every evening; and for the greater portion of his nightly visit to the George sat, with his glass in his right hand, in a state of melancholy alcoholic saturation. We called him the Doctor, for he was supposed to have some special knowledge of medicine, and had been known, upon a pinch, to set a fracture or reduce a dislocation; but beyond these slight particulars, we had no knowledge of his character and antecedents.

One dark winter night – it had struck nine some time before the landlord joined us – there was a sick man in the George, a great neighbouring proprietor suddenly struck down with apoplexy on his way to Parliament; and the great man's still greater London doctor had been telegraphed to his bedside. It was the first time that such a thing had happened in Debenham, for the railway was but newly open, and we were all proportionately moved by the occurrence.

'He's come,' said the landlord, after he had filled and lighted his pipe.

'He?' said I. 'Who? – not the doctor?'

'Himself,' replied our host.

'What is his name?'

'Dr. Macfarlane,' said the landlord.

Fettes was far through his third tumblers stupidly fuddled, now nodding over, now staring mazedly around him; but at the last word he seemed to awaken, and repeated the name 'Macfarlane' twice, quietly enough the first time, but with sudden emotion at the second.

'Yes,' said the landlord, 'that's his name, Doctor Wolfe Macfarlane.'

Fettes became instantly sober; his eyes awoke, his voice became clear, loud, and steady, his language forcible and earnest. We were all startled by the transformation, as if a man had risen from the dead.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. 'I am afraid I have not been paying much attention to your talk. Who is this Wolfe Macfarlane?' And then, when he had heard the landlord out, 'It cannot be, it cannot be,' he added; 'and yet I would like well to see him face to face.'

'Do you know him, Doctor?' asked the undertaker, with a gasp.

'God forbid!' was the reply. 'And yet the name is a strange one; it were too much to fancy two. Tell me, landlord, is he old?'

'Well,' said the host, 'he's not a young man, to be sure, and his hair is white; but he looks younger than you.'

'He is older, though; years older. But,' with a slap upon the table, 'it's the rum you see in my face – rum and sin. This man, perhaps, may have an easy conscience and a good digestion. Conscience! Hear me speak. You would think I was some good, old, decent Christian, would you not? But no, not I; I never canted. Voltaire might have canted if he'd stood in my shoes; but the brains' – with a rattling fillip on his bald head – 'the brains were clear and active, and I saw and made no deductions.'

'If you know this doctor,' I ventured to remark, after a somewhat awful pause, 'I should gather that you do not share the landlord's good opinion.'

Fettes paid no regard to me.

'Yes,' he said, with sudden decision, 'I must see him face to face.'

There was another pause, and then a door was closed rather sharply on the first floor, and a step was heard upon the stair.

'That's the doctor,' cried the landlord. 'Look sharp, and you can catch him.'

It was but two steps from the small parlour to the door of the old George Inn; the wide oak staircase landed almost in the street; there was room for a Turkey rug and nothing more between the threshold and the last round of the descent; but this little space was every evening brilliantly lit up, not only by the light upon the stair and the great signal-lamp below the sign, but by the warm radiance of the barroom window. The George thus brightly advertised itself to passers-by in the

cold street. Fettes walked steadily to the spot, and we, who were hanging behind, beheld the two men meet, as one of them had phrased it, face to face. Dr. Macfarlane was alert and vigorous. His white hair set off his pale and placid, although energetic, countenance. He was richly dressed in the finest of broadcloth and the whitest of linen, with a great gold watch-chain, and studs and spectacles of the same precious material. He wore a broad-folded tie, white and speckled with lilac, and he carried on his arm a comfortable driving-coat of fur. There was no doubt but he became his years, breathing, as he did, of wealth and consideration; and it was a surprising contrast to see our parlour sot – bald, dirty, pimpled, and robed in his old camlet cloak – confront him at the bottom of the stairs.

‘Macfarlane!’ he said somewhat loudly, more like a herald than a friend.

The great doctor pulled up short on the fourth step, as though the familiarity of the address surprised and somewhat shocked his dignity.

‘Toddy Macfarlane!’ repeated Fettes.

The London man almost staggered. He stared for the swiftest of seconds at the man before him, glanced behind him with a sort of scare, and then in a startled whisper ‘Fettes!’ he said, ‘you!’

‘Ay,’ said the other, ‘me! Did you think I was dead too? We are not so easy shut of our acquaintance.’

‘Hush, hush!’ exclaimed the doctor. ‘Hush, hush! this meeting is so unexpected – I can see you are unmanned I hardly knew you, I confess, at first; but I am overjoyed – overjoyed to have this opportunity. For the present it must be how-d’ye-do and good-by in one, for my fly is waiting, and I must not fail the train; but you shall – let me see – yes – you shall give me your address, and you can count on early news of me. We must do something for you, Fettes. I fear you are out at elbows; but we must see to that for auld lang syne, as once we sang at suppers.’

‘Money!’ cried Fettes; ‘money from you! The money that I had from you is lying where I cast it in the rain.’

Dr. Macfarlane had talked himself into some measure of superiority and confidence, but the uncommon energy of this refusal cast him back into his first confusion.

A horrible, ugly look came and went across his almost venerable countenance. ‘My dear fellow,’ he said, ‘be it as you please; my last thought is to offend you. I would intrude on none. I will leave you my address however–’

‘I do not wish it – I do not wish to know the roof that shelters you,’ interrupted the other. ‘I heard your name; I feared it might be you; I wished to know if, after all, there were a God; I know now that there is none. Begone!’

He still stood in the middle of the rug, between the stair and doorway; and the great London physician, in order to escape, would be forced to step to one side. It was plain that he hesitated before the thought of this humiliation. White as he was, there was a dangerous glitter in his spectacles; but while he still paused uncertain, he became aware that the driver of his fly was peering in from the street at this unusual scene, and caught a glimpse at the same time of our little body from the parlour, huddled by the corner of the bar. The presence of so many witnesses decided him at once to flee. He crouched together, brushing on the wainscot, and made a dart like a serpent, striking for the door. But his tribulation was not yet entirely at an end, for even as he was passing, Fettes clutched him by the arm and these words came in a whisper, and yet painfully distinct, ‘Have you seen it again?’

The great rich London doctor cried out aloud with a sharp, throttling cry; he dashed his questioner across the open space, and, with his hands over his head, fled out of the door like a detected thief. Before it had occurred to one of us to make a movement the fly was already rattling toward the station. The scene was over like a dream, but the dream had left proofs and traces of its passage. Next day the servant found the fine gold spectacles broken on the threshold, and that very night we were all standing breathless by the barroom window, and Fettes at our side, sober, pale and resolute in look.

‘God protect us, Mr. Fettes!’ said the landlord, coming first into possession of his customary senses. ‘What in the universe is all this? These are strange things you have been saying.’

Fettes turned toward us; he looked us each in succession in the face. 'See if you can hold your tongues,' said he. 'That man Macfarlane is not safe to cross; those that have done so already have repented it too late.'

And then, without so much as finishing his third glass, far less waiting for the other two, he bade us good-by and went forth, under the lamp of the hotel, into the black night.

We three turned to our places in the parlour, with the big red fire and four clear candles; and as we recapitulated what had passed the first chill of our surprise soon changed into a glow of curiosity. We sat late; it was the latest session I have known in the old George. Each man, before we parted, had his theory that he was bound to prove; and none of us had any nearer business in this world than to track out the past of our condemned companion, and surprise the secret that he shared with the great London doctor. It is no great boast, but I believe I was a better hand at worming out a story than either of my fellows at the George; and perhaps there is now no other man alive who could narrate to you the following foul and unnatural events.

In his young days Fettes studied medicine in the schools of Edinburgh<sup>1</sup>. He had talent of a kind, the talent that picks up swiftly what it hears and readily retails it for its own. He worked little at home; but he was civil, attentive, and intelligent in the presence of his masters. They soon picked him out as a lad who listened closely and remembered well; nay, strange as it seemed to me when I first heard it, he was in those days well favoured, and pleased by his exterior. There was, at that period, a certain extramural teacher of anatomy, whom I shall here designate by the letter K. His name was subsequently too well known. The man who bore it skulked through the streets of Edinburgh in disguise, while the mob that applauded at the execution of Burke called loudly for the blood of his employer. But Mr. K— was then at the top of his vogue; he enjoyed a popularity due partly to his own talent and address, partly to the incapacity of his rival, the university professor. The students, at least, swore by his name, and Fettes believed himself, and was believed by others, to have laid the foundations of success when he had acquired the favour of this meteorically famous man. Mr. K— was a *bon vivant*<sup>2</sup> as well as an accomplished teacher; he liked a sly allusion no less than a careful preparation. In both capacities Fettes enjoyed and deserved his notice, and by the second year of his attendance he held the half-regular position of second demonstrator or sub-assistant in his class.

In this capacity, the charge of the theatre and lecturandom devolved in particular upon his shoulders. He had to answer for the cleanliness of the premises and the conduct of the other students, and it was a part of his duty to supply, receive, and divide the various subjects. It was with a view to this last – at that time very delicate – affair that he was lodged by Mr. K— in the same wynd<sup>3</sup>, and at last in the same building, with the dissecting-room. Here, after a night of turbulent pleasures, his hand still tottering, his sight still misty and confused, he would be called out of bed in the black hours before the winter dawn by the unclean and desperate interlopers who supplied the table. He would open the door to these men, since infamous throughout the land. He would help them with their tragic burden, pay them their sordid price, and remain alone, when they were gone, with the unfriendly relics of humanity. From such a scene he would return to snatch another hour or two of slumber, to repair the abuses of the night, and refresh himself for the labours of the day.

Few lads could have been more insensible to the impressions of a life thus passed among the ensigns of mortality. His mind was closed against all general considerations. He was incapable of interest in the fate and fortunes of another, the slave of his own desires and low ambitions. Cold, light, and selfish in the last resort, he had that modicum of prudence, miscalled morality, which keeps a man from inconvenient drunkenness or punishable theft. He coveted, besides, a measure of consideration from his masters and his fellow-pupils, and he had no desire to fail conspicuously in the external parts of life. Thus he made it his pleasure to gain some distinction in his studies, and day after day rendered unimpeachable eye-service to his employer, Mr. K—. For his day of work he indemnified himself by nights of roaring, blackguardly enjoyment; and when that balance had been

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<sup>1</sup> **Edinburgh** – the capital of Scotland, located in southeastern Scotland

<sup>2</sup> **bon vivant** – a merry man who enjoys life (*French*)

<sup>3</sup> **wynd** = lane, side street

struck, the organ that he called his conscience declared itself content.

The supply of subjects was a continual trouble to him as well as to his master. In that large and busy class, the raw material of the anatomists kept perpetually running out; and the business thus rendered necessary was not only unpleasant in itself, but threatened dangerous consequences to all who were concerned. It was the policy of Mr. K— to ask no questions in his dealings with the trade. ‘They bring the body, and we pay the price,’ he used to say, dwelling on the alliteration —‘quid pro quo<sup>1</sup>.’ And again, and somewhat profanely, ‘Ask no questions,’ he would tell his assistants, ‘for conscience sake.’ There was no understanding that the subjects were provided by the crime of murder. Had that idea been broached to him in words, he would have recoiled in horror; but the lightness of his speech upon so grave a matter was, in itself, an offence against good manners, and a temptation to the men with whom he dealt. Fettes, for instance, had often remarked to himself upon the singular freshness of the bodies. He had been struck again and again by the hang-dog, abominable looks of the ruffians who came to him before the dawn; and putting things together clearly in his private thoughts, he perhaps attributed a meaning too immoral and too categorical to the unguarded counsels of his master. He understood his duty, in short, to have three branches: to take what was brought, to pay the price, and to avert the eye from any evidence of crime.

One November morning this policy of silence was put sharply to the test. He had been awake all night with a racking toothache — pacing his room like a caged beast or throwing himself in fury on his bed — and had fallen at last into that profound, uneasy slumber that so often follows on a night of pain, when he was awakened by the third or fourth angry repetition of the concerted signal. There was a thin, bright moonshine; it was bitter cold, windy, and frosty; the town had not yet awakened, but an indefinable stir already preluded the noise and business of the day. The ghouls had come later than usual, and they seemed more than usually eager to be gone. Fettes, sick with sleep, lighted them upstairs. He heard their grumbling Irish voices through a dream; and as they stripped the sack from their sad merchandise he leaned dozing, with his shoulder propped against the wall; he had to shake himself to find the men their money. As he did so his eyes lighted on the dead face. He started; he took two steps nearer, with the candle raised.

‘God Almighty!’ he cried. ‘That is Jane Galbraith!’ The men answered nothing, but they shuffled nearer the door.

‘I know her, I tell you,’ he continued. ‘She was alive and hearty yesterday. It’s impossible she can be dead; it’s impossible you should have got this body fairly.’

‘Sure, sir, you’re mistaken entirely,’ said one of the men.

But the other looked Fettes darkly in the eyes, and demanded the money on the spot.

It was impossible to misconceive the threat or to exaggerate the danger. The lad’s heart failed him. He stammered some excuses, counted out the sum, and saw his hateful visitors depart. No sooner were they gone than he hastened to confirm his doubts. By a dozen unquestionable marks he identified the girl he had jested with the day before. He saw, with horror, marks upon her body that might well betoken violence. A panic seized him, and he took refuge in his room. There he reflected at length over the discovery that he had made; considered soberly the bearing of Mr. K—’s instructions and the danger to himself of interference in so serious a business, and at last, in sore perplexity, determined to wait for the advice of his immediate superior, the class assistant.

This was a young doctor, Wolfe Macfarlane, a high favourite among all the reckless students, clever, dissipated, and unscrupulous to the last degree. He had travelled and studied abroad. His manners were agreeable and a little forward. He was an authority on the stage, skilful on the ice or the links with skate or golf-club; he dressed with nice audacity, and, to put the finishing touch upon his glory, he kept a gig<sup>2</sup> and a strong trotting-horse. With Fettes he was on terms of intimacy; indeed, their relative positions called for some community of life; and when subjects were scarce the pair would drive far into the country in Macfarlane’s gig, visit and desecrate some lonely graveyard, and return before dawn with their booty to the door of the dissecting-room.

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<sup>1</sup> **quid pro quo** = this for that (*Latin*)

<sup>2</sup> **gig** — a light, open, two-wheeled one-horse carriage, first appeared in the 17th century in Paris

On that particular morning Macfarlane arrived somewhat earlier than his wont. Fettes heard him, and met him on the stairs, told him his story, and showed him the cause of his alarm. Macfarlane examined the marks on her body.

‘Yes,’ he said with a nod, ‘it looks fishy.’

‘Well, what should I do?’ asked Fettes.

‘Do?’ repeated the other. ‘Do you want to do anything? Least said soonest mended, I should say.’

‘Someone else might recognise her,’ objected Fettes. ‘She was as well known as the Castle Rock.’

‘We’ll hope not,’ said Macfarlane, ‘and if anybody does – well, you didn’t, don’t you see, and there’s an end. The fact is, this has been going on too long. Stir up the mud, and you’ll get K– into the most unholy trouble; you’ll be in a shocking box yourself. So will I, if you come to that. I should like to know how any one of us would look, or what the devil we should have to say for ourselves in any Christian witness-box. For me, you know there’s one thing certain – that, practically speaking, all our subjects have been murdered.’

‘Macfarlane!’ cried Fettes.

‘Come now!’ sneered the other. ‘As if you hadn’t suspected it yourself!’

‘Suspecting is one thing—’

‘And proof another. Yes, I know; and I’m as sorry as you are this should have come here,’ tapping the body with his cane. ‘The next best thing for me is not to recognise it; and,’ he added coolly, ‘I don’t. You may, if you please. I don’t dictate, but I think a man of the world would do as I do; and I may add, I fancy that is what K– would look for at our hands. The question is, why did he choose us two for his assistants? And I answer, because he didn’t want old wives.’

This was the tone of all others to affect the mind of a lad like Fettes. He agreed to imitate Macfarlane. The body of the unfortunate girl was duly dissected, and no one remarked or appeared to recognize her.

One afternoon, when his day’s work was over, Fettes dropped into a popular tavern and found Macfarlane sitting with a stranger. This was a small man, very pale and dark, with coal-black eyes. The cut of his features gave a promise of intellect and refinement which was but feebly realised in his manners, for he proved, upon a nearer acquaintance, coarse, vulgar, and stupid. He exercised, however, a very remarkable control over Macfarlane; issued orders like the Great Bashaw; became inflamed at the least discussion or delay, and commented rudely on the servility with which he was obeyed. This most offensive person took a fancy to Fettes on the spot, plied him with drinks, and honoured him with unusual confidences on his past career. If a tenth part of what he confessed were true, he was a very loathsome rogue; and the lad’s vanity was tickled by the attention of so experienced a man.

‘I’m a pretty bad fellow myself,’ the stranger remarked, ‘but Macfarlane is the boy – Toddy Macfarlane, I call him. “Toddy, order your friend another glass.” Or it might be, “Toddy, you jump up and shut the door.” ‘Toddy hates me,’ he said again. ‘Oh, yes, Toddy, you do!’

‘Don’t you call me that confounded name,’ growled Macfarlane.

‘Hear him! Did you ever see the lads play knife? He would like to do that all over my body,’ remarked the stranger.

‘We medicals have a better way than that,’ said Fettes. ‘When we dislike a dead friend of ours, we dissect him.’

Macfarlane looked up sharply, as though this jest was scarcely to his mind.

The afternoon passed. Gray, for that was the stranger’s name, invited Fettes to join them at dinner, ordered a feast so sumptuous that the tavern was thrown in commotion, and when all was done commanded Macfarlane to settle the bill. It was late before they separated; the man Gray was incapably drunk. Macfarlane, sobered by his fury, chewed the cud of the money he had been forced to squander and the slights he had been obliged to swallow. Fettes, with various liquors singing in his head, returned home with devious footsteps and a mind entirely in abeyance. Next day Macfarlane was absent from the class, and Fettes smiled to himself as he imagined him still squiring

the intolerable Gray from tavern to tavern. As soon as the hour of liberty had struck he posted from place to place in quest of his last night's companions. He could find them, however, nowhere; so returned early to his rooms, went early to bed, and slept the sleep of the just.

At four in the morning he was awakened by the well-known signal. Descending to the door, he was filled with astonishment to find Macfarlane with his gig, and in the gig one of those long and ghastly packages with which he was so well acquainted.

'What?' he cried. 'Have you been out alone? How did you manage?'

But Macfarlane silenced him roughly, bidding him turn to business. When they had got the body upstairs and laid it on the table, Macfarlane made at first as if he were going away. Then he paused and seemed to hesitate; and then, 'You had better look at the face,' said he, in tones of some constraint. 'You had better,' he repeated, as Fettes only stared at him in wonder.

'But where, and how, and when did you come by it?' cried the other.

'Look at the face,' was the only answer.

Fettes was staggered; strange doubts assailed him. He looked from the young doctor to the body, and then back again. At last, with a start, he did as he was bidden. He had almost expected the sight that met his eyes, and yet the shock was cruel. To see, fixed in the rigidity of death and naked on that coarse layer of sackcloth, the man whom he had left well clad and full of meat and sin upon the threshold of a tavern, awoke, even in the thoughtless Fettes, some of the terrors of the conscience. It was a *cras tibi*<sup>1</sup> which re-echoed in his soul, that two whom he had known should have come to lie upon these icy tables. Yet these were only secondary thoughts. His first concern regarded Wolfe. Unprepared for a challenge so momentous, he knew not how to look his comrade in the face. He durst not meet his eye, and he had neither words nor voice at his command.

It was Macfarlane himself who made the first advance. He came up quietly behind and laid his hand gently but firmly on the other's shoulder.

'Richardson,' said he, 'may have the head.'

Now Richardson was a student who had long been anxious for that portion of the human subject to dissect. There was no answer, and the murderer resumed: 'Talking of business, you must pay me; your accounts, you see, must tally.'

Fettes found a voice, the ghost of his own: 'Pay you!' he cried. 'Pay you for that?'

'Why, yes, of course you must. By all means and on every possible account, you must,' returned the other. 'I dare not give it for nothing, you dare not take it for nothing; it would compromise us both. This is another case like Jane Galbraith's. The more things are wrong the more we must act as if all were right. Where does old K— keep his money?'

'There,' answered Fettes hoarsely, pointing to a cupboard in the corner.

'Give me the key, then,' said the other, calmly, holding out his hand.

There was an instant's hesitation, and the die was cast. Macfarlane could not suppress a nervous twitch, the infinitesimal mark of an immense relief, as he felt the key between his fingers. He opened the cupboard, brought out pen and ink and a paper-book that stood in one compartment, and separated from the funds in a drawer a sum suitable to the occasion.

'Now, look here,' he said, 'there is the payment made – first proof of your good faith: first step to your security. You have now to clinch it by a second. Enter the payment in your book, and then you for your part may defy the devil.'

The next few seconds were for Fettes an agony of thought; but in balancing his terrors it was the most immediate that triumphed. Any future difficulty seemed almost welcome if he could avoid a present quarrel with Macfarlane. He set down the candle which he had been carrying all this time, and with a steady hand entered the date, the nature, and the amount of the transaction.

'And now,' said Macfarlane, 'it's only fair that you should pocket the lucre. I've had my share already. By the bye, when a man of the world falls into a bit of luck, has a few shillings extra in his pocket – I'm ashamed to speak of it, but there's a rule of conduct in the case. No treating, no purchase of expensive class-books, no squaring of old debts; borrow, don't lend.'

'Macfarlane,' began Fettes, still somewhat hoarsely, 'I have put my neck in a halter to oblige

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<sup>1</sup> **cras tibi** – the second part of the expression 'Hodie mihi cras tibi' – 'Today for me, tomorrow for you.' (*Latin*)

you.'

'To oblige me?' cried Wolfe. 'Oh, come! You did, as near as I can see the matter; what you downright had to do in self-defence. Suppose I got into trouble, where would you be? This second little matter flows clearly from the first. Mr. Gray is the continuation of Miss Galbraith. You can't begin and then stop. If you begin, you must keep on beginning; that's the truth. No rest for the wicked.'

A horrible sense of blackness and the treachery of fate seized hold upon the soul of the unhappy student.

'My God!' he cried, 'but what have I done? and when did I begin? To be made a class assistant – in the name of reason, where's the harm in that? Service wanted the position; Service might have got it. Would *he* have been where *I* am now?'

'My dear fellow,' said Macfarlane, 'what a boy you are! What harm *has* come to you? What harm *can* come to you if you hold your tongue? Why, man, do you know what this life is? There are two squads of us – the lions, and the lambs. If you're a lamb, you'll come to lie upon these tables like Gray or Jane Galbraith; if you're a lion, you'll live and drive a horse like me, like K–, like all the world with any wit or courage. You're staggered at the first. But look at K–! My dear fellow, you're clever, you have pluck. I like you, and K– likes you. You were born to lead the hunt; and I tell you, on my honour and my experience of life, three days from now you'll laugh at all these scarecrows like a high-school boy at a farce.'

And with that Macfarlane took his departure and drove off up the wynd in his gig to get under cover before daylight. Fettes was thus left alone with his regrets. He saw the miserable peril in which he stood involved. He saw, with inexpressible dismay, that there was no limit to his weakness, and that, from concession to concession, he had fallen from the arbiter of Macfarlane's destiny to his paid and helpless accomplice. He would have given the world to have been a little braver at the time, but it did not occur to him that he might still be brave. The secret of Jane Galbraith and the cursed entry in the daybook closed his mouth.

Hours pass; the class began to arrive; the members of the unhappy Gray were dealt out to one and to another, and received without remark. Richardson was made happy with the head; and before the hour of freedom rang Fettes trembled with exultation to perceive how far they had already gone toward safety.

For two days he continued to watch, with increasing joy, the dreadful process of disguise.

On the third day Macfarlane made his appearance. He had been ill, he said; but he made up for lost time by the energy with which he directed the students. To Richardson in particular he extended the most valuable assistance and advice, and that student, encouraged by the praise of the demonstrator, burned high with ambitious hopes, and saw the medal already in his grasp.

Before the week was out Macfarlane's prophecy had been fulfilled. Fettes had outlived his terrors and had forgotten his baseness. He began to plume himself upon his courage, and had so arranged the story in his mind that he could look back on these events with an unhealthy pride. Of his accomplice he saw but little. They met, of course, in the business of the class; they received their orders together from Mr. K–. At times they had a word or two in private, and Macfarlane was from first to last particularly kind and jovial. But it was plain that he avoided any reference to their common secret; and even when Fettes whispered to him that he had cast in his lot with the lions and forsworn the lambs, he only signed to him smilingly to hold his peace.

At length an occasion arose which threw the pair once more into a closer union. Mr. K– was again short of subjects; pupils were eager, and it was a part of this teacher's pretensions to be always well supplied. At the same time there came the news of a burial in the rustic graveyard of Glencorse. Time has little changed the place in question. It stood then, as now, upon a cross road, out of call of human habitations, and buried fathoms deep in the foliage of six cedar trees. The cries of the sheep upon the neighbouring hills, the streamlets upon either hand, one loudly singing among pebbles, the other dripping furtively from pond to pond, the stir of the wind in mountainous old flowering chestnuts, and once in seven days the voice of the bell and the old tunes of the precentor, were the only sounds that disturbed the silence around the rural church. The Resurrection Man – to



use a byname of the period – was not to be deterred by any of the sanctities of customary piety. It was part of his trade to despise and desecrate the scrolls and trumpets of old tombs, the paths worn by the feet of worshippers and mourners, and the offerings and the inscriptions of bereaved affection. To rustic neighbourhoods, where love is more than commonly tenacious, and where some bonds of blood or fellowship unite the entire society of a parish, the body-snatcher, far from being repelled by natural respect, was attracted by the ease and safety of the task. To bodies that had been laid in earth, in joyful expectation of a far different awakening, there came that hasty, lamp-lit, terror-haunted resurrection of the spade and mattock. The coffin was forced, the cerements torn, and the melancholy relics, clad in sackcloth, after being rattled for hours on moonless byways, were at length exposed to uttermost indignities before a class of gaping boys.

Somewhat as two vultures may swoop upon a dying lamb, Fettes and Macfarlane were to be let loose upon a grave in that green and quiet resting-place. The wife of a farmer, a woman who had lived for sixty years, and been known for nothing but good butter and a godly conversation, was to be rooted from her grave at midnight and carried, dead and naked to that far-away city that she had always honoured with her Sunday's best; the place beside her family was to be empty till the crack of doom; her innocent and almost venerable members to be exposed to that last curiosity of the anatomist.

Late one afternoon the pair set forth, well wrapped in cloaks and furnished with a formidable bottle. It rained without remission – a cold, dense, lashing rain. Now and again there blew a puff of wind, but these sheets of falling water kept it down. Bottle and all, it was a sad and silent drive as far as Penicuik, where they were to spend the evening. They stopped once, to hide their implements in a thick bush not far from the churchyard, and once again at the Fisher's Tryst, to have a toast before the kitchen fire and vary their nips of whisky with a glass of ale. When they reached their journey's end the gig was housed, the horse was fed and comforted, and the two young doctors in a private room sat down to the best dinner and the best wine the house afforded. The lights, the fire, the beating rain upon the window, the cold, incongruous work that lay before them, added zest to their enjoyment of the meal. With every glass their cordiality increased. Soon Macfarlane handed a little pile of gold to his companion.

'A compliment,' he said. 'Between friends these little d – d accommodations ought to fly like pipe-lights.'

Fettes pocketed the money, and applauded the sentiment to the echo. 'You are a philosopher,' he cried. 'I was an ass till I knew you. You and K – between you, by the Lord Harry! but you'll make a man of me.'

'Of course, we shall,' applauded Macfarlane. 'A man? I tell you, it required a man to back me up the other morning. There are some big, brawling, forty-year-old cowards who would have turned sick at the look of the d – d thing; but not you – you kept your head. I watched you.'

'Well, and why not?' Fettes thus vaunted himself.

'It was no affair of mine. There was nothing to gain on the one side but disturbance, and on the other I could count on your gratitude, don't you see?' And he slapped his pocket till the gold pieces rang.

Macfarlane somehow felt a certain touch of alarm at these unpleasant words. He may have regretted that he had taught his young companion so successfully, but he had no time to interfere, for the other noisily continued in this boastful strain:

'The great thing is not to be afraid. Now, between you and me, I don't want to hang – that's practical; but for all cant, Macfarlane, I was born with a contempt. Hell, God, Devil, right, wrong, sin, crime, and all the old gallery of curiosities – they may frighten boys, but men of the world, like you and me, despise them. Here's to the memory of Gray!'

It was by this time growing somewhat late. The gig, according to order, was brought round to the door with both lamps brightly shining, and the young men had to pay their bill and take the road. They announced that they were bound for Peebles, and drove in that direction till they were clear of the last houses of the town; then, extinguishing the lamps, returned upon their course, and followed a by-road toward Glencorse. There was no sound but that of their own passage, and the

incessant, strident pouring of the rain. It was pitch dark; here and there a white gate or a white stone in the wall guided them for a short space across the night; but for the most part it was at a foot pace, and almost groping, that they picked their way through that resonant blackness to their solemn and isolated destination. In the sunken woods that traverse the neighbourhood of the burying-ground the last glimmer failed them, and it became necessary to kindle a match and reillumine one of the lanterns of the gig. Thus, under the dripping trees, and environed by huge and moving shadows, they reached the scene of their unhallowed labours.

They were both experienced in such affairs, and powerful with the spade; and they had scarce been twenty minutes at their task before they were rewarded by a dull rattle on the coffin lid. At the same moment Macfarlane, having hurt his hand upon a stone, flung it carelessly above his head. The grave, in which they now stood almost to the shoulders, was close to the edge of the plateau of the graveyard; and the gig lamp had been propped, the better to illuminate their labours, against a tree, and on the immediate verge of the steep bank descending to the stream. Chance had taken a sure aim with the stone. Then came a clang of broken glass; night fell upon them; sounds alternately dull and ringing announced the bounding of the lantern down the bank, and its occasional collision with the trees. A stone or two, which it had dislodged in its descent, rattled behind it into the profundities of the glen; and then silence, like night, resumed its sway; and they might bend their hearing to its utmost pitch, but naught was to be heard except the rain, now marching to the wind, now steadily falling over miles of open country.

They were so nearly at an end of their abhorred task that they judged it wisest to complete it in the dark. The coffin was exhumed and broken open; the body inserted in the dripping sack and carried between them to the gig; one mounted to keep it in its place, and the other, taking the horse by the mouth, groped along by wall and bush until they reached the wider road by the Fisher's Tryst. Here was a faint, diffused radiancy, which they hailed like daylight; by that they pushed the horse to a good pace and began to rattle along merrily in the direction of the town.

They had both been wetted to the skin during their operations, and now, as the gig jumped among the deep ruts, the thing that stood propped between them fell now upon one and now upon the other. At every repetition of the horrid contact each instinctively repelled it with the greater haste; and the process, natural although it was, began to tell upon the nerves of the companions. Macfarlane made some ill-favoured jest about the farmer's wife, but it came hollowly from his lips, and was allowed to drop in silence. Still their unnatural burden bumped from side to side; and now the head would be laid, as if in confidence, upon their shoulders, and now the drenching sackcloth would flap icily about their faces. A creeping chill began to possess the soul of Fettes. He peered at the bundle, and it seemed somehow larger than at first. All over the countryside, and from every degree of distance, the farm dogs accompanied their passage with tragic ululations; and it grew and grew upon his mind that some unnatural miracle had been accomplished, that some nameless change had befallen the dead body, and that it was in fear of their unholy burden that the dogs were howling.

'For God's sake,' said he, making a great effort to arrive at speech, 'for God's sake, let's have a light!'

Seemingly Macfarlane was affected in the same direction; for, though he made no reply, he stopped the horse, passed the reins to his companion, got down, and proceeded to kindle the remaining lamp. They had by that time got no farther than the cross-road down to Auchenclinny. The rain still poured as though the deluge were returning, and it was no easy matter to make a light in such a world of wet and darkness. When at last the flickering blue flame had been transferred to the wick and began to expand and clarify, and shed a wide circle of misty brightness round the gig, it became possible for the two young men to see each other and the thing they had along with them. The rain had moulded the rough sacking to the outlines of the body underneath; the head was distinct from the trunk, the shoulders plainly modelled; something at once spectral and human riveted their eyes upon the ghastly comrade of their drive.

For some time Macfarlane stood motionless, holding up the lamp. A nameless dread was swathed, like a wet sheet, about the body, and tightened the white skin upon the face of Fettes; a

fear that was meaningless, a horror of what could not be, kept mounting to his brain. Another beat of the watch, and he had spoken. But his comrade forestalled him.

‘That is not a woman,’ said Macfarlane in a hushed voice.

‘It was a woman when we put her in,’ whispered Fettes.

‘Hold that lamp,’ said the other. ‘I must see her face.’

And as Fettes took the lamp his companion untied the fastenings of the sack and drew down the cover from the head. The light fell very clear upon the dark, well-moulded features and smooth-shaven cheeks of a too familiar countenance, often beheld in dreams of both of these young men. A wild yell rang up into the night; each leaped from his own side into the roadway; the lamp fell, broke and was extinguished; and the horse, terrified by this unusual commotion, bounded and went off toward Edinburgh at a gallop, bearing along with it, sole occupant of the gig, the body of the dead and long-dissected Gray.

## **The Judge’s House (Bram Stoker)**

When the time for his examination drew near Malcolmson made up his mind to go somewhere to read by himself. He feared the attractions of the seaside, and also he feared completely rural isolation, for of old he knew its charms, and so he determined to find some unpretentious little town where there would be nothing to distract him. He refrained from asking suggestions from any of his friends, for he argued that each would recommend some place of which he had knowledge, and where he had already acquaintances. As Malcolmson wished to avoid friends he had no wish to encumber himself with the attention of friends’ friends and so he determined to look out for a place for himself. He packed a portmanteau with some clothes and all the books he required, and then took ticket for the first name on the local time-table which he did not know.

When at the end of three hours’ journey he alighted at Benchurch, he felt satisfied that he had so far obliterated his tracks as to be sure of having a peaceful opportunity of pursuing his studies. He went straight to the one inn which the sleepy little place contained, and put up for the night. Benchurch was a market town, and once in three weeks was crowded to excess, but for the remainder of the twenty-one days it was as attractive as a desert. Malcolmson looked around the day after his arrival to try to find quarters more isolated than even so quiet an inn as ‘The Good Traveller’ afforded. There was only one place which took his fancy, and it certainly satisfied his wildest ideas regarding quiet; in fact, quiet was not the proper word to apply to it – desolation was the only term conveying any suitable idea of its isolation. It was an old, rambling, heavy-built house of the Jacobean style<sup>1</sup>, with heavy gables and windows, unusually small, and set higher than was customary in such houses, and was surrounded with a high brick wall massively built. Indeed, on examination, it looked more like a fortified house than an ordinary dwelling. But all these things pleased Malcolmson. ‘Here,’ he thought, ‘is the very spot I have been looking for, and if I can only get opportunity of using it I shall be happy.’ His joy was increased when he realized beyond doubt that it was not at present inhabited.

From the post-office he got the name of the agent, who was rarely surprised at the application to rent a part of the old house. Mr. Carnford, the local lawyer and agent, was a genial old gentleman, and frankly confessed his delight at anyone being willing to live in the house.

‘To tell you the truth,’ said he, ‘I should be only too happy, on behalf of the owners, to let anyone have the house rent free, for a term of years if only to accustom the people here to see it inhabited. It has been so long empty that some kind of absurd prejudice has grown up about it, and this can be best put down by its occupation – if only,’ he added with a sly glance at Malcolmson, ‘by a scholar like yourself, who wants its quiet for a time.’

Malcolmson thought it needless to ask the agent about the ‘absurd prejudice’; he knew he would get more information, if he should require it, on that subject from other quarters. He paid his

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<sup>1</sup> **the Jacobean style** – the style in literature, art and architecture of the Jacobean age, the time of the reign of James I of England (1603–1625); the Jacobean age followed the Elizabethan age, and the two had very much in common.

three months' rent, got a receipt, and the name of an old woman who would probably undertake to 'do' for him, and came away with the keys in his pocket. He then went to the landlady of the inn, who was a cheerful and most kindly person, and asked her advice as to such stores and provisions as he would be likely to require. She threw up her hands in amazement when he told her where he was going to settle himself.

'Not in the Judge's House!' she said, and grew pale as she spoke. He explained the locality of the house, saying that he did not know its name. When he had finished she answered:

'Aye, sure enough – sure enough the very place! It is the Judge's House sure enough.' He asked her to tell him about the place, why so called, and what there was against it. She told him that it was so called locally because it had been many years before – how long she could not say, as she was herself from another part of the country, but she thought it must have been a hundred years or more – the abode of a judge who was held in great terror on account of his harsh sentences and his hostility to prisoners at Assizes<sup>1</sup>. As to what there was against the house she could not tell. She had often asked, but no one could inform her, but there was a general feeling that there was *something*, and for her own part she would not take all the money in Drinkwater's Bank and stay in the house an hour by herself. Then she apologized to Malcolmson for her disturbing talk.

'It is too bad of me, sir, and you – and a young gentleman, too – if you will pardon me saying it, going to live there all alone. If you were my boy – and you'll excuse me for saying it – you wouldn't sleep there a night, not if I had to go there myself and pull the big alarm bell that's on the roof!' The good creature was so manifestly in earnest, and was so kindly in her intentions, that Malcolmson, although amused, was touched. He told her kindly how much he appreciated her interest in him, and added:

'But, my dear Mrs. Witham, indeed you need not be concerned about me! A man who is reading for the Mathematical Tripos<sup>2</sup> has too much to think of to be disturbed by any of these mysterious "somethings," and his work is of too exact and prosaic a kind to allow of his having any order in his mind for mysteries of any kind. Harmonical Progression, Permutations and Combinations, and Elliptic Functions have sufficient mysteries for me!' Mrs. Witham kindly undertook to see after his commissions, and he went himself to look for the old woman who had been recommended to him. When he turned to the Judge's House with her, after an interval of a couple of hours, he found Mrs. Witham herself waiting with several men and boys carrying parcels, and an upholsterer's man with a bed in a cart, for she said, though table and chairs might be all very well, a bed that hadn't been aired for maybe fifty years was not proper for young ones to lie on. She was evidently curious to see the inside of the house, and though manifestly so afraid of the 'somethings' that at the slightest sound she clutched on to Malcolmson, whom she never left for a moment, went over the whole place.

After his examination of the house, Malcolmson decided to take up his abode in the great dining-room, which was big enough to serve for all his requirements, and Mrs. Witham, with the aid of the charwoman, Mrs. Dempster, proceeded to arrange matters. When the hampers were brought in and unpacked, Malcolmson saw that with much kind forethought she had sent from her own kitchen sufficient provisions to last for a few days. Before going she expressed all sorts of kind wishes, and at the door turned and said:

'And perhaps, sir, as the room is big and draughty it might be well to have one of those big screens put round your bed at night – though truth to tell, I would die myself if I were to be so shut in with all kinds of – of "things," that put their heads round the sides or over the top, and look on me!' The image which she had called up was too much for her nerves and she fled incontinently.

Mrs. Dempster sniffed in a superior manner as the landlady disappeared, and remarked that for her own part she wasn't afraid of all the bogies in the kingdom.

'I'll tell you what it is, sir,' she said, 'bogies is all kinds and sorts of things – except bogies! Rats and mice, and beetles and creaky doors, and loose slates, and broken panes, and stiff drawer handles, that stay out when you pull them and then fall down in the middle of the night. Look at the

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<sup>1</sup> **Assizes** – court sessions held in every county of England to try civil and criminal cases before High Court Judges

<sup>2</sup> **Mathematical Tripos** – a highly competitive mathematical contest at the University of Cambridge

wainscot of the room! It is old – hundreds of years old! Do you think there's no rats and beetles there? And do you imagine, sir, that you won't see none of them? Rats is bogies, I tell you, and bogies is rats, and don't you get to think anything else!

'Mrs. Dempster,' said Malcolmson gravely, making her a polite bow, 'you know more than a Senior Wrangler<sup>1</sup>! And let me say that, as a mark of esteem for your indubitable soundness of head and heart, I shall, when I go, give you possession of this house, and let you stay here by yourself for the last two months of my tenancy, for four weeks will serve my purpose.'

'Thank you kindly, sir!' she answered, 'but I couldn't sleep away from home a night. I am in Greenhow's Charity, and if I slept a night away from my rooms I should lose all I have got to live on. The rules is very strict, and there's too many watching for a vacancy for me to run any risks in the matter. Only for that, sir, I'd gladly come here and attend on you altogether during your stay.'

'My good woman,' said Malcolmson hastily, 'I have come here on a purpose to obtain solitude, and believe me that I am grateful to the late Greenhow for having organized his admirable charity – whatever it is – that I am perforce denied the opportunity of suffering from such a form of temptation! Saint Anthony<sup>2</sup> himself could not be more rigid on the point!'

The old woman laughed harshly. 'Ah, you young gentlemen,' she said, 'you don't fear for nought, and belike you'll get all the solitude you want here.' She set to work with her cleaning, and by nightfall, when Malcolmson returned from his walk – he always had one of his books to study as he walked – he found the room swept and tidied, a fire burning on the old hearth, the lamp lit, and the table spread for supper with Mrs. Witham's excellent fare. 'This is comfort indeed,' he said, and rubbed his hands.

When he had finished his supper, and lifted the tray to the other end of the great oak dining-table, he got out his books again, put fresh wood on the fire, trimmed his lamp, and set himself down to a spell of real hard work. He went on without a pause till about eleven o'clock, when he knocked off for a bit to fix his fire and lamp, and to make himself a cup of tea. He had always been a tea-drinker, and during his college life had sat late at work and had taken tea late. The rest was a great luxury to him, and he enjoyed it with a sense of delicious voluptuous ease. The renewed fire leaped and sparkled, and threw quaint shadows through the great old room, and as he sipped his hot tea he revelled in the sense of isolation from his kind. Then it was that he began to notice for the first time what a noise the rats were making.

'Surely,' he thought, 'they cannot have been at it all the time I was reading. Had they been, I must have noticed it!' Presently, when the noise increased, he satisfied himself that it was really new. It was evident that at first the rats had been frightened at the presence of a stranger, and the light of fire and lamp, but that as the time went on they had grown bolder and were now disporting themselves as was their wont.

How busy they were – and hark to the strange noises! Up and down the old wainscot, over the ceiling and under the floor they raced, and gnawed, and scratched! Malcolmson smiled to himself as he recalled to mind the saying of Mrs. Dempster, 'Bogies is rats, and rats is bogies!' The tea began to have its effect of intellectual and nervous stimulus, he saw with joy another long spell of work to be done before the night was past, and in the sense of security which it gave him, he allowed himself the luxury of a good look round the room. He took his lamp in one hand, and went all round, wondering that so quaint and beautiful an old house had been so long neglected. The carving of the oak on the panels of the wainscot was fine, and on and round the doors and windows it was beautiful and of rare merit. There were some old pictures on the walls, but they were coated so thick with dust and dirt that he could not distinguish any detail of them, though he held his lamp as high as he could over his head. Here and there as he went round he saw some crack or hole blocked for a moment by the face of a rat with its bright eyes glittering in the light, but in an instant it was gone, and a squeak and a scamper followed. The thing that most struck him, however, was the rope of the great alarm bell on the roof, which hung down in a corner of the room on the right-hand side of the

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<sup>1</sup> **Senior Wrangler** – a student who takes first-class honours in Mathematical Tripos

<sup>2</sup> **Saint Anthony** (251–356) – a Christian monk who lived in Egypt, practiced ascetic life and withstood many temptations in his legendary combat against the Devil; Saint Anthony is considered the founder of monasticism.

fireplace. He pulled up close to the hearth a great high-backed carved oak chair, and sat down to his last cup of tea. When this was done he made up the fire, and went back to his work, sitting at the corner of the table, having the fire to his left. For a little while the rats disturbed him somewhat with their perpetual scampering, but he got accustomed to the noise as one does to the ticking of the clock or to the roar of moving water, and he became so immersed in his work that everything in the world, except the problem which he was trying to solve, passed away from him.

He suddenly looked up, his problem was still unsolved, and there was in the air that sense of the hour before the dawn, which is so dread to doubtful life. The noise of the rats had ceased. Indeed it seemed to him that it must have ceased but lately and that it was the sudden cessation which had disturbed him. The fire had fallen low, but still it threw out a deep red glow. As he looked he started in spite of his *sang froid*.

There, on the great high-backed carved oak chair by the right side of the fire-place sat an enormous rat, steadily glaring at him with baleful eyes. He made a motion to it as though to hunt it away, but it did not stir. Then he made the motion of throwing something. Still it did not stir, but showed its great white teeth angrily, and its cruel eyes shone in the lamplight with an added vindictiveness.

Malcolmson felt amazed, and seizing the poker from the hearth ran at it to kill it. Before, however, he could strike it the rat, with a squeak that sounded like the concentration of hate, jumped upon the floor, and, running up the rope of the alarm bell, disappeared in the darkness beyond the range of the green-shaded lamp. Instantly, strange to say, the noisy scampering of the rats in the wainscot began again.

By this time Malcolmson's mind was quite off the problem, and as a shrill cock-crow outside told him of the approach of morning, he went to bed and to sleep.

He slept so sound that he was not even waked by Mrs. Dempster coming in to make up his room. It was only when she had tidied up the place and got his breakfast ready and tapped on the screen which closed in his bed that he woke. He was a little tired still after his night's hard work, but a strong cup of tea soon freshened him up and, taking his book, he went out for his morning walk, bringing with him a few sandwiches lest he should not care to return till dinner-time. He found a quiet walk between high elms some way outside the town, and here he spent the greater part of the day studying his Laplace. On his return he looked in to see Mrs. Witham and to thank her for her kindness. When she saw him coming through the diamond-paned bay window of her sanctum she came out to meet him and asked him in. She looked at him searchingly and shook her head as she said:

'You must not overdo it, sir. You are paler this morning than you should be. Too late hours and too hard work on the brains isn't good for any man! But tell me, sir, how did you pass the night? Well, I hope? But, my heart! sir, I was glad when Mrs. Dempster told me this morning that you were all right and sleeping sound when she went in.' 'Oh, I was all right,' he answered smiling, 'The "somethings" didn't worry me, as yet. Only the rats, and they had a circus, I tell you, all over the place. There was one wicked-looking old devil that sat up on my own chair by the fire, and wouldn't go till I took the poker to him, and then he ran up the rope of the alarm bell and got to somewhere up the wall or the ceiling – I couldn't see where, it was so dark.'

'Mercy on us,' said Mrs. Witham, 'an old devil, and sitting on a chair by the fireside! Take care, sir! take care! There's many a true word spoken in jest.'

'How do you mean? 'Pon my word, I don't understand.'

'An old devil! The old devil, perhaps. There! sir, you needn't laugh,' for Malcolmson had broken into a hearty peal. 'You young folks think it easy to laugh at things that makes older ones shudder. Never mind, sir! never mind! Please God, you'll laugh all the time. It's what I wish you myself!' and the good lady beamed all over in sympathy with his enjoyment, her fears gone for a moment.

'Oh, forgive me,' said Malcolmson presently. 'Don't think me rude, but the idea was too much for me – that the old devil himself was on the chair last night!' And at the thought he laughed again. Then he went home to dinner.

This evening the scampering of the rats began earlier, indeed it had been going on before his arrival, and only ceased whilst his presence by its freshness disturbed them. After dinner he sat by the fire for a while and had a smoke, and then, having cleared his table, began to work as before. To-night the rats disturbed him more than they had done on the previous night.

How they scampered up and down and under and over! How they squeaked and scratched and gnawed! How they, getting bolder by degrees, came to the mouths of their holes and to the chinks and cracks and crannies in the wainscoting till their eyes shone like tiny lamps as the firelight rose and fell. But to him, now doubtless accustomed to them, their eyes were not wicked, only their playfulness touched him. Sometimes the boldest of them made sallies out on the floor or along the mouldings of the wainscot. Now and again as they disturbed him Malcolmson made a sound to frighten them, smiting the table with his hand or giving a fierce 'Hsh, hsh,' so that they fled straightway to their holes.

And so the early part of the night wore on, and despite the noise Malcolmson got more and more immersed in his work.

All at once he stopped, as on the previous night, being overcome by a sudden silence. There was not the faintest sound of gnaw, or scratch, or squeak. The silence was as of the grave.

He remembered the odd occurrence of the previous night, and instinctively he looked at the chair standing close by the fireside. And then a very odd sensation thrilled through him.

There, on the great old high-backed carved oak chair beside the fireplace sat the same enormous rat, steadily glaring at him with baleful eyes.

Instinctively he took the nearest thing to his hand, a book of logarithms, and flung it at it. The book was badly aimed and the rat did not stir, so again the poker performance of the previous night was repeated, and again the rat, being closely pursued, fled up the rope of the alarm bell. Strangely, too, the departure of this rat was instantly followed by the renewal of the noise made by the general rat community. On this occasion, as on the previous one, Malcolmson could not see at what part of the room the rat disappeared, for the green shade of his lamp left the upper part of the room in darkness and the fire had burned low.

On looking at his watch he found it was close on midnight, and, not sorry for the *divertissement*<sup>1</sup>, he made up his fire and made himself his nightly pot of tea. He had got through a good spell of work, and thought himself entitled to a cigarette, and so he sat on the great carved oak chair before the fire and enjoyed it. Whilst smoking he began to think that he would like to know where the rat disappeared to, for he had certain ideas for the morrow not entirely disconnected with a rat-trap. Accordingly he lit another lamp and placed it so that it would shine well into the right-hand corner of the wall by the fireplace. Then he got all the books he had with him, and placed them handy to throw at the vermin. Finally he lifted the rope of the alarm bell and placed the end of it on the table, fixing the extreme end under the lamp. As he handled it he could not help noticing how pliable it was, especially for so strong a rope and one not in use. 'You could hang a man with it,' he thought to himself. When his preparations were made he looked around, and said complacently:

'There now, my friend, I think we shall learn something of you this time!' He began his work again, and though, as before, somewhat disturbed at first by the noise of the rats, soon lost himself in his proposition and problems.

Again he was called to his immediate surroundings suddenly. This time it might not have been the sudden silence only which took his attention; there was a slight movement of the rope, and the lamp moved. Without stirring, he looked to see if his pile of books was within range, and then cast his eye along the rope. As he looked he saw the great rat drop from the rope on the oak arm-chair and sit there glaring at him. He raised a book in his right hand, and taking careful aim, flung it at the rat. The latter, with a quick movement, sprang aside and dodged the missile. Then he took another book, and a third, and flung them one after the other at the rat, but each time unsuccessfully. At last, as he stood with a book poised in his hand to throw, the rat squeaked and seemed afraid. This made Malcolmson more than ever eager to strike, and the book flew and struck

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<sup>1</sup> *divertissement* – here: distraction from work (*French*)

the rat a resounding blow. It gave a terrified squeak, and turning on his pursuer a look of terrible malevolence, ran up the chair-back and made a great jump to the rope of the alarm bell and ran up it like lightning. The lamp rocked under the sudden strain, but it was a heavy one and did not topple over. Malcolmson kept his eyes on the rat, and saw it by the light of the second lamp leap to a moulding of the wainscot and disappear through a hole in one of the great pictures which hung on the wall, obscured and invisible through its coating of dirt and dust.

‘I shall look up my friend’s habitation in the morning,’ said the student, as he went over to collect his books. ‘The third picture from the fireplace, I shall not forget.’ He picked up the books one by one, commenting on them as he lifted them. Conic Sections he does not mind, nor Cycloid Oscillations, nor the Principia, nor Quaternions, nor Thermodynamics<sup>1</sup>. Now for a look at the book that fetched him!’ Malcolmson took it up and looked at it. As he did so he started, and a sudden pallor overspread his face. He looked round uneasily and shivered slightly, as he murmured to himself:

‘The Bible my mother gave me! What an odd coincidence.’ He sat down to work again, and the rats in the wainscot renewed their gambols. They did not disturb him, however; somehow their presence gave him a sense of companionship. But he could not attend to his work, and after striving to master the subject on which he was engaged gave it up in despair, and went to bed as the first streak of dawn stole in through the eastern window.

He slept heavily but uneasily, and dreamed much, and when Mrs. Dempster woke him late in the morning he seemed ill at ease, and for a few minutes did not seem to realize exactly where he was. His first request rather surprised the servant.

‘Mrs. Dempster, when I am out to-day I wish you would get the steps and dust or wash those pictures – specially that one the third from the fireplace – I want to see what they are.’

Late in the afternoon Malcolmson worked at his books in the shaded walk, and the cheerfulness of the previous day came back to him as the day wore on, and he found that his reading was progressing well. He had worked out to a satisfactory conclusion all the problems which had as yet baffled him, and it was in a state of jubilation that he paid a visit to Mrs. Witham at ‘The Good Traveller.’ He found a stranger in the cosy sitting-room with the landlady, who was introduced to him as Dr. Thornhill. She was not quite at ease, and this, combined with the doctor’s plunging at once into a series of questions, made Malcolmson come to the conclusion that his presence was not an accident, so without preliminary he said:

‘Dr. Thornhill, I shall with pleasure answer you any question you may choose to ask me if you will answer me one question first.’

The doctor seemed surprised, but he smiled and answered at once, ‘Done! What is it?’

‘Did Mrs. Witham ask you to come here and see me and advise me?’

Dr. Thornhill for a moment was taken aback, and Mrs. Witham got fiery red and turned away, but the doctor was a frank and ready man, and he answered at once and openly:

‘She did, but she didn’t intend you to know it. I suppose it was my clumsy haste that made you suspect. She told me that she did not like the idea of your being in that house all by yourself, and that she thought you took too much strong tea. In fact, she wants me to advise you, if possible, to give up the tea and the very late hours. I was a keen student in my time, so I suppose I may take the liberty of a college man, and without offence, advise you not quite as a stranger.’

Malcolmson with a bright smile held out his hand. ‘Shake – as they say in America,’ he said. ‘I must thank you for your kindness, and Mrs. Witham too, and your kindness deserves a return on my part. I promise to take no more strong tea – no tea at all till you let me – and I shall go to bed to-night at one o’clock at latest. Will that do?’

‘Capital,’ said the doctor. ‘Now tell us all that you noticed in the old house,’ and so Malcolmson then and there told in minute detail all that had happened in the last two nights. He was interrupted every now and then by some exclamation from Mrs. Witham, till finally when he told of the episode of the Bible the landlady’s pent-up emotions found vent in a shriek, and it was not till a

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<sup>1</sup> **Conic Sections, Cycloid Oscillations, Principia, Quaternions, Thermodynamics** – famous scientific and philosophical works on mathematics and physics



stiff glass of brandy and water had been administered that she grew composed again. Dr. Thornhill listened with a face of growing gravity, and when the narrative was complete and Mrs. Witham had been restored he asked:

‘The rat always went up the rope of the alarm bell?’

‘Always.’

‘I suppose you know,’ said the Doctor after a pause, ‘what that rope is?’

‘No?’

‘It is,’ said the Doctor slowly, ‘the very rope which the hangman used for all the victims of the Judge’s judicial rancour!’ Here he was interrupted by another scream from Mrs. Witham, and steps had to be taken for her recovery. Malcolmson having looked at his watch, and found that it was close to his dinner-hour, had gone home before her complete recovery.

When Mrs. Witham was herself again she almost assailed the Doctor with angry questions as to what he meant by putting such horrible ideas into the poor young man’s mind. ‘He has quite enough there already to upset him,’ she added.

Dr. Thornhill replied:

‘My dear madam, I had a distinct purpose in it! I wanted to draw his attention to the bell-rope, and to fix it there. It may be that he is in a highly over-wrought state, and has been studying too much, although I am bound to say that he seems as sound and healthy a young man, mentally and bodily, as ever I saw – but then the rats – and that suggestion of the devil.’ The doctor shook his head and went on. ‘I would have offered to go and stay the first night with him but that I felt sure it would have been a cause of offence. He may get in the night some strange fright or hallucination, and if he does I want him to pull that rope. All alone as he is it will give us warning, and we may reach him in time to be of service. I shall be sitting up pretty late to-night and shall keep my ears open. Do not be alarmed if Benchurch gets a surprise before morning.’

‘Oh, Doctor, what do you mean? What do you mean?’

‘I mean this, that possibly – nay, more probably – we shall hear the great alarm-bell from the Judge’s House to-night,’ and the Doctor made about an effective exit as could be thought of.

When Malcolmson arrived home he found that it was a little after his usual time, and Mrs. Dempster had gone away – the rules of Greenhow’s Charity were not to be neglected. He was glad to see that the place was bright and tidy with a cheerful fire and a well-trimmed lamp. The evening was colder than might have been expected in April, and a heavy wind was blowing with such rapidly-increasing strength that there was every promise of a storm during the night. For a few minutes after his entrance the noise of the rats ceased, but so soon as they became accustomed to his presence they began again. He was glad to hear them, for he felt once more the feeling of companionship in their noise, and his mind ran back to the strange fact that they only ceased to manifest themselves when the other – the great rat with the baleful eyes – came upon the scene. The reading-lamp only was lit and its green shade kept the ceiling and the upper part of the room in darkness so that the cheerful light from the hearth spreading over the floor and shining on the white cloth laid over the end of the table was warm and cheery. Malcolmson sat down to his dinner with a good appetite and a buoyant spirit. After his dinner and a cigarette he sat steadily down to work, determined not to let anything disturb him, for he remembered his promise to the doctor, and made up his mind to make the best of the time at his disposal.

For an hour or so he worked all right, and then his thoughts began to wander from his books. The actual circumstances around him, and the calls on his physical attention, and his nervous susceptibility were not to be denied. By this time the wind had become a gale, and the gale a storm. The old house, solid though it was, seemed to shake to its foundation, and the storm roared and raged through its many chimneys and its queer old gables, producing strange, unearthly sounds in the empty rooms and corridors. Even the great alarm-bell on the roof must have felt the force of the wind, for the rope rose and fell slightly, as though the bell were moved a little from time to time, and the limber rope fell on the oak floor with a hard and hollow sound.

As Malcolmson listened to it he bethought himself of the doctor’s words, ‘It is the rope which the hangman used for the victims of the Judge’s judicial rancour,’ and he went over to the corner of

the fireplace and took it in his hand to look at it. There seemed a sort of deadly interest in it, and as he stood there he lost himself for a moment in speculation as to who these victims were, and the grim wish of the Judge to have such a ghastly relic ever under his eyes. As he stood there the swaying of the bell on the roof still lifted the rope now and again, but presently there came a new sensation – a sort of tremor in the rope, as though something was moving along it.

Looking up instinctively Malcolmson saw the great rat coming slowly down towards him, glaring at him steadily. He dropped the rope and started back with a muttered curse, and the rat turning ran up the slope again and disappeared, and at the same instant Malcolmson became conscious that the noise of the other rats, which had ceased for a while, began again.

All this set him thinking, and it occurred to him that he had not investigated the lair of the rat or looked at the pictures, as he had intended. He lit the other lamp without the shade, and, holding it up went and stood opposite the third picture from the fireplace on the right-hand side where he had seen the rat disappear on the previous night.

At the first glance he started back so suddenly that he almost dropped the lamp, and a deadly pallor overspread his face.

His knees shook, and heavy drops of sweat came on his forehead, and he trembled like an aspen. But he was young and plucky, and pulled himself together, and after the pause of a few seconds stepped forward again, raised the lamp, and examined the picture which had been dusted and washed, and now stood out clearly.

It was of a judge dressed in his robes of scarlet and ermine. His face was strong and merciless, evil, crafty and vindictive, with a sensual mouth, hooked nose of ruddy colour, and shaped like the beak of a bird of prey. The rest of the face was of a cadaverous colour. The eyes were of peculiar brilliance and with a terribly malignant expression. As he looked at them, Malcolmson grew cold, for he saw there the very counterpart of the eyes of the great rat. The lamp almost fell from his hand, he saw the rat with its baleful eyes peering out through the hole in the corner of the picture, and noted the sudden cessation of the noise of the other rats. However, he pulled himself together, and went on with his examination of the picture.

The Judge was seated in a great high-backed carved oak chair, on the right-hand side of a great stone fireplace where, in the corner, a rope hung down from the ceiling, its end lying coiled on the floor. With a feeling of something like horror, Malcolmson recognized the scene of the room as it stood, and gazed around him in an awestruck manner as though he expected to find some strange presence behind him. Then he looked over to the corner of the fireplace – and with a loud cry he let the lamp fall from his hand.

There, in the judge's arm-chair, with the rope hanging behind, sat the rat with the Judge's baleful eyes, now intensified as with a fiendish leer. Save for the howling of the storm without there was silence.

The fallen lamp recalled Malcolmson to himself. Fortunately it was of metal, and so the oil was not spilt. However, the practical need of attending to it settled at once his nervous apprehensions. When he had turned it out, he wiped his brow and thought for a moment.

'This will not do,' he said to himself. 'If I go on like this I shall become a crazy fool. This must stop! I promised the doctor I would not take tea. Faith, he was pretty right! My nerves must have been getting into a queer state. Funny I did not notice it. I never felt better in my life. However, it is all right now, and I shall not be such a fool again.'

Then he mixed himself a good stiff glass of brandy and water and resolutely sat down to his work.

It was nearly an hour when he looked up from his book, disturbed by the sudden stillness. Without, the wind howled and roared louder than ever, and the rain drove in sheets against the windows, beating like hail on the glass, but within there was no sound whatever save the echo of the wind as it roared in the great chimney, and now and then a hiss as a few raindrops found their way down the chimney in a lull of the storm. The fire had fallen low and had ceased to flame, though it threw out a red glow. Malcolmson listened attentively, and presently heard a thin, squeaking noise, very faint. It came from the corner of the room where the rope hung down, and he thought it was the

creaking of the rope on the floor as the swaying of the bell raised and lowered it. Looking up, however, he saw in the dim light the great rat clinging to the rope and gnawing it. The rope was already nearly gnawed through – he could see the lighter colour where the strands were laid bare. As he looked the job was completed, and the severed end of the rope fell clattering on the oaken floor, whilst for an instant the great rat remained like a knob or tassel at the end of the rope, which now began to sway to and fro. Malcolmson felt for a moment another pang of terror as he thought that now the possibility of calling the outer world to his assistance was cut off, but an intense anger took its place, and seizing the book he was reading he hurled it at the rat. The blow was well-aimed, but before the missile could reach him the rat dropped off and struck the floor with a soft thud. Malcolmson instantly rushed over towards him, but it darted away and disappeared in the darkness of the shadows of the room. Malcolmson felt that his work was over for the night, and determined then and there to vary the monotony of the proceedings by a hunt for the rat, and took off the green shade of the lamp so as to insure a wider spreading light. As he did so the gloom of the upper part of the room was relieved, and in the new flood of light, great by comparison with the previous darkness, the pictures on the wall stood out boldly.

From where he stood, Malcolmson saw right opposite to him the third picture on the wall from the right of the fireplace. He rubbed his eyes in surprise, and then a great fear began to come upon him.

In the centre of the picture was a great irregular patch of brown canvas, as fresh as when it was stretched on the frame. The background was as before, with chair and chimney-corner and rope, but the figure of the Judge had disappeared.

Malcolmson, almost in a chill of horror, turned slowly round, and then he began to shake and tremble like a man in a palsy. His strength seemed to have left him, and he was incapable of action or movement, hardly even of thought. He could only see and hear.

There, on the great high-backed carved oak chair sat the judge in his robes of scarlet and ermine, with his baleful eyes glaring vindictively, and a smile of triumph on the resolute cruel mouth, as he lifted with his hands a *black cap*. Malcolmson felt as if the blood was running from his heart, as one does in moments of prolonged suspense. There was a singing in his ears. Without, he could hear the roar and howl of the tempest, and through it, swept on the storm, came the striking of midnight by the great chimes in the market-place. He stood for a space of time that seemed to him endless still as a statue, and with wide-open, horror-struck eyes, breathless. As the clock struck, so the smile of triumph on the Judge's face intensified, and at the last stroke of midnight he placed the black cap on his head.

Slowly and deliberately the Judge rose from his chair and picked up the piece of rope of the alarm bell which lay on the floor, drew it through his hands as if he enjoyed its touch and then deliberately began to knot one end of it, fashioning it into a noose. This he tightened and tested with his foot, pulling hard at it till he was satisfied and then making a running noose of it, which he held in his hand. Then he began to move along the table on the opposite side of Malcolmson keeping his eyes on him until he had passed him, when with a quick movement he stood in front of the door. Malcolmson then began to feel that he was trapped, and tried to think of what he should do. There was some fascination in the Judge's eyes, which he never took off him, and he had, perforce, to look. He saw the Judge approach – still keeping between him and the door – and raise the noose and throw it towards him as if to entangle him. With a great effort he made a quick movement to one side, and saw the rope fall beside him, and heard it strike the oaken floor. Again the Judge raised the noose and tried to ensnare him, ever keeping his baleful eyes fixed on him, and each time by a mighty effort the student just managed to evade it. So this went on for many times, the Judge seeming never discouraged nor discomposed at failure, but playing as a cat does with a mouse. At last in despair, which had reached its climax, Malcolmson cast a quick glance round him. The lamp seemed to have blazed up, and there was a fairly good light in the room. At the many rat-holes and in the chinks and crannies of the wainscot he saw the rats' eyes, and this aspect, that was purely physical, gave him a gleam of comfort. He looked round and saw that the rope of the great alarm bell was laden with rats. Every inch of it was covered with them, and more and more were pouring

through the small circular hole in the ceiling whence it emerged, so that with their weight the bell was beginning to sway.

Hark! it had swayed till the clapper had touched the bell. The sound was but a tiny one, but the bell was only beginning to sway, and it would increase.

At the sound the Judge, who had been keeping his eyes fixed on Malcolmson, looked up, and a scowl of diabolical anger overspread his face. His eyes fairly glowed like hot coals, and he stamped his foot with a sound that seemed to make the house shake. A dreadful peal of thunder broke overhead as he raised the rope again, whilst the rats kept running up and down the rope as though working against time. This time, instead of throwing it, he drew close to his victim, and held open the noose as he approached. As he came closer there seemed something paralyzing in his very presence, and Malcolmson stood rigid as a corpse. He felt the Judge's icy fingers touch his throat as he adjusted the rope. The noose tightened – tightened. Then the Judge, taking the rigid form of the student in his arms, carried him over and placed him standing in the oak chair, and stepping up beside him, put his hand up and caught the end of the swaying rope of the alarm-bell. As he raised his hand the rats fled squeaking and disappeared through the hole in the ceiling. Taking the end of the noose which was round Malcolmson's neck he tied it to the hanging bell-rope, and then descending pulled away the chair.

When the alarm-bell of the Judge's House began to sound a crowd soon assembled. Lights and torches of various kinds appeared, and soon a silent crowd was hurrying to the spot. They knocked loudly at the door, but there was no reply. Then they burst in the door, and poured into the great dining-room, the doctor at the head.

There at the end of the rope of the great alarm-bell hung the body of the student, and on the face of the Judge in the picture was a malignant smile.

## Dracula's<sup>1</sup> Guest (Bram Stoker)

When we started for our drive the sun was shining brightly on Munich<sup>2</sup>, and the air was full of the joyousness of early summer. Just as we were about to depart, Herr Delbruck (the maitre d'hotel<sup>3</sup> of the Quatre Saisons, where I was staying) came down bareheaded to the carriage and, after wishing me a pleasant drive, said to the coachman, still holding his hand on the handle of the carriage door, 'Remember you are back by nightfall. The sky looks bright but there is a shiver in the north wind that says there may be a sudden storm. But I am sure you will not be late.' Here he smiled and added, 'for you know what night it is.'

Johann answered with an emphatic, 'Ja, mein Herr<sup>4</sup>,' and, touching his hat, drove off quickly. When we had cleared the town, I said, after signalling to him to stop:

'Tell me, Johann, what is tonight?'

He crossed himself, as he answered laconically: 'Walpurgis nacht<sup>5</sup>.' Then he took out his watch, a great, old-fashioned German silver thing as big as a turnip and looked at it, with his eyebrows gathered together and a little impatient shrug of his shoulders. I realized that this was his way of respectfully protesting against the unnecessary delay and sank back in the carriage, merely motioning him to proceed. He started off rapidly, as if to make up for lost time. Every now and then the horses seemed to throw up their heads and sniff the air suspiciously. On such occasions I often looked round in alarm. The road was pretty bleak, for we were traversing a sort of high windswept plateau. As we drove, I saw a road that looked but little used and which seemed to dip through a

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1 **Dracula** – a fictional character, a villain with supernatural powers and vampire, invented by Bram Stoker in his famous novel; the character is based on Vlad III Dracula, prince of Wallachia, known for his cruelty.

2 **Munich** – the capital of Bavaria, the land in southern Germany, founded in 1157

3 **maitre d'hotel** = hotel manager (*French*)

4 **Ja, mein Herr** = Yes, sir (*German*)

5 **Walpurgis nacht** – Walpurgis Night, a holiday on April 30, celebrated in northern Europe and Scandinavia; people light fires, sing and make loud noise to keep off the evil forces; on this day the witches are said to gather on Brocken, the mountain in Harz, Germany.

little winding valley. It looked so inviting that, even at the risk of offending him, I called Johann to stop – and when he had pulled up, I told him I would like to drive down that road. He made all sorts of excuses and frequently crossed himself as he spoke. This somewhat piqued my curiosity, so I asked him various questions. He answered fencingly and repeatedly looked at his watch in protest.

Finally I said, ‘Well, Johann, I want to go down this road. I shall not ask you to come unless you like; but tell me why you do not like to go, that is all I ask.’ For answer he seemed to throw himself off the box, so quickly did he reach the ground. Then he stretched out his hands appealingly to me and implored me not to go. There was just enough of English mixed with the German for me to understand the drift of his talk. He seemed always just about to tell me something – the very idea of which evidently frightened him; but each time he pulled himself up saying, ‘Walpurgis nacht!’

I tried to argue with him, but it was difficult to argue with a man when I did not know his language. The advantage certainly rested with him, for although he began to speak in English, of a very crude and broken kind, he always got excited and broke into his native tongue – and every time he did so, he looked at his watch. Then the horses became restless and sniffed the air. At this he grew very pale, and, looking around in a frightened way, he suddenly jumped forward, took them by the bridles, and led them on some twenty feet. I followed and asked why he had done this. For an answer he crossed himself, pointed to the spot we had left, and drew his carriage in the direction of the other road, indicating a cross, and said, first in German, then in English, ‘Buried him – him what killed themselves.’

I remembered the old custom of burying suicides at cross roads: ‘Ah! I see, a suicide. How interesting!’ But for the life of me I could not make out why the horses were frightened.

Whilst we were talking, we heard a sort of sound between a yelp and a bark. It was far away; but the horses got very restless, and it took Johann all his time to quiet them. He was pale and said, ‘It sounds like a wolf – but yet there are no wolves here now.’

‘No?’ I said, questioning him. ‘Isn’t it long since the wolves were so near the city?’

‘Long, long,’ he answered, ‘in the spring and summer; but with the snow the wolves have been here not so long.’

Whilst he was petting the horses and trying to quiet them, dark clouds drifted rapidly across the sky. The sunshine passed away, and a breath of cold wind seemed to drift over us. It was only a breath, however, and more of a warning than a fact, for the sun came out brightly again.

Johann looked under his lifted hand at the horizon and said, ‘The storm of snow, he comes before long time.’ Then he looked at his watch again, and, straightway holding his reins firmly – for the horses were still pawing the ground restlessly and shaking their heads – he climbed to his box as though the time had come for proceeding on our journey.

I felt a little obstinate and did not at once get into the carriage.

‘Tell me,’ I said, ‘about this place where the road leads,’ and I pointed down.

Again he crossed himself and mumbled a prayer before he answered, ‘It is unholy.’

‘What is unholy?’ I enquired.

‘The village.’

‘Then there is a village?’

‘No, no. No one lives there hundreds of years.’

My curiosity was piqued, ‘But you said there was a village.’

‘There was.’

‘Where is it now?’

Whereupon he burst out into a long story in German and English, so mixed up that I could not quite understand exactly what he said. Roughly I gathered that long ago, hundreds of years, men had died there and been buried in their graves; but sounds were heard under the clay, and when the graves were opened, men and women were found rosy with life and their mouths red with blood. And so, in haste to save their lives (aye, and their souls! – and here he crossed himself) those who were left fled away to other places, where the living lived and the dead were dead and not – not something. He was evidently afraid to speak the last words. As he proceeded with his narration, he

grew more and more excited. It seemed as if his imagination had got hold of him, and he ended in a perfect paroxysm of fear – white-faced, perspiring, trembling, and looking round him as if expecting that some dreadful presence would manifest itself there in the bright sunshine on the open plain.

Finally, in an agony of desperation, he cried, ‘Walpurgis nacht!’ and pointed to the carriage for me to get in.

All my English blood rose at this, and standing back I said, ‘You are afraid, Johann – you are afraid. Go home, I shall return alone, the walk will do me good.’ The carriage door was open. I took from the seat my oak walking stick – which I always carry on my holiday excursions – and closed the door, pointing back to Munich, and said, ‘Go home, Johann – Walpurgis nacht doesn’t concern Englishmen.’

The horses were now more restive than ever, and Johann was trying to hold them in, while excitedly imploring me not to do anything so foolish. I pitied the poor fellow, he was so deeply in earnest; but all the same I could not help laughing. His English was quite gone now. In his anxiety he had forgot ten that his only means of making me understand was to talk my language, so he jabbered away in his native German. It began to be a little tedious. After giving the direction, ‘Home!’ I turned to go down the cross road into the valley.

With a despairing gesture, Johann turned his horses towards Munich. I leaned on my stick and looked after him. He went slowly along the road for a while, then there came over the crest of the hill a man tall and thin. I could see so much in the distance. When he drew near the horses, they began to jump and kick about, then to scream with terror. Johann could not hold them in; they bolted down the road, running away madly. I watched them out of sight, then looked for the stranger; but I found that he, too, was gone.

With a light heart I turned down the side road through the deepening valley to which Johann had objected. There was not the slightest reason, that I could see, for his objection; and I daresay I tramped for a couple of hours without thinking of time or distance and certainly without seeing a person or a house. So far as the place was concerned, it was desolation itself. But I did not notice this particularly till, on turning a bend in the road, I came upon a scattered fringe of wood; then I recognized that I had been impressed unconsciously by the desolation of the region through which I had passed.

I sat down to rest myself and began to look around. It struck me that it was considerably colder than it had been at the commencement of my walk – a sort of sighing sound seemed to be around me with, now and then, high overhead, a sort of muffled roar. Looking upwards I noticed that great thick clouds were drafting rapidly across the sky from north to south at a great height. There were signs of a coming storm in some lofty stratum of the air. I was a little chilly, and, thinking that it was the sitting still after the exercise of walking, I resumed my journey.

The ground I passed over was now much more picturesque. There were no striking objects that the eye might single out, but in all there was a charm of beauty. I took little heed of time, and it was only when the deepening twilight forced itself upon me that I began to think of how I should find my way home. The air was cold, and the drifting of clouds high overhead was more marked. They were accompanied by a sort of far away rushing sound, through which seemed to come at intervals that mysterious cry which the driver had said came from a wolf. For a while I hesitated. I had said I would see the deserted village, so on I went and presently came on a wide stretch of open country, shut in by hills all around. Their sides were covered with trees which spread down to the plain, dotting in clumps the gentler slopes and hollows which showed here and there. I followed with my eye the winding of the road and saw that it curved close to one of the densest of these clumps and was lost behind it.

As I looked there came a cold shiver in the air, and the snow began to fall. I thought of the miles and miles of bleak country I had passed, and then hurried on to seek shelter of the wood in front. Darker and darker grew the sky, and faster and heavier fell the snow, till the earth before and

around me was a glistening white carpet the further edge of which was lost in misty vagueness. The road was here but crude, and when on the level its boundaries were not so marked as when it passed through the cuttings; and in a little while I found that I must have strayed from it, for I missed underfoot the hard surface, and my feet sank deeper in the grass and moss. Then the wind grew stronger and blew with ever increasing force, till I was fain to run before it. The air became icy-cold, and in spite of my exercise I began to suffer. The snow was now falling so thickly and whirling around me in such rapid eddies that I could hardly keep my eyes open. Every now and then the heavens were torn asunder by vivid lightning, and in the flashes I could see ahead of me a great mass of trees, chiefly yew and cypress all heavily coated with snow.

I was soon amongst the shelter of the trees, and there in comparative silence I could hear the rush of the wind high overhead. Presently the blackness of the storm had become merged in the darkness of the night. By-and-by the storm seemed to be passing away, it now only came in fierce puffs or blasts. At such moments the weird sound of the wolf appeared to be echoed by many similar sounds around me.

Now and again, through the black mass of drifting cloud, came a straggling ray of moonlight which lit up the expanse and showed me that I was at the edge of a dense mass of cypress and yew trees. As the snow had ceased to fall, I walked out from the shelter and began to investigate more closely. It appeared to me that, amongst so many old foundations as I had passed, there might be still standing a house in which, though in ruins, I could find some sort of shelter for a while. As I skirted the edge of the copse<sup>1</sup>, I found that a low wall encircled it, and following this I presently found an opening. Here the cypresses formed an alley leading up to a square mass of some kind of building. Just as I caught sight of this, however, the drifting clouds obscured the moon, and I passed up the path in darkness. The wind must have grown colder, for I felt myself shiver as I walked; but there was hope of shelter, and I groped my way blindly on.

I stopped, for there was a sudden stillness. The storm had passed; and, perhaps in sympathy with nature's silence, my heart seemed to cease to beat. But this was only momentarily; for suddenly the moonlight broke through the clouds showing me that I was in a graveyard and that the square object before me was a great massive tomb of marble, as white as the snow that lay on and all around it. With the moonlight there came a fierce sigh of the storm which appeared to resume its course with a long, low howl, as of many dogs or wolves. I was awed and shocked, and I felt the cold perceptibly grow upon me till it seemed to grip me by the heart. Then while the flood of moonlight still fell on the marble tomb, the storm gave further evidence of renewing, as though it were returning on its track. Impelled by some sort of fascination, I approached the sepulchre to see what it was and why such a thing stood alone in such a place. I walked around it and read, over the Doric door, in German –

COUNTESS DOLINGEN OF GRATZ<sup>2</sup>  
IN STYRIA<sup>3</sup>  
SOUGHT AND FOUND DEATH  
1801

On the top of the tomb, seemingly driven through the solid marble – for the structure was composed of a few vast blocks of stone – was a great iron spike or stake. On going to the back I saw, graven in great Russian letters:

‘The dead travel fast.’

There was something so weird and uncanny about the whole thing that it gave me a turn and made me feel quite faint. I began to wish, for the first time, that I had taken Johann's advice. Here a thought struck me, which came under almost mysterious circumstances and with a terrible shock.

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<sup>1</sup> **copse** = *poet.* coppice

<sup>2</sup> **Gratz** – a city in southeastern Austria and the capital of Styria, founded in the 9th century

<sup>3</sup> **Styria** – a state in southeastern Austria on the border with Slovenia

This was Walpurgis Night!

Walpurgis Night was when, according to the belief of millions of people, the devil was abroad – when the graves were opened and the dead came forth and walked. When all evil things of earth and air and water held revel. This very place the driver had specially shunned. This was the depopulated village of centuries ago. This was where the suicide lay; and this was the place where I was alone – unmanned, shivering with cold in a shroud of snow with a wild storm gathering again up on me! It took all my philosophy, all the religion I had been taught, all my courage, not to collapse in a paroxysm of fright.

And now a perfect tornado burst upon me. The ground shook as though thousands of horses thundered across it; and this time the storm bore on its icy wings, not snow, but great hailstones which drove with such violence that they might have come from the thongs of Balearic slingers – hailstones that beat down leaf and branch and made the shelter of the cypresses of no more avail than though their stems were standing corn. At the first I had rushed to the nearest tree; but I was soon fain to leave it and seek the only spot that seemed to afford refuge, the deep Doric doorway of the marble tomb. There, crouching against the massive bronze door, I gained a certain amount of protection from the beating of the hail stones, for now they only drove against me as they ricocheted from the ground and the side of the marble.

As I leaned against the door, it moved slightly and opened inwards. The shelter of even a tomb was welcome in that pitiless tempest and I was about to enter it when there came a flash of forked lightning that lit up the whole expanse of the heavens. In the instant, as I am a living man, I saw, as my eyes turned into the darkness of the tomb, a beautiful woman with rounded cheeks and red lips, seemingly sleeping on a bier. As the thunder broke overhead, I was grasped as by the hand of a giant and hurled out into the storm. The whole thing was so sudden that, before I could realize the shock, moral as well as physical, I found the hailstones beating me down. At the same time I had a strange, dominating feeling that I was not alone. I looked towards the tomb. Just then there came another blinding flash which seemed to strike the iron stake that surmounted the tomb and to pour through to the earth, blasting and crumbling the marble, as in a burst of flame. The dead woman rose for a moment of agony while she was lapped in the flame, and her bitter scream of pain was drowned in the thunder-crash. The last thing I heard was this mingling of dreadful sound, as again I was seized in the giant grasp and dragged away, while the hailstones beat on me and the air around seemed reverberant with the howling of wolves. The last sight that I remembered was a vague, white, moving mass, as if all the graves around me had sent out the phantoms of their sheeted dead, and that they were closing in on me through the white cloudiness of the driving hail.

Gradually there came a sort of vague beginning of consciousness, then a sense of weariness that was dreadful. For a time I remembered nothing, but slowly my senses returned. My feet seemed positively racked with pain, yet I could not move them. They seemed to be numbed. There was an icy feeling at the back of my neck and all down my spine, and my ears, like my feet, were dead yet in torment; but there was in my breast a sense of warmth which was by comparison delicious. It was as a nightmare – a physical nightmare, if one may use such an expression; for some heavy weight on my chest made it difficult for me to breathe.

This period of semi-lethargy<sup>1</sup> seemed to remain a long time, and as it faded away I must have slept or swooned. Then came a sort of loathing, like the first stage of seasickness, and a wild desire to be free of something – I knew not what. A vast stillness enveloped me, as though all the world were asleep or dead – only broken by the low panting as of some animal close to me. I felt a warm rasping at my throat, then came a consciousness of the awful truth which chilled me to the heart and sent the blood surging up through my brain. Some great animal was lying on me and now licking my throat. I feared to stir, for some instinct of prudence bade me lie still; but the brute seemed to realize that there was now some change in me, for it raised its head. Through my eyelashes I saw above me the two great flaming eyes of a gigantic wolf. Its sharp white teeth gleamed in the gaping

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<sup>1</sup> **lethargy** – 1) unconsciousness resembling deep sleep; 2) drowsiness, apathy, indifference, inactivity.



red mouth, and I could feel its hot breath fierce and acrid upon me.

For another spell of time I remembered no more. Then I became conscious of a low growl, followed by a yelp, renewed again and again. Then seemingly very far away, I heard a 'Hol loa! holloa!' as of many voices calling in unison. Cautiously I raised my head and looked in the direction whence the sound came, but the cemetery blocked my view. The wolf still continued to yelp in a strange way, and a red glare began to move round the grove of cypresses, as though following the sound. As the voices drew closer, the wolf yelped faster and louder. I feared to make either sound or motion. Nearer came the red glow over the white pall which stretched into the darkness around me. Then all at once from beyond the trees there came at a trot a troop of horsemen bearing torches. The wolf rose from my breast and made for the cemetery. I saw one of the horsemen (soldiers by their caps and their long military cloaks) raise his carbine<sup>2</sup> and take aim. A companion knocked up his arm, and I heard the ball whiz over my head. He had evidently taken my body for that of the wolf. Another sighted the animal as it slunk away, and a shot followed. Then, at a gallop, the troop rode forward – some towards me, others following the wolf as it disappeared amongst the snow-clad cypresses.

As they drew nearer I tried to move but was powerless, although I could see and hear all that went on around me. Two or three of the soldiers jumped from their horses and knelt beside me. One of them raised my head and placed his hand over my heart.

'Good news, comrades!' he cried. 'His heart still beats!'

Then some brandy was poured down my throat; it put vigor into me, and I was able to open my eyes fully and look around. Lights and shadows were moving among the trees, and I heard men call to one another. They drew together, uttering frightened exclamations; and the lights flashed as the others came pouring out of the cemetery pell-mell, like men possessed. When the further ones came close to us, those who were around me asked them eagerly, 'Well, have you found him?'

The reply rang out hurriedly, 'No! no! Come away quick – quick! This is no place to stay, and on this of all nights!'

'What was it?' was the question, asked in all manner of keys. The answer came variously and all indefinitely as though the men were moved by some common impulse to speak yet were restrained by some common fear from giving their thoughts.

'It – it – indeed!' gibbered one, whose wits had plainly given out for the moment.

'A wolf – and yet not a wolf!' another put in shudderingly.

'No use trying for him without the sacred bullet,' a third remarked in a more ordinary manner.

'Serve us right for coming out on this night! Truly we have earned our thousand marks!' were the ejaculations of a fourth.

'There was blood on the broken marble,' another said after a pause, 'the lightning never brought that there. And for him – is he safe? Look at his throat! See comrades, the wolf has been lying on him and keeping his blood warm.'

The officer looked at my throat and replied, 'He is all right, the skin is not pierced. What does it all mean? We should never have found him but for the yelping of the wolf.'

'What became of it?' asked the man who was holding up my head and who seemed the least panic-stricken of the party, for his hands were steady and without tremor. On his sleeve was the chevron of a petty officer.

'It went home,' answered the man, whose long face was pallid and who actually shook with terror as he glanced around him fearfully. 'There are graves enough there in which it may lie. Come, comrades – come quickly! Let us leave this cursed spot.'

The officer raised me to a sitting posture, as he uttered a word of command; then several men placed me upon a horse. He sprang to the saddle behind me, took me in his arms, gave the word to advance; and, turning our faces away from the cypresses, we rode away in swift military order.

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<sup>2</sup> **carbine** – a light, shortbarrelled rifle invented in the 16th century; it is no longer a military weapon but a sporting one.

As yet my tongue refused its office, and I was perforce silent. I must have fallen asleep; for the next thing I remembered was finding myself standing up, supported by a soldier on each side of me. It was almost broad daylight, and to the north a red streak of sunlight was reflected like a path of blood over the waste of snow. The officer was telling the men to say nothing of what they had seen, except that they found an English stranger, guarded by a large dog.

‘Dog! that was no dog,’ cut in the man who had exhibited such fear. ‘I think I know a wolf when I see one.’

The young officer answered calmly, ‘I said a dog.’

‘Dog!’ reiterated the other ironically. It was evident that his courage was rising with the sun; and, pointing to me, he said, ‘Look at his throat. Is that the work of a dog, master?’

Instinctively I raised my hand to my throat, and as I touched it I cried out in pain. The men crowded round to look, some stooping down from their saddles; and again there came the calm voice of the young officer, ‘A dog, as I said. If aught else were said we should only be laughed at.’

I was then mounted behind a trooper, and we rode on into the suburbs of Munich. Here we came across a stray carriage into which I was lifted, and it was driven off to the Quatre Saisons – the young officer accompanying me, whilst a trooper followed with his horse, and the others rode off to their barracks.

When we arrived, Herr Delbruck rushed so quickly down the steps to meet me, that it was apparent he had been watching within. Taking me by both hands he solicitously led me in. The officer saluted me and was turning to withdraw, when I recognized his purpose and insisted that he should come to my rooms. Over a glass of wine I warmly thanked him and his brave comrades for saving me. He replied simply that he was more than glad, and that Herr Delbruck had at the first taken steps to make all the searching party pleased; at which ambiguous utterance the maitre d’hotel smiled, while the officer plead-duty and withdrew.

‘But Herr Delbruck,’ I enquired, ‘how and why was it that the soldiers searched for me?’

He shrugged his shoulders, as if in depreciation of his own deed, as he replied, ‘I was so fortunate as to obtain leave from the commander of the regiment in which I serve, to ask for volunteers.’

‘But how did you know I was lost?’ I asked.

‘The driver came hither with the remains of his carriage, which had been upset when the horses ran away.’

‘But surely you would not send a search party of soldiers merely on this account?’

‘Oh, no!’ he answered, ‘but even before the coachman arrived, I had this telegram from the Boyar whose guest you are,’ and he took from his pocket a telegram which he handed to me, and I read:

Bistritz<sup>1</sup>.

Be careful of my guest – his safety is most precious to me. Should aught happen to him, or if he be missed, spare nothing to find him and ensure his safety. He is English and therefore adventurous. There are often dangers from snow and wolves and night. Lose not a moment if you suspect harm to him. I answer your zeal with my fortune.

– Dracula.

As I held the telegram in my hand, the room seemed to whirl around me, and if the attentive maitre d’hotel had not caught me, I think I should have fallen. There was something so strange in all this, something so weird and impossible to imagine, that there grew on me a sense of my being in some way the sport of opposite forces – the mere vague idea of which seemed in a way to paralyze me. I was certainly under some form of mysterious protection. From a distant country had come, in the very nick of time, a message that took me out of the danger of the snow sleep and the jaws of the wolf.

## How I Edited an Agricultural Paper (Mark Twain)

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<sup>1</sup> **Bistritz** – a region and city of the same name in northern Romania, in the Eastern Carpathian Mountains

I did not take temporary editorship of an agricultural paper without misgivings. Neither would a landsman take command of a ship without misgivings. But I was in circumstances that made the salary an object. The regular editor of the paper was going off for a holiday, and I accepted the terms he offered, and took his place.

The sensation of being at work again was luxurious, and I wrought all the week with unflagging pleasure. We went to press, and I waited a day with some solicitude to see whether my effort was going to attract any notice. As I left the office, toward sundown, a group of men and boys at the foot of the stairs dispersed with one impulse, and gave me passageway, and I heard one or two of them say: 'That's him!' I was naturally pleased by this incident. The next morning I found a similar group at the foot of the stairs, and scattering couples and individuals standing here and there in the street and over the way, watching me with interest. The group separated and fell back as I approached, and I heard a man say, 'Look at his eye!' I pretended not to observe the notice I was attracting, but secretly I was pleased with it, and was purposing to write an account of it to my aunt. I went up the short flight of stairs, and heard cheery voices and a ringing laugh as I drew near the door, which I opened, and caught a glimpse of two young rural-looking men, whose faces blanched and lengthened when they saw me, and then they both plunged through the window with a great crash. I was surprised.

In about half an hour an old gentleman, with a flowing beard and a fine but rather austere face, entered, and sat down at my invitation. He seemed to have something on his mind. He took off his hat and set it on the floor, and got out of it a red silk handkerchief and a copy of our paper.

He put the paper on his lap, and while he polished his spectacles with his handkerchief he said, 'Are you the new editor?'

I said I was.

'Have you ever edited an agricultural paper before?'

'No,' I said; 'this is my first attempt.'

'Very likely. Have you had any experience in agriculture practically?'

'No; I believe I have not.'

'Some instinct told me so,' said the old gentleman, putting on his spectacles, and looking over them at me with asperity, while he folded his paper into a convenient shape. 'I wish to read you what must have made me have that instinct. It was this editorial. Listen, and see if it was you that wrote it:

"'Turnips should never be pulled, it injures them. It is much better to send a boy up and let him shake the tree.'"

'Now, what do you think of that? For I really suppose you wrote it?'

'Think of it? Why, I think it is good. I think it is sense. I have no doubt that every year millions and millions of bushels of turnips are spoiled in this township alone by being pulled in a half-ripe condition, when, if they had sent a boy up to shake the tree—'

'Shake your grandmother! Turnips don't grow on trees!'

'Oh, they don't, don't they? Well, who said they did? The language was intended to be figurative, wholly figurative. Anybody that knows anything will know that I meant that the boy should shake the vine.'

Then this old person got up and tore his paper all into small shreds, and stamped on them, and broke several things with his cane, and said I did not know as much as a cow; and then went out and banged the door after him, and, in short, acted in such a way that I fancied he was displeased about something. But not knowing what the trouble was, I could not be any help to him.

Pretty soon after this a long, cadaverous creature, with lanky locks hanging down to his shoulders, and a week's stubble bristling from the hills and valleys of his face, darted within the door, and halted, motionless, with finger on lip, and head and body bent in listening attitude. No sound was heard.

Still he listened. No sound. Then he turned the key in the door, and came elaborately tiptoeing toward me till he was within long reaching distance of me, when he stopped and, after scanning my face with intense interest for a while, drew a folded copy of our paper from his bosom, and said:

‘There, you wrote that. Read it to me – quick! Relieve me. I suffer.’

I read as follows; and as the sentences fell from my lips I could see the relief come, I could see the drawn muscles relax, and the anxiety go out of the face, and rest and peace steal over the features like the merciful moonlight over a desolate landscape:

“The guano is a fine bird, but great care is necessary in rearing it. It should not be imported earlier than June or later than September. In the winter it should be kept in a warm place, where it can hatch out its young.

It is evident that we are to have a backward season for grain. Therefore it will be well for the farmer to begin setting out his corn-stalks and planting his buckwheat cakes in July instead of August.

Concerning the pumpkin. This berry is a favorite with the natives of the interior of New England, who prefer it to the gooseberry for the making of fruit-cake, and who likewise give it the preference over the raspberry for feeding cows, as being more filling and fully as satisfying. The pumpkin is the only esculent of the orange family that will thrive in the North, except the gourd and one or two varieties of the squash. But the custom of planting it in the front yard with the shrubbery is fast going out of vogue, for it is now generally conceded that, the pumpkin as a shade tree is a failure.

Now, as the warm weather approaches, and the ganders begin to spawn—”

The excited listener sprang toward me to shake hands, and said:

‘There, there – that will do. I know I am all right now, because you have read it just as I did, word for word. But, stranger, when I first read it this morning, I said to myself, I never, never believed it before, notwithstanding my friends kept me under watch so strict, but now I believe I am crazy; and with that I fetched a howl that you might have heard two miles, and started out to kill somebody – because, you know, I knew it would come to that sooner or later, and so I might as well begin. I read one of them paragraphs over again, so as to be certain, and then I burned my house down and started. I have crippled several people, and have got one fellow up a tree, where I can get him if I want him. But I thought I would call in here as I passed along and make the thing perfectly certain; and now it is certain, and I tell you it is lucky for the chap that is in the tree. I should have killed him sure, as I went back. Good-bye, sir, good-bye; you have taken a great load off my mind. My reason has stood the strain of one of your agricultural articles, and I know that nothing can ever unseat it now. Good-bye, sir.’

I felt a little uncomfortable about the cripplings and arsons this person had been entertaining himself with, for I could not help feeling remotely accessory to them. But these thoughts were quickly banished, for the regular editor walked in! [I thought to myself, ‘Now if you had gone to Egypt as I recommended you to, I might have had a chance to get my hand in; but you wouldn’t do it, and here you are. I sort of expected you.’]

The editor was looking sad and perplexed and dejected.

He surveyed the wreck which that old rioter and those two young farmers had made, and then said, ‘This is a sad business – a very sad business. There is the mucilage-bottle broken, and six panes of glass, and a spittoon, and two candlesticks. But that is not the worst. The reputation of the paper is injured – and permanently, I fear. True, there never was such a call for the paper before, and it never sold such a large edition or soared to such celebrity; but does one want to be famous for lunacy, and prosper upon the infirmities of his mind? My friend, as I am an honest man, the street out here is full of people, and others are roosting on the fences, waiting to get a glimpse of you, because they think you are crazy. And well they might after reading your editorials. They are a disgrace to journalism. Why, what put it into your head that you could edit a paper of this nature? You do not seem to know the first rudiments of agriculture. You speak of a furrow and a harrow as being the same thing; you talk of the moulting season for cows; and you recommend the domestication of the pole-cat on account of its playfulness and its excellence as a ratter! Your remark that clams will lie quiet if music be played to them was superfluous – entirely superfluous. Nothing disturbs clams. Clams always lie quiet. Clams care nothing whatever about music. Ah, heavens and earth, friend! If you had made the acquiring of ignorance the study of your life, you

could not have graduated with higher honor than you could to-day. I never saw anything like it. Your observation that the horse-chestnut as an article of commerce is steadily gaining in favor is simply calculated to destroy this journal. I want you to throw up your situation and go. I want no more holiday – I could not enjoy it if I had it. Certainly not with you in my chair. I would always stand in dread of what you might be going to recommend next. It makes me lose all patience every time I think of your discussing oyster-beds under the head of “Landscape Gardening.” I want you to go. Nothing on earth could persuade me to take another holiday. Oh! why didn’t you tell me you didn’t know anything about agriculture?’

‘Tell you, you corn-stalk, you cabbage, you son of a cauliflower? It’s the first time I ever heard such an unfeeling remark. I tell you I have been in the editorial business going on fourteen years, and it is the first time I ever heard of a man’s having to know anything in order to edit a newspaper. You turnip! Who write the dramatic critiques for the second-rate papers? Why, a parcel of promoted shoemakers and apprentice apothecaries, who know just as much about good acting as I do about good farming and no more. Who review the books? People who never wrote one. Who do up the heavy leaders on finance? Parties who have had the largest opportunities for knowing nothing about it. Who criticize the Indian campaigns? Gentlemen who do not know a war-whoop from a wigwam<sup>1</sup>, and who never have had to run a foot-race with a tomahawk, or pluck arrows out of the several members of their families to build the evening camp-fire with. Who write the temperance appeals, and clamor about the flowing bowl? Folks who will never draw another sober breath till they do it in the grave. Who edit the agricultural papers, you, yam? Men, as a general thing, who fail in the poetry line, yellow-colored novel line, sensation, drama line, city-editor line, and finally fall back on agriculture as a temporary reprieve from the poorhouse. You try to tell me anything about the newspaper business! Sir, I have been through it from Alpha to Omaha<sup>2</sup>, and I tell you that the less a man knows the bigger the noise he makes and the higher the salary he commands. Heaven knows if I had but been ignorant instead of cultivated, and impudent instead of diffident, I could have made a name for myself in this cold, selfish world. I take my leave, sir. Since I have been treated as you have treated me, I am perfectly willing to go. But I have done my duty. I have fulfilled my contract as far as I was permitted to do it. I said I could make your paper of interest to all classes – and I have. I said I could run your circulation up to twenty thousand copies, and if I had had two more weeks I’d have done it. And I’d have given you the best class of readers that ever an agricultural paper had – not a farmer in it, nor a solitary individual who could tell a watermelon-tree from a peach-vine to save his life. You are the loser by this rupture, not me, Pie-plant. Adiós.<sup>3</sup>’

I then left.

## Experience of the McWilliamses with Membranous Croup<sup>4</sup> (Mark Twain)

[As related to the author of this book by Mr. McWilliams, a pleasant New York gentleman whom the said author met by chance on a journey.]

Well, to go back to where I was before I digressed to explain to you how that frightful and incurable disease, membranous croup, was ravaging the town and driving all mothers mad with terror, I called Mrs. McWilliams’s attention to little Penelope, and said:

‘Darling, I wouldn’t let that child be chewing that pine stick if I were you.’

‘Precious, where is the harm in it?’ said she, but at the same time preparing to take away the stick for women cannot receive even the most palpably judicious suggestion without arguing it, that is married women.

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1 **wigwam** – a traditional dome-shaped dwelling of North American Indians consisting of a framework covered with large woven mats

2 **Alpha and Omaha** – *Alpha* is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; *Omaha* is a city in eastern Nebraska, US; in the popular phrase ‘Alpha and Omega’, where Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet, the author substitutes Omega for Omaha.

3 **Adiós** = Goodbye (*Spanish*)

4 **Membranous croup** – an infectious respiratory children disease with harsh cough and difficult breathing

I replied:

‘Love, it is notorious that pine is the least nutritious wood that a child can eat.’

My wife’s hand paused, in the act of taking the stick, and returned itself to her lap. She bridled perceptibly, and said:

‘Hubby, you know better than that. You know you do. Doctors all say that the turpentine in pine wood is good for weak back and the kidneys.’

‘Ah – I was under a misapprehension. I did not know that the child’s kidneys and spine were affected, and that the family physician had recommended–’

‘Who said the child’s spine and kidneys were affected?’

‘My love, you intimated it.’

‘The idea! I never intimated anything of the kind.’

‘Why, my dear, it hasn’t been two minutes since you said–’

‘Bother what I said! I don’t care what I did say. There isn’t any harm in the child’s chewing a bit of pine stick if she wants to, and you know it perfectly well. And she shall chew it, too. So there, now!’

‘Say no more, my dear. I now see the force of your reasoning, and I will go and order two or three cords of the best pine wood to-day. No child of mine shall want while I–’

‘Oh, please go along to your office and let me have some peace. A body can never make the simplest remark but you must take it up and go to arguing and arguing and arguing till you don’t know what you are talking about, and you never do.’

‘Very well, it shall be as you say. But there is a want of logic in your last remark which–’

However, she was gone with a flourish before I could finish, and had taken the child with her. That night at dinner she confronted me with a face as white as a sheet:

‘Oh, Mortimer, there’s another! Little Georgi Gordon is taken.’

‘Membranous croup?’

‘Membranous croup.’

‘Is there any hope for him?’

‘None in the wide world. Oh, what is to become of us!’

By and by a nurse brought in our Penelope to say good night and offer the customary prayer at the mother’s knee. In the midst of ‘Now I lay me down to sleep,’ she gave a slight cough! My wife fell back like one stricken with death. But the next moment she was up and brimming with the activities which terror inspires.

She commanded that the child’s crib be removed from the nursery to our bedroom; and she went along to see the order executed. She took me with her, of course. We got matters arranged with speed. A cot-bed was put up in my wife’s dressing room for the nurse. But now Mrs. McWilliams said we were too far away from the other baby, and what if he were to have the symptoms in the night – and she blanched again, poor thing.

We then restored the crib and the nurse to the nursery and put up a bed for ourselves in a room adjoining.

Presently, however, Mrs. McWilliams said suppose the baby should catch it from Penelope? This thought struck a new panic to her heart, and the tribe of us could not get the crib out of the nursery again fast enough to satisfy my wife, though she assisted in her own person and well-nigh pulled the crib to pieces in her frantic hurry.

We moved down-stairs; but there was no place there to stow the nurse, and Mrs. McWilliams said the nurse’s experience would be an inestimable help. So we returned, bag and baggage, to our own bedroom once more, and felt a great gladness, like storm-buffed birds that have found their nest again.

Mrs. McWilliams sped to the nursery to see how things were going on there. She was back in a moment with a new dread. She said:

‘What can make Baby sleep so?’

I said:

‘Why, my darling, Baby always sleeps like a graven image.’

'I know. I know; but there's something peculiar about his sleep now. He seems to – to – he seems to breathe so regularly. Oh, this is dreadful.'

'But, my dear, he always breathes regularly.'

'Oh, I know it, but there's something frightful about it now. His nurse is too young and inexperienced. Maria shall stay there with her, and be on hand if anything happens.'

'That is a good idea, but who will help you?'

'You can help me all I want. I wouldn't allow anybody to do anything but myself, anyhow, at such a time as this.'

I said I would feel mean to lie abed and sleep, and leave her to watch and toil over our little patient all the weary night. But she reconciled me to it. So old Maria departed and took up her ancient quarters in the nursery.

Penelope coughed twice in her sleep.

'Oh, why don't that doctor come! Mortimer, this room is too warm. This room is certainly too warm. Turn off the register – quick!'

I shut it off, glancing at the thermometer at the same time, and wondering to myself if 70 was too warm for a sick child.

The coachman arrived from down-town now with the news that our physician was ill and confined to his bed. Mrs. McWilliams turned a dead eye upon me, and said in a dead voice:

'There is a Providence in it. It is foreordained. He never was sick before. Never. We have not been living as we ought to live, Mortimer. Time and time again I have told you so. Now you see the result. Our child will never get well. Be thankful if you can forgive yourself; I never can forgive myself.'

I said, without intent to hurt, but with heedless choice of words, that I could not see that we had been living such an abandoned life.

'Mortimer! Do you want to bring the judgment upon Baby, too!'

Then she began to cry, but suddenly exclaimed:

'The doctor must have sent medicines!'

I said:

'Certainly. They are here. I was only waiting for you to give me a chance.'

'Well do give them to me! Don't you know that every moment is precious now? But what was the use in sending medicines, when he knows that the disease is incurable?'

I said that while there was life there was hope.

'Hope! Mortimer, you know no more what you are talking about than the child unborn. If you would – as I live, the directions say give one teaspoonful once an hour! Once an hour! – as if we had a whole year before us to save the child in! Mortimer, please hurry. Give the poor perishing thing a tablespoonful, and try to be quick!'

'Why, my dear, a tablespoonful might–'

'Don't drive me frantic!.. There, there, there, my precious, my own; it's nasty bitter stuff, but it's good for Nelly – good for mother's precious darling; and it will make her well. There, there, there, put the little head on mamma's breast and go to sleep, and pretty soon – oh, I know she can't live till morning! Mortimer, a tablespoonful every half-hour will – Oh, the child needs belladonna, too; I know she does – and aconite. Get them, Mortimer. Now do let me have my way. You know nothing about these things.'

We now went to bed, placing the crib close to my wife's pillow. All this turmoil had worn upon me, and within two minutes I was something more than half asleep. Mrs. McWilliams roused me:

'Darling, is that register turned on?'

'No.'

'I thought as much. Please turn it on at once. This room is cold.'

I turned it on, and presently fell asleep again. I was aroused once more:

'Dearie, would you mind moving the crib to your side of the bed? It is nearer the register.'

I moved it, but had a collision with the rug and woke up the child. I dozed off once more,

while my wife quieted the sufferer. But in a little while these words came murmuring remotely through the fog of my drowsiness:

‘Mortimer, if we only had some goose grease – will you ring?’

I climbed dreamily out, and stepped on a cat, which responded with a protest and would have got a convincing kick for it if a chair had not got it instead.

‘Now, Mortimer, why do you want to turn up the gas and wake up the child again?’

‘Because I want to see how much I am hurt, Caroline.’

‘Well, look at the chair, too – I have no doubt it is ruined. Poor cat, suppose you had–’

‘Now I am not going to suppose anything about the cat. It never would have occurred if Maria had been allowed to remain here and attend to these duties, which are in her line and are not in mine.’

‘Now, Mortimer, I should think you would be ashamed to make a remark like that. It is a pity if you cannot do the few little things I ask of you at such an awful time as this when our child–’

‘There, there, I will do anything you want. But I can’t raise anybody with this bell. They’re all gone to bed. Where is the goose grease?’

‘On the mantelpiece in the nursery. If you’ll step there and speak to Maria–’

I fetched the goose grease and went to sleep again. Once more I was called:

‘Mortimer, I so hate to disturb you, but the room is still too cold for me to try to apply this stuff. Would you mind lighting the fire? It is all ready to touch a match to.’

I dragged myself out and lit the fire, and then sat down disconsolate.

‘Mortimer, don’t sit there and catch your death of cold. Come to bed.’

As I was stepping in she said:

‘But wait a moment. Please give the child some more of the medicine.’

Which I did. It was a medicine which made a child more or less lively; so my wife made use of its waking interval to strip it and grease it all over with the goose oil. I was soon asleep once more, but once more I had to get up.

‘Mortimer, I feel a draft. I feel it distinctly. There is nothing so bad for this disease as a draft. Please move the crib in front of the fire.’

I did it; and collided with the rug again, which I threw in the fire. Mrs. McWilliams sprang out of bed and rescued it and we had some words. I had another trifling interval of sleep, and then got up, by request, and constructed a flax-seed poultice. This was placed upon the child’s breast and left there to do its healing work.

A wood-fire is not a permanent thing. I got up every twenty minutes and renewed ours, and this gave Mrs. McWilliams the opportunity to shorten the times of giving the medicines by ten minutes, which was a great satisfaction to her. Now and then, between times, I reorganized the flax-seed poultices, and applied sinapisms and other sorts of blisters where unoccupied places could be found upon the child. Well, toward morning the wood gave out and my wife wanted me to go down cellar and get some more. I said:

‘My dear, it is a laborious job, and the child must be nearly warm enough, with her extra clothing. Now mightn’t we put on another layer of poultices and–’

I did not finish, because I was interrupted. I lugged wood up from below for some little time, and then turned in and fell to snoring as only a man can whose strength is all gone and whose soul is worn out. Just at broad daylight I felt a grip on my shoulder that brought me to my senses suddenly. My wife was glaring down upon me and gasping. As soon as she could command her tongue she said:

‘It is all over! All over! The child’s perspiring! What shall we do?’

‘Mercy, how you terrify me! I don’t know what we ought to do. Maybe if we scraped her and put her in the draft again–’

‘Oh, idiot! There is not a moment to lose! Go for the doctor. Go yourself. Tell him he must come, dead or alive.’

I dragged that poor sick man from his bed and brought him. He looked at the child and said she was not dying. This was joy unspeakable to me, but it made my wife as mad as if he had offered



her a personal affront. Then he said the child's cough was only caused by some trifling irritation or other in the throat. At this I thought my wife had a mind to show him the door. Now the doctor said he would make the child cough harder and dislodge the trouble. So he gave her something that sent her into a spasm of coughing, and presently up came a little wood splinter or so.

'This child has no membranous croup,' said he. 'She has been chewing a bit of pine shingle or something of the kind, and got some little slivers in her throat. They won't do her any hurt.'

'No,' said I, 'I can well believe that. Indeed, the turpentine that is in them is very good for certain sorts of diseases that are peculiar to children. My wife will tell you so.'

But she did not. She turned away in disdain and left the room; and since that time there is one episode in our life which we never refer to. Hence the tide of our days flows by in deep and untroubled serenity.

[Very few married men have such an experience as McWilliams's, and so the author of this book thought that maybe the novelty of it would give it a passing interest to the reader.]

## The Choice (Edith Wharton)

### I

Stilling, that night after dinner, had surpassed himself. He always did, Wrayford reflected, when the small fry from Highfield came to dine. He, Cobham Stilling, who had to find his bearings and keep to his level in the big heedless ironic world of New York, dilated and grew vast in the congenial medium of Highfield. The Red House was the biggest house of the Highfield summer colony, and Cobham Stilling was its biggest man. No one else within a radius of a hundred miles (on a conservative estimate) had as many horses, as many greenhouses, as many servants, and assuredly no one else had three motors and a motor-boat for the lake.

The motor-boat was Stilling's latest hobby, and he rode – or steered – it in and out of the conversation all the evening, to the obvious edification of every one present save his wife and his visitor, Austin Wrayford. The interest of the latter two who, from opposite ends of the drawing-room, exchanged a fleeting glance when Stilling again launched his craft on the thin current of the talk – the interest of Mrs. Stilling and Wrayford had already lost its edge by protracted contact with the subject.

But the dinner-guests – the Rector, Mr. Swordsley, his wife Mrs. Swordsley, Lucy and Agnes Granger, their brother Addison, and young Jack Emmerton from Harvard – were all, for divers reasons, stirred to the proper pitch of feeling. Mr. Swordsley, no doubt, was saying to himself: 'If my good parishioner here can afford to buy a motor-boat, in addition to all the other expenditures which an establishment like this must entail, I certainly need not scruple to appeal to him again for a contribution for our Galahad Club.' The Granger girls, meanwhile, were evoking visions of lakeside picnics, not unadorned with the presence of young Mr. Emmerton; while that youth himself speculated as to whether his affable host would let him, when he came back on his next vacation, 'learn to run the thing himself'; and Mr. Addison Granger, the elderly bachelor brother of the volatile Lucy and Agnes, mentally formulated the precise phrase in which, in his next letter to his cousin Professor Spildyke of the University of East Latmos, he should allude to 'our last delightful trip in my old friend Cobham Stilling's ten-thousand-dollar motor-launch' – for East Latmos was still in that primitive stage of culture on which five figures impinge.

*Isabel Stilling, sitting beside Mrs. Swordsley, her head slightly bent above the needlework with which on these occasions it was her old-fashioned habit to employ herself – Isabel also had doubtless her reflections to make. As Wrayford leaned back in his corner and looked at her across the wide flower-filled drawing-room he noted, first of all – for the how many hundredth time? – the play of her hands above the embroidery-frame, the shadow of the thick dark hair on her forehead, the lids over her somewhat full grey eyes. He noted all this with a conscious deliberateness of enjoyment, taking in unconsciously, at the same time, the particular quality in her attitude, in the fall of her dress and the turn of her head, which had set her for him, from the first day, in a*

*separate world; then he said to himself: 'She is certainly thinking: "Where on earth will Cobham get the money to pay for it?"'*

Stilling, cigar in mouth and thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, was impressively perorating from his usual dominant position on the hearth-rug.

'I said: "If I have the thing at all, I want the best that can be got." That's my way, you know, Swordsley; I suppose I'm what you'd call fastidious. Always was, about everything, from cigars to wom—' his eye met the apprehensive glance of Mrs. Swordsley, who looked like her husband with his clerical coat cut slightly lower — 'so I said: "If I have the thing at all, I want the best that can be got." Nothing makeshift for me, no second-best. I never cared for the cheap and showy. I always say frankly to a man: "If you can't give me a first-rate cigar, for the Lord's sake let me smoke my own."' He paused to do so. 'Well, if you have my standards, you can't buy a thing in a minute. You must look round, compare, select. I found there were lots of motor-boats on the market, just as there's lots of stuff called champagne. But I said to myself: "Ten to one there's only one fit to buy, just as there's only one champagne fit for a gentleman to drink." Argued like a lawyer, eh, Austin?' He tossed this to Wrayford. 'Take me for one of your own trade, wouldn't you? Well, I'm not such a fool as I look. I suppose you fellows who are tied to the treadmill — excuse me, Swordsley, but work's work, isn't it? — I suppose you think a man like me has nothing to do but take it easy: loll through life like a woman. By George, sir, I'd like either of you to see the time it takes — I won't say the *brain* — but just the time it takes to pick out a good motor-boat. Why, I went—'

Mrs. Stilling set her embroidery-frame noiselessly on the table at her side, and turned her head toward Wrayford. 'Would you mind ringing for the tray?'

The interruption helped Mrs. Swordsley to waver to her feet. 'I'm afraid we ought really to be going; my husband has an early service to-morrow.'

Her host intervened with a genial protest. 'Going already? Nothing of the sort! Why, the night's still young, as the poet says. Long way from here to the rectory? Nonsense! In our little twenty-horse car we do it in five minutes — don't we, Belle? Ah, you're walking, to be sure—' Stilling's indulgent gesture seemed to concede that, in such a case, allowances must be made, and that he was the last man not to make them. 'Well, then, Swordsley—' He held out a thick red hand that seemed to exude beneficence, and the clergyman, pressing it, ventured to murmur a suggestion.

'What, that Galahad Club again? Why, I thought my wife — Isabel, didn't we — No? Well, it must have been my mother, then. Of course, you know, anything my good mother gives is — well — virtually — You haven't asked her? Sure? I could have sworn; I get so many of these appeals. And in these times, you know, we have to go cautiously. I'm sure you recognize that yourself, Swordsley. With my obligations — here now, to show you don't bear malice, have a brandy and soda before you go. Nonsense, man! This brandy isn't liquor; it's liqueur. I picked it up last year in London — last of a famous lot from Lord St. Oswyn's cellar. Laid down here, it stood me at — Eh?' he broke off as his wife moved toward him. 'Ah, yes, of course. Miss Lucy, Miss Agnes — a drop of soda-water? Look here, Addison, you won't refuse my tippie, I know. Well, take a cigar, at any rate, Swordsley. And, by the way, I'm afraid you'll have to go round the long way by the avenue to-night. Sorry, Mrs. Swordsley, but I forgot to tell them to leave the gate into the lane unlocked. Well, it's a jolly night, and I daresay you won't mind the extra turn along the lake. And, by Jove! if the moon's out, you'll have a glimpse of the motorboat. She's moored just out beyond our boat-house; and it's a privilege to look at her, I can tell you!'

The dispersal of his guests carried Stilling out into the hall, where his pleasantries reverberated under the oak rafters while the Granger girls were being muffled for the drive and the carriages summoned from the stables.

By a common impulse Mrs. Stilling and Wrayford had moved together toward the fire-place, which was hidden by a tall screen from the door into the hall. Wrayford leaned his elbow against the mantel-piece, and Mrs. Stilling stood beside him, her clasped hands hanging down before her.

'Have you anything more to talk over with him?' she asked.

'No. We wound it all up before dinner. He doesn't want to talk about it anymore than he can

help.'

'It's so bad?'

'No; but this time he's got to pull up.'

She stood silent, with lowered lids. He listened a moment, catching Stilling's farewell shout; then he moved a little nearer, and laid his hand on her arm.

'In an hour?'

She made an imperceptible motion of assent.

'I'll tell you about it then. The key's as usual?'

She signed another 'Yes' and walked away with her long drifting step as her husband came in from the hall.

He went up to the tray and poured himself out a tall glass of brandy and soda.

'The weather is turning queer – black as pitch. I hope the Swordsleys won't walk into the lake – involuntary immersion, eh? He'd come out a Baptist<sup>1</sup>, I suppose. What'd the Bishop do in such a case? There's a problem for a lawyer, my boy!'

He clapped his hand on Wrayford's thin shoulder and then walked over to his wife, who was gathering up her embroidery silks and dropping them into her work-bag. Stilling took her by the arms and swung her playfully about so that she faced the lamplight.

'What's the matter with you tonight?'

'The matter?' she echoed, colouring a little, and standing very straight in her desire not to appear to shrink from his touch.

'You never opened your lips. Left me the whole job of entertaining those blessed people. Didn't she, Austin?'

Wrayford laughed and lit a cigarette.

'There! You see even Austin noticed it. What's the matter, I say? Aren't they good enough for you? I don't say they're particularly exciting; but, hang it! I like to ask them here – I like to give people pleasure.'

'I didn't mean to be dull,' said Isabel.

'Well, you must learn to make an effort. Don't treat people as if they weren't in the room just because they don't happen to amuse you. Do you know what they'll think? They'll think it's because you've got a bigger house and more money than they have. Shall I tell you something? My mother said she'd noticed the same thing in you lately. She said she sometimes felt you looked down on her for living in a small house. Oh, she was half joking, of course; but you see you do give people that impression. I can't understand treating any one in that way. The more I have myself, the more I want to make other people happy.'

Isabel gently freed herself and laid the work-bag on her embroidery-frame. 'I have a headache; perhaps that made me stupid. I'm going to bed.' She turned toward Wrayford and held out her hand. 'Good night.'

'Good night,' he answered, opening the door for her.

When he turned back into the room, his host was pouring himself a third glass of brandy and soda.

'Here, have a nip, Austin? Gad, I need it badly, after the shaking up you gave me this afternoon.' Stilling laughed and carried his glass to the hearth, where he took up his usual commanding position. 'Why the deuce don't you drink something? You look as glum as Isabel. One would think you were the chap that had been hit by this business.'

Wrayford threw himself into the chair from which Mrs. Stilling had lately risen. It was the one she usually sat in, and to his fancy a faint scent of her clung to it. He leaned back and looked up at Stilling.

'Want a cigar?' the latter continued. 'Shall we go into the den and smoke?'

Wrayford hesitated. 'If there's anything more you want to ask me about—'

'Gad, no! I had full measure and running over this afternoon. The deuce of it is, I don't see where the money's all gone to. Luckily I've got plenty of nerve; I'm not the kind of man to sit down

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<sup>1</sup> **Baptist** – a follower of those Protestant Christians who insist that only believers should be baptized

and snivel because I've been touched in Wall Street<sup>2</sup>.'

Wrayford got to his feet again. 'Then, if you don't want me, I think I'll go up to my room and put some finishing touches to a brief before I turn in. I must get back to town to-morrow afternoon.'

'All right, then.' Stilling set down his empty glass, and held out his hand with a tinge of alacrity. 'Good night, old man.'

They shook hands, and Wrayford moved toward the door.

'I say, Austin – stop a minute!' his host called after him. Wrayford turned, and the two men faced each other across the hearth-rug. Stilling's eyes shifted uneasily.

'There's one thing more you can do for me before you leave. Tell Isabel about that loan; explain to her that she's got to sign a note for it.'

Wrayford, in his turn, flushed slightly. 'You want me to tell her?'

'Hang it! I'm soft-hearted – that's the worst of me.'

Stilling moved toward the tray, and lifted the brandy decanter. 'And she'll take it better from you; she'll *have* to take it from you. She's proud. You can take her out for a row to-morrow morning – look here, take her out in the motor-launch if you like. I meant to have a spin in it myself; but if you'll tell her—'

Wrayford hesitated. 'All right, I'll tell her.'

'Thanks a lot, my dear fellow. And you'll make her see it wasn't my fault, eh? Women are awfully vague about money, and she'll think it's all right if you back me up.'

Wrayford nodded. 'As you please.'

'And, Austin – there's just one more thing. You needn't say anything to Isabel about the other business – I mean about my mother's securities.'

'Ah?' said Wrayford, pausing.

Stilling shifted from one foot to the other. 'I'd rather put that to the old lady myself. I can make it clear to her. She idolizes me, you know – and, hang it! I've got a good record. Up to now, I mean. My mother's been in clover since I married; I may say she's been my first thought. And I don't want her to hear of this beastly business from Isabel. Isabel's a little harsh at times – and of course this isn't going to make her any easier to live with.'

'Very well,' said Wrayford.

Stilling, with a look of relief, walked toward the window which opened on the terrace. 'Gad! what a queer night! Hot as the kitchen-range. Shouldn't wonder if we had a squall before morning. I wonder if that infernal skipper took in the launch's awnings before he went home.'

Wrayford stopped with his hand on the door. 'Yes, I saw him do it. She's shipshape for the night.'

'Good! That saves me a run down to the shore.'

'Good night, then,' said Wrayford.

'Good night, old man. You'll tell her?'

'I'll tell her.'

'And mum about my mother!' his host called after him.

## II

The darkness had thinned a little when Wrayford scrambled down the steep path to the shore. Though the air was heavy the threat of a storm seemed to have vanished, and now and then the moon's edge showed above a torn slope of cloud.

But in the thick shrubbery about the boat-house the darkness was still dense, and Wrayford had to strike a match before he could find the lock and insert his key. He left the door unlatched, and groped his way in. How often he had crept into this warm pine-scented obscurity, guiding himself by the edge of the bench along the wall, and hearing the soft lap of water through the gaps in the flooring! He knew just where one had to duck one's head to avoid the two canoes swung from the rafters, and just where to put his hand on the latch of the farther door that led to the broad

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<sup>2</sup> **Wall Street** – a street in New York City, in the borough of Manhattan, the financial centre of the United States

balcony above the lake.

The boat-house represented one of Stilling's abandoned whims. He had built it some seven years before, and for a time it had been the scene of incessant nautical exploits. Stilling had rowed, sailed, paddled indefatigably, and all Highfield had been impressed to bear him company, and to admire his versatility. Then motors had come in, and he had forsaken aquatic sports for the flying chariot. The canoes of birch-bark and canvas had been hoisted to the roof, the sail-boat had rotted at her moorings, and the movable floor of the boat-house, ingeniously contrived to slide back on noiseless runners, had lain undisturbed through several seasons. Even the key of the boat-house had been mislaid – by Isabel's fault, her husband said – and the locksmith had to be called in to make a new one when the purchase of the motor-boat made the lake once more the centre of Stilling's activity.

As Wrayford entered he noticed that a strange oily odor overpowered the usual scent of dry pine-wood; and at the next step his foot struck an object that rolled noisily across the boards. He lighted another match, and found he had overturned a can of grease which the boatman had no doubt been using to oil the runners of the sliding floor.

Wrayford felt his way down the length of the boathouse, and softly opening the balcony door looked out on the lake. A few yards away, he saw the launch lying at anchor in the veiled moonlight; and just below him, on the black water, was the dim outline of the skiff which the boatman kept to paddle out to her. The silence was so intense that Wrayford fancied he heard a faint rustling in the shrubbery on the high bank behind the boat-house, and the crackle of gravel on the path descending to it.

He closed the door again and turned back into the darkness; and as he did so the other door, on the land-side, swung inward, and he saw a figure in the dim opening. Just enough light entered through the round holes above the respective doors to reveal Mrs. Stilling's cloaked outline, and to guide her to him as he advanced. But before they met she stumbled and gave a little cry.

'What is it?' he exclaimed.

'My foot caught; the floor seemed to give way under me. Ah, of course–' she bent down in the darkness – 'I saw the men oiling it this morning.'

Wrayford caught her by the arm. 'Do take care! It might be dangerous if it slid too easily. The water's deep under here.'

'Yes; the water's very deep. I sometimes wish–' She leaned against him without finishing her sentence, and he put both arms about her.

'Hush!' he said, his lips on hers.

Suddenly she threw her head back and seemed to listen.

'What's the matter? What do you hear?'

'I don't know.' He felt her trembling. 'I'm not sure this place is as safe as it used to be–'

Wrayford held her to him reassuringly. 'But the boatman sleeps down at the village; and who else should come here at this hour?'

'Cobham might. He thinks of nothing but the launch.'

'He won't to-night. I told him I'd seen the skipper put her shipshape, and that satisfied him.'

'Ah – he did think of coming, then?'

'Only for a minute, when the sky looked so black half an hour ago, and he was afraid of a squall. It's clearing now, and there's no danger.'

He drew her down on the bench, and they sat a moment or two in silence, her hands in his. Then she said: 'You'd better tell me.'

Wrayford gave a faint laugh. 'Yes, I suppose I had. In fact, he asked me to.'

'He asked you to?'

'Yes.'

She uttered an exclamation of contempt. 'He's afraid!'

Wrayford made no reply, and she went on: 'I'm not. Tell me everything, please.'

'Well, he's chucked away a pretty big sum again–'

'How?'

‘He says he doesn’t know. He’s been speculating, I suppose. The madness of making him your trustee!’

She drew her hands away. ‘You know why I did it. When we married I didn’t want to put him in the false position of the man who contributes nothing and accepts everything; I wanted people to think the money was partly his.’

‘I don’t know what you’ve made people think; but you’ve been eminently successful in one respect. *He* thinks it’s all his – and he loses it as if it were.’

‘There are worse things. What was it that he wished you to tell me?’

‘That you’ve got to sign another promissory note – for fifty thousand this time.’

‘Is that all?’

Wrayford hesitated; then he said: ‘Yes – for the present.’

She sat motionless, her head bent, her hand resting passively in his.

He leaned nearer. ‘What did you mean just now, by worse things?’

She hesitated. ‘Haven’t you noticed that he’s been drinking a great deal lately?’

‘Yes; I’ve noticed.’

They were both silent; then Wrayford broke out, with sudden vehemence: ‘And yet you won’t–’

‘Won’t?’

‘Put an end to it. Good God! Save what’s left of your life.’

She made no answer, and in the stillness the throb of the water underneath them sounded like the beat of a tormented heart.

‘Isabel–’ Wrayford murmured. He bent over to kiss her. ‘Isabel! I can’t stand it! listen–’

‘No; no. I’ve thought of everything. There’s the boy – the boy’s fond of him. He’s not a bad father.’

‘Except in the trifling matter of ruining his son.’

‘And there’s his poor old mother. He’s a good son, at any rate; he’d never hurt her. And I know her. If I left him, she’d never take a penny of my money. What she has of her own is not enough to live on; and how could he provide for her? If I put him out of doors, I should be putting his mother out too.’

‘You could arrange that – there are always ways.’

‘Not for her! She’s proud. And then she believes in him. Lots of people believe in him, you know. It would kill her if she ever found out.’

Wrayford made an impatient movement. ‘It will kill you if you stay with him to prevent her finding out.’

She laid her other hand on his. ‘Not while I have you.’

‘Have me? In this way?’

‘In any way.’

‘My poor girl – poor child!’

‘Unless you grow tired – unless your patience gives out.’

He was silent, and she went on insistently: ‘Don’t you suppose I’ve thought of that too – foreseen it?’

‘Well – and then?’ he exclaimed.

‘I’ve accepted that too.’

He dropped her hands with a despairing gesture. ‘Then, indeed, I waste my breath!’

She made no answer, and for a time they sat silent again, a little between them. At length he asked: ‘You’re not crying?’

‘No.’

‘I can’t see your face, it’s grown so dark.’

‘Yes. The storm must be coming.’ She made a motion as if to rise.

He drew close and put his arm about her. ‘Don’t leave me yet. You know I must go to-morrow.’ He broke off with a laugh. ‘I’m to break the news to you to-morrow morning, by the way; I’m to take you out in the motor-launch and break it to you.’ He dropped her hands and stood

up. 'Good God! How can I go and leave you here with him?'

'You've done it often.'

'Yes; but each time it's more damnable. And then I've always had a hope—'

She rose also. 'Give it up! Give it up!'

'You've none, then, yourself?'

She was silent, drawing the folds of her cloak about her.

'None – none?' he insisted.

He had to bend his head to hear her answer. 'Only one!'

'What, my dearest? What?'

'Don't touch me! That he may die!'

They drew apart again, hearing each other's quick breathing through the darkness.

'You wish that too?' he said.

'I wish it always – every day, every hour, every moment!' She paused, and then let the words break from her. 'You'd better know it; you'd better know the worst of me. I'm not the saint you suppose; the duty I do is poisoned by the thoughts I think. Day by day, hour by hour, I wish him dead. When he goes out I pray for something to happen; when he comes back I say to myself: "Are you here again?" When I hear of people being killed in accidents, I think: "Why wasn't he there?" When I read the death-notices in the paper I say: "So-and-so was just his age." When I see him taking such care of his health and his diet – as he does, you know, except when he gets reckless and begins to drink too much – when I see him exercising and resting, and eating only certain things, and weighing himself, and feeling his muscles, and boasting that he hasn't gained a pound, I think of the men who die from overwork, or who throw their lives away for some great object, and I say to myself: "What can kill a man who thinks only of himself?" And night after night I keep myself from going to sleep for fear I may dream that he's dead. When I dream that, and wake and find him there it's worse than ever—'

She broke off with a sob, and the loud lapping of the water under the floor was like the beat of a rebellious heart.

'There, you know the truth!' she said.

He answered after a pause: 'People do die.'

'Do they?' She laughed. 'Yes – in happy marriages!'

They were silent again, and Isabel turned, feeling her way toward the door. As she did so, the profound stillness was broken by the sound of a man's voice trolling out unsteadily the refrain of a music-hall song.

The two in the boat-house darted toward each other with a simultaneous movement, clutching hands as they met.

'He's coming!' Isabel said.

Wrayford disengaged his hands.

'He may only be out for a turn before he goes to bed. Wait a minute. I'll see.' He felt his way to the bench, scrambled up on it, and stretching his body forward managed to bring his eyes in line with the opening above the door.

'It's as black as pitch. I can't see anything.'

The refrain rang out nearer.

'Wait! I saw something twinkle. There it is again. It's his cigar. It's coming this way – down the path.'

There was a long rattle of thunder through the stillness.

'It's the storm!' Isabel whispered. 'He's coming to see about the launch.'

Wrayford dropped noiselessly from the bench and she caught him by the arm.

'Isn't there time to get up the path and slip under the shrubbery?'

'No, he's in the path now. He'll be here in two minutes. He'll find us.'

He felt her hand tighten on his arm.

'You must go in the skiff, then. It's the only way.'

'And let him find you? And hear my oars? Listen – there's something I must say.'

She flung her arms about him and pressed her face to his.

'Isabel, just now I didn't tell you everything. He's ruined his mother – taken everything of hers too. And he's got to tell her; it can't be kept from her.'

She uttered an incredulous exclamation and drew back.

'Is this the truth? Why didn't you tell me before?'

'He forbade me. You were not to know.'

Close above them, in the shrubbery, Stilling warbled:

*'Nita, Juanita,  
Ask thy soul if we must part!'*

Wrayford held her by both arms. 'Understand this – if he comes in, he'll find us. And if there's a row you'll lose your boy.'

She seemed not to hear him. 'You – you – you – he'll kill you!' she exclaimed.

Wrayford laughed impatiently and released her, and she stood shrinking against the wall, her hands pressed to her breast. Wrayford straightened himself and she felt that he was listening intently. Then he dropped to his knees and laid his hands against the boards of the sliding floor. It yielded at once, as if with a kind of evil alacrity; and at their feet they saw, under the motionless solid night, another darker night that moved and shimmered. Wrayford threw himself back against the opposite wall, behind the door.

A key rattled in the lock, and after a moment's fumbling the door swung open. Wrayford and Isabel saw a man's black bulk against the obscurity. It moved a step, lurched forward, and vanished out of sight. From the depths beneath them there came a splash and a long cry.

'Go! go!' Wrayford cried out, feeling blindly for Isabel in the blackness.

'Oh–' she cried, wrenching herself away from him.

He stood still a moment, as if dazed; then she saw him suddenly plunge from her side, and heard another splash far down, and a tumult in the beaten water.

In the darkness she cowered close to the opening, pressing her face over the edge, and crying out the name of each of the two men in turn. Suddenly she began to see: the obscurity was less opaque, as if a faint moon-pallor diluted it. Isabel vaguely discerned the two shapes struggling in the black pit below her; once she saw the gleam of a face. She glanced up desperately for some means of rescue, and caught sight of the oars ranged on brackets against the wall. She snatched down the nearest, bent over the opening, and pushed the oar down into the blackness, crying out her husband's name.

The clouds had swallowed the moon again, and she could see nothing below her; but she still heard the tumult in the beaten water.

'Cobham! Cobham!' she screamed.

As if in answer, she felt a mighty clutch on the oar, a clutch that strained her arms to the breaking-point as she tried to brace her knees against the runners of the sliding floor.

'Hold on! Hold on! Hold on!' a voice gasped out from below; and she held on, with racked muscles, with bleeding palms, with eyes straining from their sockets, and a heart that tugged at her as the weight was tugging at the oar.

Suddenly the weight relaxed, and the oar slipped up through her lacerated hands. She felt a wet body scrambling over the edge of the opening, and Stilling's voice, raucous and strange, groaned out, close to her: 'God! I thought I was done for.'

He staggered to his knees, coughing and sputtering, and the water dripped on her from his streaming clothes.

She flung herself down, again, straining over the pit. Not a sound came up from it.

'Austin! Austin! Quick! Another oar!' she shrieked.

Stilling gave a cry. 'My God! Was it Austin? What in hell – Another oar? No, no; untie the skiff, I tell you. But it's no use. Nothing's any use. I felt him lose hold as I came up.'



After that she was conscious of nothing till, hours later, as it appeared to her, she became dimly aware of her husband's voice, high, hysterical and important, haranguing a group of scared lantern-struck faces that had sprung up mysteriously about them in the night.

'Poor Austin! Poor Wrayford... terrible loss to me... mysterious dispensation. Yes, I do feel gratitude – miraculous escape – but I wish old Austin could have known that I was saved!'

## **The Remarkable Rocket (Oscar Wilde)**

The King's son was going to be married, so there were general rejoicings. He had waited a whole year for his bride, and at last she had arrived. She was a Russian Princess, and had driven all the way from Finland in a sledge drawn by six reindeer. The sledge was shaped like a great golden swan, and between the swan's wings lay the little Princess herself. Her long ermine-cloak reached right down to her feet, on her head was a tiny cap of silver tissue, and she was as pale as the Snow Palace in which she had always lived. So pale was she that as she drove through the streets all the people wondered. 'She is like a white rose!' they cried, and they threw down flowers on her from the balconies.

At the gate of the Castle the Prince was waiting to receive her. He had dreamy violet eyes, and his hair was like fine gold. When he saw her he sank upon one knee, and kissed her hand.

'Your picture was beautiful,' he murmured, 'but you are more beautiful than your picture;' and the little Princess blushed.

'She was like a white rose before,' said a young Page to his neighbour, 'but she is like a red rose now;' and the whole Court was delighted.

For the next three days everybody went about saying, 'White rose, Red rose, Red rose, White rose;' and the King gave orders that the Page's salary was to be doubled. As he received no salary at all this was not of much use to him, but it was considered a great honour, and was duly published in the Court Gazette.

When the three days were over the marriage was celebrated. It was a magnificent ceremony, and the bride and bridegroom walked hand in hand under a canopy of purple velvet embroidered with little pearls. Then there was a State Banquet, which lasted for five hours. The Prince and Princess sat at the top of the Great Hall and drank out of a cup of clear crystal. Only true lovers could drink out of this cup, for if false lips touched it, it grew grey and dull and cloudy.

'It's quite clear that they love each other,' said the little Page, 'as clear as crystal!' and the King doubled his salary a second time.

'What an honour!' cried all the courtiers.

After the banquet there was to be a Ball. The bride and bridegroom were to dance the Rose-dance together, and the King had promised to play the flute. He played very badly, but no one had ever dared to tell him so, because he was the King. Indeed, he knew only two airs, and was never quite certain which one he was playing; but it made no matter, for, whatever he did, everybody cried out, 'Charming! charming!'

The last item on the programme was a grand display of fireworks, to be let off exactly at midnight. The little Princess had never seen a firework in her life, so the King had given orders that the Royal Pyrotechnist should be in attendance on the day of her marriage.

'What are fireworks like?' she had asked the Prince, one morning, as she was walking on the terrace.

'They are like the Aurora Borealis<sup>1</sup>,' said the King, who always answered questions that were addressed to other people, 'only much more natural. I prefer them to stars myself, as you always know when they are going to appear, and they are as delightful as my own flute-playing. You must certainly see them.'

So at the end of the King's garden a great stand had been set up, and as soon as the Royal Pyrotechnist had put everything in its proper place, the fireworks began to talk to each other.

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<sup>1</sup> **Aurora Borealis** – also called northern lights, a luminous atmospheric phenomenon

‘The world is certainly very beautiful,’ cried a little Squib. ‘Just look at those yellow tulips. Why! if they were real crackers they could not be lovelier. I am very glad I have travelled. Travel improves the mind wonderfully, and does away with all one’s prejudices.’

‘The King’s garden is not the world, you foolish squib,’ said a big Roman Candle; ‘the world is an enormous place, and it would take you three days to see it thoroughly.’

‘Any place you love is the world to you,’ exclaimed a pensive Catherine Wheel, who had been attached to an old deal box in early life, and prided herself on her broken heart; ‘but love is not fashionable any more, the poets have killed it. They wrote so much about it that nobody believed them, and I am not surprised. True love suffers, and is silent. I remember myself once – But no matter now. Romance is a thing of the past.’

‘Nonsense!’ said the Roman Candle, ‘Romance never dies. It is like the moon, and lives forever. The bride and bridegroom, for instance, love each other very dearly. I heard all about them this morning from a brown-paper cartridge, who happened to be staying in the same drawer as myself, and knew the latest Court news.’

But the Catherine Wheel shook her head. ‘Romance is dead, Romance is dead, Romance is dead,’ she murmured. She was one of those people who think that, if you say the same thing over and over a great many times, it becomes true in the end.

Suddenly, a sharp, dry cough was heard, and they all looked round.

It came from a tall, supercilious-looking Rocket, who was tied to the end of a long stick. He always coughed before he made any observation, so as to attract attention.

‘Ahem! Ahem!’ he said, and everybody listened except the poor Catherine Wheel, who was still shaking her head, and murmuring, ‘Romance is dead.’

‘Order! order!’ cried out a Cracker. He was something of a politician, and had always taken a prominent part in the local elections, so he knew the proper Parliamentary expressions to use.

‘Quite dead,’ whispered the Catherine Wheel, and she went off to sleep.

As soon as there was perfect silence, the Rocket coughed a third time and began. He spoke with a very slow, distinct voice, as if he was dictating his memoirs, and always looked over the shoulder of the person to whom he was talking. In fact, he had a most distinguished manner.

‘How fortunate it is for the King’s son,’ he remarked, ‘that he is to be married on the very day on which I am to be let off. Really, if it had been arranged beforehand, it could not have turned out better for him; but Princes are always lucky.’

‘Dear me!’ said the little Squib, ‘I thought it was quite the other way, and that we were to be let off in the Prince’s honour.’

‘It may be so with you,’ he answered; ‘indeed, I have no doubt that it is, but with me it is different. I am a very remarkable Rocket, and come of remarkable parents. My mother was the most celebrated Catherine Wheel of her day, and was renowned for her graceful dancing. When she made her great public appearance she spun round nineteen times before she went out, and each time that she did so she threw into the air seven pink stars. She was three feet and a half in diameter, and made of the very best gunpowder. My father was a Rocket like myself, and of French extraction. He flew so high that the people were afraid that he would never come down again. He did, though, for he was of a kindly disposition, and he made a most brilliant descent in a shower of golden rain. The newspapers wrote about his performance in very flattering terms. Indeed, the Court Gazette called him a triumph of Pylotechnic art.’

‘Pyrotechnic, Pyrotechnic, you mean,’ said a Bengal Light; ‘I know it is Pyrotechnic, for I saw it written on my own canister.’

‘Well, I said Pylotechnic,’ answered the Rocket, in a severe tone of voice, and the Bengal Light felt so crushed that he began at once to bully the little squibs, in order to show that he was still a person of some importance.

‘I was saying,’ continued the Rocket, ‘I was saying – What was I saying?’

‘You were talking about yourself,’ replied the Roman Candle.

‘Of course; I knew I was discussing some interesting subject when I was so rudely interrupted. I hate rudeness and bad manners of every kind, for I am extremely sensitive. No one in

the whole world is so sensitive as I am, I am quite sure of that.'

'What is a sensitive person?' said the Cracker to the Roman Candle.

'A person who, because he has corns himself, always treads on other people's toes,' answered the Roman Candle in a low whisper; and the Cracker nearly exploded with laughter.

'Pray, what are you laughing at?' inquired the Rocket; 'I am not laughing.'

'I am laughing because I am happy,' replied the Cracker.

'That is a very selfish reason,' said the Rocket angrily. 'What right have you to be happy? You should be thinking about others. In fact, you should be thinking about me. I am always thinking about myself, and I expect everybody else to do the same. That is what is called sympathy. It is a beautiful virtue, and I possess it in a high degree. Suppose, for instance, anything happened to me tonight, what a misfortune that would be for every one! The Prince and Princess would never be happy again, their whole married life would be spoiled; and as for the King, I know he would not get over it. Really, when I begin to reflect on the importance of my position, I am almost moved to tears.'

'If you want to give pleasure to others,' cried the Roman Candle, 'you had better keep yourself dry.'

'Certainly,' exclaimed the Bengal Light, who was now in better spirits; 'that is only common sense.'

'Common sense, indeed!' said the Rocket indignantly; 'you forget that I am very uncommon, and very remarkable. Why, anybody can have common sense, provided that they have no imagination. But I have imagination, for I never think of things as they really are; I always think of them as being quite different. As for keeping myself dry, there is evidently no one here who can at all appreciate an emotional nature. Fortunately for myself, I don't care. The only thing that sustains one through life is the consciousness of the immense inferiority of everybody else, and this is a feeling that I have always cultivated. But none of you have any hearts. Here you are laughing and making merry just as if the Prince and Princess had not just been married.'

'Well, really,' exclaimed a small Fire-balloon<sup>1</sup>, 'why not? It is a most joyful occasion, and when I soar up into the air I intend to tell the stars all about it. You will see them twinkle when I talk to them about the pretty bride.'

'Ah! what a trivial view of life!' said the Rocket; 'but it is only what I expected. There is nothing in you; you are hollow and empty. Why, perhaps the Prince and Princess may go to live in a country where there is a deep river, and perhaps they may have one only son, a little fair-haired boy with violet eyes like the Prince himself; and perhaps someday he may go out to walk with his nurse; and perhaps the nurse may go to sleep under a great elder-tree; and perhaps the little boy may fall into the deep river and be drowned. What a terrible misfortune! Poor people, to lose their only son! It is really too dreadful! I shall never get over it.'

'But they have not lost their only son,' said the Roman Candle; 'no misfortune has happened to them at all.'

'I never said that they had,' replied the Rocket; 'I said that they might. If they had lost their only son there would be no use in saying anything more about the matter. I hate people who cry over spilt milk. But when I think that they might lose their only son, I certainly am very much affected.'

'You certainly are!' cried the Bengal Light. 'In fact, you are the most affected person I ever met.'

'You are the rudest person I ever met,' said the Rocket, 'and you cannot understand my friendship for the Prince.'

'Why, you don't even know him,' growled the Roman Candle.

'I never said I knew him,' answered the Rocket. 'I dare say that if I knew him I should not be his friend at all. It is a very dangerous thing to know one's friends.'

'You had really better keep yourself dry,' said the Fire-balloon. 'That is the important thing.'

'Very important for you, I have no doubt,' answered the Rocket, 'but I shall weep if I

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<sup>1</sup> Roman Candle, Catherine Wheel, Cracker, Fireballoon, Bengal Light – objects used in pyrotechnic shows

choose;’ and he actually burst into real tears, which flowed down his stick like rain-drops, and nearly drowned two little beetles, who were just thinking of setting up house together, and were looking for a nice dry spot to live in.

‘He must have a truly romantic nature,’ said the Catherine Wheel, ‘for he weeps when there is nothing at all to weep about;’ and she heaved a deep sigh and thought about the deal box.

But the Roman Candle and the Bengal Light were quite indignant, and kept saying, ‘Humbug! humbug!’ at the top of their voices. They were extremely practical, and whenever they objected to anything they called it humbug.

Then the moon rose like a wonderful silver shield; and the stars began to shine, and a sound of music came from the palace.

The Prince and Princess were leading the dance. They danced so beautifully that the tall white lilies peeped in at the window and watched them, and the great red poppies nodded their heads and beat time.

Then ten o’clock struck, and then eleven, and then twelve, and at the last stroke of midnight every one came out on the terrace, and the King sent for the Royal Pyrotechnist.

‘Let the fireworks begin,’ said the King; and the Royal Pyrotechnist made a low bow, and marched down to the end of the garden. He had six attendants with him, each of whom carried a lighted torch at the end of a long pole.

It was certainly a magnificent display.

Whizz! Whizz! went the Catherine Wheel, as she spun round and round. Boom! Boom! went the Roman Candle. Then the Squibs danced all over the place, and the Bengal Lights made everything look scarlet. ‘Good-bye,’ cried the Fire-balloon, as he soared away, dropping tiny blue sparks. Bang! Bang! answered the Crackers, who were enjoying themselves immensely. Everyone was a great success except the Remarkable Rocket. He was so damp with crying that he could not go off at all. The best thing in him was the gunpowder, and that was so wet with tears that it was of no use. All his poor relations, to whom he would never speak, except with a sneer, shot up into the sky like wonderful golden flowers with blossoms of fire. ‘Huzza! Huzza!’ cried the Court; and the little Princess laughed with pleasure.

‘I suppose they are reserving me for some grand occasion,’ said the Rocket; ‘no doubt that is what it means,’ and he looked more supercilious than ever.

The next day the workmen came to put everything tidy. ‘This is evidently a deputation,’ said the Rocket; ‘I will receive them with becoming dignity;’ so he put his nose in the air, and began to frown severely as if he were thinking about some very important subject. But they took no notice of him at all till they were just going away. Then one of them caught sight of him. ‘Hallo!’ he cried, ‘what a bad rocket!’ and he threw him over the wall into the ditch.

‘BAD ROCKET? BAD ROCKET?’ he said, as he whirled through the air; ‘impossible! GRAND ROCKET, that is what the man said. BAD and GRAND sound very much the same, indeed they often are the same;’ and he fell into the mud.

‘It is not comfortable here,’ he remarked, ‘but no doubt it is some fashionable watering-place, and they have sent me away to recruit my health. My nerves are certainly very much shattered, and I require rest.’

Then a little Frog, with bright jewelled eyes, and a green mottled coat, swam up to him.

‘A new arrival, I see!’ said the Frog. ‘Well, after all there is nothing like mud. Give me rainy weather and a ditch, and I am quite happy. Do you think it will be a wet afternoon? I am sure I hope so, but the sky is quite blue and cloudless. What a pity!’

‘Ahem! ahem!’ said the Rocket, and he began to cough.

‘What a delightful voice you have!’ cried the Frog. ‘Really it is quite like a croak, and croaking is of course the most musical sound in the world. You will hear our glee-club this evening. We sit in the old duck pond close by the farmer’s house, and as soon as the moon rises we begin. It is so entrancing that everybody lies awake to listen to us. In fact, it was only yesterday that I heard the farmer’s wife say to her mother that she could not get a wink of sleep at night on account of us. It is most gratifying to find oneself so popular.’

‘Ahem! ahem!’ said the Rocket angrily. He was very much annoyed that he could not get a word in.

‘A delightful voice, certainly,’ continued the Frog; ‘I hope you will come over to the duck-pond. I am off to look for my daughters. I have six beautiful daughters, and I am so afraid the Pike may meet them. He is a perfect monster, and would have no hesitation in breakfasting off them. Well, good-bye; I have enjoyed our conversation very much, I assure you.’

‘Conversation, indeed!’ said the Rocket. ‘You have talked the whole time yourself. That is not conversation.’

‘Somebody must listen,’ answered the Frog, ‘and I like to do all the talking myself. It saves time, and prevents arguments.’

‘But I like arguments,’ said the Rocket.

‘I hope not,’ said the Frog complacently. ‘Arguments are extremely vulgar, for everybody in good society holds exactly the same opinions. Good-bye a second time; I see my daughters in the distance;’ and the little Frog swam away.

‘You are a very irritating person,’ said the Rocket, ‘and very ill-bred. I hate people who talk about themselves, as you do, when one wants to talk about oneself, as I do. It is what I call selfishness, and selfishness is a most detestable thing, especially to any one of my temperament, for I am well known for my sympathetic nature. In fact, you should take example by me; you could not possibly have a better model. Now that you have the chance you had better avail yourself of it, for I am going back to Court almost immediately. I am a great favourite at Court; in fact, the Prince and Princess were married yesterday in my honour. Of course you know nothing of these matters, for you are a provincial.’

‘There is no good talking to him,’ said a Dragon-fly, who was sitting on the top of a large brown bulrush; ‘no good at all, for he has gone away.’

‘Well, that is his loss, not mine,’ answered the Rocket. ‘I am not going to stop talking to him merely because he pays no attention. I like hearing myself talk. It is one of my greatest pleasures. I often have long conversations all by myself, and I am so clever that sometimes I don’t understand a single word of what I am saying.’

‘Then you should certainly lecture on Philosophy,’ said the Dragon-fly; and he spread a pair of lovely gauze wings and soared away into the sky.

‘How very silly of him not to stay here!’ said the Rocket. ‘I am sure that he has not often got such a chance of improving his mind. However, I don’t care a bit. Genius like mine is sure to be appreciated some day;’ and he sank down a little deeper into the mud.

After some time a large White Duck swam up to him. She had yellow legs, and webbed feet, and was considered a great beauty on account of her waddle.

‘Quack, quack, quack,’ she said. ‘What a curious shape you are! May I ask were you born like that, or is it the result of an accident?’

‘It is quite evident that you have always lived in the country,’ answered the Rocket, ‘otherwise you would know who I am. However, I excuse your ignorance. It would be unfair to expect other people to be as remarkable as oneself. You will no doubt be surprised to hear that I can fly up into the sky, and come down in a shower of golden rain.’

‘I don’t think much of that,’ said the Duck, ‘as I cannot see what use it is to anyone. Now, if you could plough the fields like the ox, or draw a cart like the horse, or look after the sheep like the collie-dog, that would be something.’

‘My good creature,’ cried the Rocket in a very haughty tone of voice, ‘I see that you belong to the lower orders. A person of my position is never useful. We have certain accomplishments, and that is more than sufficient. I have no sympathy myself with industry of any kind, least of all with such industries as you seem to recommend. Indeed, I have always been of opinion that hard work is simply the refuge of people who have nothing whatever to do.’

‘Well, well,’ said the Duck, who was of a very peaceable disposition, and never quarrelled with any one, ‘everybody has different tastes. I hope, at any rate, that you are going to take up your residence here.’

‘Oh! dear no,’ cried the Rocket. ‘I am merely a visitor, a distinguished visitor. The fact is that I find this place rather tedious. There is neither society here, nor solitude. In fact, it is essentially suburban. I shall probably go back to Court, for I know that I am destined to make a sensation in the world.’

‘I had thoughts of entering public life once myself,’ remarked the Duck; ‘there are so many things that need reforming. Indeed, I took the chair at a meeting some time ago, and we passed resolutions condemning everything that we did not like. However, they did not seem to have much effect. Now I go in for domesticity, and look after my family.’

‘I am made for public life,’ said the Rocket, ‘and so are all my relations, even the humblest of them. Whenever we appear we excite great attention. I have not actually appeared myself, but when I do so it will be a magnificent sight. As for domesticity, it ages one rapidly, and distracts one’s mind from higher things.’

‘Ah! the higher things of life, how fine they are!’ said the Duck; ‘and that reminds me how hungry I feel;’ and she swam away down the stream, saying, ‘Quack, quack, quack.’

‘Come back! come back!’ screamed the Rocket, ‘I have a great deal to say to you;’ but the Duck paid no attention to him. ‘I am glad that she has gone,’ he said to himself, ‘she has a decidedly middle-class mind;’ and he sank a little deeper still into the mud, and began to think about the loneliness of genius, when suddenly two little boys in white smocks came running down the bank, with a kettle and some faggots.

‘This must be the deputation,’ said the Rocket, and he tried to look very dignified.

‘Hallo!’ cried one of the boys, ‘look at this old stick! I wonder how it came here;’ and he picked the Rocket out of the ditch.

‘OLD STICK!’ said the Rocket, ‘impossible! GOLD STICK, that is what he said. Gold Stick is very complimentary. In fact, he mistakes me for one of the Court dignitaries!’

‘Let us put it into the fire!’ said the other boy, ‘it will help to boil the kettle.’

So they piled the faggots together, and put the Rocket on top, and lit the fire.

‘This is magnificent,’ cried the Rocket, ‘they are going to let me off in broad day-light, so that everyone can see me.’

‘We will go to sleep now,’ they said, ‘and when we wake up the kettle will be boiled;’ and they lay down on the grass, and shut their eyes.

The Rocket was very damp, so he took a long time to burn. At last, however, the fire caught him.

‘Now I am going off!’ he cried, and he made himself very stiff and straight. ‘I know I shall go much higher than the stars, much higher than the moon, much higher than the sun. In fact, I shall go so high that—’

Fizz! Fizz! Fizz! and he went straight up into the air.

‘Delightful!’ he cried, ‘I shall go on like this for ever. What a success I am!’

But nobody saw him.

Then he began to feel a curious tingling sensation all over him.

‘Now I am going to explode,’ he cried. ‘I shall set the whole world on fire, and make such a noise that nobody will talk about anything else for a whole year.’ And he certainly did explode. Bang! Bang! Bang! went the gunpowder. There was no doubt about it.

But nobody heard him, not even the two little boys, for they were sound asleep.

Then all that was left of him was the stick, and this fell down on the back of a Goose who was taking a walk by the side of the ditch.

‘Good heavens!’ cried the Goose. ‘It is going to rain sticks;’ and she rushed into the water.

‘I knew I should create a great sensation,’ gasped the Rocket, and he went out.

## **The Model Millionaire (Oscar Wilde)**

Unless one is wealthy there is no use in being a charming fellow. Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed. The poor should be practical and prosaic. It is better

to have a permanent income than to be fascinating. These are the great truths of modern life which Hughie Erskine never realised. Poor Hughie! Intellectually, we must admit, he was not of much importance. He never said a brilliant or even an ill-natured thing in his life. But then he was wonderfully good-looking, with his crisp brown hair, his clear-cut profile, and his grey eyes. He was as popular with men as he was with women and he had every accomplishment except that of making money. His father had bequeathed him his cavalry sword and a History of the Peninsular War in fifteen volumes. Hughie hung the first over his looking-glass, put the second on a shelf between Ruff's Guide and Bailey's Magazine, and lived on two hundred a year that an old aunt allowed him. He had tried everything. He had gone on the Stock Exchange for six months; but what was a butterfly to do among bulls and bears? He had been a tea-merchant for a little longer, but had soon tired of pekoe and souchong<sup>1</sup>. Then he had tried selling dry sherry<sup>2</sup>. That did not answer; the sherry was a little too dry. Ultimately he became nothing, a delightful, ineffectual young man with a perfect profile and no profession.

To make matters worse, he was in love. The girl he loved was Laura Merton, the daughter of a retired Colonel who had lost his temper and his digestion in India, and had never found either of them again. Laura adored him, and he was ready to kiss her shoe-strings. They were the handsomest couple in London, and had not a penny-piece between them. The Colonel was very fond of Hughie, but would not hear of any engagement.

'Come to me, my boy, when you have got ten thousand pounds of your own, and we will see about it,' he used to say; and Hughie looked very glum in those days, and had to go to Laura for consolation.

One morning, as he was on his way to Holland Park, where the Mertons lived, he dropped in to see a great friend of his, Alan Trevor. Trevor was a painter. Indeed, few people escape that nowadays. But he was also an artist, and artists are rather rare. Personally he was a strange rough fellow, with a freckled face and a red ragged beard. However, when he took up the brush he was a real master, and his pictures were eagerly sought after. He had been very much attracted by Hughie at first, it must be acknowledged, entirely on account of his personal charm. 'The only people a painter should know,' he used to say, 'are people who are *bête*<sup>3</sup> and beautiful, people who are an artistic pleasure to look at and an intellectual repose to talk to. Men who are dandies and women who are darlings rule the world, at least they should do so.' However, after he got to know Hughie better, he liked him quite as much for his bright, buoyant spirits and his generous, reckless nature, and had given him the permanent entree to his studio.

When Hughie came in he found Trevor putting the finishing touches to a wonderful life-size picture of a beggar-man. The beggar himself was standing on a raised platform in a corner of the studio. He was a wizened old man, with a face like wrinkled parchment, and a most piteous expression. Over his shoulders was flung a coarse brown cloak, all tears and tatters; his thick boots were patched and cobbled, and with one hand he leant on a rough stick, while with the other he held out his battered hat for alms.

'What an amazing model!' whispered Hughie, as he shook hands with his friend.

'An amazing model?' shouted Trevor at the top of his voice; 'I should think so! Such beggars as he are not to be met with every day. A *trouvaille*<sup>4</sup>, *mon cher*<sup>5</sup>; a living Velasquez!<sup>6</sup> My stars! what an etching Rembrandt<sup>7</sup> would have made of him!'

'Poor old chap!' said Hughie, 'how miserable he looks! But I suppose, to you painters, his face is his fortune?'

'Certainly,' replied Trevor, 'you don't want a beggar to look happy, do you?'

'How much does a model get for sitting?' asked Hughie, as he found himself a comfortable

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1 **pekoe, souchong** – large leafy sorts of tea

2 **sherry** – fortified wine of Spanish origin

3 **bête** = foolish (*French*)

4 **trouvaille** = find, discovery (*French*)

5 **mon cher** = my dear (*French*)

6 **Velasquez** – Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), the greatest Spanish painter of the 16th century

7 **Rembrandt** (1606–1669) – an outstanding Dutch painter and printmaker

seat on a divan.

‘A shilling an hour.’

‘And how much do you get for your picture, Alan?’

‘Oh, for this I get two thousand!’

‘Pounds?’

‘Guineas. Painters, poets, and physicians always get guineas.’

‘Well, I think the model should have a percentage,’ cried Hughie, laughing; ‘they work quite as hard as you do.’

‘Nonsense, nonsense! Why, look at the trouble of laying on the paint alone, and standing all day long at one’s easel! It’s all very well, Hughie, for you to talk, but I assure you that there are moments when Art almost attains to the dignity of manual labour. But you mustn’t chatter; I’m very busy. Smoke a cigarette, and keep quiet.’

After some time the servant came in, and told Trevor that the frame-maker wanted to speak to him.

‘Don’t run away, Hughie,’ he said, as he went out, ‘I will be back in a moment.’

The old beggar-man took advantage of Trevor’s absence to rest for a moment on a wooden bench that was behind him. He looked so forlorn and wretched that Hughie could not help pitying him, and felt in his pockets to see what money he had. All he could find was a sovereign and some coppers. ‘Poor old fellow,’ he thought to himself, ‘he wants it more than I do, but it means no hansoms for a fortnight’; and he walked across the studio and slipped the sovereign<sup>1</sup> into the beggar’s hand.

The old man started, and a faint smile flitted across his withered lips. ‘Thank you, sir,’ he said, ‘thank you.’

Then Trevor arrived, and Hughie took his leave, blushing a little at what he had done. He spent the day with Laura, got a charming scolding for his extravagance, and had to walk home.

That night he strolled into the Palette Club about eleven o’clock, and found Trevor sitting by himself in the smoking-room drinking hock and seltzer.

‘Well, Alan, did you get the picture finished all right?’ he said, as he lit his cigarette.

‘Finished and framed, my boy!’ answered Trevor; ‘and, by the bye, you have made a conquest. That old model you saw is quite devoted to you. I had to tell him all about you – who you are, where you live, what your income is, what prospects you have—’

‘My dear Alan,’ cried Hughie, ‘I shall probably find him waiting for me when I go home. But of course you are only joking. Poor old wretch! I wish I could do something for him. I think it is dreadful that any one should be so miserable. I have got heaps of old clothes at home – do you think he would care for any of them? Why, his rags were falling to bits.’

‘But he looks splendid in them,’ said Trevor. ‘I wouldn’t paint him in a frock coat for anything. What you call rags I call romance. What seems poverty to you is picturesqueness to me. However, I’ll tell him of your offer.’

‘Alan,’ said Hughie seriously, ‘you painters are a heartless lot.’

‘An artist’s heart is his head,’ replied Trevor; ‘and besides, our business is to realise the world as we see it, not to reform it as we know it. A *chacun son métier*<sup>2</sup>. And now tell me how Laura is. The old model was quite interested in her.’

‘You don’t mean to say you talked to him about her?’ said Hughie.

‘Certainly I did. He knows all about the relentless colonel, the lovely Laura, and the 10, 000 pounds.’

‘You told that old beggar all my private affairs?’ cried Hughie, looking very red and angry.

‘My dear boy,’ said Trevor, smiling, ‘that old beggar, as you call him, is one of the richest men in Europe. He could buy all London to-morrow without overdrawing his account. He has a house in every capital, dines off gold plate, and can prevent Russia going to war when he chooses.’

‘What on earth do you mean?’ exclaimed Hughie.

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<sup>1</sup> **sovereign** – an English gold coin introduced in 1489

<sup>2</sup> **A chacun son métier** = Everyone does his own work. (*French*)



‘What I say,’ said Trevor. ‘The old man you saw to-day in the studio was Baron Hausberg. He is a great friend of mine, buys all my pictures and that sort of thing, and gave me a commission a month ago to paint him as a beggar. *Que voulez-vous? La fantaisie d’un millionnaire!*<sup>2</sup> And I must say he made a magnificent figure in his rags, or perhaps I should say in my rags; they are an old suit I got in Spain.’

‘Baron Hausberg!’ cried Hughie. ‘Good heavens! I gave him a sovereign!’ and he sank into an armchair the picture of dismay.

‘Gave him a sovereign!’ shouted Trevor, and he burst into a roar of laughter. ‘My dear boy, you’ll never see it again. *Son affaire c’est l’argent des autres*<sup>3</sup>.’

‘I think you might have told me, Alan,’ said Hughie sulkily, ‘and not have let me make such a fool of myself.’

‘Well, to begin with, Hughie,’ said Trevor, ‘it never entered my mind that you went about distributing alms in that reckless way. I can understand your kissing a pretty model, but your giving a sovereign to an ugly one – by Jove, no! Besides, the fact is that I really was not at home to-day to any one; and when you came in I didn’t know whether Hausberg would like his name mentioned. You know he wasn’t in full dress.’

‘What a duffer he must think me!’ said Hughie.

‘Not at all. He was in the highest spirits after you left; kept chuckling to himself and rubbing his old wrinkled hands together. I couldn’t make out why he was so interested to know all about you; but I see it all now. He’ll invest your sovereign for you, Hughie, pay you the interest every six months, and have a capital story to tell after dinner.’

‘I am an unlucky devil,’ growled Hughie. ‘The best thing I can do is to go to bed; and, my dear Alan, you mustn’t tell anyone. I shouldn’t dare show my face in the Row.’

‘Nonsense! It reflects the highest credit on your philanthropic spirit, Hughie. And don’t run away. Have another cigarette, and you can talk about Laura as much as you like.’

However, Hughie wouldn’t stop, but walked home, feeling very unhappy, and leaving Alan Trevor in fits of laughter.

The next morning, as he was at breakfast, the servant brought him up a card on which was written, ‘Monsieur Gustave Naudin, de la part de M. le Baron Hausberg<sup>4</sup>.’ ‘I suppose he has come for an apology,’ said Hughie to himself; and he told the servant to show the visitor up.

An old gentleman with gold spectacles and grey hair came into the room, and said, in a slight French accent, ‘Have I the honour of addressing Monsieur Erskine?’

Hughie bowed.

‘I have come from Baron Hausberg,’ he continued. ‘The Baron—’

‘I beg, sir, that you will offer him my sincerest apologies,’ stammered Hughie.

‘The Baron,’ said the old gentleman with a smile, ‘has commissioned me to bring you this letter’; and he extended a sealed envelope.

On the outside was written, ‘A wedding present to Hugh Erskine and Laura Merton, from an old beggar,’ and inside was a cheque for 10,000 pounds.

When they were married Alan Trevor was the best man, and the Baron made a speech at the wedding breakfast.

‘Millionaire models,’ remarked Alan, ‘are rare enough; but, by Jove, model millionaires are rarer still!’

## A Society (Virginia Woolf)

This is how it all came about. Six or seven of us were sitting one day after tea. Some were gazing across the street into the windows of a milliner’s shop where the light still shone brightly

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2 *Que voulez-vous? La fantaisie d’un millionnaire!* = What do you want? The whim of a millionaire! (*French*)

3 *Son affaire c’est l’argent des autres.* = Your work is the money of others. (*French*)

4 *Monsieur Gustave Naudin, de la part de M. le Baron Hausberg.* = Mr. Gustave Naudin, on behalf of Baron Hausberg. (*French*)

upon scarlet feathers and golden slippers. Others were idly occupied in building little towers of sugar upon the edge of the tea tray. After a time, so far as I can remember, we drew round the fire and began as usual to praise men – how strong, how noble, how brilliant, how courageous, how beautiful they were – how we envied those who by hook or by crook managed to get attached to one for life – when Poll, who had said nothing, burst into tears. Poll, I must tell you, has always been queer. For one thing her father was a strange man. He left her a fortune in his will, but on condition that she read all the books in the London Library. We comforted her as best we could; but we knew in our hearts how vain it was. For though we like her, Poll is no beauty; leaves her shoe laces untied; and must have been thinking, while we praised men, that not one of them would ever wish to marry her. At last she dried her tears. For some time we could make nothing of what she said. Strange enough it was in all conscience. She told us that, as we knew, she spent most of her time in the London Library, reading. She had begun, she said, with English literature on the top floor; and was steadily working her way down to the *Times* on the bottom. And now half, or perhaps only a quarter, way through a terrible thing had happened. She could read no more. Books were not what we thought them. ‘Books,’ she cried, rising to her feet and speaking with an intensity of desolation which I shall never forget, ‘are for the most part unutterably bad!’

Of course we cried out that Shakespeare wrote books, and Milton and Shelley<sup>1</sup>.

‘Oh, yes,’ she interrupted us. ‘You’ve been well taught, I can see. But you are not members of the London Library.’ Here her sobs broke forth anew. At length, recovering a little, she opened one of the pile of books which she always carried about with her – ‘From a Window’ or ‘In a Garden,’ or some such name as that it was called, and it was written by a man called Benton or Henson, or something of that kind. She read the first few pages. We listened in silence. ‘But that’s not a book,’ someone said. So she chose another. This time it was a history, but I have forgotten the writer’s name. Our trepidation increased as she went on. Not a word of it seemed to be true, and the style in which it was written was execrable.

‘Poetry! Poetry!’ we cried, impatiently. ‘Read us poetry!’ I cannot describe the desolation which fell upon us as she opened a little volume and mouthed out the verbose, sentimental foolery which it contained.

‘It must have been written by a woman,’ one of us urged. But no. She told us that it was written by a young man, one of the most famous poets of the day. I leave you to imagine what the shock of the discovery was. Though we all cried and begged her to read no more, she persisted and read us extracts from the *Lives of the Lord Chancellors*<sup>2</sup>. When she had finished, Jane, the eldest and wisest of us, rose to her feet and said that she for one was not convinced.

‘Why,’ she asked, ‘if men write such rubbish as this, should our mothers have wasted their youth in bringing them into the world?’

We were all silent; and, in the silence, poor Poll could be heard sobbing out, ‘Why, why did my father teach me to read?’

Clorinda was the first to come to her senses. ‘It’s all our fault,’ she said. ‘Every one of us knows how to read. But no one, save Poll, has ever taken the trouble to do it. I, for one, have taken it for granted that it was a woman’s duty to spend her youth in bearing children. I venerated my mother for bearing ten; still more my grandmother for bearing fifteen; it was, I confess, my own ambition to bear twenty. We have gone on all these ages supposing that men were equally industrious, and that their works were of equal merit. While we have borne the children, they, we supposed, have borne the books and the pictures. We have populated the world. They have civilized it. But now that we can read, what prevents us from judging the results? Before we bring another child into the world we must swear that we will find out what the world is like.’

So we made ourselves into a society for asking questions. One of us was to visit a man-of-war; another was to hide herself in a scholar’s study; another was to attend a meeting of business men; while all were to read books, look at pictures, go to concerts, keep our eyes open in the streets, and ask questions perpetually. We were very young. You can judge of our simplicity

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1 **Shelley** – Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), an English Romantic poet

2 **Lord Chancellors** – *Lord Chancellor* is the highest judge and the chairman of the House of Lords

when I tell you that before parting that night we agreed that the objects of life were to produce good people and good books. Our questions were to be directed to finding out how far these objects were now attained by men. We vowed solemnly that we would not bear a single child until we were satisfied.

Off we went then, some to the British Museum; others to the King's Navy<sup>1</sup>; some to Oxford; others to Cambridge; we visited the Royal Academy<sup>2</sup> and the Tate<sup>3</sup>; heard modern music in concert rooms, went to the Law Courts<sup>4</sup>, and saw new plays. No one dined out without asking her partner certain questions and carefully noting his replies. At intervals we met together and compared our observations. Oh, those were merry meetings! Never have I laughed so much as I did when Rose read her notes upon 'Honour' and described how she had dressed herself as an Æthiopian Prince and gone aboard one of His Majesty's ships. Discovering the hoax, the Captain visited her (now disguised as a private gentleman) and demanded that honour should be satisfied. 'But how?' she asked. 'How?' he bellowed. 'With the cane of course!' Seeing that he was beside himself with rage and expecting that her last moment had come, she bent over and received, to her amazement, six light taps upon the behind. 'The honour of the British Navy is avenged!' he cried, and, raising herself, she saw him with the sweat pouring down his face holding out a trembling right hand. 'Away!' she exclaimed, striking an attitude and imitating the ferocity of his own expression, 'My honour has still to be satisfied!' 'Spoken like a gentleman!' he returned, and fell into profound thought. 'If six strokes avenge the honour of the King's Navy,' he mused, 'how many avenge the honour of a private gentleman?' He said he would prefer to lay the case before his brother officers. She replied haughtily that she could not wait. He praised her sensibility. 'Let me see,' he cried suddenly, 'did your father keep a carriage?' 'No,' she said. 'Or a riding horse!' 'We had a donkey,' she bethought her, 'which drew the mowing machine.' At this his face lighted. 'My mother's name—' she added. 'For God's sake, man, don't mention your mother's name!' he shrieked, trembling like an aspen and flushing to the roots of his hair, and it was ten minutes at least before she could induce him to proceed. At length he decreed that if she gave him four strokes and a half in the small of the back at a spot indicated by himself (the half conceded, he said, in recognition of the fact that her great grandmother's uncle was killed at Trafalgar) it was his opinion that her honour would be as good as new. This was done; they retired to a restaurant; drank two bottles of wine for which he insisted upon paying; and parted with protestations of eternal friendship.

Then we had Fanny's account of her visit to the Law Courts. At her first visit she had come to the conclusion that the Judges were either made of wood or were impersonated by large animals resembling man who had been trained to move with extreme dignity, mumble and nod their heads. To test her theory she had liberated a handkerchief of bluebottles at the critical moment of a trial, but was unable to judge whether the creatures gave signs of humanity for the buzzing of the flies induced so sound a sleep that she only woke in time to see the prisoners led into the cells below. But from the evidence she brought we voted that it is unfair to suppose that the Judges are men.

Helen went to the Royal Academy, but when asked to deliver her report upon the pictures she began to recite from a pale blue volume, 'O! for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still. Home is the hunter, home from the hill. He gave his bridle reins a shake. Love is sweet, love is brief. Spring, the fair spring, is the year's pleasant King. O! to be in England now that April's there. Men must work and women must weep. The path of duty is the way to glory—' We could listen to no more of this gibberish.

'We want no more poetry!' we cried.

'Daughters of England!' she began, but here we pulled her down, a vase of water getting spilt over her in the scuffle.

'Thank God!' she exclaimed, shaking herself like a dog. 'Now I'll roll on the carpet and see if I can't brush off what remains of the Union Jack<sup>5</sup>. Then perhaps—' here she rolled energetically.

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1 **the King's Navy** – here: the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich

2 **the Royal Academy (of Arts)** – a postgraduate school for artists with an exhibition hall

3 **the Tate** – a famous art gallery opened in 1897 with the financial support of Sir Henry Tate

4 **the Law Courts** – a complex of courtrooms, halls and offices in the borough of Westminster in central London

5 **the Union Jack** – the flag of the United Kingdom, developed in 1606

Getting up she began to explain to us what modern pictures are like when Castalia stopped her.

'What is the average size of a picture?' she asked. 'Perhaps two feet by two and a half,' she said. Castalia made notes while Helen spoke, and when she had done, and we were trying not to meet each other's eyes, rose and said, 'At your wish I spent last week at Oxbridge, disguised as a charwoman. I thus had access to the rooms of several Professors and will now attempt to give you some idea – only,' she broke off, 'I can't think how to do it. It's all so queer. These Professors,' she went on, 'live in large houses built round grass plots each in a kind of cell by himself. Yet they have every convenience and comfort. You have only to press a button or light a little lamp. Their papers are beautifully filed. Books abound. There are no children or animals, save half a dozen stray cats and one aged bullfinch – a cock. I remember,' she broke off, 'an Aunt of mine who lived at Dulwich and kept cactuses. You reached the conservatory through the double drawing-room, and there, on the hot pipes, were dozens of them, ugly, squat, bristly little plants each in a separate pot. Once in a hundred years the Aloe flowered, so my Aunt said. But she died before that happened—' We told her to keep to the point. 'Well,' she resumed, 'when Professor Hobkin was out, I examined his life work, an edition of Sappho<sup>2</sup>. It's a queer looking book, six or seven inches thick, not all by Sappho. Oh, no. Most of it is a defence of Sappho's chastity, which some German had denied, and I can assure you the passion with which these two gentlemen argued, the learning they displayed, the prodigious ingenuity with which they disputed the use of some implement which looked to me for all the world like a hairpin astounded me; especially when the door opened and Professor Hobkin himself appeared. A very nice, mild, old gentleman, but what could *he* know about chastity?' We misunderstood her.

'No, no,' she protested, 'he's the soul of honour I'm sure – not that he resembles Rose's sea captain in the least. I was thinking rather of my Aunt's cactuses. What could *they* know about chastity?'

Again we told her not to wander from the point, – did the Oxbridge professors help to produce good people and good books? – the objects of life.

'There!' she exclaimed. 'It never struck me to ask. It never occurred to me that they could possibly produce anything.'

'I believe,' said Sue, 'that you made some mistake. Probably Professor Hobkin was a gynæcologist. A scholar is a very different sort of man. A scholar is overflowing with humour and invention – perhaps addicted to wine, but what of that? – a delightful companion, generous, subtle, imaginative – as stands to reason. For he spends his life in company with the finest human beings that have ever existed.'

'Hum,' said Castalia. 'Perhaps I'd better go back and try again.'

Some three months later it happened that I was sitting alone when Castalia entered. I don't know what it was in the look of her that so moved me; but I could not restrain myself, and, dashing across the room, I clasped her in my arms. Not only was she very beautiful; she seemed also in the highest spirits. 'How happy you look!' I exclaimed, as she sat down.

'I've been at Oxbridge,' she said.

'Asking questions?'

'Answering them,' she replied.

'You have not broken our vow?' I said anxiously, noticing something about her figure.

'Oh, the vow,' she said casually. 'I'm going to have a baby, if that's what you mean. You can't imagine,' she burst out, 'how exciting, how beautiful, how satisfying—'

'What is?' I asked.

'To – to – answer questions,' she replied in some confusion. Whereupon she told me the whole of her story. But in the middle of an account which interested and excited me more than anything I had ever heard, she gave the strangest cry, half whoop, half holloa –

'Chastity! Chastity! Where's my chastity!' she cried. 'Help Ho! The scent bottle!'

There was nothing in the room but a cruet containing mustard, which I was about to administer when she recovered her composure.

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2 Sappho (610 BC–570 BC) – an ancient Greek lyric woman-poet

'You should have thought of that three months ago,' I said severely.

'True,' she replied. 'There's not much good in thinking of it now. It was unfortunate, by the way, that my mother had me called Castalia.'

'Oh, Castalia, your mother—' I was beginning when she reached for the mustard pot.

'No, no, no,' she said, shaking her head. 'If you'd been a chaste woman yourself you would have screamed at the sight of me – instead of which you rushed across the room and took me in your arms. No, Cassandra. We are neither of us chaste.' So we went on talking.

Meanwhile the room was filling up, for it was the day appointed to discuss the results of our observations. Everyone, I thought, felt as I did about Castalia. They kissed her and said how glad they were to see her again. At length, when we were all assembled, Jane rose and said that it was time to begin. She began by saying that we had now asked questions for over five years, and that though the results were bound to be inconclusive – here Castalia nudged me and whispered that she was not so sure about that. Then she got up, and, interrupting Jane in the middle of a sentence, said:

'Before you say any more, I want to know – am I to stay in the room? Because,' she added, 'I have to confess that I am an impure woman.'

Everyone looked at her in astonishment.

'You are going to have a baby?' asked Jane.

She nodded her head.

It was extraordinary to see the different expressions on their faces. A sort of hum went through the room, in which I could catch the words 'impure,' 'baby,' 'Castalia,' and so on. Jane, who was herself considerably moved, put it to us:

'Shall she go? Is she impure?'

Such a roar filled the room as might have been heard in the street outside.

'No! No! No! Let her stay! Impure? Fiddlesticks!' Yet I fancied that some of the youngest, girls of nineteen or twenty, held back as if overcome with shyness. Then we all came about her and began asking questions, and at last I saw one of the youngest, who had kept in the background, approach shyly and say to her:

'What is chastity then? I mean is it good, or is it bad, or is it nothing at all?' She replied so low that I could not catch what she said.

'You know I was shocked,' said another, 'for at least ten minutes.'

'In my opinion,' said Poll, who was growing crusty from always reading in the London Library, 'chastity is nothing but ignorance – a most discreditable state of mind. We should admit only the unchaste to our society. I vote that Castalia shall be our President.'

This was violently disputed.

'It is as unfair to brand women with chastity as with unchastity,' said Poll. 'Some of us haven't the opportunity either. Moreover, I don't believe Cassy herself maintains that she acted as she did from a pure love of knowledge.'

'He is only twenty-one and divinely beautiful,' said Cassy, with a ravishing gesture.

'I move,' said Helen, 'that no one be allowed to talk of chastity or unchastity save those who are in love.'

'Oh, bother,' said Judith, who had been enquiring into scientific matters, 'I'm not in love and I'm longing to explain my measures for dispensing with prostitutes and fertilizing virgins by Act of Parliament.'

She went on to tell us of an invention of hers to be erected at Tube stations and other public resorts, which, upon payment of a small fee, would safeguard the nation's health, accommodate its sons, and relieve its daughters. Then she had contrived a method of preserving in sealed tubes the germs of future Lord Chancellors 'or poets or painters or musicians,' she went on, 'supposing, that is to say, that these breeds are not extinct, and that women still wish to bear children—'

'Of course we wish to bear children!' cried Castalia, impatiently. Jane rapped the table.

'That is the very point we are met to consider,' she said. 'For five years we have been trying to find out whether we are justified in continuing the human race. Castalia has anticipated our decision. But it remains for the rest of us to make up our minds.'

Here one after another of our messengers rose and delivered their reports. The marvels of civilisation far exceeded our expectations, and, as we learnt for the first time how man flies in the air, talks across space, penetrates to the heart of an atom, and embraces the universe in his speculations, a murmur of admiration burst from our lips.

‘We are proud,’ we cried, ‘that our mothers sacrificed their youth in such a cause as this!’ Castalia, who had been listening intently, looked prouder than all the rest. Then Jane reminded us that we had still much to learn, and Castalia begged us to make haste. On we went through a vast tangle of statistics. We learnt that England has a population of so many millions, and that such and such a proportion of them is constantly hungry and in prison; that the average size of a working man’s family is such, and that so great a percentage of women die from maladies incident to childbirth. Reports were read of visits to factories, shops, slums, and dockyards. Descriptions were given of the Stock Exchange, of a gigantic house of business in the City, and of a Government Office. The British Colonies were now discussed, and some account was given of our rule in India, Africa and Ireland. I was sitting by Castalia and I noticed her uneasiness.

‘We shall never come to any conclusion at all at this rate,’ she said. ‘As it appears that civilisation is so much more complex than we had any notion, would it not be better to confine ourselves to our original enquiry? We agreed that it was the object of life to produce good people and good books. All this time we have been talking of aeroplanes, factories, and money. Let us talk about men themselves and their arts, for that is the heart of the matter.’

So the diners out stepped forward with long slips of paper containing answers to their questions. These had been framed after much consideration. A good man, we had agreed, must at any rate be honest, passionate, and unworldly. But whether or not a particular man possessed those qualities could only be discovered by asking questions, often beginning at a remote distance from the centre. Is Kensington a nice place to live in? Where is your son being educated – and your daughter? Now please tell me, what do you pay for your cigars? By the way, is Sir Joseph a baronet or only a knight? Often it seemed that we learnt more from trivial questions of this kind than from more direct ones. ‘I accepted my peerage,’ said Lord Bunkum, ‘because my wife wished it.’ I forget how many titles were accepted for the same reason. ‘Working fifteen hours out of the twenty-four, as I do—’ ten thousand professional men began.

‘No, no, of course you can neither read nor write. But why do you work so hard?’ ‘My dear lady, with a growing family—’ ‘But *why* does your family grow?’ Their wives wished that too, or perhaps it was the British Empire. But more significant than the answers were the refusals to answer. Very few would reply at all to questions about morality and religion, and such answers as were given were not serious. Questions as to the value of money and power were almost invariably brushed aside, or pressed at extreme risk to the asker. ‘I’m sure,’ said Jill, ‘that if Sir Harley Tightboots hadn’t been carving the mutton when I asked him about the capitalist system he would have cut my throat. The only reason why we escaped with our lives over and over again is that men are at once so hungry and so chivalrous. They despise us too much to mind what we say.’

‘Of course they despise us,’ said Eleanor. ‘At the same time how do you account for this – I made enquiries among the artists. Now, no woman has ever been an artist, has she, Poll?’

‘Jane-Austen-Charlotte-Brontë-George-Eliot<sup>1</sup>,’ cried Poll, like a man crying muffins in a back street.

‘Damn the woman!’ someone exclaimed. ‘What a bore she is!’

‘Since Sappho there has been no female of first rate—’ Eleanor began, quoting from a weekly newspaper.

‘It’s now well known that Sappho was the somewhat lewd invention of Professor Hobkin,’ Ruth interrupted.

‘Anyhow, there is no reason to suppose that any woman ever has been able to write or ever will be able to write,’ Eleanor continued. ‘And yet, whenever I go among authors they never cease to talk to me about their books. Masterly! I say, or Shakespeare himself! (for one must say

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<sup>1</sup> **Jane-Austin-Charlotte-Brontë-George-Eliot** – famous English women-writers and novelists: Jane Austin (1775–1817), Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855) and George Eliot (pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans) (1819–1880)

something) and I assure you, they believe me.'

'That proves nothing,' said Jane. 'They all do it. Only,' she sighed, 'it doesn't seem to help *us* much. Perhaps we had better examine modern literature next. Liz, it's your turn.'

Elizabeth rose and said that in order to prosecute her enquiry she had dressed as a man and been taken for a reviewer.

'I have read new books pretty steadily for the past five years,' said she. 'Mr. Wells<sup>2</sup> is the most popular living writer; then comes Mr. Arnold Bennett<sup>3</sup>; then Mr. Compton Mackenzie<sup>4</sup>; Mr. McKenna and Mr. Walpole<sup>5</sup> may be bracketed together.' She sat down.

'But you've told us nothing!' we expostulated. 'Or do you mean that these gentlemen have greatly surpassed Jane-Elliot and that English fiction is – where's that review of yours? Oh, yes, "safe in their hands."'

'Safe, quite safe,' she said, shifting uneasily from foot to foot. 'And I'm sure that they give away even more than they receive.'

We were all sure of that. 'But,' we pressed her, 'do they write good books?'

'Good books?' she said, looking at the ceiling. 'You must remember,' she began, speaking with extreme rapidity, 'that fiction is the mirror of life. And you can't deny that education is of the highest importance, and that it would be extremely annoying, if you found yourself alone at Brighton late at night, not to know which was the best boarding house to stay at, and suppose it was a dripping Sunday evening – wouldn't it be nice to go to the Movies?'

'But what has that got to do with it?' we asked.

'Nothing – nothing – nothing whatever,' she replied.

'Well, tell us the truth,' we bade her.

'The truth? But isn't it wonderful,' she broke off – 'Mr. Chitter has written a weekly article for the past thirty years upon love or hot buttered toast and has sent all his sons to Eton—'

'The truth!' we demanded.

'Oh, the truth,' she stammered, 'the truth has nothing to do with literature,' and sitting down she refused to say another word.

It all seemed to us very inconclusive.

'Ladies, we must try to sum up the results,' Jane was beginning, when a hum, which had been heard for some time through the open window, drowned her voice.

'War! War! War! Declaration of War!' men were shouting in the street below.

We looked at each other in horror.

'What war?' we cried. 'What war?' We remembered, too late, that we had never thought of sending anyone to the House of Commons. We had forgotten all about it. We turned to Poll, who had reached the history shelves in the London Library, and asked her to enlighten us.

'Why,' we cried, 'do men go to war?'

'Sometimes for one reason, sometimes for another,' she replied calmly. 'In 1760, for example—' The shouts outside drowned her words. 'Again in 1797 – in 1804 – It was the Austrians in 1866–1870 was the Franco-Prussian – In 1900 on the other hand—'

'But it's now 1914!' we cut her short.

'Ah, I don't know what they're going to war for now,' she admitted.

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The war was over and peace was in process of being signed, when I once more found myself with Castalia in the room where our meetings used to be held. We began idly turning over the pages of our old minute books. 'Queer,' I mused, 'to see what we were thinking five years ago.' 'We are agreed,' Castalia quoted, reading over my shoulder, 'that it is the object of life to produce good

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2 **Mr. Wells** – Herbert George Wells (1866–1946), an English writer and historian, the author of world-famous science fiction novels

3 **Arnold Bennett** (1867–1931) – a British novelist, playwright and critic

4 **Compton Mackenzie** (1883–1972) – a British novelist of Scottish origin

5 **Mr. Walpole** – Sir Hugh Walpole (1884–1941), a British novelist, critic and dramatist

people and good books.' We made no comment upon *that*. 'A good man is at any rate honest, passionate and unworldly.' 'What a woman's language!' I observed. 'Oh, dear,' cried Castalia, pushing the book away from her, 'what fools we were! It was all Poll's father's fault,' she went on. 'I believe he did it on purpose – that ridiculous will, I mean, forcing Poll to read all the books in the London Library. If we hadn't learnt to read,' she said bitterly, 'we might still have been bearing children in ignorance and that I believe was the happiest life after all. I know what you're going to say about war,' she checked me, 'and the horror of bearing children to see them killed, but our mothers did it, and their mothers, and their mothers before them. And *they* didn't complain. They couldn't read. I've done my best,' she sighed, 'to prevent my little girl from learning to read, but what's the use? I caught Ann only yesterday with a newspaper in her hand and she was beginning to ask me if it was "true." Next she'll ask me whether Mr. Lloyd George is a good man, then whether Mr. Arnold Bennett is a good novelist, and finally whether I believe in God. How can I bring my daughter up to believe in nothing?' she demanded.

'Surely you could teach her to believe that a man's intellect is, and always will be, fundamentally superior to a woman's?' I suggested. She brightened at this and began to turn over our old minutes again. 'Yes,' she said, 'think of their discoveries, their mathematics, their science, their philosophy, their scholarship—' and then she began to laugh, 'I shall never forget old Hobkin and the hairpin,' she said, and went on reading and laughing and I thought she was quite happy, when suddenly she drew the book from her and burst out, 'Oh, Cassandra, why do you torment me? Don't you know that our belief in man's intellect is the greatest fallacy of them all?' 'What?' I exclaimed. 'Ask any journalist, schoolmaster, politician or public house keeper in the land and they will all tell you that men are much cleverer than women.' 'As if I doubted it,' she said scornfully. 'How could they help it? Haven't we bred them and fed and kept them in comfort since the beginning of time so that they may be clever even if they're nothing else? It's all our doing!' she cried. 'We insisted upon having intellect and now we've got it. And it's intellect,' she continued, 'that's at the bottom of it. What could be more charming than a boy before he has begun to cultivate his intellect? He is beautiful to look at; he gives himself no airs; he understands the meaning of art and literature instinctively; he goes about enjoying his life and making other people enjoy theirs. Then they teach him to cultivate his intellect. He becomes a barrister, a civil servant, a general, an author, a professor. Every day he goes to an office. Every year he produces a book. He maintains a whole family by the products of his brain – poor devil! Soon he cannot come into a room without making us all feel uncomfortable; he condescends to every woman he meets, and dares not tell the truth even to his own wife; instead of rejoicing our eyes we have to shut them if we are to take him in our arms. True, they console themselves with stars of all shapes, ribbons of all shades, and incomes of all sizes – but what is to console us? That we shall be able in ten years' time to spend a week-end at Lahore?<sup>1</sup> Or that the least insect in Japan has a name twice the length of its body? Oh, Cassandra, for Heaven's sake let us devise a method by which men may bear children! It is our only chance. For unless we provide them with some innocent occupation we shall get neither good people nor good books; we shall perish beneath the fruits of their unbridled activity; and not a human being will survive to know that there once was Shakespeare!'

'It is too late,' I replied. 'We cannot provide even for the children that we have.'

'And then you ask me to believe in intellect,' she said.

While we spoke, men were crying hoarsely and wearily in the street, and, listening, we heard that the Treaty of Peace had just been signed. The voices died away. The rain was falling and interfered no doubt with the proper explosion of the fireworks.

'My cook will have bought the *Evening News*,' said Castalia, 'and Ann will be spelling it out over her tea. I must go home.'

'It's no good – not a bit of good,' I said. 'Once she knows how to read there's only one thing you can teach her to believe in – and that is herself.'

'Well, that would be a change,' sighed Castalia.

So we swept up the papers of our Society, and, though Ann was playing with her doll very

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<sup>1</sup> **Lahore** – a large city in Pakistan, the capital of Punjab province



happily, we solemnly made her a present of the lot and told her we had chosen her to be President of the Society of the future – upon which she burst into tears, poor little girl.