
23 STORIES

BY

TWENTY AND THREE AUTHORS



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TWENTY-THREE STORIES

BY

TWENTY AND THREE AUTHORS



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KERFOL

By EDITH WHARTON

I

“YOU ought to buy it,” said my host; “it’s just the place for a solitary-minded devil like you. And it would be rather worth while to own the most romantic house in Brittany. The present people are dead broke, and it’s going for a song—you ought to buy it.”

It was not with the least idea of living up to the character my friend Lanrivain ascribed to me (as a matter of fact, under my unsociable exterior I have always had secret yearnings for domesticity) that I took his hint one autumn afternoon and went to Kerfol. My friend was motoring over to Quimper on business: he dropped me on the way, at a cross-road on a heath, and said: “First turn to the right and second to the left. Then straight ahead till you see an avenue. If you meet any peasants, don’t ask your way. They don’t understand French, and they would pretend they did and mix you up. I’ll be back for you here by sunset—and don’t forget the tombs in the chapel.”

I followed Lanrivain’s directions with the hesitation occasioned by the usual difficulty of remembering whether he had said the first turn to the right and second to the left, or the contrary. If I had met a peasant I should certainly have asked, and probably been sent astray; but

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I had the desert landscape to myself, and so stumbled on the right turn and walked across the heath till I came to an avenue. It was so unlike any other avenue I have ever seen that I instantly knew it must be *the* avenue. The grey-trunked trees sprang up straight to a great height and then interwove their pale-grey branches in a long tunnel through which the autumn light fell faintly. I know most trees by name, but I haven't to this day been able to decide what those trees were. They had the tall curve of elms, the tenuity of poplars, the ashen colour of olives under a rainy sky; and they stretched ahead of me for half a mile or more without a break in their arch. If ever I saw an avenue that unmistakably led to something, it was the avenue at Kerfol. My heart beat a little as I began to walk down it.

Presently the trees ended and I came to a fortified gate in a long wall. Between me and the wall was an open space of grass, with other grey avenues radiating from it. Behind the wall were tall slate roofs mossed with silver, a chapel belfry, the top of a keep. A moat filled with wild shrubs and brambles surrounded the place; the draw-bridge had been replaced by a stone arch, and the portcullis by an iron gate. I stood for a long time on the hither side of the moat, gazing about me, and letting the influence of the place sink in. I said to myself: "If I wait long enough, the guardian will turn up and show me the tombs—" and I rather hoped he wouldn't turn up too soon.

I sat down on a stone and lit a cigarette. As soon as I had done it, it struck me as a puerile and portentous thing to do, with that great blind house looking down at me, and all the empty avenues converging on me. It

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may have been the depth of the silence that made me so conscious of my gesture. The squeak of my match sounded as loud as the scraping of a brake, and I almost fancied I heard it fall when I tossed it onto the grass. But there was more than that: a sense of irrelevance, of littleness, of futile bravado, in sitting there puffing my cigarette-smoke into the face of such a past.

I knew nothing of the history of Kerfol—I was new to Brittany, and Lanrivain had never mentioned the name to me till the day before—but one couldn't as much as glance at that pile without feeling in it a long accumulation of history. What kind of history I was not prepared to guess: perhaps only that sheer weight of many associated lives and deaths which gives a majesty to all old houses. But the aspect of Kerfol suggested something more a perspective of stern and cruel memories stretching away, like its own grey avenues, into a blur of darkness.

Certainly no house had ever more completely and finally broken with the present. As it stood there, lifting its proud roofs and gables to the sky, it might have been its own funeral monument. "Tombs in the chapel? The whole place is a tomb!" I reflected. I hoped more and more that the guardian would not come. The details of the place, however striking, would seem trivial compared with its collective impressiveness; and I wanted only to sit there and be penetrated by the weight of its silence.

"It's the very place for you!" Lanrivain had said; and I was overcome by the almost blasphemous frivolity of suggesting to any living being that Kerfol was the place for him. "Is it possible that any one could *not* see—?" I wondered. I did not finish the thought: what I meant was undefinable. I stood up and wandered toward the

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gate. I was beginning to want to know more; not to *see* more—I was by now so sure it was not a question of seeing—but to feel more: feel all the place had to communicate. “But to get in one will have to rout out the keeper,” I thought reluctantly, and hesitated. Finally I crossed the bridge and tried the iron gate. It yielded, and I walked through the tunnel formed by the thickness of the *chemin de ronde*. At the farther end, a wooden barricade had been laid across the entrance, and beyond it was a court enclosed in noble architecture. The main building faced me; and I now saw that one half was a mere ruined front, with gaping windows through which the wild growths of the moat and the trees of the park were visible. The rest of the house was still in its robust beauty. One end abutted on the round tower, the other on the small traceried chapel, and in an angle of the building stood a graceful well-head crowned with mossy urns. A few roses grew against the walls, and on an upper window-sill I remember noticing a pot of fuchsias.

My sense of the pressure of the invisible began to yield to my architectural interest. The building was so fine that I felt a desire to explore it for its own sake. I looked about the court, wondering in which corner the guardian lodged. Then I pushed open the barrier and went in. As I did so, a dog barred my way. He was such a remarkably beautiful little dog that for a moment he made me forget the splendid place he was defending. I was not sure of his breed at the time, but have since learned that it was Chinese, and that he was of a rare variety called the “Sleeve-dog.” He was very small and golden brown, with large brown eyes and a ruffled throat: he looked like a large tawny chrysanthemum. I

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said to myself: "These little beasts always snap and scream, and somebody will be out in a minute."

The little animal stood before me, forbidding, almost menacing; there was anger in his large brown eyes. But he made no sound, he came no nearer. Instead, as I advanced, he gradually fell back, and I noticed that another dog, a vague rough brindled thing, had limped up on a lame leg. "There'll be a hubbub now," I thought; for at the same moment a third dog, a long-haired white mongrel, slipped out of a doorway and joined the others. All three stood looking at me with grave eyes; but not a sound came from them. As I advanced they continued to fall back on muffled paws, still watching me. "At a given point, they'll all charge at my ankles: it's one of the jokes that dogs who live together put on one," I thought. I was not alarmed, for they were neither large nor formidable. But they let me wander about the court as I pleased, following me at a little distance—always the same distance—and always keeping their eyes on me. Presently I looked across at the ruined façade, and saw that in one of its empty window-frames another dog stood: a white pointer with one brown ear. He was an old grave dog, much more experienced than the others; and he seemed to be observing me with a deeper intentness.

"I'll hear from *him*," I said to myself; but he stood in the window-frame, against the trees of the park, and continued to watch me without moving. I stared back at him for a time, to see if the sense that he was being watched would not rouse him. Half the width of the court lay between us, and we gazed at each other silently across it. But he did not stir, and at last I turned away.

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Behind me I found the rest of the pack, with a new-comer added: a small black greyhound with pale agate-coloured eyes. He was shivering a little, and his expression was more timid than that of the others. I noticed that he kept a little behind them. And still there was not a sound.

I stood there for fully five minutes, the circle about me—waiting, as they seemed to be waiting. At last I went up to the little golden-brown dog and stooped to pat him. As I did so, I heard myself give a nervous laugh. The little dog did not start, or growl, or take his eyes from me—he simply slipped back about a yard, and then paused and continued to look at me. “Oh, hang it!” I exclaimed, and walked across the court toward the well.

As I advanced, the dogs separated and slid away into different corners of the court. I examined the urns on the well, tried a locked door or two, and looked up and down the dumb façade: then I faced about toward the chapel. When I turned I perceived that all the dogs had disappeared except the old pointer, who still watched me from the window. It was rather a relief to be rid of that cloud of witnesses; and I began to look about me for a way to the back of the house. “Perhaps there’ll be somebody in the garden,” I thought. I found a way across the moat, scrambled over a wall smothered in brambles, and got into the garden. A few lean hydrangeas and geraniums pined in the flower-beds, and the ancient house looked down on them indifferently. Its garden side was plainer and severer than the other: the long granite front, with its few windows and steep roof, looked like a fortress-prison. I walked around the

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farther wing, went up some disjointed steps, and entered the deep twilight of a narrow and incredibly old box-walk. The walk was just wide enough for one person to slip through, and its branches met overhead. It was like the ghost of a box-walk, its lustrous green all turning to the shadowy greyness of the avenues. I walked on and on, the branches hitting me in the face and springing back with a dry rattle; and at length I came out on the grassy top of the *chemin de ronde*. I walked along it to the gate-tower, looking down into the court, which was just below me. Not a human being was in sight; and neither were the dogs. I found a flight of steps in the thickness of the wall and went down them; and when I emerged again into the court, there stood the circle of dogs, the golden-brown one a little ahead of the others, the black greyhound shivering in the rear.

“Oh, hang it—you uncomfortable beasts, you!” I exclaimed, my voice startling me with a sudden echo. The dogs stood motionless, watching me. I knew by this time that they would not try to prevent my approaching the house, and the knowledge left me free to examine them. I had a feeling that they must be horribly cowed to be so silent and inert. Yet they did not look hungry or ill-treated. Their coats were smooth and they were not thin, except the shivering greyhound. It was more as if they had lived a long time with people who never spoke to them or looked at them: as though the silence of the place had gradually benumbed their busy, inquisitive natures. And this strange passivity, this almost human lassitude, seemed to me sadder than the misery of starved and beaten animals. I should have liked to rouse them for a minute, to coax them into a game or a scamper;

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but the longer I looked into their fixed and weary eyes the more preposterous the idea became. With the windows of that house looking down on us, how could I have imagined such a thing? The dogs knew better: *they* knew what the house would tolerate and what it would not. I even fancied that they knew what was passing through my mind, and pitied me for my frivolity. But even that feeling probably reached them through a thick fog of listlessness. I had an idea that their distance from me was as nothing to my remoteness from them. The impression they produced was that of having in common one memory so deep and dark that nothing that had happened since was worth either a growl or a wag.

“I say,” I broke out abruptly, addressing myself to the dumb circle, “do you know what you look like, the whole lot of you? You look as if you’d seen a ghost—that’s how you look. I wonder if there *is* a ghost here, and nobody but you left for it to appear to?” The dogs continued to gaze at me without moving. . . .

It was dark when I saw Lanrivain’s motor lamps at the cross-roads—and I wasn’t exactly sorry to see them. I had the sense of having escaped from the loneliest place in the whole world, and of not liking loneliness—to that degree—as much as I had imagined I should. My friend had brought his solicitor back from Quimper for the night, and seated beside a fat and affable stranger I felt no inclination to talk of Kerfol. . . .

But that evening, when Lanrivain and the solicitor were closeted in the study, Madame de Lanrivain began to question me in the drawing-room.

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“Well—are you going to buy Kerfol?” she asked, tilting up her gay chin from her embroidery.

“I haven’t decided yet. The fact is, I couldn’t get into the house,” I said, as if I had simply postponed my decision, and meant to go back for another look.

“You couldn’t get in? Why, what happened? The family are mad to sell the place, and the old guardian has orders——”

“Very likely. But the old guardian wasn’t there.”

“What a pity. He must have gone to market. But his daughter——?”

“There was nobody about. At least I saw no one.”

“How extraordinary! Literally nobody?”

“Nobody but a lot of dogs—a whole pack of them—who seemed to have the place to themselves.”

Madame de Lanrivain let the embroidery slip to her knees, and folded her hands on it. For several minutes she looked at me thoughtfully.

“A pack of dogs—you saw them?”

“Saw them? I saw nothing else!”

“How many?” She dropped her voice a little. “I’ve always wondered——”

I looked at her with surprise: I had supposed the place to be familiar to her. “Have you never been to Kerfol?” I asked.

“Oh, yes; often. But never on that day.”

“What day?”

“I’d quite forgotten, and so had Hervé, I’m sure. If we’d remembered, we never should have sent you to-day—but then, after all, one doesn’t half believe that sort of thing, does one?”

“What sort of thing?” I asked, involuntarily sinking

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my voice to the level of hers. Inwardly I was thinking: "I *knew* there was something. . . ."

Madame de Lanrivain cleared her throat and produced a reassuring smile. "Didn't Hervé tell you the story of Kerfol? An ancestor of his was mixed up in it. You know every Breton house has its ghost-story; and some of them are rather unpleasant."

"Yes—but those dogs?"

"Well, those dogs are the ghosts of Kerfol. At least, the peasants say there's one day in the year when a lot of dogs appear there; and that day the keeper and his daughter go off to Morlaix and get drunk. The women in Brittany drink dreadfully." She stooped to match a silk; then she lifted her charming, inquisitive Parisian face. "Did you *really* see a lot of dogs? There isn't one at Kerfol," she said.

2

Lanrivain, the next day, hunted out a shabby calf volume from the back of an upper shelf of his library.

"Yes—here it is. What does it call itself? *A History of the Assizes of the Duchy of Brittany. Quimper, 1702.* The book was written about a hundred years later than the Kerfol affair; but I believe the account is transcribed pretty literally from the judicial records. Anyhow, it's queer reading. And there's a Hervé de Lanrivain mixed up in it—not exactly my style, as you'll see. But then he's only a collateral. Here, take the book up to bed with you. I don't exactly remember the details; but after you've read it, I'll bet anything you'll leave your light burning all night!"

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I left my light burning all night, as he had predicted; but it was chiefly because, till near dawn, I was absorbed in my reading. The account of the trial of Anne de Cornault, wife of the lord of Kerfol, was long and closely printed. It was, as my friend had said, probably an almost literal transcription of what took place in the court-room; and the trial lasted nearly a month. Besides, the type of the book was very bad. . . .

At first I thought of translating the old record. But it is full of wearisome repetitions, and the main lines of the story are forever straying off into side issues. So I have tried to disentangle it, and give it here in a simpler form. At times, however, I have reverted to the text because no other words could have conveyed so exactly the sense of what I felt at Kerfol; and nowhere have I added anything of my own.

3

It was in the year 16— that Yves de Cornault, lord of the domain of Kerfol, went to the *pardon* of Locronan to perform his religious duties. He was a rich and powerful noble, then in his sixty-second year, but hale and sturdy, a great horseman and hunter and a pious man. So all his neighbours attested. In appearance he was short and broad, with a swarthy face, legs slightly bowed from the saddle, a hanging nose and broad hands with black hairs on them. He had married young and lost his wife and son soon after, and since then had lived alone at Kerfol. Twice a year he went to Morlaix, where he had a handsome house by the river, and spent a week or ten days there; and occasionally he rode to Rennes on business.

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Witnesses were found to declare that during these absences he led a life different from the one he was known to lead at Kerfol, where he busied himself with his estate, attended mass daily, and found his only amusement in hunting the wild boar and water-fowl. But these rumours are not particularly relevant, and it is certain that among people of his own class in the neighbourhood he passed for a stern and even austere man, observant of his religious obligations, and keeping strictly to himself. There was no talk of any familiarity with the women on his estate, though at that time the nobility were very free with their peasants. Some people said he had never looked at a woman since his wife's death; but such things are hard to prove, and the evidence on this point was not worth much.

Well, in his sixty-second year, Yves de Cornault went to the *pardon* at Locronan, and saw there a young lady of Douarnenez, who had ridden over pillion behind her father to do her duty to the saint. Her name was Anne de Barrigan, and she came of good old Breton stock, but much less great and powerful than that of Yves de Cornault; and her father had squandered his fortune at cards, and lived almost like a peasant in his little granite manor on the moors. . . . I have said I would add nothing of my own to this bald statement of a strange case; but I must interrupt myself here to describe the young lady who rode up to the lych-gate of Locronan at the very moment when the Baron de Cornault was also dismounting there. I take my description from a faded drawing in red crayon, sober and truthful enough to be by a late pupil of the Clouets, which hangs in Lanrivain's study, and is said to be a portrait of Anne de Barrigan.

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It is unsigned and has no mark of identity but the initials A. B., and the date 16—, the year after her marriage. It represents a young woman with a small oval face, almost pointed, yet wide enough for a full mouth with a tender depression at the corners. The nose is small, and the eyebrows are set rather high, far apart, and as lightly pencilled as the eyebrows in a Chinese painting. The forehead is high and serious, and the hair, which one feels to be fine and thick and fair, is drawn off it and lies close like a cap. The eyes are neither large nor small, hazel probably, with a look at once shy and steady. A pair of beautiful long hands are crossed below the lady's breast. . . .

The chaplain of Kerfol, and other witnesses, averred that when the Baron came back from Locronan he jumped from his horse, ordered another to be instantly saddled, called to a young page to come with him, and rode away that same evening to the south. His steward followed the next morning with coffers laden on a pair of pack mules. The following week Yves de Cornault rode back to Kerfol, sent for his vassals and tenants, and told them he was to be married at All Saints to Anne de Barrigan of Douarnenez. And on All Saints' Day the marriage took place.

As to the next few years, the evidence on both sides seems to show that they passed happily for the couple. No one was found to say that Yves de Cornault had been unkind to his wife, and it was plain to all that he was content with his bargain. Indeed, it was admitted by the chaplain and other witnesses for the prosecution that the young lady had a softening influence on her husband, and that he became less exacting with his tenants,

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less harsh to peasants and dependents, and less subject to the fits of gloomy silence which had darkened his widowhood. As to his wife, the only grievance her champions could call up in her behalf was that Kerfol was a lonely place, and that when her husband was away on business at Rennes or Morlaix—whither she was never taken—she was not allowed so much as to walk in the park unaccompanied. But no one asserted that she was unhappy, though one servant-woman said she had surprised her crying, and had heard her say that she was a woman accursed to have no child, and nothing in life to call her own. But that was a natural enough feeling in a wife attached to her husband; and certainly it must have been a great grief to Yves de Cornault that she bore no son. Yet he never made her feel her childlessness as a reproach—she admits this in her evidence—but seemed to try to make her forget it by showering gifts and favours on her. Rich though he was, he had never been open-handed; but nothing was too fine for his wife, in the way of silks or gems or linen, or whatever else she fancied. Every wandering merchant was welcome at Kerfol, and when the master was called away he never came back without bringing his wife a handsome present—something curious and particular—from Morlaix or Rennes or Quimper. One of the waiting-women gave, in cross-examination, an interesting list of one year's gifts, which I copy. From Morlaix, a carved ivory junk, with Chinamen at the oars, that a strange sailor had brought back as a votive offering for Notre Dame de la Clarté, above Ploumanac'h; from Quimper, an embroidered gown, worked by the nuns of the Assumption; from Rennes, a silver rose that opened and showed an amber Virgin

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with a crown of garnets; from Morlaix, again, a length of Damascus velvet shot with gold, bought of a Jew from Syria; and for Michaelmas that same year, from Rennes, a necklet or bracelet of round stones—emeralds and pearls and rubies—strung like beads on a fine gold chain. This was the present that pleased the lady best, the woman said. Later on, as it happened, it was produced at the trial, and appears to have struck the Judges and the public as a curious and valuable jewel.

The very same winter, the Baron absented himself again, this time as far as Bordeaux, and on his return he brought his wife something even odder and prettier than the bracelet. It was a winter evening when he rode up to Kerfol, and, walking into the hall, found her sitting by the hearth, her chin on her hand, looking into the fire. He carried a velvet box in his hand and, setting it down, lifted the lid and let out a little golden-brown dog.

Anne de Cornault exclaimed with pleasure as the little creature bounded toward her. "Oh, it looks like a bird or a butterfly!" she cried as she picked it up; and the dog put its paws on her shoulders and looked at her with eyes "like a Christian's." After that she would never have it out of her sight, and petted and talked to it as if it had been a child—as indeed it was the nearest thing to a child she was to know. Yves de Cornault was much pleased with his purchase. The dog had been brought to him by a sailor from an East Indian merchantman, and the sailor had bought it of a pilgrim in a bazaar at Jaffa, who had stolen it from a nobleman's wife in China: a perfectly permissible thing to do, since the pilgrim was a Christian and the nobleman a heathen doomed to hell-fire. Yves de Cornault had paid a long price for the dog,

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for they were beginning to be in demand at the French court, and the sailor knew he had got hold of a good thing; but Anne's pleasure was so great that, to see her laugh and play with the little animal, her husband would doubtless have given twice the sum.

So far all the evidence is at one, and the narrative plain sailing; but now the steering becomes difficult. I will try to keep as nearly as possible to Anne's own statements; though toward the end, poor thing. . . .

Well, to go back. The very year after the little brown dog was brought to Kerfol, Yves de Cornault, one winter night, was found dead at the head of a narrow flight of stairs leading down from his wife's rooms to a door opening on the court. It was his wife who found him and gave the alarm, so distracted, poor wretch, with fear and horror—for his blood was all over her—that at first the roused household could not make out what she was saying, and thought she had suddenly gone mad. But there, sure enough, at the top of the stairs lay her husband, stone dead, and head foremost, the blood from his wounds dripping down to the step below him. He had been dreadfully scratched and gashed about the face and throat, as if with curious pointed weapons; and one of his legs had a deep tear in it which had cut an artery, and probably caused his death. But how did he come there, and who had murdered him?

His wife declared that she had been asleep in her bed, and hearing his cry had rushed out to find him lying on the stairs; but this was immediately questioned. In the first place, it was proved that from her room she could not have heard the struggle on the stairs, owing to the thickness of the walls and the length of the intervening

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passage; then it was evident that she had not been in bed and asleep, since she was dressed when she roused the house, and her bed had not been slept in. Moreover, the door at the bottom of the stairs was ajar, and it was noticed by the chaplain (an observant man) that the dress she wore was stained with blood about the knees, and that there were traces of small blood-stained hands low down on the staircase walls, so that it was conjectured that she had really been at the postern-door when her husband fell and, feeling her way up to him in the darkness on her hands and knees, had been stained by his blood dripping down on her. Of course it was argued on the other side that the blood-marks on her dress might have been caused by her kneeling down by her husband when she rushed out of her room; but there was the open door below, and the fact that the finger-marks in the staircase all pointed upward.

The accused held to her statement for the first two days, in spite of its improbability; but on the third day word was brought to her that Hervé de Lanrivain, a young nobleman of the neighbourhood, had been arrested for complicity in the crime. Two or three witnesses thereupon came forward to say that it was known throughout the country that Lanrivain had formerly been on good terms with the lady of Cornault; but that he had been absent from Brittany for over a year, and people had ceased to associate their names. The witnesses who made this statement were not of a very reputable sort. One was an old herb-gatherer suspected of witchcraft, another a drunken clerk from a neighbouring parish, the third a half-witted shepherd who could be made to say anything; and it was clear that the prosecution was not satis-

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fied with its case, and would have liked to find more proof of Lanrivain's complicity than the statement of the herb-gatherer, who swore to having seen him climbing the wall of the park on the night of the murder. One way of patching out incomplete proofs in those days was to put some sort of pressure, moral or physical, on the accused person. It is not clear what pressure was put on Anne de Cornault; but on the third day, when she was brought in court, she "appeared weak and wandering," and after being encouraged to collect herself and speak the truth, on her honour and the wounds of her Blessed Redeemer, she confessed that she had in fact gone down the stairs to speak with Hervé de Lanrivain (who denied everything), and had been surprised there by the sound of her husband's fall. That was better; and the prosecution rubbed its hands with satisfaction. The satisfaction increased when various dependents living at Kerfol were induced to say—with apparent sincerity—that during the year or two preceding his death their master had once more grown uncertain and irascible, and subject to the fits of brooding silence which his household had learned to dread before his second marriage. This seemed to show that things had not been going well at Kerfol; though no one could be found to say that there had been any signs of open disagreement between husband and wife.

Anne de Cornault, when questioned as to her reason for going down at night to open the door to Hervé de Lanrivain, made an answer which must have sent a smile around the court. She said it was because she was lonely and wanted to talk with the young man. Was this the only reason? she was asked; and replied: "Yes, by

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the Cross over your Lordships' heads." "But why at midnight?" the court asked. "Because I could see him in no other way." I can see the exchange of glances across the ermine collars under the Crucifix.

Anne de Cornault, further questioned, said that her married life had been extremely lonely: "desolate" was the word she used. It was true that her husband seldom spoke harshly to her; but there were days when he did not speak at all. It was true that he had never struck or threatened her; but he kept her like a prisoner at Kerfol, and when he rode away to Morlaix or Quimper or Rennes he set so close a watch on her that she could not pick a flower in the garden without having a waiting-woman at her heels. "I am no Queen, to need such honours," she once said to him; and he had answered that a man who has a treasure does not leave the key in the lock when he goes out. "Then take me with you," she urged; but to this he said that towns were pernicious places, and young wives better off at their firesides.

"But what did you want to say to Hervé de Lanrivain?" the court asked; and she answered: "To ask him to take me away."

"Ah—you confess that you went down to him with adulterous thoughts?"

"No."

"Then why did you want him to take you away?"

"Because I was afraid for my life."

"Of whom were you afraid?"

"Of my husband."

"Why were you afraid of your husband?"

"Because he had strangled my little dog."

Another smile must have passed around the court-

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room: in days when any nobleman had a right to hang his peasants—and most of them exercised it—pinching a pet animal's wind-pipe was nothing to make a fuss about.

At this point one of the Judges, who appears to have had a certain sympathy for the accused, suggested that she should be allowed to explain herself in her own way; and she thereupon made the following statement.

The first years of her marriage had been lonely; but her husband had not been unkind to her. If she had had a child she would not have been unhappy; but the days were long, and it rained too much.

It was true that her husband, whenever he went away and left her, brought her a handsome present on his return; but this did not make up for the loneliness. At least nothing had, till he brought her the little brown dog from the East: after that she was much less unhappy. Her husband seemed pleased that she was so fond of the dog; he gave her leave to put her jewelled bracelet around its neck, and keep it always with her.

One day she had fallen asleep in her room, with the dog at her feet, as his habit was. Her feet were bare and resting on his back. Suddenly she was waked by her husband: he stood beside her, smiling not unkindly.

“You look like my great-grandmother, Juliane de Cornault, lying in the chapel with her feet on a little dog,” he said.

The analogy sent a chill through her, but she laughed and answered: “Well, when I am dead you must put me beside her, carved in marble, with my dog at my feet.”

“Oho—we'll wait and see,” he said, laughing also, but

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with his black brows close together. "The dog is the emblem of fidelity."

"And do you doubt my right to lie with mine at my feet?"

"When I'm in doubt I find out," he answered. "I am an old man," he added, "and people say I make you lead a lonely life. But I swear you shall have your monument if you earn it."

"And I swear to be faithful," she returned, "if only for the sake of having my little dog at my feet."

Not long afterward he went on business to the Quimper Assizes; and while he was away his aunt, the widow of a great nobleman of the duchy, came to spend a night at Kerfol on her way to the *pardon* of Ste. Barbe. She was a woman of piety and consequence, and much respected by Yves de Cornault, and when she proposed to Anne to go with her to Ste. Barbe, no one could object, and even the chaplain declared himself in favour of the pilgrimage. So Anne set out for Ste. Barbe, and there for the first time she talked with Hervé de Lanrivain. He had come once or twice to Kerfol with his father, but she had never before exchanged a dozen words with him. They did not talk for more than five minutes now: it was under the chestnuts, as the procession was coming out of the chapel. He said: "I pity you," and she was surprised, for she had not supposed that any one thought her an object of pity. He added: "Call for me when you need me," and she smiled a little, but was glad afterward, and thought often of the meeting.

She confessed to having seen him three times afterward: not more. How or where she would not say—one had the impression that she feared to implicate some

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one. Their meetings had been rare and brief; and at the last he had told her that he was starting the next day for a foreign country, on a mission which was not without peril and might keep him for many months absent. He asked her for a remembrance, and she had none to give him but the collar about the little dog's neck. She was sorry afterward that she had given it, but he was so unhappy at going that she had not had the courage to refuse.

Her husband was away at the time. When he returned a few days later he picked up the animal to pet it, and noticed that its collar was missing. His wife told him that the dog had lost it in the undergrowth of the park, and that she and her maids had hunted a whole day for it. It was true, she explained to the court, that she had made the maids search for the necklet—they all believed the dog had lost it in the park.

Her husband made no comment, and that evening at supper he was in his usual mood, between good and bad: you could never tell which. He talked a good deal, describing what he had seen and done at Rennes; but now and then he stopped and looked hard at her, and when she went to bed she found her little dog strangled on her pillow. The little thing was dead, but still warm; she stooped to lift it, and her distress turned to horror when she discovered that it had been strangled by twisting twice round its throat the necklet she had given to Lanrivain.

The next morning at dawn she buried the dog in the garden, and hid the necklet in her breast. She said nothing to her husband, then or later, and he said nothing to her; but that day he had a peasant hanged for stealing

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a faggot in the park, and the next day he nearly beat to death a young horse he was breaking.

Winter set in, and the short days passed, and the long nights, one by one; and she heard nothing of Hervé de Lanrivain. It might be that her husband had killed him; or merely that he had been robbed of the necklet. Day after day by the hearth among the spinning maids, night after night alone on her bed, she wondered and trembled. Sometimes at table her husband looked across at her and smiled; and then she felt sure that Lanrivain was dead. She dared not try to get news of him, for she was sure her husband would find out if she did: she had an idea that he could find out anything. Even when a witch-woman who was a noted seer, and could show you the whole world in her crystal, came to the castle for a night's shelter, and the maids flocked to her, Anne held back.

The winter was long and black and rainy. One day, in Yves de Cornault's absence, some gypsies came to Kerfol with a troop of performing dogs. Anne bought the smallest and cleverest, a white dog with a feathery coat and one blue and one brown eye. It seemed to have been ill-treated by the gypsies, and clung to her plaintively when she took it from them. That evening her husband came back, and when she went to bed she found the dog strangled on her pillow.

After that she said to herself that she would never have another dog; but one bitter cold evening a poor lean greyhound was found whining at the castle-gate, and she took him in and forbade the maids to speak of him to her husband. She hid him in a room that no one went to, smuggled food to him from her own plate, made him a warm bed to lie on and petted him like a child.

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Yves de Cornault came home, and the next day she found the greyhound strangled on her pillow. She wept in secret, but said nothing, and resolved that even if she met a dog dying of hunger she would never bring him into the castle; but one day she found a young sheep-dog, a brindled puppy with good blue eyes, lying with a broken leg in the snow of the park. Yves de Cornault was at Rennes, and she brought the dog in, warmed and fed it, tied up its leg and hid it in the castle till her husband's return. The day before, she gave it to a peasant woman who lived a long way off, and paid her handsomely to care for it and say nothing; but that night she heard a whining and scratching at her door, and when she opened it the lame puppy, drenched and shivering, jumped up on her with little sobbing barks. She hid him in her bed, and the next morning was about to have him taken back to the peasant woman when she heard her husband ride into the court. She shut the dog in a chest, and went down to receive him. An hour or two later, when she returned to her room, the puppy lay strangled on her pillow. . . .

After that she dared not make a pet of any other dog; and her loneliness became almost unendurable. Sometimes, when she crossed the court of the castle, and thought no one was looking, she stopped to pat the old pointer at the gate. But one day as she was caressing him her husband came out of the chapel; and the next day the old dog was gone. . . .

This curious narrative was not told in one sitting of the court, or received without impatience and incredulous comment. It was plain that the Judges were surprised by its puerility, and that it did not help the accused in

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the eyes of the public. It was an odd tale, certainly; but what did it prove? That Yves de Cornault disliked dogs, and that his wife, to gratify her own fancy, persistently ignored this dislike. As for pleading this trivial disagreement as an excuse for her relations—whatever their nature—with her supposed accomplice, the argument was so absurd that her own lawyer manifestly regretted having let her make use of it, and tried several times to cut short her story. But she went on to the end, with a kind of hypnotised insistence, as though the scenes she evoked were so real to her that she had forgotten where she was and imagined herself to be re-living them.

At length the Judge who had previously shown a certain kindness to her said (leaning forward a little, one may suppose, from his row of dozing colleagues): “Then you would have us believe that you murdered your husband because he would not let you keep a pet dog?”

“I did not murder my husband.”

“Who did, then? Hervé de Lanrivain?”

“No.”

“Who then? Can you tell us?”

“Yes, I can tell you. The dogs—” At that point she was carried out of the court in a swoon.

.

It was evident that her lawyer tried to get her to abandon this line of defence. Possibly her explanation, whatever it was, had seemed convincing when she poured it out to him in the heat of their first private colloquy; but now that it was exposed to the cold daylight of judicial scrutiny, and the banter of the town, he was thoroughly ashamed of it, and would have sacrificed her without a scruple to save his professional reputation.

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But the obstinate Judge—who perhaps, after all, was more inquisitive than kindly—evidently wanted to hear the story out, and she was ordered, the next day, to continue her deposition.

She said that after the disappearance of the old watchdog nothing particular happened for a month or two. Her husband was much as usual: she did not remember any special incident. But one evening a pedlar woman came to the castle and was selling trinkets to the maids. She had no heart for trinkets, but she stood looking on while the women made their choice. And then, she did not know how, but the pedlar coaxed her into buying for herself a pear-shaped pomander with a strong scent in it—she had once seen something of the kind on a gypsy woman. She had no desire for the pomander, and did not know why she had bought it. The pedlar said that whoever wore it had the power to read the future; but she did not really believe that, or care much either. However, she bought the thing and took it up to her room, where she sat turning it about in her hand. Then the strange scent attracted her and she began to wonder what kind of spice was in the box. She opened it and found a grey bean rolled in a strip of paper; and on the paper she saw a sign she knew, and a message from Hervé de Lanrivain, saying that he was at home again and would be at the door in the court that night after the moon had set. . . .

She burned the paper and sat down to think. It was nightfall, and her husband was at home. . . . She had no way of warning Lanrivain, and there was nothing to do but to wait. . . .

At this point I fancy the drowsy court-room beginning

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to wake up. Even to the oldest hand on the bench there must have been a certain relish in picturing the feelings of a woman on receiving such a message at nightfall from a man living twenty miles away, to whom she had no means of sending a warning. . . .

She was not a clever woman, I imagine; and as the first result of her cogitation she appears to have made the mistake of being, that evening, too kind to her husband. She could not ply him with wine, according to the traditional expedient, for though he drank heavily at times, he had a strong head; and when he drank beyond its strength it was because he chose to, and not because a woman coaxed him. Not his wife, at any rate—she was an old story by now. As I read the case, I fancy there was no feeling for her left in him but the hatred occasioned by his supposed dishonour.

At any rate, she tried to call up her old graces; but early in the evening he complained of pains and fever, and left the hall to go up to the closet where he sometimes slept. His servant carried him a cup of hot wine, and brought back word that he was sleeping and not to be disturbed; and an hour later, when Anne lifted the tapestry and listened at his door, she heard his loud regular breathing. She thought it might be a faint, and stayed a long time barefooted in the passage, her ear to the crack; but the breathing went on too steadily and naturally to be other than that of a man in a sound sleep. She crept back to her room reassured, and stood in the window watching the moon set through the trees of the park. The sky was misty and starless, and after the moon went down the night was black as pitch. She knew the time had come, and stole along the passage, past her husband's door—

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where she stopped again to listen to his breathing—to the top of the stairs. There she paused a moment, and assured herself that no one was following her; then she began to go down the stairs in the darkness. They were so steep and winding that she had to go very slowly, for fear of stumbling. Her one thought was to get the door unbolted, tell Lanrivain to make his escape, and hasten back to her room. She had tried the bolt earlier in the evening, and managed to put a little grease on it; but nevertheless, when she drew it, it gave a squeak . . . not loud, but it made her heart stop; and the next minute, overhead, she heard a noise. . . .

“What noise?” the prosecution interposed.

“My husband’s voice calling out my name and cursing me.”

“What did you hear after that?”

“A terrible scream and a fall.”

“Where was Hervé de Lanrivain at this time?”

“He was standing outside in the court. I just made him out in the darkness. I told him for God’s sake to go, and then I pushed the door shut.”

“What did you do next?”

“I stood at the foot of the stairs and listened.”

“What did you hear?”

“I heard dogs snarling and panting.” (Visible discouragement of the bench, boredom of the public, and exasperation of the lawyer for the defence. Dogs again! But the inquisitive Judge insisted.)

“What dogs?”

She bent her head and spoke so low that she had to be told to repeat her answer: “I don’t know.”

“How do you mean—you don’t know?”

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"I don't know what dogs. . . ."

The Judge again intervened: "Try to tell us exactly what happened. How long did you remain at the foot of the stairs?"

"Only a few minutes."

"And what was going on meanwhile overhead?"

"The dogs kept on snarling and panting. Once or twice he cried out. I think he moaned. Then he was quiet."

"Then what happened?"

"Then I heard a sound like the noise of a pack when the wolf is thrown to them—gulping and lapping."

(There was a groan of disgust and repulsion through the court, and another attempted intervention by the distracted lawyer. But the inquisitive Judge was still inquisitive.)

"And all the while you did not go up?"

"Yes—I went up then—to drive them off."

"The dogs?"

"Yes."

"Well——?"

"When I got there it was quite dark. I found my husband's flint and steel and struck a spark. I saw him lying there. He was dead."

"And the dogs?"

"The dogs were gone."

"Gone—where to?"

"I don't know. There was no way out—and there were no dogs at Kerfol."

She straightened herself to her full height, threw her arms above her head, and fell down on the stone floor with a long scream. There was a moment of confusion

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in the court-room. Some one on the bench was heard to say: "This is clearly a case for the ecclesiastical authorities"—and the prisoner's lawyer doubtless jumped at the suggestion.

After this, the trial loses itself in a maze of cross-questioning and squabbling. Every witness who was called corroborated Anne de Cornault's statement that there were no dogs at Kerfol: had been none for several months. The master of the house had taken a dislike to dogs, there was no denying it. But, on the other hand, at the inquest, there had been long and bitter discussions as to the nature of the dead man's wounds. One of the surgeons called in had spoken of marks that looked like bites. The suggestion of witchcraft was revived, and the opposing lawyers hurled tomes of necromancy at each other.

At last Anne de Cornault was brought back into court—at the instance of the same Judge—and asked if she knew where the dogs she spoke of could have come from. On the body of her Redeemer she swore that she did not. Then the Judge put his final question: "If the dogs you think you heard had been known to you, do you think you would have recognized them by their barking?"

"Yes."

"Did you recognize them?"

"Yes."

"What dogs do you take them to have been?"

"My dead dogs," she said in a whisper. . . . She was taken out of court, not to reappear there again. There was some kind of ecclesiastical investigation, and the end of the business was that the Judges disagreed with each

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other, and with the ecclesiastical committee, and that Anne de Cornault was finally handed over to the keeping of her husband's family, who shut her up in the keep of Kerfol, where she is said to have died many years later, a harmless mad-woman.

So ends her story. As for that of Hervé de Lanrivain, I had only to apply to his collateral descendant for its subsequent details. The evidence against the young man being insufficient, and his family influence in the duchy considerable, he was set free, and left soon afterward for Paris. He was probably in no mood for a worldly life, and he appears to have come almost immediately under the influence of the famous M. Arnauld d'Andilly and the gentlemen of Port Royal. A year or two later he was received into their Order, and without achieving any particular distinction he followed its good and evil fortunes till his death some twenty years later. Lanrivain showed me a portrait of him by a pupil of Philippe de Champaigne: sad eyes, an impulsive mouth and a narrow brow. Poor Hervé de Lanrivain: it was a grey ending. Yet as I looked at his stiff and sallow effigy, in the dark dress of the Jansenists, I almost found myself envying his fate. After all, in the course of his life two great things had happened to him: he had loved romantically, and he must have talked with Pascal. . . .

THE CHINK AND THE CHILD

By THOMAS BURKE

IT is a tale of love and lovers that they tell in the low-lit Causeway that slinks from West India Dock Road to the dark waste of waters beyond. In Pennyfields, too, you may hear it; and I do not doubt that it is told in far-away Tai-Ping, in Singapore, in Tokio, in Shanghai, and those other gay-lamped haunts of wonder whither the wandering people of Limehouse go and whence they return so casually. It is a tale for tears, and should you hear it in the liliated tongue of the yellow men, it would awaken in you all your pity. In our bald speech it must, unhappily, lose its essential fragrance, that quality that will lift an affair of squalor into the loftier spheres of passion and imagination, beauty and sorrow. It will sound unconvincing, a little . . . you know . . . the kind of thing that is best forgotten. Perhaps . . .

But listen.

It is Battling Burrows, the lightning welter-weight of Shadwell, the box o' tricks, the Tetrarch of the ring, who enters first. Battling Burrows, the pride of Ratcliff, Poplar and Limehouse, and the despair of his manager and backers. For he loved wine, woman and song; and the boxing world held that he couldn't last long on that. There was any amount of money in him for his parasites if only the damned women could be cut out; but again and again would he disappear from his training quarters

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on the eve of a big fight, to consort with Molly and Dolly, and to drink other things than barley-water and lemon-juice. Wherefore Chuck Lightfoot, his manager, forced him to fight on any and every occasion while he was good and a money-maker; for at any moment the collapse might come, and Chuck would be called upon by his creditors to strip off that "shirt" which at every contest he laid upon his man.

Battling was of a type that is too common in the eastern districts of London; a type that upsets all accepted classifications. He wouldn't be classed. He was a curious mixture of athleticism and degeneracy. He could run like a deer, leap like a greyhound, fight like a machine, and drink like a suction-hose. He was a bully; he had the courage of the high hero. He was an open-air sport; he had the vices of a French decadent.

It was one of his love adventures that properly begins this tale; for the girl had come to Battling one night with a recital of terrible happenings; of an angered parent, of a slammed door. . . . In her arms was a bundle of white rags. Now Battling, like so many sensualists, was also a sentimentalist. He took that bundle of white rags; he paid the girl money to get into the country; and the bundle of white rags had existed in and about his domicile in Pekin Street, Limehouse, for some eleven years. Her position was nondescript; to the casual observer it would seem that she was Battling's relief punch-ball—an unpleasant post for any human creature to occupy, especially if you are a little girl of twelve, and the place be the one-room household of the lightning welter-weight. When Battling was cross with his manager . . . well, it is indefensible to strike your manager or to throw

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chairs at him, if he is a good manager; but to use a dog-whip on a small child is permissible and quite as satisfying; at least he found it so. On these occasions, then, when very cross with his sparring partners, or over-flushed with victory and juice of the grape, he would flog Lucy. But he was reputed by the boys to be a good fellow. He only whipped the child when he was drunk; and he was only drunk for eight months of the year.

For just over twelve years this bruised little body had crept about Poplar and Limehouse. Always the white face was scarred with red, or black-furrowed with tears; always in her steps and in her look was expectation of dread things. Night after night her sleep was broken by the cheerful Battling's brute voice and violent hands; and terrible were the lessons which life taught her in those few years. Yet, for all the starved face and the transfixed air, there was a lurking beauty about her, a something that called you in the soft curve of her cheek that cried for kisses and was fed with blows, and in the splendid mournfulness that grew in eyes and lips. The brown hair chimed against the pale face, like the rounding of a verse. The blue cotton frock and the broken shoes could not break the loveliness of her slender figure or the shy grace of her movements as she flitted about the squalid alleys of the docks; though in all that region of wasted life and toil and decay, there was not one that noticed her, until . . .

Now there lived in Chinatown, in one lousy room over Mr. Tai Fu's store in Pennyfields, a wandering yellow man, named Cheng Huan. Cheng Huan was a poet. He did not realise it. He had never been able to understand why he was unpopular; and he died without know-

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ing. But a poet he was, tinged with the materialism of his race, and in his poor listening heart strange echoes would awake of which he himself was barely conscious. He regarded things differently from other sailors; he felt things more passionately, and things which they felt not at all; so he lived alone instead of at one of the lodgings-houses. Every evening he would sit at his window and watch the street. Then, a little later, he would take a jolt of opium at the place at the corner of Formosa Street.

He had come to London by devious ways. He had loafed on the Bund at Shanghai. The fateful intervention of a crimp had landed him on a boat. He got to Cardiff, and sojourned in its Chinatown; thence to Liverpool, to Glasgow; thence, by a ticket from the Asiatics' Aid Society, to Limehouse, where he remained for two reasons—because it cost him nothing to live there, and because he was too lazy to find a boat to take him back to Shanghai.

So he would lounge and smoke cheap cigarettes, and sit at his window, from which point he had many times observed the lyrical Lucy. He noticed her casually. Another day, he observed her, not casually. Later, he looked long at her; later still, he began to watch for her and for that strangely provocative something about the toss of the head and the hang of the little blue skirt as it coyly kissed her knee.

Then that beauty which all Limehouse had missed smote Cheng. Straight to his heart it went, and cried itself into his very blood. Thereafter the spirit of poetry broke her blossoms all about his odorous chamber. Nothing was the same. Pennyfields became a happy-lanterned

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street, and the monotonous fiddle in the house opposite was the music of his fathers. Bits of old song floated through his mind: little sweet verses of Le Tai-pih, murmuring of plum blossom, ricefield and stream. Day by day he would moon at his window, or shuffle about the streets, lighting to a flame when Lucy would pass and gravely return his quiet regard; and night after night, too, he would dream of a pale, lily-lovely child.

And now the Fates moved swiftly various pieces on their sinister board, and all that followed happened with a speed and precision that showed direction from higher ways.

It was Wednesday night in Limehouse, and for once clear of mist. Out of the coloured darkness of the Causeway stole the muffled wail of reed instruments, and, though every window was closely shuttered, between the joints shot jets of light and stealthy voices, and you could hear the whisper of slippered feet, and the stuttering steps of the satyr and the sadist. It was to the café in the middle of the Causeway, lit by the pallid blue light that is the symbol of China throughout the world, that Cheng Huan came, to take a dish of noodle and some tea. Thence he moved to another house whose stairs ran straight to the street, and above whose doorway a lamp glowed like an evil eye. At this establishment he mostly took his pipe of "chandu" and a brief chat with the keeper of the house, for, although not popular, and very silent, he liked sometimes to be in the presence of his compatriots. Like a figure of a shadowgraph he slid through the door and up the stairs.

The chamber he entered was a bit of the Orient squatting at the portals of the West. It was a well-kept place

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where one might play a game of fan-tan, or take a shot or so of *li-un*, or purchase other varieties of Oriental delight. It was sunk in a purple dusk, though here and there a lantern stung the gloom. Low couches lay around the walls, and strange men decorated them: Chinese, Japs, Malays, Lascars, with one or two white girls; and sleek, noiseless attendants swam from couch to couch. Away in the far corner sprawled a lank figure in brown shirt-ing, its nerveless fingers curled about the stem of a spent pipe. On one of the lounges a scorbutic nigger sat with a Jewess from Shadwell. Squatting on a table in the centre, beneath one of the lanterns, was a musician with a reed, blinking upon the company like a sly cat, and making his melody of six repeated notes.

The atmosphere churned. The dirt of years, tobacco of many growings, opium, betel nut, and moist flesh allied themselves in one grand assault against the nostrils.

As Cheng brooded on his insect-ridden cushion, of a sudden the lantern above the musician was caught by the ribbon of his reed. It danced and flung a hazy radiance on a divan in the shadow. He saw—started—half rose. His heart galloped, and the blood pounded in his quiet veins. Then he dropped again,—crouched, and stared.

O lily-flowers and plum blossoms! O silver streams and dim-starred skies! O wine and roses, song and laughter! For there, kneeling on a mass of rugs, mazed and big-eyed, but understanding, was Lucy . . . his Lucy . . . his little maid. Through the dusk she must have felt his intent gaze upon her; for he crouched there, fascinated, staring into the now obscured corner where she knelt.

But the sickness which momentarily gripped him on

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finding in this place his snowy-breasted pearl passed and gave place to great joy. She was here; he would talk with her. Little English he had, but simple words, those with few gutturals, he had managed to pick up; so he rose, the masterful lover, and, with feline movements, crossed the nightmare chamber to claim his own.

If you wonder how Lucy came to be in this bagnio, the explanation is simple. Battling was in training. He had flogged her that day before starting work; he had then had a few brandies—not many; some eighteen or nineteen—and had locked the door of his room and taken the key. Lucy was, therefore, homeless, and a girl somewhat older than Lucy, so old and so wise, as girls are in that region, saw in her a possible source of revenue. So there they were, and to them appeared Cheng.

From what horrors he saved her that night cannot be told, for her ways were too audaciously childish to hold her long from harm in such a place. What he brought to her was love and death.

For he sat by her. He looked at her—reverently yet passionately. He touched her—wistfully yet eagerly. He locked a finger in her wondrous hair. She did not start away; she did not tremble. She knew well what she had to be afraid of in that place; but she was not afraid of Cheng. She pierced the mephitic gloom and scanned his face. No, she was not afraid. His yellow hands, his yellow face, his smooth black hair . . . well, he was the first thing that had ever spoken soft words to her; the first thing that had ever laid a hand upon her that was not brutal; the first thing that had deferred in manner towards her as though she, too, had a right to live. She knew his words were sweet, though she did not under-

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stand them. Nor can they be set down. Half that he spoke was in village Chinese; the rest in a mangling of English which no distorted spelling could possibly reproduce.

But he drew her back against the cushions and asked her name, and she told him; and he inquired her age, and she told him; and he had then two beautiful words that came easily to his tongue. He repeated them again and again:

“Lucia . . . l'il Lucia. . . . Twelve. . . . Twelve.” Musical phrases they were, dropping from his lips, and to the child who heard her name pronounced so lovingly, they were the lost heights of melody. She clung to him, and he to her. She held his strong arm in both of hers as they crouched on the divan, and nestled her cheek against his coat.

Well . . . he took her home to his wretched room.

“Li'l Lucia, come-a-home . . . Lucia.”

His heart was on fire. As they slipped out of the noisomeness into the night air and crossed the West India Dock Road into Pennyfields, they passed unnoticed. It was late, for one thing, and for another . . . well, nobody cared particularly. His blood rang with soft music and the solemnity of drums, for surely he had found now what for many years he had sought—his world's one flower. Wanderer he was, from Tuan-tsen to Shanghai, Shanghai to Glasgow, Cardiff . . . Liverpool . . . London. He had dreamed often of the women of his native land; perchance one of them should be his flower. Women, indeed, there had been. Swatow . . . he had recollections of certain rose-winged hours in coast cities. At many places to which chance had led him a little bird

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had perched itself upon his heart, but so lightly and for so brief a while as hardly to be felt. But now—now he had found her in this alabaster Cockney child. So that he was glad and had great joy of himself and the blue and silver night, and the harsh flares of the Poplar Hippodrome.

You will observe that he had claimed her, but had not asked himself whether she were of an age for love. The white perfection of the child had captivated every sense. It may be that he forgot that he was in London and not in Tuan-tsen. It may be that he did not care. Of that nothing can be told. All that is known is that his love was a pure and holy thing. Of that we may be sure, for his worst enemies have said it.

Slowly, softly they mounted the stairs to his room, and with almost an obeisance he entered and drew her in. A bank of cloud raced to the east and a full moon thrust a sharp sword of light upon them. Silence lay over all Pennyfields. With a bird-like movement, she looked up at him—her face alight, her tiny hands upon his coat—clinging, wondering, trusting. He took her hand and kissed it; repeated the kiss upon her cheek and lip and little bosom, twining his fingers in her hair. Docilely, and echoing the smile of his lemon lips in a way that thrilled him almost to laughter, she returned his kisses impetuously, gladly.

He clasped the nestling to him. Bruised, tearful, with the love of life almost thrashed out of her, she had fluttered to him out of the evil night.

“O li'l Lucia!” And he put soft hands upon her, and smoothed her and crooned over her many gracious things in his flowered speech. So they stood in the moonlight,

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while she told him the story of her father, of her beatings, and starvings and unhappiness.

“O li'l Lucia. . . . White Blossom. . . . Twelve. . . . Twelve years old!”

As he spoke, the clock above the Milwall Docks shot twelve crashing notes across the night. When the last echo died, he moved to a cupboard, and from it he drew strange things . . . formless masses of blue and gold, magical things of silk, and a vessel that was surely Aladdin's lamp, and a box of spices. He took these robes, and, with tender, reverent fingers, removed from his White Blossom the besmirched rags that covered her and robed her again, and led her then to the heap of stuff that was his bed, and bestowed her safely.

For himself, he squatted on the floor before her, holding one grubby little hand. There he crouched all night, under the lyric moon, sleepless, watchful; and sweet content was his. He had fallen into an uncomfortable posture, and his muscles ached intolerably. But she slept, and he dared not move nor release her hand lest he should awaken her. Weary and trustful, she slept, knowing that the yellow man was kind and that she might sleep with no fear of a steel hand smashing the delicate structure of her dreams.

In the morning, when she awoke, still wearing her blue and yellow silk, she gave a cry of amazement. Cheng had been about. Many times had he glided up and down the two flights of stairs, and now at last his room was prepared for his princess. It was swept and garnished, and was an apartment worthy a maid who is loved by a poet-prince. There was a bead curtain. There were muslins of pink and white. There were four bowls of

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flowers, clean, clear flowers to gladden the White Blossom and set off her sharp beauty. And there was a bowl of water, and a sweet lotion for the bruise on her cheek.

When she had risen, her prince ministered to her with rice and egg and tea. Cleansed and robed and calm, she sat before him, perched on the end of many cushions as on a throne, with all the grace of the child princess in the story. She was a poem. The beauty hidden by neglect and fatigue shone out now more clearly and vividly, and from the head sunning over with curls to the small white feet, now bathed and sandalled, she seemed the living interpretation of a Chinese lyric. And she was his; her sweet self and her prattle, and her bird-like ways were all his own.

Oh, beautifully they loved. For two days he held her. Soft caresses from his yellow hands and long, devout kisses were all their demonstration. Each night he would tend her, as might mother to child; and each night he watched and sometimes slumbered at the foot of her couch.

But now there were those that ran to Battling at his training quarters across the river, with the news that his child had gone with a Chink—a yellow man. And Battling was angry. He discovered parental rights. He discovered indignation. A yellow man after his kid! He'd learn him. Battling did not like men who were not born in the same great country as himself. Particularly he disliked yellow men. His birth and education in Shadwell had taught him that of all creeping things that creep upon the earth the most insidious is the Oriental in the West. And a yellow man and a child. It was . . . as you might say . . . so . . . kind of . . . well, wasn't

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it? He bellowed that it was "unnacherel." The yellerman would go through it. Yeller! It was his supreme condemnation, his final epithet for all conduct of which he disapproved.

There was no doubt that he was extremely annoyed. He went to the Blue Lantern, in what was once Ratcliff Highway, and thumped the bar, and made all his world agree with him. And when they agreed with him he got angrier still. So that when, a few hours later, he climbed through the ropes at the Netherlands to meet Bud Tuffit for ten rounds, it was Bud's fight all the time, and to that bright boy's astonishment he was the victor on points at the end of the ten. Battling slouched out of the ring, still more determined to let the Chink have it where the chicken had the axe. He left the house with two pals and a black man, and a number of really inspired curses from his manager.

On the evening of the third day, then, Cheng slipped sleepily down the stairs to procure more flowers and more rice. The genial Ho Ling, who keeps the Canton store, held him in talk some little while, and he was gone from his room perhaps half-an-hour. Then he glided back, and climbed with happy feet the forty stairs to his temple of wonder.

With a push of a finger he opened the door, and the blood froze on his cheek, the flowers fell from him. The temple was empty and desolate; White Blossom was gone. The muslin hangings were torn down and trampled underfoot. The flowers had been flung from their bowls about the floor, and the bowls lay in fifty fragments. The joss was smashed. The cupboard had been opened. Rice was scattered here and there. The little straight bed had

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been jumped upon by brute feet. Everything that could be smashed or violated had been so treated, and—horror of all—the blue and yellow silk robe had been rent in pieces, tied in grotesque knots, and slung derisively about the table legs.

I pray devoutly that you may never suffer what Cheng Huan suffered in that moment. The pangs of death, with no dying; the sickness of the soul which longs to escape and cannot; the imprisoned animal within the breast which struggles madly for a voice and finds none; all the agonies of all the ages—the agonies of every abandoned lover and lost woman, past and to come—all these things were his in that moment.

Then he found voice and gave a great cry, and men from below came up to him; and they told him how the man who boxed had been there with a black man; how he had torn the robes from his child, and dragged her down the stairs by her hair; and how he had shouted aloud for Cheng and had vowed to return and deal separately with him.

Now a terrible dignity came to Cheng, and the soul of his great fathers swept over him. He closed the door against them, and fell prostrate over what had been the resting-place of White Blossom. Those without heard strange sounds as of an animal in its last pains; and it was even so. Cheng was dying. The sacrament of his high and holy passion had been profaned; the last sanctuary of the Oriental—his soul dignity—had been assaulted. The love robes had been torn to ribbons; the veil of his temple cut down. Life was no longer possible; and life without his little lady, his White Blossom, was no longer desirable.

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Prostrate he lay for the space of some five minutes. Then, in his face all the pride of accepted destiny, he arose. He drew together the little bed. With reverent hands he took the pieces of blue and yellow silk, kissing them and fondling them and placing them about the pillow. Silently he gathered up the flowers, and the broken earthenware, and burnt some prayer papers and prepared himself for death.

Now it is the custom among those of the sect of Cheng that the dying shall present love-gifts to their enemies; and when he had set all in order, he gathered his brown canvas coat about him, stole from the house, and set out to find Battling Burrows, bearing under the coat his love-gift to Battling. White Blossom he had no hope of finding. He had heard of Burrows many times; and he judged that, now that she was taken from him, never again would he hold those hands or touch that laughing hair. Nor, if he did, could it change things from what they were. Nothing that was not a dog could live in the face of this sacrilege.

As he came before the house in Pekin Street, where Battling lived, he murmured gracious prayers. Fortunately, it was a night of thick river mist, and through the enveloping velvet none could observe or challenge him. The main door was open, as are all doors in this district. He writhed across the step, and through to the back room, where again the door yielded to a touch.

Darkness. Darkness and silence, and a sense of frightful things. He peered through it. Then he fumbled under his jacket—found a match—struck it. An inch of a candle stood on the mantelshelf. He lit it. He looked around. No sign of Burrows, but . . . Almost before

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he looked he knew what awaited him. But the sense of finality had kindly stunned him; he could suffer nothing more.

On the table lay a dog-whip. In the corner a belt had been flung. Half across the greasy couch lay White Blossom. A few rags of clothing were about her pale and slim body; her hair hung limp as her limbs; her eyes were closed. As Cheng drew nearer and saw the savage red rails that ran across and across the beloved body, he could not scream—he could not think. He dropped beside the couch. He laid gentle hands upon her, and called soft names. She was warm to the touch. The pulse was still.

Softly, oh, so softly, he bent over the little frame that had enclosed his friend-spirit, and his light kisses fell all about her. Then, with the undirected movements of a sleep-walker, he bestowed the rags decently about her, clasped her in strong arms, and crept silently into the night.

From Pekin Street to Pennyfields it is but a turn or two, and again he passed unobserved as he bore his tired bird back to her nest. He laid her upon the bed, and covered the lily limbs with the blue and yellow silks and strewed upon her a few of the trampled flowers. Then, with more kisses and prayers, he crouched beside her.

So, in the ghastly Limehouse morning, they were found—the dead child, and the Chink, kneeling beside her, with a sharp knife gripped in a vice-like hand, its blade far between his ribs.

Meantime, having vented his wrath on his prodigal daughter, Battling, still cross, had returned to the Blue Lantern, and there he stayed with a brandy tumbler in

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his fist, forgetful of an appointment at Premierland, whereby he should have been in the ring at ten o'clock sharp. For the space of an hour Chuck Lightfoot was going blasphemously to and fro in Poplar, seeking Battling and not finding him, and murmuring in tearful tones: "Battling—you dammanblasted Battling—where are yeh?"

His opponent was in his corner sure enough, but there was no fight. For Battling lurched from the Blue Lantern to Pekin Street. He lurched into his happy home, and he cursed Lucy, and called for her. And finding no matches, he lurched to where he knew the couch should be, and flopped heavily down.

Now it is a peculiarity of the reptile tribe that its members are impatient of being flopped on without warning. So, when Battling flopped, eighteen inches of writhing gristle upreared itself on the couch, and got home on him as Bud Tuffit had done the night before—one to the ear, one to the throat, and another to the forearm.

Battling went down and out.

And he, too, was found in the morning, with Cheng Huan's love-gift coiled about his neck.

THE NOMAD

By ROBERT HICHENS

I

THE fate of Madame Lemaire had certainly not been an ordinary one. She was French, of Marseilles, as you could tell by her accent, especially when she said "*C'est bien!*" and had been an extremely coquettish and lively girl, with a strong will of her own and a passionate love of pleasure and of town life. From her talk when she was seventeen, you would have gathered that if she ever moved from Marseilles it would be to go to Paris. Nothing else would be good enough for her. She felt herself born to play a part in some great city.

And yet, at the age of forty, here she was in the desert of Sahara, keeping an *auberge* at El-Kelf under the salt mountain! She sometimes wondered how it had ever come about, when she crossed the court of the inn, round which mules of customers were tethered in open sheds, or when she served the rough Algerian wine to farmers from the Tell, or to some dusty commercial traveller from Batna, in the arbour trellised with vines that fronted the desert.

Marie Lemaire, who had been Marie Bretelle, at El-Kelf! Marie Lemaire in the desert of Sahara attending upon God knows whom: Algerians, Spahis, camel-drivers, gazelle-hunters! No; it was too much!

From *Snakebite*, by Robert Hichens. Copyright, 1919, by George H. Doran Company.

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But if you have a "kink" in you, to what may you not come? Marie Bretelle's "kink" had been an idiotic softness for handsome faces.

She wanted to shine in the world, to cut a dash, to go to Paris; or, if that were impossible, to stay in Marseilles married to some rich city man, and to give parties, and to get gowns from Madame Vannier, of the Rue de Cliche, and hats from Trebichot, of the Rue des Colonies, and to attend the theatres, and to be stared at and pointed out on to the race-course, and—and, in fact, to be the belle of Marseilles. And here she was at El-Kelf and all because of that "kink" in her nature!

Lemaire had had a handsome face and been a fine man, stalwart, bold, muscular, determined. He did not belong to Marseilles, but had come there to give an acrobatic show in a music-hall; and there Marie Bretelle had seen him, dressed in silver-spangled tights, and doing marvellous feats on three parallel bars. His bare arms had lumps on them like balls of iron, his fair moustaches were trained into points, his bold eyes were lit with a fire to fascinate women; and—well, Marie Bretelle ran away with him and became Madame Lemaire. And so she came to Algiers, where Lemaire had an accident while giving his performance. And that was the beginning of the Odyssey which had ended at El-Kelf.

"Fool—fool—fool!"

Often she said that to herself, as she went about the inn doing her duties with grains of sand in her hair.

"Fool—fool—fool!"

The word was taken by the wind of the waste and carried away to the desert.

After his accident Lemaire lost his engagements. Then

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he lost his looks. He put on flesh. He ceased to train his moustaches into points. The great muscles got soft, were covered with flabby fat. Finally he took to drink. And so they drifted.

To earn some money he became many things—guide, *concierger*, tout for “La Belle Fatma.” He had impossible professions in Algiers. And Marie? Well, it were best not to scrutinise her life too closely under the burning sun of Africa. Whatever it was, it was not very successful; and they drifted from Algiers. Where did they go? Where had they not been in this fiery land? Oran on the Moroccan border had seen them, and the mosques of Kairouan, windy Tunis, and rock-bound Constantine, laughing Bougie in its wall by the water, Fort National in the Grande Kabyle. They had been everywhere. And at last some wind of the desert had blown them, like poor grains of desert sand, from the bending palms of Biskra to the mud walls of El-Kelf.

And here—Gold help them!—for ten years they had been keeping the inn, “Au Retour du Desert.”

For ten, long, dry years, and such an inn! Why, at Marseilles they would have called it—well, one cannot tell what they would have called it on the Cannebiere! But they would have found a name for it, that is certain.

It stood alone, this inn, quite alone in the desert, which at El-Kelf circles a small oasis in which there is hidden among fair-sized palms a meagre Arab village. Why the inn should have been built outside of the oasis, away from the village, I cannot tell you. But so it is. It seems to be disdainful of the earth houses of the Arabs, to be determined to have nothing to do with them. And yet there is little reason in its disdain.

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For it, too, is built on sun-dried earth for the most part, and has only the ground floor possessed by most of them. It stands facing flat but not illimitable desert. The road that passes before it winds way to land where there is water; and from the trellised arbour, but far off, one can see in the sunshine the sharp, shrill green of crops, grown by the Spahis whose tented camp lies to the right of the caravan track that leads over the Col de Sfa to Biskra.

Far, far along that road one can see from the inn, till its whiteness is as the whiteness of a thread, and any figures travelling upon it are less than little dolls, and even a caravan is but a moving dimness shrouded in a dimness of dust. But towards evening, when the strange clearness of Africa becomes almost terribly acute, every speck upon the thread has a meaning to attract the eye, and set the mind at work asking:

“What is this that is coming upon the road? Who is this that travels? Is it a mounted man on his thin horse, with his matchlock pointing to the sky? Or is it a woman hunched upon a trotting donkey? Or a Nomad on his camel? Or is it only some poor desert man, half naked in his rags, who tramps on his bare brown feet along sun-baked track, his hood drawn above his eyes, his knotted club in his hand?”

After ten years Madame Lemaire still asked herself such questions in the arbour of the inn, when business was slack, when her husband was away, or was lying half drunk upon the bed after an extra dose of absinthe, and the one-eyed Arab servant, Hadj, was squatting on his haunches in a corner smoking keef.

Not that the answer mattered at all to her. She ex-

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pected nothing of the road that led from the desert. But her mind, stagnant though it had become in the solitude of Africa, had to do something to occupy itself. And so she often stared across the plain, with an aimless "*Je me demande*" trembling upon her lips, and a hard expression of inquiry in her dark brown eyes, whose lids were seamed with tiny wrinkles. Perhaps you will wonder why Madame Lemaire, having once had a passionate love for pleasure and a strong will of her own, had consented to remain for ten years in the solitude of El-Kelf, drudging in a miserable *auberge*, to which few people, and those but poor ones, ever came.

Circumstances and Robert Lemaire had been too much for her. Both had been cruel. She was something of a slave to both. Lemaire was an utter failure, but there lurked within him still, under the waves of absinthe, traces of the dominating power which had long ago made him a success.

Madame Lemaire had worshipped him once, had adored his strength and beauty. They were gone now. He was a wreck. But he was a wreck with fierceness in it. And command with him had become a habit. And Africa bids one accept. And so Madame Lemaire had stayed for ten long years drudging at the inn beside the salt mountain, and staring down the long white road for the something strange and interesting from the desert that never, never came.

And still Lemaire drank absinthe, and cursed and drowsed. For ten long years! And still Hadj squatted upon his haunches and drugged himself with keef. And still Madame Lemaire stood under the trellised vine, with

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the sand-grains in her hair, and gazed and gazed over the plain.

And when a black speck appeared far off upon the whiteness of the track, she watched it till her eyes ached, demanding who, or what, it was—whether a Spahi on horseback, a woman on her donkey, a Nomad on his camel, or some dark and half-naked pedestrian of the sands, that travelled through the sunset glory towards the lonely inn.

Although Robert Lemaire was a wreck he was not an old man in years, only forty-five, and the fine and tonic air of the Sahara preserved from complete destruction. Shaggy and unkept he was, with a heavy bulk of chest and shoulders, a large, pale face, and the angry and distressed eyes of the absinthe slave. His hands trembled habitually, and on his bad days fluttered like leaves. But there was still some force in his prematurely aged body, still some will in his mind. He was a wreck, but he was the wreck of one who had been really a man and accustomed to dominate women. And this he did not forget.

One evening—it was in May, and the long heats of the desert had already set in—Lemaire was away from the *auberge*, shooting near the salt mountain with an acquaintance, a colonist who had a small farm not far from Biskra, and who had come to spend the night at El-Kelf. This man had a history. He had once been a hotel-keeper, and had reason to suspect a guest in his hotel of having guilty intercourse with his wife.

One night, having discovered beyond possibility of doubt that his suspicions were well founded, he waited till the hotel was closed, then made his way to his guest's room, and put three bullets into him as he lay asleep in

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his bed. For this murder, or act of justice, he got only ten months' imprisonment. But his business as a hotel-keeper was ruined. So now he was a small farmer. He was also, perhaps, the only real friend Lemaire had in Africa, and he came occasionally to spend a night at the *Retour du Desert*.

Upon this evening of May, Madame Lemaire was alone in the inn with the one-eyed servant Hadj preparing supper for the two sportsmen. The flies buzzed about under the dusty leaves of the vine, which were un-stirred by any breeze. The crystals upon the flanks of the salt mountain glittered in the sun that was still fiery, though not far from its declining.

Upon the dry, earthen walls of the inn and over the stones of the court round which it was built, the lizards crept, or rested with eager, glancing patience, as if alert for further movement, but waiting for a signal. A mule or two stamped in the long stable that was open to the court, and a skeleton of a white Kabyle dog slunk to and fro searching for scraps with his lips curled back from his pointed teeth.

And Madame Lemaire went slowly about her work with the sand-grains in her hair, and the flies buzzing around her.

Nothing had happened. Nothing ever did happen at El-Kelf. But for some mysterious reason Madame Lemaire suddenly felt to-day that her existence in the desert had become insupportable. It may have been that Africa, gradually draining away the Frenchwoman's vitality, had on this day removed the last little drop of the force that had, till now, enabled her to face her life, however dully, however wearily.

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It may have been that there was some peculiar and unusual heaviness in the air that was generally of a feathery lightness. Or the reason may have been mental, and Africa may have drawn from this victim's nature, on this particular day, a grain, small as a grain of sand, of will-power that was absolutely necessary for the keeping of the woman's stamina upon its feet.

However it was, she felt that she collapsed. She did not cry. She did not curse. She did not faint, or lie down and stare with desperate eyes at the vacant dying day. She did not neglect her domestic duties, and was even now tearing, with a flat key, the cover from some tinned veal and ham for the evening's supper. But something within her had abruptly raised its voice. She seemed to hear it saying: "I can't bear any more!" and to know that it spoke the truth. No longer could she bear it: the African sun on the brown-earth walls, the settling of the sand-grains in her hair, the movement of the flies about her face, wrinkled prematurely by the perpetual dry heat and by the desert winds; the brazen sky above her, the iron land beneath, the silence—like the silence that was before creation, or the monotonous sounds that broke it; the mule's stamp on the stones, the barking of the guard-dogs upon the palm roofs of the distant houses in the village, the sneering laugh of the jackals by night, that whining song of Hadj, as he wagged his shaven head over the pipe-bowl into which he pressed the keef that was bringing him to madness.

She could not bear it any more.

The look in her face scarcely altered. The corners of her mouth, long since grown grim, did not droop any more than usual. Her thin, hard hands were steady as

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they did their dreary work. But the woman who had resisted somehow during ten terrible years of incomparable monotony suddenly died within Marie Lemaire, and the girl of Marseilles, Marie Bretelle, shrieked out in the middle-aged, haggard body.

"This fate was not meant for me. I cannot bear it any more."

Presently the tin which had held the veal and ham was empty, save for some bits of opaque jelly that still clung round its edges; and Madame Lemaire went over to the dimly burning charcoal with a dirty old pan in her hand.

Marie Bretelle was still shrieking out, but Madame Lemaire must get ready the supper for her absinthe-soaked husband, and his friend the murderer from Alfa.

The sportsmen were late in returning, and Madame Lemaire's task was finished before they came. She had nothing more to do, and she came out to the arbour that looked upon the road. Here there was an old table stained with the lees of wine. About it stood three or four rickety chairs. Madame Lemaire sat down—dropped down, rather—on one of these, laid her arms upon the table, and gazed down the empty road.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she said to herself. "*Mon Dieu!*" She beat one hand on the table and said it aloud.

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*"

She stared up at the vine. The leaves were sandy, and she saw insects running over them. She watched them. What were they doing? What purpose could they have? What purpose could anything have?

Always the hand tapped, tapped upon the table.

And Marseilles! It was still there by the sea, crowded,

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gay with life. This was the time when the life began to grow turbulent. The cascades were roaring under the lifted gardens, where the beasts roamed in their cages. The awnings were out over the cafés in that city of cafés. She could almost see the coloured edges of stuff fluttering in the wind that came from the arbour and from the Château d'If. There was a sound of hammering along the sea. They were putting up the bathing sheds for the season. It would be good to go into the sea. It would cool one.

A beetle dropped from the vine on to the table, close to the beating hand. Madame Lemaire started violently. She got up, and went to stand in the entrance of the arbour. Marseilles was gone now. Africa was there.

For ten years she had been looking down the road. She looked down it once more.

It was the wonderful evening hour when Africa seems to lift itself toward the light, reluctant to be given to the darkness. Very far one could see, and with an almost supernatural distinctness. Yet Madame Lemaire strained her eyes, as people do at dusk when they strive to pierce a veil of gathering darkness.

What was coming along the road?

Her gaze travelled onwards over the hard and barren plain till it reached the green crops, on and on past the tents of the Spahis' encampment, near which rose a trail of smoke into the lucent air; farther still, farther and farther, until the whiteness narrowed towards the mountains, and at last was lost to sight.

And this evening, perhaps because she longed so much for something, for anything, there was nothing on the

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road. It was a white emptiness under the setting sun.

Then the woman felt frantic, and she beat her hands together, and she cried aloud:

“If the Devil himself would only come along the road and ask me to go from this cursed hole of a place, I’d go with him! I’d go! I’d go!”

She repeated it shrilly, making wild gestures with her hands towards the desert. Her face was twisted awry. She looked just then like a desperate hag of a woman.

But it was the girl of Marseilles who was crying out in her. It was Marie Bretelle who was demanding the joys she had flung away in her youth for the sake of a handsome face.

“I’d go! I’d go!”

The shrill cry went up to the setting sun. But no one answered, and nothing darkened the arid whiteness of the road that wound across the plain and passed before the inn-door.

2

Night had fallen when the two sportsmen rode in on mules, tired and hungry. Hadj came from his keef to take the beasts, Madame Lemaire from her kitchen to ask if there were any birds for her to cook. Her husband gave her a string of them, and she turned away from him without a word, and went back into the house.

There was nothing odd in this, but something in his wife’s face, seen only for a moment in the darkness of the court, had startled Lemaire, and he looked after her as if he were inclined to call her back; then said to his companion, Jacques Bouvier:

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“Did you see Marie?”

“Yes. She looks as if she had just stumbled over a jackal,” and he laughed.

Lemaire stood for a minute where he was. Then he shouted to Hadj:

“Hadj! A—Hadj!”

The one-eyed keef-smoker came.

“Who has been here to-day?”

“No one. A few have passed the door, but no one has entered.”

“Good business!” said Bouvier, shrugging his shoulders.

“Business!” exclaimed Lemaire, with an oath. “It’s a fine business we do here. Another ten years, and we shan’t have put by ten sous.”

“Perhaps that is why madame has such a face to-night!”

“We’ll see at supper. Now for an absinthe!”

The two men walked stiffly into the inn, put their guns in a corner, went into the arbour that fronted the desert, and sat down by the table.

“Marie!” bawled Lemaire.

He struck his flabby fist down upon the wood.

“Marie, the absinthe!”

Madame Lemaire heard the hoarse shout in the kitchen, and her face went awry again:

“I’d go! I’d go!”

She hissed it under her breath.

“*Sacrà nom de Dieu!* Marie!”

“*V’lé!*”

“The devil! What a voice!” said Bouvier in the arbour. Lemaire was half turned in his chair. His hands were

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slightly shaking, and his large white face, with its angry and distressed eyes, looked startled.

“Who was that?” he said, moving in his chair as if he were going to get up.

“Who? Your wife!”

“No, it wasn’t!”

“Well, then——”

At this moment there was a clink and a rattle, and Madame Lemaire came slowly out from the inn, carrying a tray with an absinthe bottle, a bottle of water, and two thick glasses with china saucers. She set it down between the two men. Her husband stared at her like one who stares suspiciously at a stranger.

“Was that you who called out?” he asked.

“Of course! Who else should it be? Who ever comes here?”

“Madame is a bit sick of El-Kelf,” said Bouvier. “That’s what is the matter.”

Madame Lemaire compressed her lips tightly and said nothing.

Her husband looked more suspicious.

“Why should she be sick of it? She’s done very well with it for ten years,” he said roughly.

Madame Lemaire turned away and left the arbour. She was wearing slippers without heels, and went softly.

The two men sat in silence, looking at each other. A breath of wind, the first that had come that day, stole from the desert and rustled the leaves of the vine above their heads. Lemaire stretched out his trembling hand to the absinthe bottle.

“For God’s sake let’s have a drink!” he said. “There’s

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something about my wife that's given my blood a turn."

"Beat her!" said Bouvier, pushing forward his glass. "If you don't beat them be sure they'll betray you."

His wife's treachery had set him against all women. Lemaire growled something inarticulate. He was thinking of the days in Algiers, of their strange and often disgraceful existence there. Bouvier knew nothing of that.

"Come on!" he said.

And he lifted his glass of absinthe to his lips.

At supper that night Lemaire perpetually watched his wife. She seemed to be just as usual. For years there had been a sort of sickly weariness upon her face. It was there now. For years there had been a dull sound in her voice. He heard it to-night. For years she had had a poor appetite. She ate little at supper, had her habitual manner of swallowing almost with difficulty. Surely she was just as usual.

And yet she was not—she was not!

After supper the two men returned to the arbour to smoke and drink, and Madame Lemaire remained in the kitchen to clear away and wash up.

"Isn't there something the matter with my wife?" asked Lemaire, lighting a thin, black cigar, and settling his loose, bulky body in the small chair, with his fat legs stretched out, and one foot crossed over the other. "Or is it that I'm out of sorts to-night? It seems to me as if she were strange."

Bouvier was a small, pinched man, with a narrow face, evenly red in colour, large ears that stood out from his closely shaven head, and hot-looking, prominent brown eyes.

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"Perhaps she's taken with some Arab," he said.

"P'f! She's dropped all that nonsense. The devil! A woman of forty's an old woman in Africa."

Bouvier spat.

"Isn't she?"

"Oh, don't ask me about women. Young or old, they're always calling the Devil to their elbow."

"What for?"

"To put them up to wickedness. Perhaps your wife's been calling him to-night. You look behind her presently, and you may catch a sight of him. He's always about where women are."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lemaire laughed mirthlessly.

"D'you think he'd show himself to me?"

He emptied his glass. Bouvier suddenly looked terrible—looked like the man who had put three bullets into his sleeping guest.

"How did I know?" he said.

He leaned across the table towards Lemaire.

"How did I know?" he repeated in a low voice.

"What—when your wife——"

"Yes. They didn't let me see anything. They were too sharp. No; it was one night I saw *him*, with his mouth at her ear, coming in behind her through the door like a shadow. There!"

He sat back with his hands on his knees. Lemaire stared at him again.

Again the wind rustled furtively through the diseased vine-leaves of the arbour.

"It was then that I got out my revolver and charged it," continued Bouvier, in a less mysterious voice, as of

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one returned to practical life. "For I knew she'd been up to some villainy. Pass the bottle!" . . .

"Pass the bottle! . . . Why don't you pass the bottle?"

"Pardon!"

Lemaire pushed the bottle over to his friend.

"What's the matter with you to-night?"

"Nothing. You mean to say . . . why d'you talk such nonsense? D'you think I'm a fool to be taken in by rubbish like that?"

"Well, then, why did you sit just as if you'd seen him?"

"I'm a bit tired to-night, that's what it is. We went a long way. The wine'll pull me together."

He poured out another glass.

"You don't mean to say," he continued, "you believe in the Devil?"

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why not! Why should I? Nobody does—me, I mean. That sort of thing is all very well for women."

Bouvier said nothing, but sat with his arms on the table, staring out towards the desert. He looked at the empty road just in front of him, let his eyes travel along until it disappeared into the night.

"I say, that sort of thing is all very well for women," repeated Lemaire.

"I hear you."

"But I want to know whether you don't think the same."

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“As you?”

“Yes; to be sure.”

“I might have done once.”

“But you don’t now?”

“There’s a devil in the desert; that’s certain.”

“Why?”

“Because I tell you he came out of the desert to turn my wife wrong.”

“Then you weren’t joking?”

“Not I. It’s as true as that I went and charged my revolver, because I saw what I told you. Here’s Madame coming out to join us.”

Lemaire shifted heavily and abruptly in his chair.

“Hallo!” he said, in a brutal tone of voice. “What’s up with you to-night?”

As he spoke he stared hard at his wife’s shoulder, just by her ear.

“Nothing. What are you looking at? There isn’t——”

She put up her hand quickly to her shoulder and felt over her dress.

“Ugh!” She shook herself. “I thought you’d seen a scorpion on me.”

Bouvier, whose red face seemed to be deepening in colour under the influence of the red Algerian wine, burst out laughing.

“It wasn’t a scorpion he was looking for,” he exclaimed. His thin body shook with mirth till his chair creaked under him.

“It wasn’t a scorpion,” he repeated.

“What was it, then?” said Madame Lemaire.

She looked from one man to the other—from the one

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who was strange in his laughter, to the other who was even stranger in his gravity.

“What have you been saying about me?” she said, with a flare-up of suspicion.

“Well,” said Bouvier, recovering himself a little, “if you must know, we were talking about the Devil.”

The woman stared and gave the table a shake. Some of her husband’s wine was spilled over it.

“The Devil take you!” he bawled with sudden fury.

“I only wish he would!”

The two men jumped back as if a viper of the sands had suddenly reared up its thin head between them.

“I only wish he would!”

It was Marie Bretelle who had spoken, the girl of Marseilles, who still lived in the body of Marie Lemaire. But it was Marie Lemaire from whom the two men shrank away—Marie Lemaire changed, startling, terrible, her haggard face furious with expression, her thin hands clutching at the edge of the table, from which the wine-bottle had fallen, to be smashed at their feet.

For a moment there was a dead silence succeeding that second shrill cry. Then Lemaire scrambled up heavily from his chair.

“What do you mean?” he stammered. “What do you mean?”

And then she told him, like a fury, and with the words which had surely been accumulating in her mind, like water behind a dam, for ten years. She told him what she had wanted, and what she had had. And when at last she had finished telling him, she stood for a minute, making mouths at him in silence, as if she still had something to say, some final word of summing up.

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“Stop that!”

It was Lemaire who spoke; and as he spoke he thrust out one of his white, shaking hands to cover that nightmare mouth. But she beat his hand down, and screamed, with the gesture.

“And if the Devil himself would come along the road to fetch me from this cursed place, I’d go with him! D’you hear? I’d go with him! I’d go with him!”

When the scream died away, one-eyed Hadj was standing at the entrance to the arbour. Madame Lemaire felt that he was there, turned round, and saw him.

“I’d go with him if he was an Arab,” she said, but almost muttering now, for her voice had suddenly failed her, though her passion was still red-hot. “Even the Arabs—they’re better than you, absinthe-soaked, do-nothing Roumis, who sit and drink, drink——”

Her voice cracked, went into a whisper, disappeared. She thrust out her hand, swept the glasses off the table to follow the bottle, turned, and went out of the arbour softly on her slippered feet.

And one-eyed Hadj stood there laughing, for he understood French very well, although he was half mad with keef.

“She’d go with an Arab!” he repeated. “She’d go with an Arab!” And then he saw his master.

The two Frenchmen sat staring at one another across the empty table under the shivering vine-leaves, which were now stirred continually by the wind of night. Lemaire’s large face had gone a dusky grey. About his eyes there was a tinge of something that was almost lead colour. His loose mouth had dropped, and the lower lip disclosed his decayed teeth. His hands, laid upon the

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table as if for support, shook and jumped, were never still even for a second.

Bouvier was almost purple. Veins stood out about his forehead. The blood had gone to his ears and to his eyes. Now he leaned across to Lemaire.

“Beat her!” he said. “Beat her for that! Hadj heard her. If you don’t beat her, the Arabs——”

But before he had finished the sentence Lemaire had got up, with a wild gesture of his shaking hand, and gone unsteadily into the house.

That night Madame Lemaire suffered at the hands of her husband, while Bouvier and Hadj listened in the darkness of the court.

3

It was drawing towards evening on the following day, and Madame Lemaire was quite alone in the inn. Hadj had gone to the village for some more keef, and Lemaire and Bouvier had set out together in the morning for Batna.

So she was quite alone. Her face was bruised and discoloured near the right eye. Her head ached. She felt immensely listless. To-day there was no activity in her misery. It seemed a slow-witted, lethargic thing, undeserving even of respect.

There were no customers. There was nothing to do, absolutely nothing. She went heavily into the arbour, and sank down upon a chair. At first she sat upright. But presently she spread her arms out upon the table, and laid her discoloured face on them, and remained so for a long time.

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Any traveller, passing by on the road from the desert, would have thought that she was asleep. But she was not asleep. Nor had she slept all night. It is not easy to sleep after such punishment as she had received.

And no traveller passed by.

The flies, finding that the woman kept quite still, settled upon her face, her hair, her hands, cleaned themselves, stretched their legs and wings, went to and fro busily upon her. She never moved to drive them away.

She was not thinking just then. She was only feeling—feeling how she was alone, feeling that this enormous sun-dried land was about her, stretching away to right and left of her, behind her and before, feeling that in all this enormous, sun-dried land there was nobody who wanted her, nobody thinking of her, nobody coming towards her to take her away into a different life, into a life that she could bear.

All this she was dully feeling.

Perfectly still were the diseased vine-leaves above her head, motionless as she was. On them the insects went to and fro, actively leading their mysterious lives, as the flies went to and fro on her.

For a long time she remained thus. All the white road was empty before her as far as eye could see. No trail of smoke went up by the growing crops beside the distant tents of the Spahis. It seemed as if man had abandoned Africa, leaving only one of God's creatures there, this woman who leaned across the discoloured table with her bruised face hidden on her arms.

The hour before sunset approached, the miraculous hour of the day, when Africa seems to lift itself towards the light that will soon desert it, as if it could not bear

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to let the glory go, as if it would not consent to be hidden in the night. Upon the salt mountain the crystals glittered.

The details of the land began to live as they had not lived all day. The wonderful clearness came, in which all things seem filled with supernatural meaning. And, even in the dullness of her misery, habit took hold of Madame Lemaire.

She lifted her head from her arms, and she stared down the long white road. Her gaze travelled. It started from the patch of glaring white before the harbour, and it went away like one who goes to a tryst. It went down the road, and on, and on. It reached the green of the crops. It passed the Spahis' tents. It moved towards the distant mountains that hid the plains and the palms of Biskra.

The flies buzzed into the air.

Madame Lemaire had got up from her seat. With her hands laid flat upon the table she stared at the thread of white that was the limit of her vision. Then she lifted her hands and curved them, and put them above her eyes to form a shade. And then she moved and came out to the entrance of the harbour.

She had seen a black speck upon the road.

There was dust around it. As so often before she asked herself the question: "Who is it coming towards the inn from the desert?" But to-day she asked herself the question as she had never asked it before, with a sort of violence, with a passionate eagerness, with a leaping expectation. And she stepped right out into the road, as if she would go and meet the traveller, would hasten with stretched-out hands as to some welcome friend.

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The sun dropped its burning rays upon her hair, and she realised her folly, took her hands from her eyes, and laughed to herself. Then she went back to the arbour and stood by the table waiting. Slowly—very slowly it seemed to Madame Lemaire—the black speck grew larger on the white. But there was very much dust to-day, and always the misty cloud was round it, stirred up by—was it a camel's padding feet, or the hoofs of a horse, or—? She could not tell yet, but soon she would be able to tell.

Now it was approaching the watered land, was not far from the Spahis' tents. And a great fear came upon her that it might turn aside to them, that it might be perhaps a Spahi riding home from his patrol of the desert. She felt that she could not bear to be alone any longer; that if she could not see and speak to someone before sunset she must go mad.

The traveller passed before the Spahis' camp without turning aside; and now the dust was less, and Madame Lemaire could see that it was a Nomad mounted on a camel.

With a smothered exclamation she hurried into the inn. A sudden resolve possessed her. She would prepare a couscous. And then, if the Nomad desired to pass on without entering the inn, she would detain him.

She would offer him a couscous for nothing, only she must have company. Whoever the stranger was, however poor, however filthy, ragged, hideous, or even terrible, he must stay a while at the inn, distract her thoughts for an instant.

Without that she would go mad.

Quickly she began her preparations. There was time.

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He could not be here for twenty minutes yet, and the meal for a couscous was all ready. She had only to——

She moved frantically about the kitchen.

Twenty minutes later she heard the peevish roar of a camel from the road, and ran out to meet the Nomad, carrying the couscous. As she came into the arbour she noticed that it was already dark outside.

The night had fallen suddenly.

That night, as Lemaire and Bouvier were nearing the inn, riding slowly upon their mules, they heard before them in the darkness the angry snarling of a camel.

Almost immediately it died away.

“Madame has company,” said Bouvier. “There’s a customer at the *Retour du Desert*.”

“Some damned Arab!” said Lemaire. “Come for a coffee or a couscous. Much good that’ll do us!”

They rode on in silence. When they reached the inn, the road before it was empty.

“*Mai foi*,” said Bouvier. “Nobody here! The camel was getting up, then, and Madame is alone again.”

“Marie!” called Lemaire. “Marie! The absinthe!”

There was no reply.

“Marie! *Nom d’un chien!* Marie! The absinthe! Marie!”

He let his heavy body down from the mule.

“Where the devil is she? Marie! Marie!”

He went into the arbour, stumbled over something, and uttered a curse.

In reply to it there was a shrill and prolonged howl from the court.

“What is it? What’s the dog up to?” said Bouvier,

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whipping out his revolver and following Lemaire. "The table knocked over! What's up? D'you think there's anything wrong?"

The Kabyle dog howled again, slunk into the arbour from the court, and pressed itself against Lemaire's legs. He gave it a kick in the ribs that sent it yelping into the night.

"Marie! Marie!"

There was the anger of alarm in his voice now; but no one answered his call.

Walking furtively, the two men passed through the doorway into the kitchen. Lemaire struck a match, lit a candle, took it in his hand, and they searched the inn, and the court, then returned to the arbour. In the arbour, close to the overturned table, they found a broken bowl, with a couscous scattered over the earth beside it. Several vine-leaves were trodden into the ground near by.

"Someone's been here," said Lemaire, staring at Bouvier in the candlelight, which flickered in his angry and distressed eyes. "Someone's been. She was bringing him a couscous. See here!"

He pointed with his foot.

Bouvier laughed uneasily.

"Perhaps," he said—"perhaps it was the Devil come for her. You remember! She said last night, if he came, she'd go with him."

The candle dropped from Lemaire's shaking hand.

"Damn you! Why d'you talk like that?" he exclaimed furiously. She must be somewhere about. Let's have an absinthe. Perhaps she's gone to the village."

They had an absinthe and searched once more.

Presently Hadj, who was half mad with keef, joined

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them. The rumour of what was going forward had got about in the village; and other Arabs glided noiselessly through the night to share in the absinthe and the quest, for that night Lemaire forgot to lock up the bottle.

But the hostess of the inn at El-Kelf has not been seen again.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE OUTCAST

By W. B. YEATS

A MAN, with thin brown hair and a pale face, half ran, half walked along the road that wound from the south to the Town of the Shelly River. Many called him Cumhal, the son of Cormac, and many called him the Swift, Wild Horse; and he was a gleeman, and he wore a short parti-coloured doublet, and had pointed shoes, and a bulging wallet. Also he was of the blood of the Ernaans, and his birth-place was the Field of Gold; but his eating and sleeping places were the four provinces of Eri, and his abiding place was not upon the ridge of the earth. His eyes strayed from the Abbey tower of the White Friars and the town battlements to a row of crosses which stood out against the sky upon a hill a little to the eastward of the town, and he clenched his fist, and shook it at the crosses. He knew they were not empty, for the birds were fluttering about them; and he thought, how, as like as not, just such another vagabond as himself was hanged on one of them; and he muttered; "If it were hanging or bow-stringing, or stoning or beheading, it would be bad enough. But to have the birds pecking your eyes and the wolves eating your feet! I would that the red wind of the Druids had withered in his cradle the soldier of Dathi, who brought the tree of death out of barbarous lands, or that the lightning, when

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it smote Dathi at the foot of the mountain, had smitten him also, or that his grave had been dug by the green-haired and green-toothed merrows deep at the roots of the deep sea."

While he spoke, he shivered from head to foot, and the sweat came out upon his face, and he knew not why, for he had looked upon many crosses. He passed over two hills and under the battlemented gate, and then round by a left-hand way to the door of the Abbey. It was studded with great nails, and when he knocked at it, he roused the lay brother who was the porter, and of him he asked a place in the guest-house. Then the lay brother took a glowing turf on a shovel, and led the way to a big and naked outhouse strewn with dirty rushes: and lighted a rush-candle fixed between two of the stones of the wall, and set the glowing turf upon the hearth and gave him two unlighted sods and a wisp of straw, and showed him a blanket hanging from a nail, and a shelf with a loaf of bread and a jug of water, and a tub in a far corner. Then the lay brother left him and went back to his place by the door. And Cumhal the son of Cormac began to blow upon the glowing turf, that he might light the two sods and the wisp of straw; but his blowing profited him nothing, for the sods and the straw were damp. So he took off his pointed shoes, and drew the tub out of the corner with the thought of washing the dust of the highway from his feet; but the water was so dirty that he could not see the bottom. He was very hungry, for he had not eaten all that day; so he did not waste much anger upon the tub, but took up the black loaf, and bit into it, and then spat out the bite, for the bread was hard and mouldy. Still he did not give way to his wrath, for

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he had not drunken these many hours; having a hope of heath beer or wine at his day's end, he had left the brooks untasted, to make his supper the more delightful. Now he put the jug to his lips, but he flung it from him straightway, for the water was bitter and ill-smelling. Then he gave the jug a kick, so that it broke against the opposite wall, and he took down the blanket to wrap it about him for the night. But no sooner did he touch it than it was alive with skipping fleas. At this, beside himself with anger, he rushed to the door of the guest-house, but the lay brother, being well accustomed to such outcries, had locked it on the outside; so Cumhal emptied the tub and began to beat the door with it, till the lay brother came to the door, and asked what ailed him, and why he woke him out of sleep. "What ails me!" shouted Cumhal, "are not the sods as wet as the sands of the Three Headlands? and are not the fleas in the blanket as many as the waves of the sea and as lively? and is not the bread as hard as the heart of a lay brother who has forgotten God? and is not the water in the jug as bitter and as ill-smelling as his soul? and is not the foot-water the colour that shall be upon him when he has been charred in the Undying Fires?" The lay brother saw that the lock was fast, and went back to his niche, for he was too sleepy to talk with comfort. And Cumhal went on beating at the door, and presently he heard the lay brother's foot once more, and cried out at him, "O cowardly and tyrannous race of friars, persecutors of the bard and the gleeman, haters of life and joy! O race that does not draw the sword and tell the truth! O race that melts the bones of the people with cowardice and with deceit!"

"Gleeman," said the lay brother, "I also make rhymes;

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I make many while I sit in my niche by the door, and I sorrow to hear the bards railing upon the friars. Brother, I would sleep, and therefore I make known to you that it is the head of the monastery, our gracious Coarb, who orders all things concerning the lodging of travellers."

"You may sleep," said Cumhal, "I will sing a bard's curse on the Coarb." And he set the tub outside down under the window, and stood upon it, and began to sing in a very loud voice. The singing awoke the Coarb, so that he sat up in bed and blew a silver whistle until the lay brother came to him. "I cannot get a wink of sleep with that noise," said the Coarb. "What is happening?"

"It is a gleeman," said the lay brother, "who complains of the sods, of the bread, of the water in the jug, of the foot-water, and of the blanket. And now he is singing a bard's curse upon you, O brother Coarb, and upon your father and your mother, and your grandfather and your grandmother, and upon all your relations."

"Is he cursing in rhyme?"

"He is cursing in rhyme, and with two assonances in every line of his curse."

The Coarb pulled his night-cap off and crumbled it in his hands, and the circular brown patch of hair in the middle of his bald head looked like an island in the midst of a pond, for in Connaught they had not yet abandoned the ancient tonsure for the style then coming into use. "If we do not somewhat," he said, "he will teach his curses to the children in the street, and the girls spinning at the doors, and to the robbers on the mountain of Gulben."

"Shall I go then," said the other, "and give him dry

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sods, a fresh loaf, clean water in a jug, clean foot-water, and a new blanket, and make him swear by the blessed St. Benignus, and by the sun and moon, that no bond be lacking, not to tell his rhymes to the children in the street, and the girls spinning at the doors, and the robbers on the mountain of Gulben?"

"Neither our blessed Patron nor the sun and the moon would avail at all," said the Coarb: "for to-morrow or the next day the mood to curse would come upon him, or a pride in those rhymes would move him, and he would teach his lines to the children, and the girls, and the robbers. Or else he would tell another of his craft how he fared in the guest-house, and he in his turn would begin to curse, and my name would wither. For learn there is no steadfastness of purpose upon the roads, but only under roofs, and between four walls. Therefore I bid you go and awaken Brother Kevin, Brother Dove, Brother Little Wolf, Brother Bald Patrick, Brother Bald Brandon, Brother James and Brother Peter. And they shall take the man, and bind him with ropes, and dip him in the river that he may cease to sing. And in the morning, lest this but make him curse the louder, we will crucify him."

"The crosses are all full," said the lay brother.

"Then we must make another cross. If we do not make an end of him another will, for who can eat and sleep in peace while men like him are going about the world? Ill should we stand before blessed St. Benignus, and sour would be his face when he comes to judge us at the Last Day, were we to spare an enemy of his when we had him under our thumb! Brother, the bards and the gleemen are an evil race, ever cursing and ever stir-

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ring up the people, and immoral and immoderate in all things, and heathen in their hearts, always longing after the Son of Lir, and Angus, and Bridget, and the Dagda, and Dana the Mother, and all the false gods of the old days; always making poems in praise of those kings and queens of the demons, Finvaragh of the Hill in the Plain, and Red Aodh of the Hill of the Shee, and Cleena of the Wave, and Eiveen of the Grey Rock, and him they call Don of the Vats of the Sea; and railing against God and Christ and the blessed Saints." While he was speaking he crossed himself, and when he had finished he drew the night-cap over his ears, to shut out the noise, and closed his eyes, and composed himself to sleep.

The lay brother found Brother Kevin, Brother Dove, Brother Little Wolf, Brother Bald Patrick, Brother Bald Brandon, Brother James and Brother Peter sitting up in bed, and he made them get up. Then they bound Cumhal, and they dragged him to the river, and they dipped him in at the place which was afterwards called Buckley's Ford.

"Gleeman," said the lay brother, as they led him back to the guest-house, "why do you ever use the wit which God has given you to make blasphemous and immoral tales and verses? For such is the way of your craft. I have, indeed, many such tales and verses well nigh by rote, and so I know that I speak true! And why do you praise with rhyme those demons, Finvaragh, Red Aodh, Cleena, Eiveen and Don? I, too, am a man of great wit and learning, but I ever glorify our gracious Coarb, and Benignus our Patron, and the princes of the province. My soul is decent and orderly, but yours is like the wind among the salley gardens. I said what I

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could for you, being also a man of many thoughts, but who could help such a one as you?"

"My soul, friend," answered the gleeman, "is indeed like the wind, and it blows me to and fro, and up and down, and puts many things into my mind and out of my mind, and therefore am I called the Swift, Wild Horse." And he spoke no more that night, for his teeth were chattering with the cold.

The Coarb and the friars came to him in the morning, and bade him get ready to be crucified, and led him out of the guest-house. And while he still stood upon the step a flock of great grass-barnacles passed high above him with clanking cries. He lifted his arms to them and said, "O great grass-barnacles, tarry a little, and mayhap my soul will travel with you to the waste places of the shore and to the ungovernable sea!" At the gate a crowd of beggars gathered about them, being come there to beg from any traveller or pilgrim who might have spent the night in the guest-house. The Coarb and the friars led the gleeman to a place in the woods at some distance, where many straight young trees were growing, and they made him cut one down and fashion it to the right length, while the beggars stood round them in a ring, talking and gesticulating. The Coarb then bade him cut off another and shorter piece of wood, and nail it upon the first. So there was his cross for him; and they put it upon his shoulder, for his crucifixion was to be on the top of the hill where the others were. A half-mile on the way he asked them to stop and see him juggle for them: for he knew, he said, all the tricks of Angus the Subtle-Hearted. The old friars were for pressing on, but the young friars would see him: so he did many

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wonders for them, even to the drawing of live frogs out of his ears. But after a while they turned on him, and said his tricks were dull and a shade unholy, and set the cross on his shoulders again. Another half-mile on the way, and he asked them to stop and hear him jest for them, for he knew, he said, all the jests of Conan the Bald, upon whose back a sheep's wool grew. And the young friars, when they had heard his merry tales, again bade him take up his cross, for it ill became them to listen to such follies. Another half-mile on the way, he asked them to stop and hear him sing the story of White-Breasted Deirdre, and how she endured many sorrows, and how the sons of Usna died to serve her. And the young friars were mad to hear him, but when he had ended, they grew angry, and beat him for waking forgotten longings in their hearts. So they set the cross upon his back, and hurried him to the hill.

When he was come to the top, they took the cross from him, and began to dig a hole to stand it in, while the beggars gathered round, and talked among themselves. "I ask a favour before I die," says Cumhal.

"We will grant you no more delays," says the Coarb.

"I ask no more delays, for I have drawn the sword, and told the truth, and lived my vision and am content."

"Would you then confess?"

"By sun and moon, not I; I ask but to be let eat the food I carry in my wallet. I carry food in my wallet whenever I go upon a journey, but I do not taste of it unless I am well-nigh starved. I have not eaten now these two days."

"You may eat, then," says the Coarb, and he turned to help the friars dig the hole.

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The gleeman took a loaf and some strips of cold fried bacon out of his wallet and laid them upon the ground. "I will give a tithe to the poor," says he, and he cut a tenth part from the loaf and the bacon. "Who among you is the poorest?" And thereupon was a great clamour, for the beggars began the history of their sorrows and their poverty, and their yellow faces swayed like the Shelly River when the floods have filled it with water from the bogs.

He listened for a little, and, says he, "I am myself the poorest, for I have travelled the bare road, and by the glittering footsteps of the sea; and the tattered doublet of parti-coloured cloth upon my back, and the torn pointed shoes upon my feet have ever irked me, because of the towered city full of noble raiment which was in my heart. And I have been the more alone upon the roads and by the sea, because I heard in my heart the rustling of the rose-bordered dress of her who is more subtle than Angus, the Subtle-Hearted, and more full of the beauty of laughter than Conan the Bald, and more full of the wisdom of tears than White-Breasted Deirdre, and more lovely than a bursting dawn to them that are lost in the darkness. Therefore, I award the tithe to myself; but yet, because I am done with all things, I give it unto you."

So he flung the bread and the strips of bacon among the beggars, and they fought with many cries until the last scrap was eaten. But meanwhile the friars nailed the gleeman to his cross, and set it upright in the hole, and shovelled the earth in at the foot, and trampled it level and hard. So then they went away, but the beggars stared on, sitting round the cross. But when the

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sun was sinking, they also got up to go, for the air was getting chilly. And as soon as they had gone a little way, the wolves, who had been showing themselves on the edge of a neighbouring coppice, came nearer, and the birds wheeled closer and closer. "Stay, outcasts, yet a little while," the crucified one called in a weak voice to the beggars, "and keep the beasts and the birds from me." But the beggars were angry because he had called them outcasts, so they threw stones and mud at him, and went their way. Then the wolves gathered at the foot of the cross, and the birds lighted all at once upon his head and arms and shoulders, and began to peck at him, and the wolves began to eat his feet. "Outcasts," he moaned, "have you also turned against the outcast?"

THE DRUMS OF KAIRWAN

By the Marquess CURZON OF KEDLESTON

WHEN the appointed hour arrived, I presented myself at the mosque, which is situated outside the city walls of Kairwan, not far from the Bab-el-Djuluddin, or Tanners' Gate. Passing through an open courtyard into the main building, I was received with a dignified salaam by the sheik, who forthwith led me to a platform or divan at the upper end of the central space. This was surmounted by a ribbed and white-washed dome, and was separated from two side aisles by rows of marble columns with battered capitals, dating from the Empire of Rome. Between the arches of the roof small and feeble lamps—mere lighted wicks floating on dingy oil in cups of coloured glass—ostrich eggs, and gilt balls were suspended from wooden beams. From the cupola in the centre hung a dilapidated chandelier in which flickered a few miserable candles. In one of the side aisles a plastered tomb was visible behind an iron lattice. The *mise en scène* was unprepossessing and squalid.

My attention was next turned to the *dramatis personae*. Upon the floor in the centre beneath the dome sat the musicians, ten or a dozen in number, cross-legged, the chief presiding upon a stool at the head of the circle. I observed no instrument save the *darabookah*, or earthen

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drum, and a number of tambours, the skins of which, stretched tightly across the frames, gave forth, when struck sharply by the fingers, a hollow and resonant note. The rest of the orchestra was occupied by the chorus. So far no actors were visible. The remainder of the floor, both under the dome and in the aisles, was thickly covered with seated and motionless figures, presenting in the fitful light a weird and fantastic picture. In all there must have been over a hundred persons, all males, in the mosque.

Presently the sheik gave the signal for commencement, and in a moment burst forth the melancholy chant of the Arab voices and the ceaseless droning of the drums. The song was not what we should call singing, but a plaintive and quavering wail, pursued in a certain cadence, now falling to a moan, now terminating in a shriek, but always pitiful, piercing and inexpressibly sad. The tambours, which were struck like the keyboard of a piano, by the outstretched fingers of the hand, and, occasionally, when a louder note was required, by the thumb, kept up a monotonous refrain in the background. From time to time, at moments of greater stress, they were brandished high in the air and beaten with all the force of fingers and thumb combined. Then the noise was imperious and deafening.

Among the singers, one grizzled and bearded veteran, with a strident and nasal intonation, surpassed his fellows. He observed the time with grotesque reflections of his body; his eyes were fixed and shone with religious zeal.

The chant proceeded, and the figures of the singers, as they became more and more excited, rocked to and

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fro. More people poured in at the doorway, and the building was now quite full. I began to wonder whether the musicians were also to be the performers, or when the latter would make their appearance.

Suddenly a line of four or five Arabs formed itself in front of the entrance on far side of the orchestra, and exactly opposite the bench on which I was sitting. They joined hands, the right of each clasped in the left of his neighbour, and began a lurching, swaying motion with their bodies and feet. At first they appeared simply to be marking time, first with one foot and then with the other; but the movement was gradually communicated to every member of their bodies; and from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet they were presently keeping time with the music in convulsive jerks and leaps and undulations, the music itself being regulated by the untiring orchestra of the drums.

This mysterious row of bobbing figures seemed to exercise an irresistible fascination over the spectators. Every moment one or other of these left his place to join its ranks. They pushed their way into the middle, severing the chain for an instant, or joined themselves on to the ends. The older men appeared to have a right to the centre, the boys and children—for there were youngsters present not more than seven or eight years old—were on the wings. Thus the line ever lengthened; originally it consisted of three or four, presently it was ten or twelve, anon it was twenty-five or thirty, and before the self-torturings commenced there were as many as forty human figures stretching right across the building, and all rocking backwards and forwards in grim and ungraceful unison. Even the spectators who kept their

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places could not resist the contagion; as they sat there they unconsciously kept time with their heads and shoulders, and one child swung his little head this way and that with a fury that threatened to separate it from his body.

Meanwhile, the music had been growing in intensity, the orchestra sharing the excitement, which they communicated. The drummers beat their tambours with redoubled force, lifting them high above their heads and occasionally, at some extreme pitch, tossing them aloft and catching them again as they fell. Sometimes in the exaltation of frenzy they started spasmodically to their feet and then sank back into their original position. But ever and without a pause continued the insistent accompaniment of the drums.

And now the oscillating line in front of the doorway for the first time found utterance. As they leaped high on one foot, alternately kicking out the other, as their heads wagged to and fro and their bodies quivered with the muscular strain, they cried aloud in praise of Allah. *La ilaha ill Allah!* (There is no God but Allah)—this was the untiring burden of their strain. And then came *Ya Allah!* (O God), and sometimes *Ya Kahhar!* (O avenging God), *Ya Hakk!* (O just God), while each burst of clamorous appeal culminated in an awful shout of *Ya Hoo!* (O Him).

The rapidity and vehemence of their gesticulations was now appalling; their heads swung backwards and forwards till their foreheads almost touched their breasts, and their scalps smote against their backs. Sweat poured from their faces; they panted for breath; and the exclamations burst from their mouths in a thick and stertorous

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murmur. Suddenly, and without warning, the first phase of the *zikh* ceased, and the actors stood gasping, shaking, and dripping with perspiration.

After a few seconds' respite the performance recommenced, and shortly waxed more furious than ever. The worshippers seemed to be gifted with an almost super-human strength and energy. As they flung themselves to and fro, at one moment their upturned faces gleamed with a sickly polish under the flickering lamps, at the next their turbaned heads all but brushed the floor. Their eyes started from the sockets; the muscles on their necks and the veins on their foreheads stood out like knotted cords. One old man fell out of the ranks, breathless, spent, and foaming. His place was taken by another, and the tumultuous orgy went on.

Presently, as the ecstasy approached its height and the fully initiated became *melboos* or possessed, they broke from the stereotyped litany into demoniacal grinning and ferocious and bestial cries. These writhing and contorted objects were no longer rational human beings, but savage animals, caged brutes howling madly in the delirium of hunger or of pain. They growled like bears, they barked like jackals, they roared like lions, they laughed like hyænas; and ever and anon from the seething rank rose a diabolical shriek, like the scream of a dying horse, or the yell of a tortured fiend. And steadily the while in the background resounded the implacable reverberation of the drums.

The climax was now reached; the requisite pitch of cataleptic inebriation had been obtained, and the rites of Aissa were about to begin. From the crowd at the door a wild figure broke forth, tore off his upper clothing till

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he was naked to the waist, and, throwing away his fez, bared a head close-shaven save for one long and dishevelled lock that, springing from the scalp, fell over his forehead like some grisly and funereal plume. A long knife, somewhat resembling a cutlass, was handed to him by the sheik, who had risen to his feet, and who directed the phenomena that ensued. Waving it wildly above his head and protruding the forepart of his figure, the fanatic brought it down blow after blow against his bared stomach, and drew it savagely to and fro against the unprotected skin. There showed the marks of a long and livid weal, but no blood spurted from the gash. In the intervals between the strokes he ran swiftly from one side to the other of the open space, taking long stealthy strides like a panther about to spring, and seemingly so powerless over his own movements that he knocked blindly up against those who stood in his way, nearly upsetting them with the violence of the collision.

The prowess or the piety of this ardent devotee proved extraordinarily contagious. First one and then another of his brethren caught the afflatus and followed his example. In a few moments every part of the mosque was the scene of some novel and horrible rite of self-mutilation, performed by a fresh aspirant to the favour of Allah. Some of these feats did not rise above the level of the curious but explicable performances which are sometimes seen upon English stages; *e.g.*, of the men who swallow swords, and carry enormous weights suspended from their jaws; achievements which are in no sense a trick or a deception, but are to be attributed to abnormal physical powers or structure developed by long and often perilous practice. In the Aissaouiian counter-

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part of these displays there was nothing specially remarkable, but there were others less commonplace and more difficult of explanation.

At length, several long iron spits or prongs were produced and distributed; these formidable implements were about two and a half feet in length and sharply pointed, and they terminated at the handle in a circular wooden knob about the size of a large orange. There was great competition for these instruments of torture, which were used as follows: Poising one in the air, an Aissioui would suddenly force the point into the flesh of his own shoulder in front just below the shoulder blade. Thus transfixed, and holding the weapon aloft, he strode swiftly up and down. Suddenly, at a signal, he fell on his knees, still forcing the point into his body, and keeping the wooden head uppermost. Then there started up another disciple armed with a big wooden mallet, and he, after a few preliminary taps, rising high on tip-toe with uplifted weapon would, with an ear-splitting yell, bring it down with all his force upon the wooden knob, driving the point home through the shoulder of his comrade. Blow succeeded blow, the victim wincing beneath the stroke, but uttering no sound, and fixing his eyes with a look of ineffable delight upon his torturer, till the point was driven right through the shoulder and projected at the back. Then the patient marched backwards and forwards with the air and the gait of a conquering hero. At one moment there were four of these semi-naked maniacs within a yard of my feet, transfixed and trembling, but beatified and triumphant. And amid the cries and the swelter, there never ceased for one second the sullen and menacing vociferation of the drums.

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Another man seized an iron skewer, and, placing the point within his open jaws, forced it steadily through his cheek until it protruded a couple of inches on the outside. He barked savagely like a dog, and foamed at the lips.

Others, afflicted with exquisite spasms of hunger, knelt down before the chief, whimpering like children for food, and turning upon him imploring glances from their glazed and bloodshot eyes. His control over his following was supreme. Some he gratified, others he forbade. At a touch from him, they were silent and relaxed into quiescence. One maddened wretch who, fancying himself some wild beast, plunged to and fro, roaring horribly, and biting and tearing with his teeth at whomever he met, was advancing, as I thought, with somewhat truculent intent in my direction, when he was arrested by his superior and sent back, cringing and cowed.

For those whose ravenous appetites he was content to humour the most singular repast was prepared. A plate was brought in, covered with huge jagged pieces of broken glass, as thick as a shattered soda-water bottle. With greedy chuckles and gurglings of delight, one of the hungry ones dashed at it, crammed a handful into his mouth, and crunched it up as though it were some exquisite dainty, a fellow-disciple calmly stroking the exterior of his throat, with intent, I suppose, to lubricate the descent of the unwonted morsels. A little child held up a snake or a sand-worm by the tail, placing the head between his teeth, and gulped it gleefully down. Several acolytes came in, carrying a big stem of the prickly pear, or *fico d'India*, whose leaves are as thick as a one-inch

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plank, and are armed with huge projecting thorns. This was ambrosia to the starving saints. They rushed at it with passionate emulation, tearing at the solid slabs with their teeth, and gnawing and munching the coarse fibers, regardless of the thorns which pierced their tongues and cheeks as they swallowed them down.

The most singular feature of all, and the one that almost defies belief, though it is none the less true, was this—that in no case did one drop of blood emerge from scar, or gash, or wound. This fact I observed most carefully, the *mokaddem* standing at my side, and each patient in turn coming to him when his self-imposed torture had been accomplished, and the cataleptic frenzy had spent its force. It was the chief who cunningly withdrew the blade from cheek or shoulder or body, rubbing over the spot what appeared to me to be the saliva of his own mouth; then he whispered an absolution in the ear of the disciple, and kissed him on the forehead, whereupon the patient, but a moment before writhing in maniacal transports, retired tranquilly and took his seat upon the floor. He seemed none the worse for his recent paroxysm, and the wound was marked only by a livid blotch or a hectic flush.

This was the scene that for more than an hour went on without pause or intermission before my eyes. The building might have been tenanted by the Harpies or Laestrygones of Homer, or by some inhuman monsters of legendary myth. Amid the dust and sweat and insufferable heat the naked bodies of the actors shone with a ghastly pallor and exhaled a sickening smell. The atmosphere reeked with heavy and intoxicating fumes. Above the despairing chant of the singers rang the frenzied yells of the possessed, the shrieks of the ham-

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merer, and the inarticulate cries, the snarling and growling, the bellowing and miauling of the self-imagined beasts. And ever behind and through all re-echoed the perpetual and pitiless imprecation of the drums.

As I witnessed the disgusting spectacle and listened to the pandemonium of sounds, my head swam, my eyes became dim, my senses reeled, and I believed that in a few moments I must have fainted, had not one of my friends touched me on the shoulder, and, whispering that the *mokaddem* was desirous that I should leave, escorted me hurriedly to the door. As I walked back to my quarters, and long after through the still night, the beat of the tambours continued, and I heard the distant hum of voices, broken at intervals by an isolated and piercing cry. Perhaps yet further and more revolting orgies were celebrated after I had left. I had not seen, as other travellers have done, the chewing and swallowing of red-hot cinders,¹ or the harmless handling and walking upon live coals. I had been spared that which others have described as the climax of the gluttonous debauch, *viz.*, the introduction of a live sheep, which then and there is savagely torn to pieces and devoured raw by these unnatural banqueters. But I had seen enough, and as I sank to sleep my agitated fancy pursued a thousand avenues of thought, confounding in one grim medley all the carnivorous horrors of fact and fable and fiction. Loud above the din and discord the tale of the false prophets of Carmel, awakened by the train of association, rang in my ears, till I seemed to hear intoned with remorseless repetition the words: "They

¹For an account of this exploit, *vide* Lane's *Modern Egyptians*, cap. xxv.; and compare the description of Richardson, the famous fire-eater, in Evelyn's *Memoirs* for October 8, 1672.

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cried aloud and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them"; and in the ever-receding distance of dreamland, faint and yet fainter, there throbbed the inexorable and unfaltering delirium of the drums.

A LIFE—A BOWL OF RICE

By L. DE BRA

BOW SAM stood in the doorway by his sugar-cane stand and watched with narrowed eyes an old man who shuffled uncertainly down the alley towards him.

“*Hoo la ma!*” cried Bow Sam, in surprised Cantonese as the old man drew near. “Hello, there! I scarcely knew you, venerable Fa’ng!”

Fa’ng, the hatchetman, straightened his bent shoulders and looked up. There was a gleam in his deep bronze eyes that was hardly in keeping with his withered frame.

“*Hoo la ma, Bow Sam,*” he said, his voice strangely deep and vibrant.

“You have grown very thin,” remarked Bow Sam with friendly interest.

“*Hi low;* that is true. But why carry around flesh that is not food?”

The sugar-cane vendor eyed the other shrewdly. What was the gossip he had heard concerning Fa’ng, the famous old hatchetman? Was it not that the old man was always hungry? Yes, that was it! Fa’ng, whose long knife and swift arm had been the most feared thing in all China-town, was starving—too proud to beg, too honest to steal.

“You have eaten well, venerable Fa’ng?” The inquiry was in a casual tone, respectful.

“*Aih,* I have eaten well,” replied the old hatchetman, averting his face.

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“How unfortunate for me! I have not yet eaten my rice; for when one must dine alone, one goes slowly to table. Is it not written that a bowl of rice shared is doubly enjoyed? Would you not at least have a cup of tea while I eat my mean fare?”

“I shall be honoured to sip tea with you, estimable Bow Sam,” replied the hatchetman with poorly disguised eagerness.

“Then condescend to enter my poor house! Ah, one does not often have the pleasure of your company in these days!”

Bow Sam preceded his guest to the wretched hovel that was the sugar-cane vendor’s only home. There he quickly removed all trace of the bowl of rice he had eaten but a moment before.

“Will you take this poor stool, venerable Fa’ng?” said Bow, setting out the only stool he possessed, and placing it so that the hatchetman’s back would be to the stove.

Wearily, Fa’ng sat down. Bow put out two small cups, each worn and badly chipped, and filled them with hot tea. Then, while the hatchetman sipped his tea, Bow uncovered the rice kettle. There was but one bowl of rice left. Bow Sam had intended to keep it for his evening meal; for until he sold some sugar-cane, he had no way of obtaining more food.

Behind Fa’ng’s back, Bow took two rice bowls and set them on the stove. One bowl he heaped full for the hatchetman. In the other he put an upturned tea bowl and sprinkled over it his last few grains of rice.

“Let us give thanks to the gods of the kitchen that we have food and teeth and appetite,” chuckled Bow Sam, seating himself on a sugar-cane box opposite Fa’ng.

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“Well spoken,” returned the old hatchetman, quickly filling his mouth with the nourishing rice. “*Aih*, there is much in life to make one content.”

With his chop-sticks Bow Sam deftly took up a few grains of rice, taking care lest he uncover the upturned tea bowl. He was deeply grateful that he had a few teeth left, that he quite often had enough rice, and sometimes had meat as often as once a month; but to hear the proud old hatchetman express such sentiments on an empty stomach filled him with admiration.

“What a virtue to be content with one’s lot!” he exclaimed, refilling the hatchetman’s tea bowl. “Yet the younger generation are always fretting because they think they have not enough; while, as anyone knows, they have much more than we who first came to this land of the white foreign devil.”

“They are young,” spoke Fa’ng, nodding his head slowly. “For us the days have fled, the years have not tarried. And we have learned that if one has but a bowl of rice for food and a bent arm for pillow, one can be content.”

“*Haie!* How can you speak so softly of the younger generation when it is they who have robbed you of your livelihood? I know the gossip. You, the most famous killer in Chinatown, find yourself cast out like a worn-out broom by these young upstarts who have no respect for their elders. Is it not true?”

With his left hand the old hatchetman made an eloquent gesture, peculiarly Chinese, much as one quickly throws open a fan.

“Of what value are words, my friend? They cannot change that which is changeless. A word cannot temper

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the wind, nor a phrase procure food for a hungry stomach.”

“Nevertheless, I do not like such things,” persisted Sam. “I love the old ways. You were an honourable and fearless killer. When you were hired to slay one’s enemy you went boldly to your victim and told him your business. Then, swiftly, even before the doomed one could open his lips, you struck—cleaned your blade and walked your way.

“The modern killers!” Bow Sam spewed the words out as one does sour rice. “They are too cowardly to use the knife. They hide on roofs, fire on their victims, then throw away their guns and flee like thieves. *Aih*, what have we come to in these days!

“It was but yesterday after mid-day rice that I had speech with Gar Ling, a gunman of the Sin Wah tong. He stopped to buy sugar-cane, and I told him that had I the money I would hire him. There is one of the younger generation, the pock-marked son of Quong, the dealer in jade, who has greatly wronged me and my honourable family name, and my distinguished ancestors. As you very well know, one cannot soil one’s own hands with the blood of vengeance. Moreover, I have no weapon, not even a dull cleaver. Neither can I afford to hire a fighting man.

“I was telling all this to Gar Ling,” went on Bow, straining the last drop of tea into Fa’ng’s bowl, “and he told me he would settle my quarrel, but it would cost one thousand dollars. When I told him I had not even a thousand copper *cash*, he became angry and abusive. As he walked his way, quickly, like a foreign devil, he spat in my direction and called me an unspeakable name.”

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"*Ts, ts!* You should have wrung his neck. Repeat to me his unspeakable words."

"He said," cried Bow Sam, his face twisted in fury, "that I am the son of a turtle!"

"*Aih-yah!* How insulting! As anyone knows, in all our language there is no epithet more vile!"

"That is true. But what is even worse, I did not remember until after he had gone that he had not paid me for the piece of sugar-cane. Such is the way of the younger generation; and we, who have been long in the land, can do nothing."

"Yet it is by such things that one learns the lesson of enduring tranquillity," remarked Fa'ng, smacking his lips and moving back from the table.

For about the time, then, that it takes one to make nine bows before the household gods, neither man made speech. Then Fa'ng arose.

"An excellent bowl of rice, my good friend."

"*Aih*, it shames me to have to give you such mean fare."

"And the tea was most fragrant."

"*Ts*, it was only the cheapest Black Dragon."

The two old men went to the door.

"*Ho hang la*," said the hatchetman.

"*Ho hang la*," echoed the sugar-cane vendor. "I hope you have a safe walk."

Fa'ng, the hatchetman, made his way down the alley to the rear entrance of a pawnshop. There he spoke a few words with the proprietor.

"I know you are honest, old man," said the pawnbroker. "But instead of bringing it back, I hope, for your own sake, you will be able to pay what you owe me."

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Then from a safe he took a knife with long, slender blade and a handle of ebony in which had been carved an unbelievable number of notches. Fa'ng took the knife, handling it as one does an object of precious memories, concealed it beneath his tattered blouse, and went his way.

Near the entrance of a gambling house in Canton Alley the old hatchetman met the pock-marked son of Quong, the dealer in jade.

"For the wrong you have done Bow Sam, his family name, and his distinguished ancestors," said Fa'ng quietly; and before the other could open his lips the long blade was through his heart.

In front of a cigar store in Shanghai Place, Fa'ng found Gar Ling, the gunman. "I have business of moment with you, Gar Ling," said the hatchetman. "Come."

Gar Ling hesitated. He stood in great fear of the old killer, yet he dared not show that fear before his young friends. So with his left hand he gave a peculiar signal. A boy standing near with a basket of *lichee* nuts on his arm turned quickly and followed the two men down the alley. Drawing near his employer, the boy held up the basket as though soliciting the gunman to buy. Gar's hand darted swiftly into the basket, beneath the *lichee* nuts, and came out with a heavy automatic pistol which he quickly concealed beneath his blouse.

The old hatchetman knew all the tricks of the young gunman, but he pretended he had not seen. As they turned a dark corner, he paused.

"For the insulting words you spoke to Bow Sam," he said calmly, and the long blade glided between the gunman's ribs.

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As Fa'ng drew the steel away, Gar Ling staggered, fired once, then collapsed.

Bow Sam stood in the doorway by his sugar-cane stand and watched with narrowed eyes an old man who shuffled uncertainly down the alley toward him.

"*Hoo la ma!*" he cried, as the old man drew near. "I did not expect to see you again so soon."

The old hatchetman did not raise his head nor reply. Staggering, he crossed the threshold and fell on his face on the littered floor.

With a throaty cry Bow Sam slammed the door shut. He bent over Fa'ng.

"This knife," said the hatchetman; "take it—to Wong the pawnbroker. Tell him—all. Worth—more—than I owe."

"But what's——"

"For the wrong that the pock-marked one did you, for the insult Gar Ling spoke to you, I slew them," said Fa'ng, with sudden strength. "My debt is paid. *Tsau kom lok.*"

"*Haie!* You did that! Why did you do that? I could never pay you! And look! *Aih-yah*, oh, how piteous! You are dying!"

With awkward fingers, the vendor of sugar-cane tried to staunch the flow of blood where Gar Ling's bullet had struck with deadly effect.

"Pay me?" breathed Fa'ng the hatchetman. "Did you—not—feed me? Can one—put a value—on food—when the stomach—is empty? *Aih*, what—matters it? A life,"—his eyelids fluttered and closed—"a life—a bowl of rice. . . ."

HODGE

By ELINOR MORDAUNT

PEOPLE are accustomed to think of Somerset as a country of deep, bosky bays, sunny coves, woods, moorlands, but Hemerton was in itself sufficient to blur this bland illusion. It lay a mile and a half back from the sea, counting it all full tide; at low tide the sly, smooth waters, unbroken by a single rock, slipped away for another mile or more across a dreary ooze of black mud.

The village lay pasted flat upon the marsh, with no trees worthy of the name in sight: a few twisted black-thorn bushes, a few split willows, one wreck of a giant blighted ash in the Rectory gardens, and that was all.

For months on end the place swam in vapours. There were wonderful effects of sunrise and sunset, veils of crimson and gold, of every shade of blue and purple. At times the grey sea-lavender was like silver, the wet, black mud gleaming like dark opals; while at high summer there was purple willow-strife spilled thick along the ditches, giving the strange place a transitory air of warm-blooded life; but for the most part it was all as aloof and detached as a sleep-walker.

The birds fitted the place as a verger fits his quiet and dusky church: herons and waders of all kinds; wild-crying curlew; and here and there a hawk, hanging motionless high overhead.

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There were scarcely fifty houses in Hemerton, and these were all alike, flat and brown and grey; where there had been plaster it was flaked and ashen. The very church stooped, as though shamed to a sort of poor-relation pose by the immense indifference of the mist-veiled sky—the drooping lids on a scornful face—for even at midday, in mid-summer, the heavens were never quite clear, quite blue, but still veiled and apart.

The Rectory was a two-storied building, low at that, and patched with damp: small, with a narrow-chested air, tiny windows, a thin, grudging doorway, blistered paint, which gave it a leprous air; and just that one tree, with its pale, curled leaves in summer, its jangling keys in winter.

It was amazing to find that any creature so warmly vital as the Rector's daughter, Rhoda Fane, had been begotten, born, reared in such a place; spent her entire life there, apart from two years of school at Clifton, and six months in Brussels, cut short by her mother's death.

She was like a beech wood in September: ruddy, crisp, fragrant. Her hair, dark-brown, with copper lights, was so springing with life that it seemed more inclined to grow up than hang down; her face was almost round, her wide, brown eyes frank and eager. She was as good as any man with her leaping-pole: broad-shouldered, deep-breasted, with a soft, deep contralto voice.

Her only brother, Hector, was four years younger than herself. Funds had run low, drained away by their mother's illness, before it was time for him to go to school; he was too delicate for the second-best, roughing it among lads of a lower class, and so he was kept at home, taught by his father: a thin trickle of distilled classics and

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wavering mathematics; a good deal of history, no geography.

He, in startling contrast to his sister, was a true child of the marshes: thin light hair, vellum-white, peaked face, pale grey eyes beneath an overhanging brow, large, transparent ears: narrow-chested, long-armed, stooping, so that he seemed almost a hunchback.

In all ways he was the shadow of Rhoda, followed her everywhere; and as there is no shadow without the sun, so it seemed that he could scarcely have existed apart from her. Small as he already was, he almost pined himself out of life while she was away at school; and after a bare week from home she would get back to find him with the best part of his substance peeled from him, white as a willow-wand.

Different as these two were, they were passionately attached to each other. The Rector was a kind father when he drew himself out of the morass of melancholy and disillusion into which he had fallen since his wife died, wilting away with damp and discontent, and sheer loathing of the soil in which it had been his misfortune to plant her. But still, at the best, he was a parent, and so apart, while there were no neighbours, no playfellows.

Once or twice Rhoda's school-friends came to stay at the Rectory, and for the first day or so it seemed delightful to talk of dress, of a gayer world, possible lovers. But after a very little while they began to pall on her: they understood nothing of what was her one absorbing interest—the natural life of the place in which she lived: were discontented, disdainful of the marshland, hated the mud, feared the fogs, shivered in the damp.

Anyhow, the brother and sister were sufficient to each

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other, for they shared a never-failing, or even diminishing, interest—and what more can any two people wish for?—a passionate absorption in, a minute knowledge of, the wild life of the marshland; its legends and folklore; its habits and calls; the mating seasons and manners of the birds; the place and habit of every wild flower; the way of the wind with the sky, and all its portents; the changing seasons, seemingly so uneven from year to year, and yet working out so much the same in the end.

They could not have said how they first came to hear of the Forest: they had always talked of it. To Hector, at least, it was so vivid that he seemed to have actually struggled through its immense depths, swung in its hanging creepers, smelt its sickly-sweet orchids, breathed its hot, damp air—so far real to both alike that they would find themselves saying, “Do you remember?” in speaking of paths that they had never traversed.

Provisionally they had fixed their Forest at the Miocene Period. Or, rather, this is what it came to: the boy ceasing to protest against the winged monsters, the rhinoceros, the long-jawed mastodon which fascinated the girl’s imagination; though there was one impassioned scene when he flamed out over his clear remembrance of a sabre-toothed tiger, putting all those others—stupid, hulking brutes!—out of court by many thousands of years.

“They couldn’t have been there, couldn’t—not with us and with ‘It’—I saw it, I tell you—I tell you I saw it!” His pale face flamed, his eyes were as bright as steel. “The mastodon! That’s nothing—nothing! But the sabre-toothed tiger—I tell you I saw it. What are you grinning at now?—in our Forest—ours, mind you!—I saw it!”

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“Oh, indeed, indeed!” Suddenly, because the day was so hot, because they were bored, because she was unwittingly impressed, as always, by her brother’s heat of conviction, Rhoda’s serene temper was gone. “And did you see yourself? and what were you doing there, may I ask—you! Silly infant, don’t you know that there weren’t any men then? Phew! Everyone knows that—everyone. You and your old tiger!”

There was mockery in her laugh as she took him by the lapels of his coat; shook him.

Then, next moment when he turned aside, sullen and pale, his brows in a pent-house above his eyes, she was filled with contrition. The rotten, thundery day had set her all on edge; it was a shame to tease him like this; and, after all, how often had she herself remembered back? Though there was a difference, and she knew it, a sense of fantasy, pretending; while Hector was as jealous of every detail of their Forest as a long-banished exile over every cherished memory of his own land.

Though, of course, there *were* no men contemporary with that wretched tiger: he knew that; he must know.

Lolling under their one tree, in the steamy, early afternoon, she coaxed him back to the subject, and was beaten upon it, as the half-hearted always are.

He was so amazingly clear about the whole thing. . . . Why, it might have happened yesterday!

He had been up in the trees, slinking along—not the hunting man, but the hunted—watchful, furtive; a picker-up of what other beasts had slain and taken their fill of: more watchful than usual because he had already come across a carcass left by the long-toothed terror, all the blood sucked out of it. Swinging from bough to bough

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by his hands—which, even when he stood upright, as upright as possible, dangled far below his knees—he had actually seen it; seen its gleaming tusks, its shining eyes; seen it, and fled, wild with terror.

Was it likely that he could ever forget it? “It and its beastly teeth!” he added; then fell silent, brooding; while even Rhoda was awed to silence.

It was that very evening that they found their Forest, or, rather, a part of it. They had gone over to the shore meaning to bathe, but for once their memories were at fault; and they found that the tide was out, a mere rim of molten lead on the far edge of the horizon.

They were both tired, but they could not rest. They cut inland for a bit, then out again; crossing the mud-flats until the mud oozed above their boots and drove them back again.

They must have wandered about a long time, for the light—although it did not actually go—became illusive; the air freshened with that salty scent which tells of a flowing tide.

Hector insisted that they ought to wait until it was full in, and have their bath by moonlight; but, as Rhoda pointed out, that would mean no supper, dawdling about for hours. After some time they compromised: they would go out and meet the tide; see what it was like.

Almost at the water’s edge they found It—their Forest.

There it was, buried like a fly in amber: twisted trunks and boughs, matted creepers, all ash-grey and black.

How far it stretched up and down the shore they could not have said, the time was too short, the sea too near for any exploration; but not far, they thought, or they must have discovered it before. “Nothing more than a fold

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out of the world, squeezed up to the surface"; that was what they agreed upon.

They divided and ran in opposite directions—"Just to try and find out," as Rhoda said. But after a few yards, a couple of dozen, maybe, they called back to each other that they had lost it.

The darkness gathering, the water almost to their feet; they were bitterly disappointed, but anyhow there was to-morrow, many "to-morrows."

All that evening they talked of nothing else. "It's been there for thousands and tens of thousands of years! It will be there to-morrow," they said.

It was towards two o'clock in the morning that Hector, restless with excitement and fear, padded into his sister's room; found her sleeping—stupidly sleeping—with the moonlight full upon her, and shook her awake; unreasonably angry, as wakeful people always are with the sleepers.

"Suppose we never find it again! Oh, Rhoda, suppose we never find it again!"

"Find what?"

"The Forest, you idiot!—our Forest."

"Hector, don't be silly. Go back to bed; you'll get cold. Of course we'll find it."

"Why of course? I've been thinking and thinking and thinking. There wasn't a tree or bush or landmark of any sort: we had pottered about all over the shop: supposing we've lost it for ever? Oh, supposing, Rhoda, Rhoda! What sillies we were! Why didn't we stay there, camp opposite it until the tide went out? I feel it in my bones—we'll never find it again—never—never—never! There might have been skulls, all sorts of things

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—long teeth—tigers' teeth! And now we've lost it. It's no good talking—we've lost it; I know we've lost it—after all these years! After thousands and thousands and thousands of years of remembering!"

The boy's forehead was glistening with sweat; the tears were running down his face, white as bone in the moonlight. Rhoda drew him into her bed, comforted him as best she could, very sleepy, and unperturbed—for, of course, they would find it. How could they help finding it? And after a while he fell asleep, still moaning and crying, searching for a lost path through his dreams.

He was right in his foreboding. They did not find it. Perhaps the tide had been out further than usual: they had walked further than they thought; they had dreamt the whole thing; the light had deceived them—impossible to say.

At first, in the broad light of day, even Hector was incredulous of their misfortune. Then, as the completeness of their loss grew upon them, they became desperate—possessed by that terrible restlessness of the searcher after lost things. Day after day they would come back from the sea worn out, utterly hopeless; declaring that here was the end of the whole thing; sick at the very thought of the secret mud, the long black shore.

They gave it up. They would never go near "the rotten thing" again.

Then, a few hours later, the thought of the freshly-receding tide began to work like madness in their veins, and they would be out and away.

It was easier for Rhoda; for she was of those who "sleep o' nights"; easier until she found that her brother slipped off on moonlight nights while she slumbered:

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coming back at all hours, haggard and worn to fainting-point.

He stooped more than ever: his brow was more overhung, furrowed with horizontal lines. Sometimes, furious with herself for her sleepiness, Rhoda would awake, jump out of bed and run to the window in the fresh dawn, to see the boy dragging himself home, old as the ages, his hands hanging loose to his knees.

At last the breaking-point came. He was very ill: after a long convalescence, money was collected from numerous relations, family treasures were sold, and he was sent away to school.

He came back for his holidays a changed creature, talking of footer, then of cricket; of boys and masters; of school—school—school—nothing but school; blunt and practical.

But all this was at the front of him, deliberately displayed in the shop-windows.

At the back of him, buried out of sight, there was still the visionary rememberer. Rhoda, who loved him, realised this.

At first she did not dare to speak of the Forest. Then, trying to get at something of the old Hector, she pressed the point; pressed it and pressed it. It was she now who kept on with that eternal, "Don't you remember?"

The worst of the whole thing was that he did not even pretend to forget. He did worse—he laughed. And in her own pain she now realised how often and how deeply she must have hurt him.

"Oh, that rot! What silly idiots we were! Such rot!"

And yet, at the back of him, at the back of his too-

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direct gaze, his laughter, there was *something*. Oh, yes, there was something. She was certain of that.

Deep, deep, hidden away at the back of him, at the back of that most imperturbable of all reserves, a boy's reserve, he remembered, felt as he had always felt. He shut her out of it, that was all: her—Rhoda.

At the end of a year they ceased to talk of the Forest; all those far-back things dropped away from their intercourse. To outward seeming their love for the countryside, their strange, unyouthful interest in geology, the age-buried world, seemed a thing of the past.

Hector had a bicycle now: he was often away for hours at a time. He never even spoke of where he had been, what he had been doing. It was always: "Nowhere in particular; nothing in particular."

Then, two years later, upon just such a breathless mid-summer day, he burst in upon his sister, his face crimson with excitement.

"I've found it! I never gave up—never for a moment! I pretended—I thought you thought it rot—were drawing me on—but it's there. We were right. It's there—there! Quick! quick! Now the tide's just almost full out. . . . Oh, by Jingo! to think I've found it! Rhoda, hurry up—quick!" He was dancing with impatience.

"I can ride the bike—you on the step," breathed Rhoda, and snatched up a hat.

They flew. The village shot past them: the flat country swirled like a top. At last they came to a place where there was a tiny rag of torn handkerchief tied to a stick stuck upright in the ground. Here they left the road, laid the bicycle in a dry ditch, and cut away across the marsh; guided by more signals—scraps of cambric, then

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paper; towards the end, one every ten yards or less, until Rhoda wondered how in the world had the boy curbed himself to such care!

Then—there it was.

They stepped it: just on fifty yards long, indefinitely wide, running out into little bays, here and there tailing off so that it was impossible to discover any definite edge, sinking away out of sight like a dream.

The sun was blazing hot and the top of the mud dry. In places they went down upon their hands and knees, peering; but really one saw most standing a little way off, with one's head bent, eyeing it sideways.

It was in this way that Rhoda found It—Him!

“Look—look! Oh, I say—there's something . . . A thing—an animal! No—no—a—a——”

“Sabre-toothed tiger!” The boy's wild shriek of triumph showed how he had hugged that old conjecture.

He came running, but until he got his head at exactly the same slant as hers he could see nothing, and was furiously petulant.

“Idiot! Silly fool!—nothing but a bough. You——” A lucky angle, and, “Oh, I say, by Jove! I've got it now! A man—a man!”

“A monkey—a great ape; there were no men, then, with 'It.' ” There, it seemed, she conceded him his tiger. “A little nearer—now again, there!”

They crept towards it. It was clear enough at a little distance; but nearer, what with the blazing sun and the queer incandescent lights on the mud, they found difficulty in exactly placing it. At last they had it, found themselves immediately over it; were able, kneeling side

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by side, to gaze down at the strange, age-old figure, lying huddled together, face forward.

It was not more than a couple of feet down; the semi-transparent mud must have been silting over it for years and years: silted away again through centuries. And all for them—just for them. What a thought!

Hector raced off for his bicycle, and so on to the nearest cottage to borrow a spade.

The mental picture of the “man” and the sabre-toothed tiger met and clashed in his brain. If he was so certain of the man he must concede the tiger, given in to Rhoda and her later period. Unless—unless. . . . Suddenly he clapped his hands to his ears as though someone were shouting: his eyes closed, shutting out sight and sound. There *was* a tiger, he remembered—of course he remembered! And if he were there, others were there also—not one tiger, not one man, but tigers and men; both, both!

By the time he got back to where he had left his sister, the water was above her knees, the tide racing inwards.

They were not going to be done this time, however.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and their father was away from home. Rhoda went back and ordered the household with as much sobriety as possible; collected a supply of food and a couple of blankets—they had camped out before and there was nothing so very amazing in their behaviour—then returned to the shore, the shrine.

Hector was sitting at the edge of the water, staring fixedly, white as a sheet.

Rhoda collected driftwood and built a fire; almost fed him, for he took nothing but what was put into his hand.

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“It will still be there, even if we go to sleep,” she said; then, “Anyhow, we’ll watch turn and turn about.”

But it was all of no use. The boy might lie down in his turn, but he still faced the sea with steady, staring eyes.

Soon after three he woke his sister, shaking her in a frenzy of impatience. Oh, these sleepers!

“Sleeping! Sleeping! You great stupid, you! I never! I . . . Just look at the tide—only look!”

The tide was pretty far out, the whole world a mist of pinkish-grey. Step by step they followed the retreating lap of water.

By six o’clock they had the heavy body out, and were dragging it across the rapidly-drying mud.

It was not as big as Hector: five-foot-one at the most, but almost incredibly heavy, with immense rounded shoulders.

By the time they reached the true shore they were done, and flung themselves down, panting, exhausted. But they could not rest. A few minutes more and they were up again, turning the creature over, rubbing the mud away from the hairy body with bunches of grass; parting the long, matted locks which hung over its lowering face, with the overhung brow, flat nose, almost non-existent chin. The eyes were shut, but oddly unshut: it smelt of marsh slime, of decayed vegetation, but nothing more.

Hector poked forward a finger to see if he could push up one eyelid, and drew back sharply.

“Why—hang it all—the thing’s warm!”

“No wonder, with this sun. I’m dripping from head

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to foot. Hector, we must go home. Matty will tell; there'll be the eyes of a row."

For all her insistence it was another hour before Rhoda could get her brother away. Again and again he met the returning tide with her hat, bringing it back full of water; washing their find from head to foot, combing its matted hair with a clipped fragment of driftwood. But at last they dragged it to a dry dyke, covered it with dry yellow grass, and were off, Rhoda on the step this time, Hector draped limply over the handle of the bicycle.

He slept like a dead thing for the best part of that day. But soon after three they were away again: no use for Rhoda to raise objections; the unrest of an intense excitement was in her bones as in his, and he knew it.

It had been a cloudless day, the veil of mist fainter than usual, the sky bluer.

As they left the bicycle and cut across the rough fore-shore the sun beat down upon them with an almost unbearable fierceness. There was a shimmer like a mirage across the marshes: the sea was the colour of burnt steel.

They dog-trotted half the way, arguing as they ran; Hector, still fixed, pivoting upon his sabre-toothed tiger, and yet insistent that *this* was a man—a real man—contemporary with it: the first absolute proof of human existence anterior to the First Glacial age.

"An ape—a sort of ape—nearish to a man, but—well, look at his hair." She'd give him his tiger, but not his man.

"By Gad, you'd grow hair, running wild as he did—a man——"

"Hector, what rot! Why, anyone—anyone could

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see—” She thought of her father, the smooth curate, the rubicund farmers. . . . A man!

“Well, stick to it—stick to it! But I bet you anything—anything . . .”

Hector’s words were jerked out of him as he padded on:

“We’ll get hundreds and hundreds of pounds for him! Travel—see the world—go to Java, where that other chap—what’s his name—was found. Why, he’s older than the Heidelberg Johnny—a thousand thousand times great-grandfather to that Pitcairn thing—older—older—oh, older than any!”

Panting, stumbling, half-blind with exhaustion, the boy was still a good six yards in front of his sister as he reached the dry dyke where they had left their treasure.

Rhoda saw him stand for a moment, staring, then spin round as though he had been shot, throwing up his arms with a hoarse scream.

By the time she had her own arms about him, he could only point, trembling from head to foot.

There was nothing there! Torn grass where they had pulled it to rub down their find; the very shape of the body distinct upon the sandy, sparsely-covered soil; the stick with the pennant of blue ribbon which Rhoda had taken from her hat to mark the spot. . . . Nothing more, nothing whatever.

Up and down the girl ran, circling like a plover, her head bent. It must be somewhere, it must—it must!

She glanced at her brother, who stood as though turned to stone: this was the sort of thing which sent people mad, killed them—to be so frightfully disappointed, and yet to stand still, to say nothing.

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She caught at his arm and faced him, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

“Oh, my dear, my dear—” she began, then broke off, staring beyond him.

“Why . . . why—Hector—I say—” Her voice broke to a whisper: she had a feeling as though she must be taking part in some mad dream. Quite inconsequently the thought of Balaam came to her. How did Balaam feel when the ass spoke to him? As she did—with eye more amazed than any ears could ever be.

“Hector—look. . . . It—It”

As her brother still stood speechless, with bent head and ashen face, she dropped to silence: too terrified of It, of her plainly deluded self, of everything on earth, to say more. . . .

One simply could not trust one's own eyes; that's what it came to.

Her legs were trembling; she could feel her knees touching each other, cold and clammy.

It would have been impossible to say a word, even if she had dared to reveal her own insanity; she could only pluck the lapels of her brother's coat, running her dry tongue along her lips.

Something in her unusual silence must have stirred through the boy's own misery, for after a moment or so he looked up, at first dimly, as though scarcely recognising her. Then—slowly realising her intent glance fixed on something beyond his own shoulder, he turned—and saw.

Twenty yards or more off, on a mound of coarse grass and sand just above the high-tide mark, “It” was sitting, its long arms wound round its knees, staring out to sea.

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For a moment or so they hung, open-mouthed, wide-eyed.

For the life of her, Rhoda could not have moved a step nearer. The creature's heavy shoulders were rounded, its head thrust forward. Silhouetted against sea and sky, white in contrast to its darkness, it had the aloofness of incredible age; drawn apart, almost sanctified by its immeasurable remoteness, its detachment from all that meant life to the men and women of the twentieth century: the web of fancied necessities, trivial possessions, absorptions.

"There was no sea—of course, there was no sea anywhere near here then!" The boy's whisper opened an incalculable panorama of world-wide change.

There *had* been no sea here then; no Bristol Channel, no Irish Sea. Valley and river, that was all!

This alien being who had lived, and more than half-died, in this very spot, was gazing at something altogether strange: a vast, uneasy sheet of water with but one visible bank; no golden-brown lights, no shadows, no reflections: a strange, restless and indifferent god.

"Well—anyhow. . . . Oh, blazes! here goes! if—" Young Fane broke off with a decision that cut his doubts, and moved forward.

In a moment the creature was alert, its head flung sideways and up, sniffing the air like a dog.

It half turned, as though to run; then, as the boy stopped short, it paused.

"Rhoda—get the grub—go quietly—don't run. . . . Bread-and-butter—anything!"

They had flung down the frail with the bottle of milk, cake, bread-and-butter that they had brought with them—

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enough for tea and supper—heedless in their despair. Rhoda moved a step or two away, picked up a packet, unfolded it and thrust the food into her brother's hand—cake, a propitiation!

The strange figure, upright—and yet not upright as it is counted in these days—remained stationary; there was one quick turn of the head following her, then the poise of it showed eyes immovably fixed upon the male.

Hector moved forward very slowly, one smooth step after another. Rhoda had seen him like that with wild birds and rabbits. He wore an old suit of shrunken flannels, faded to a yellowish-grey, which blurred him into the landscape. Far enough off to catch his outline against the molten glare of the sea, she noted that his shoulders were almost as bent as those of that Other. . . . Other what?—man?—ape? The speculation zigzagged to and fro like lightning through her mind. She could scarcely breathe for anxiety.

As the boy drew quite near to the dull, brownish figure it jerked its head uneasily aside—she knew what Hector's eyes were like, a steady, luminous grey under the bent brows—made a swinging movement with its arms, half turned; then stopped, stared sideways, crouching, sniffing.

The boy's arm was held out at its fullest stretch in front of him. Heaven—the old, old gods—only knew upon what beast-torn carrion the creature had once fed; but it was famished, and some instinct must have told it that here was food, for it snatched and crammed its mouth.

Hector turned and Rhoda's heart was in her throat, for there was no knowing what it might not do at that. But

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as he moved steadily away, without so much as a glance behind him, it hesitated, threw up its hand, as though to strike or throw; then followed.

That was the beginning of it. During those first days it would have followed him to the end of the world. Later on, he told himself bitterly that he had been a fool not to have seen further; gone off anywhere—oh, anywhere, so long as it was far enough—dragging the brute after him while his leadership still held.

It was with difficulty that they prevented it from dogging them back to the Rectory—just imagine it tailing through the village at their heels! But once it understood that it must stay where it was, it sat down on a grassy hummock, crouching with its arms round its knees, one hand tightly clenched, its small, light eyes, overhung by that portentous brow, following them with a look of desolate loneliness.

Again and again the boy and girl glanced back, but it still sat there staring after them, immovable in the spot which Hector had indicated to it. They had left it all the food they had with them, and one of the blankets which they had been too hot to carry home that morning. As it plainly had not known what to do with the thing, Rhoda, overcome by a sort of motherliness, had thrown it over its shoulders. Thus it sat, shrouded like an Arab, its shaggy head cut like a giant burr against the pale primrose sky.

“A beastly shame leaving it alone like that!” They both felt it; scarcely liked to meet each other’s eyes over it. And yet, pity it as they might, engrossed in it as they were, they couldn’t stay there with it after dark. No

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reason, no fear—just couldn't! Why? Oh, well, for all its new-found life, it was as far away as any ghost.

“Poor brute!” said Rhoda.

“Poor chap!” Hector's under-lip was thrust out, his look aggressive. But there was no argument; and when he treated her—“Don't be silly; of course it's not a man; any duffer could see that”—with contemptuous silence, Rhoda knew that he was absolutely fixed in his convictions.

He proved it, too, next morning, leading the creature out into the half-dried mud and back again to where his sister sat, following his apparently aimless movements with puzzled eyes.

“Now, look,” he crowed. “Just you look, Miss Blooming-Cocksure!”

He was right. There was the mark of his own heavy nailed boot, and beside it the track of other feet; oddly-shaped enough, but with the weight distinctly thrown upon the heel and great-toe, as no beast save man has ever yet thrown it—that fine developed great-toe, the emblem of leadership. Hardly a trace of such pressure as the three greater apes show, all on the outer edge of the foot; not even flat and even as the baboon throws his.

It was after this that—without another word said—Rhoda, meek for once, followed her brother's example, and began to speak of the creature as “He.”

They even gave him a name. They called him Hodge; only in fun, and yet with a feeling that here was one of the first of all countrymen: less learned, and yet in some way so much more observant, self-sufficing, than his machine-made successors.

He could run at an almost incredible rate, bent as he

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was; climb any tree; out-throw either of them, doubling the distance. It was there that they got at the meaning of that closed fist; for at least three days he had never let go of his stone—his one weapon.

“He didn’t trust us.” Rhoda was hurt, her vanity touched; and when they had seemed to be making such progress, too!

“Not that—a sort of ingrained habit; the poor devil didn’t feel dressed without it,” protested Hector. “Of course he trusts us as much as a perfectly natural creature ever trusts anything or anybody.”

The Rector had gone on a visit to their only relative, an old aunt, who was dying in as leisurely a fashion as she had lived, and was unable to leave her. A neighbouring curate took that next Sunday’s service.

It had been a Monday when Hector found Hodge, and a very great deal can happen in that time.

From the first it had seemed clear that nothing in the way of communicating with authorities, experts, could be done until their father was there to back them, adding his own testimony. It was no good just writing—Hector did, indeed, begin a letter to Sir Ray Lankester, but tore it up, appalled by his own formless, boyish handwriting. “He’d think we were just getting at him—a couple of silly kids,” was his reflection.

He knew a lot for his age; was very certain of his own knowledge; felt no personal fear of this wild man of his. But ordinary grown-up people! That was altogether a different matter. And here he touched the primitive mistrust of all real youth for anything too completely finished and sophisticated.

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Of course, from the very beginning, there were all sorts of minor troubles with Matty over their continued thefts of food; difficulties in keeping the creature away from the house and village.

But all that was nothing to what followed.

The first dim, unformulated sense of fear began on the night when Hector, awakened by a loud rustling among the leaves of that one tree, discovered Hodge there, climbing along a bough which ended close against Rhoda's window.

Rhoda's, not his—that was the queer part of it!

The boy felt half huffed as he drove him off. But when he came again, some instinct, something far less plain than thought, began to worry him: something which seemed ludicrous, until it gathered and grew to a feeling of nausea so horrible that the cold sweat pricked out upon his breast and forehead.

At the third visit the fear was more defined. But still. . . . That brute "smitten" with Rhoda! He tried to laugh it off. Anyhow, what did it matter? And yet. . . . Hang it all! there was something sickening about it all. It was impossible to sleep at night, listening, always listening.

He was only thirteen. Of course he had heard other chaps talking, but he had no real idea of the fierce drive of physical desire. And yet it was plain enough that here was something "beastly" beyond all words.

He told Rhoda to keep her window bolted, and when she protested against such "fugging," touched on his own fears, tried, awkwardly enough, to explain without explaining.

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"I'm funky about Hodge—he's taken to following us. He might get in—bag something."

"The darling!" cried Rhoda. "Look here, old chap. I really believe he's fond of me; fonder of me than of you!"

She persisted in putting it to the test next day; left "Hodge" sitting by her brother, and walked away.

The creature moved his head uneasily from side to side, glanced at Hector, and his glance was full of hatred, malevolence; then, scrambling furtively to his feet, helping himself with his hands, one fist tight-closed, in the old fashion, he passed round the back of the boy, and followed her.

For a minute or two Hector sat hunched together, staring doggedly out to sea. If Rhoda chose to make an ass of herself—well, let her. After all, what could the brute do? She was bigger than he was, had nothing on her worth stealing; nothing of any use to Hodge, anyhow, he told himself.

Then, of a sudden, that half-formulated dread, that sick panic seized him afresh. He glanced round; both Hodge and his sister were out of sight, and he started to run with all his might, shouting.

There was an answering cry from Rhoda, shriller than usual, with a note of panic in it. This gave him the direction; and, plunging off among a group of shallow sand-dunes, he found himself almost upon them.

Rhoda was drawn up very straight, laughing nervously, her shoulders back, flushed to the eyes, while Hodge stood close in front of her, gabbling—they had tried him with their own words, but the oddly-angled jaw had

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seemed to cramp the tongue beyond hope of articulate speech—gabbling, gesticulating.

“Oh, Hector!” The girl’s cry was full of relief as she swung sideways toward him; while Hodge, glancing round, saw him, raised his hand, and threw.

The stone just grazed the boy’s cheek, drawing a spurt of blood; but this was enough for Rhoda, who forgot her own panic in a flame of indignation.

The creature could not have understood a word of what she said: her denunciation, abuse, “the wiggling” she gave him. But her look was enough, and he shrank aside, shamed as a beaten dog.

They did not bid him good-night. They had taught him to shake hands; but now that he was in disgrace all that was over, and they turned aside with the set severity of youth: bent brows and straightened, hard mouths.

Rhoda was the first to relent, half-way home, breaking their silence with a laugh: “Poor old Hodge! I don’t know why I was so scared—I must have got him rattled, or he’d never have thrown that stone. Why, it was always you he liked best, followed,” she added magnanimously.

And yet she was puzzled, all on edge, as she had never been before. The look Hodge had cast at her brother was unmistakable; but why?—why? What had changed him? She never even thought of that passion common to man and beast, interwoven with all desire, hatred—the lees of love—jealousy.

All that evening Hector scarcely spoke. He was not so much scared as gravely anxious in a man’s way. If that brute got him with a stone, what would happen to Rhoda? Even supposing that there had been anyone to

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consult, he could not, for the life of him, have put his fear into words. So much a man, he was yet too much a boy for that. Terrified of ridicule, incredulity, he hugged his secret, as that strange man-beast hugged his—the highest and lowest—the most primitive and the most cultured—forever uncommunicative; those in the mid-way the babblers.

He was so firm in his insistence upon Rhoda changing her room that night that she gave way, without argument, overawed by his gravity, by an odd, chill sense of fear which hung about her. "I must have got a cold. I've a sort of feeling of a goose walking over my grave," was what she said laughingly, half-shamefaced, accustomed as she was to attribute every feeling to some natural cause.

That night, soon after midnight, the brute was back in the tree. Hector heard the rustling, then the spring and swish of a released bough. Before he lay down he had unbolted one of the long bars from the underneath part of his old-fashioned iron bedstead; and, now taking it in his hand, he ran to Rhoda's room.

The white-washed walls and ceiling were so flooded with moonlight that it was almost as light as day.

Hodge was already in the room: the clothes were torn from the bed; the cupboard doors wide open; the whole place littered with feminine attire.

He—It—the impersonal pronoun slid into its place in the boy's mind, and no words of self-reproach or condemnation could have said more—stood at the foot of the empty bed, with something white—it might have been a chemise—in its hand, held up to its face. Hector could not catch its expression, but there was something inex-

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pressibly bestial in the silhouette of its head, bent, sniffing; he could actually hear the whistling breath.

He would have given anything if only it had stayed, fought it out then. But it belonged to a state too far away for that—defensive, at times aggressive, but forever running, hiding, slinking: a thrower from among thick boughs behind tree-trunks—and in a moment it was out of the window, bundling over the sill, so clumsy and yet so amazingly quick.

He could hear the swing of a bough as it caught it. There was a loud rustle of leaves, and a stone hurtled in through the window; but that was all.

Hector tidied the room, tossed the scattered garments into the bottom of the wardrobe, and re-made the bed in his awkward boy-fashion, moving mechanically, as if in a dream; his hands busied over his petty tasks, his mind engrossed with something so tremendous that he seemed to be two separate people, of which the one, the greater, revolved slowly and certainly in an unalterable orbit, quite apart from his old everyday life, from that Hector Fane whom he had always known, thought of, spoken of as “myself.”

He went to his own room, put on his collar and coat—for he had lain down upon his bed without undressing, every nerve on edge—laced up his boots with meticulous care. He was no longer frightened or hurried; he knew exactly what he was going to do, and that alone hung him—moving slowly, surely—as upon a pivot.

The moonlight was so clear that there was no need for a candle, flooding the stairway, the study with its shabby book-shelves.

Easy enough to take the old shot-gun from the nails

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over the mantelshelf; only last holiday—years and years ago, while he was still a child—he had been allowed to use it for wild-duck shooting—and run his hand along the back of the writing-table drawer in search of those three or four cartridges which he had seen there a couple of days earlier.

The cartridges in his pocket swung against his hip as he mounted his bicycle and rode away—guiding himself with one hand, the gun lying heavily along his left arm; it was like someone nudging, reminding.

The scene was entirely familiar; but what was so strange in himself lent it an air of something new and uncanny. The winding road had a swing, drawing him with it; the mingled mist and moonlight were sentient, watchful, holding their breath.

Once or twice he seemed to catch sight of a low, stooping figure amid the rough grass and rush-tufted hollows to the left of him; but he could not be sure until he reached the very shore, left his bicycle in the old place.

Then a stone grazed his shoulder, and there was a blurred scurry of brown, from hummock to hummock, low as a hare to the ground.

Once in the open he got a clear sight of Hodge. The far-away tide was on the flow, but there was still a good half-mile of mud, like lead in the silvery dawn.

The man-beast bundled down the sandy strip of shore and out on to the mud: ungainly, stumbling; the boy behind it—"It." Hector held to that: the pronoun was altogether reassuring now—something to hold to, hard as a bone in his brain.

On the edge of the tide it tried to turn, double; then paused, fascinated, amazed: numb with fear of the

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strange level pipe pointing, oddly threatening, the first ray of sunlight running like an arrow of gold along the top of it.

There was something utterly naïve and piteous in the misplaced creature's gesture: the way in which it stood—long arms, short, bandy legs—moving its head uneasily from side to side; bewildered, yet fascinated.

“Poor beggar!” muttered Hector. He could not have said why, but he was horribly sorry, ashamed, saddened.

Years later he thought more clearly—“Poor beggar! After all, what did he want but life—more life—the complete life of any man—or animal, either, come to that!”

As he pressed his finger to the trigger he saw the rough brown figure throw up its arms, leap high in the air, and drop.

Something like a red-hot iron burnt up the back of his own neck; his head throbbed. After all, what did death matter when life was so rotten, so inexplicable? It wasn't that, only—only. . . . Well, it was beastly to feel so tired, so altogether gone to pieces.

With bent head he made his way, ploughing through the mud and sand, back to the shore; sat down rather suddenly, with a feeling as though the ground had risen up to meet him, and winding his arms round his knees, stared out to sea; washed through and through, swept by an immense sense of grief, a desperate regret which had nothing whatever to do with his immediate action—the death of Hodge.

That was something which had to be gone through with; it wasn't that—not exactly that. . . . But, oh, the futility, the waste of . . . well, of everything!

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“Rotten luck!” He shuddered as he dragged himself wearily to his feet. He could not have gone before, not while there was the mud with “that” on it; not even so long as the shining sands were bare. It would have seemed too hurried, almost indecent. But now that an unbroken, glittering sheet of water lapped the very edge of the shore, the funeral ceremony—with all its pomp of sunrise—was over; and, turning aside, he stumbled wearily through the rough grass to the place where he had left his bicycle.

HATTERAS

By A. W. MASON

THE story was told to me by James Walker in the cabin of a seven-ton cutter, one night when we lay anchored in Helford River. It was towards the end of September; during this last week the air had grown chilly with the dusk, and the sea when it lost the sun took on a leaden and a dreary look. There was no other boat on the wooded creek and the swish of the tide against the planks had a very lonesome sound. All these circumstances I think provoked Walker to tell the story, but most of all the lonely swish of the tide against the planks. For it is the story of a man's loneliness and the strange ways into which loneliness misled his soul. However, let the story speak for itself.

Hatteras and Walker had been schoolfellows, though never classmates. Hatteras indeed was the head of the school and prophecy vaguely sketched out for him a brilliant career in some service of importance. The definite law, however, that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children overbore this prophecy. Hatteras, the father, disorganized his son's future by dropping unexpectedly through one of the trapways of speculation into the Bankruptcy Court beneath, just two months before Hatteras, the son, was to have gone up to Oxford. The lad was therefore compelled to start life in a stony world with a stock-in-trade which consisted of a schoolboy's

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command of the classics, a real inborn gift of tongues and the friendship of James Walker.

The last item proved of the most immediate value. For Walker, whose father was the junior partner in a firm of West African merchants, obtained for Hatteras an employment as the bookkeeper at a branch factory in the Bight of Benin.

Thus the friends parted. Hatteras went out to West Africa alone, and met with a strange welcome on the day when he landed. The incident did not come to Walker's ears until some time afterwards, nor when he heard of it did he at once appreciate the effect which it had upon Hatteras. But chronologically it comes into the story at this point, and so may as well be immediately told.

There was no settlement very near to the factory. It stood by itself on the swamps of the Forcados River with the mangrove forest closing in about it. Accordingly the captain of the steamer just put Hatteras ashore in a boat and left him with his traps on the beach. Half-a-dozen Kru boys had come down from the factory to receive him, but they could speak no English, and Hatteras at this time could speak no Kru. So that although there was no lack of conversation there was not much interchange of thought. At last Hatteras pointed to his traps. The Kru boys picked them up and preceded Hatteras to the factory. They mounted the steps to the verandah on the first floor and laid their loads down. Then they proceeded to further conversation. Hatteras gathered from their excited faces and gestures that they wished to impart information, but he could make neither head nor tail of a word they said, and at last he retired from the din of their chatter through

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the windows of a room which gave on to the verandah, and sat down to wait for his superior, the agent.

It was early in the morning when Hatteras landed and he waited until midday patiently. In the afternoon it occurred to him that the agent would have shown a kindly consideration if he had left a written message or an intelligible Kru boy to receive him. It is true that the blacks came in at intervals and chattered and gesticulated, but matters were not thereby appreciably improved. He did not like to go poking about the house, so he contemplated the mud banks and the mud river and the mangrove forest, and cursed the agent. The country was very quiet. There are few things quieter than a West African forest in the daytime. It is obtrusively, emphatically quiet. It does not let you forget how singularly quiet it is. And towards sundown the quietude began to jar on Hatteras' nerves. He was besides very hungry. To while away the time he took a stroll round the verandah.

He walked along the side of the houses towards the back, and as he neared the back he heard a humming sound. The further he went the louder it grew. It was something like the hum of a mill, only not so metallic and not so loud; and it came from the rear of the house.

Hatteras turned the corner and what he saw was this—a shuttered window and a cloud of flies. The flies were not aimlessly swarming outside the window; they streamed in through the lattice of the shutters in a busy, practical way; they came in columns from the forest and converged upon the shutters; and the hum sounded from within the room.

Hatteras looked about for a Kru boy for the sake of

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company, but at that moment there was not one to be seen.

He felt the cold strike at his spine. He went back into the room in which he had been sitting. He sat again but he sat shivering. The agent had left no word for him. . . . The Kru boys had been anxious to explain—something. The humming of the flies about that shuttered window seemed to Hatteras a more explicit language than the Kru boys' chatterings. He penetrated into the interior of the house, and reckoned up the doors. He opened one of them ever so slightly and the buzzing came through like the hum of a wheel in a factory revolving in the collar of a strap. He flung the door open and stood upon the threshold. The atmosphere of the room appalled him; he felt the sweat break cold upon his forehead and a deadly sickness in all his body. Then he nerved himself to enter.

At first he saw little because of the gloom. In a while, however, he made out a bed stretched along the wall and a thing stretched upon the bed. The thing was more or less shapeless because it was covered with a black furry sort of rug. Hatteras, however, had little trouble in defining it. He knew now for certain what it was that the Kru boys had been so anxious to explain to him. He approached the bed and bent over it, and as he bent over it the horrible thing occurred which left so vivid an impression on Hatteras. The black furry rug suddenly lifted itself from the bed, beat about Hatteras' face, and dissolved into flies. The Kru boys found Hatteras in a dead swoon on the floor half-an-hour later, and next day, of course, he was down with the fever. The agent had died of it three days before.

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Hatteras recovered from the fever, but not from the impression. It left him with a prevailing sense of horror and, at first, with a sense of disgust too.

"It's an obscene country," he would say. But he stayed in it, for he had no choice. All the money which he could save went to the support of his family, and for six years the firm he served moved him from district to district, from factory to factory.

Now the second item of his stock-in-trade was a gift of tongues, and about this time it began to bring him profit. Wherever Hatteras was posted, he managed to pick up a native dialect, and with the dialect inevitably a knowledge of native customs. Dialects are numerous on the west coast, and at the end of six years Hatteras could speak as many of them as some traders could enumerate. Languages ran in his blood; he acquired a reputation for knowledge and was offered service under the Niger Protectorate, so that when, two years later, Walker came out to Africa to open a new branch factory at a settlement on the Bonny River, he found Hatteras stationed in command there.

Hatteras, in fact, went down to Bonny River town to meet the steamer which brought his friend.

"I say, Dick, you look bad," said Walker.

"People are not, as a rule, offensively robust about these parts."

"I know that; but you're the weariest bag of bones I've ever seen."

"Well, look at yourself in a glass a year from now for my double," said Hatteras, and the pair went up river together.

"Your factory is next to the Residency," said Hat-

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teras. "There's a compound to each running down to the river, and there's a palisade between the compounds. I've cut a little gate in the palisade as it will shorten the way from one house to the other."

The wicket gate was frequently used during the next few months—indeed more frequently than Walker imagined. He was only aware that, when they were both at home, Hatteras would come through it of an evening and smoke on his verandah. There he would sit for hours cursing the country, raving about the lights of Piccadilly Circus, and offering his immortal soul in exchange for a comic opera tune played upon a barrel-organ. Walker possessed a big atlas, and one of Hatteras' chief diversions was to trace with his finger a bee-line across the African continent and the Bay of Biscay until he reached London.

More rarely Walker would stroll over to the Residency, but he soon came to notice that Hatteras had a distinct preference for the factory and for the factory verandah. The reason for the preference puzzled Walker considerably. He drew a quite erroneous conclusion that Hatteras was hiding at the Residency—well, someone whom it was prudent, especially in an official, to conceal. He abandoned the conclusion, however, when he discovered that his friend was in the habit of making solitary expeditions. At times Hatteras would be absent for a couple of days, at times for a week, and, so far as Walker could ascertain, he never so much as took a servant with him to keep him company. He would simply announce at night his intended departure, and in the morning he would be gone. Nor on his return did he ever offer to Walker any explanation of his journeys. On one occasion, how-

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ever, Walker broached the subject. Hatteras had come back the night before, and he sat crouched up in a deck chair, looking intently into the darkness of the forest.

"I say," asked Walker, "isn't it rather dangerous to go slumming about West Africa alone?"

Hatteras did not reply for a moment. He seemed not to have heard the suggestion, and when he did speak it was to ask a quite irrelevant question.

"Have you ever seen the Horse Guards' Parade on a dark rainy night?" he asked; but he never moved his head, he never took his eyes from the forest. "The wet level of ground looks just like a lagoon and the arches a Venice palace above it."

"But look here, Dick!" said Walker, keeping to his subject, "you never leave word when you are coming back. One never knows that you have come back until you show yourself the morning after."

"I think," said Hatteras slowly, "that the finest sight in the world is to be seen from the bridge in St. James' Park when there's a State Ball on at Buckingham Palace and the light from the windows reddens the lake and the carriages glance about the Mall like fireflies."

"Even your servants don't know when you come back," said Walker.

"Oh," said Hatteras quietly, "so you have been asking questions of my servants?"

"I had a good reason," replied Walker. "Your safety"; and with that the conversation dropped.

Walker watched Hatteras. Hatteras watched the forest. A West African mangrove forest night is full of the eeriest, queerest sounds that ever a man's ears hearkened to. And the sounds come not so much from the birds

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or the soughing of branches; they seem to come from the swamp-life underneath the branches, at the roots of the trees. There's a ceaseless stir as of a myriad reptiles creeping in the slime. Listen long enough and you will fancy that you hear the whirr and rush of innumerable crabs, the flapping of innumerable fish. Now and again a more distinctive sound emerges from the rest—the croaking of a bull-frog, the whining cough of a crocodile. At such sounds Hatteras would start up in his chair and cock his head like a dog in a room that hears another dog barking in the street.

“Doesn't it sound damned wicked?” he said with a queer smile of enjoyment.

Walker did not answer. The light from a lamp in the room behind them struck obliquely upon Hatteras' face and slanted off from it in a narrowing column until it vanished in a yellow thread among the leaves of the trees. It showed that the same enjoyment which rang in Hatteras' voice was alive upon his face. His eyes, his ears, were alert, and he gently opened and shut his mouth with a little clicking of the teeth. In some horrible way he seemed to have something in common with, he appeared almost to participate in, the activity of the swamp. Thus had Walker often seen him sit, but never with the light so clear upon his face, and the sight gave to him a quite new impression of his friend. He wondered whether all these months his judgment had been wrong. And out of that wonder a new thought sprang into his mind.

“Dick,” he said, “this house of mine stands between your house and the forest. It stands on the borders of the trees, on the edge of the swamp. Is that why you prefer it to your own?”

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Hatteras turned his head quickly towards his companion, almost suspiciously. Then he looked back into the darkness, and after a little said:

“It’s not only the things you care about, old man, which tug at you; it’s the things you hate as well. I hate this country. I hate these miles and miles of mangroves, and yet I am fascinated. I can’t get the forests and the undergrowth and the swamp out of my mind. I dream of them at night. I dream that I am sinking into that black oily batter of mud. Listen,” and he suddenly broke off with his head stretched forward. “Doesn’t it sound wicked?”

“But all this talk about London?” cried Walker.

“Oh, don’t you understand?” interrupted Hatteras roughly. Then he changed his tone and gave his reason quietly. “One has to struggle against a fascination of that sort. It’s devil’s work. So for all I am worth I talk about London.”

“Look here, Dick,” said Walker. “You had better get leave and go back to the old country for a spell.”

“A very solid piece of advice,” said Hatteras, and he went home to the Residency.

The next morning he had again disappeared. But Walker discovered upon his table a couple of new volumes, and glanced at the titles. They were Burton’s account of his pilgrimage to El Medinah and Mecca.

Five nights afterwards Walker was smoking a pipe on the verandah when he fancied that he heard a rubbing, scuffling sound as if someone very cautiously was climbing over the fence of his compound. The moon was low in the sky and dipping down toward the forest, indeed

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the rim of it touched the treetops so that while a full half of the enclosure was lit by the yellow light, that half which bordered on the forest was inky black in shadow, and it was from the furthest corner of this second half that the sound came. Walker leaned forward listening. He heard the sound again, and a moment after a second sound, which left him in no doubt. For in that dark corner he knew that a number of palisades for repairing the fence were piled, and the second sound which he heard was a rattle as someone stumbled against them. Walker went inside and fetched a rifle.

When he came back he saw a negro creeping across the bright open space towards the Residency. Walker hailed to him to stop. Instead the negro ran. He ran towards the wicket gate in the palisade. Walker shouted again; the figure only ran the faster. He had covered half the distance before Walker fired. He clutched his right forearm with his left hand, but he did not stop. Walker fired again, this time at his legs, and the man dropped to the ground. Walker heard his servants stirring as he ran down the steps. He crossed quickly to the negro and the negro spoke to him, but in English, and with the voice of Hatteras.

“For God’s sake keep your servants off!”

Walker ran to the house, met his servants at the foot of the steps and ordered them back. He had shot at a monkey he said. Then he returned to Hatteras.

“Dicky, are you hurt?” he whispered.

“You hit me each time you fired, but not very badly, I think.”

He bandaged Hatteras’ arm and thigh with strips of his shirt, and waited by his side until the house was

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quiet. Then he lifted him and carried him across the enclosure to the steps, and up the steps into his bedroom. It was a long and fatiguing process. For one thing Walker dared make no noise and must needs tread lightly with his load; for another, the steps were steep and rickety, with a narrow balustrade on each side waist-high. It seemed to Walker that the day would dawn before he reached the top. Once or twice Hatteras stirred in his arms, and he feared the man would die then and there. For all the time his blood dripped and pattered like heavy raindrops on the wooden steps.

Walker laid Hatteras on his bed and examined his wounds. One bullet had passed through the fleshy part of the forearm, the other through the fleshy part of his right thigh. But no bones were broken and no arteries cut. Walker lit a fire, baked some plantain leaves, and applied them as a poultice. Then he went out with a pail of water and scrubbed down the steps. Again he dared not make any noise; and it was close on daybreak before he had done. His night's work, however, was not ended. He had still to cleanse the black stain from Hatteras' skin, and the sun was up before he stretched a rug upon the ground and went to sleep with his back against the door.

"Walker," Hatteras called out in a loud voice, an hour or so later.

Walker woke up and crossed over to the bed.

"Dicky, I'm frightfully sorry. I couldn't know it was you."

"That's all right, Jim. Don't you worry about that. What I wanted to say was that nobody had better know. It wouldn't do, would it, if it got about?"

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“Oh, I am not so sure. People would think it a rather creditable proceeding.”

Hatteras shot a puzzled look at his friend. Walker, however, did not notice it, and continued, “I saw Burton’s account of his pilgrimage in your room; I might have known that journeys of the kind were just the sort of thing to appeal to you.”

“Oh, yes, that’s it,” said Hatteras, lifting himself up in bed. He spoke eagerly—perhaps a thought too eagerly. “Yes, that’s it. I have always been keen on understanding the natives thoroughly. It’s after all no less than one’s duty if one has to rule them, and since I could speak their lingo—” he broke off and returned to the subject which had prompted him to rouse Walker. “But, all the same, it wouldn’t do if the natives got to know.”

“There’s no difficulty about that,” said Walker. “I’ll give out that you have come back with the fever and that I am nursing you. Fortunately there’s no doctor handy to come making inconvenient examinations.”

Hatteras knew something of surgery, and under his directions Walker poulticed and bandaged him until he recovered. The bandaging, however, was amateurish, and, as a result, the muscles contracted in Hatteras’ thigh and he limped—ever so slightly, still he limped—he limped to his dying day. He did not, however, on that account abandon his explorations, and more than once Walker, when his lights were out and he was smoking a pipe on the verandah, would see a black figure with a trailing walk cross his compound and pass stealthily through the wicket in the fence. Walker took occasion to expostulate with his friend.

“It’s too dangerous a game for a man to play for any

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length of time. It is doubly dangerous now that you limp. You ought to give it up."

Hatteras made a strange reply.

"I'll try to," he said.

Walker pondered over the words for some time. He set them side by side in his thoughts with that confession which Hatteras had made to him one evening. He asked himself whether, after all, Hatteras' explanation of his conduct was sincere, whether it was really a desire to know the native thoroughly which prompted those mysterious expeditions, and then he remembered that he himself had first suggested the explanation to Hatteras. Walker began to feel uneasy—more than uneasy, actually afraid on his friend's account. Hatteras had acknowledged that the country fascinated him, and fascinated him through its hideous side. Was this masquerading as a black man a further proof of the fascination? Was it, as it were, a step downwards towards a closer association? Walker sought to laugh the notion from his mind, but it returned and returned, and here and there an incident occurred to give it strength and colour.

For instance, on one occasion after Hatteras had been three weeks absent, Walker sauntered over to the Residency towards four o'clock in the afternoon. Hatteras was trying cases in the Court-house, which formed the ground floor of the Residency. Walker stepped into the room. It was packed with a naked throng of blacks, and the heat was overpowering. At the end of the hall sat Hatteras. His worn face shone out amongst the black heads about him white and waxy like a gardenia.

Walker, however, thinking that the Court would rise, determined to wait for a little. But, at the last moment,

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a negro was put up to answer to a charge of participation in fetish rites. The case seemed sufficiently clear from the outset, but somehow Hatteras delayed its conclusion. There was evidence and unrebuted evidence of the usual details—human sacrifice, mutilations, and the like, but Hatteras pressed for more. He sat until it was dusk, and then had candles brought into the Court-house. He seemed indeed not so much to be investigating the negro's guilt as to be adding to his own knowledge of fetish ceremonials. And Walker could not but perceive that he took more than a merely scientific pleasure in the increase of his knowledge. His face appeared to smooth out, his eyes became quick, interested, almost excited; and Walker again had the queer impression that Hatteras was in spirit participating in the loathsome ceremonies, and participating with an intense enjoyment. In the end the negro was convicted and the Court rose. But he might have been convicted a good three hours before. Walker went home shaking his head. He seemed to be watching a man deliberately divesting himself of his humanity. It seemed as though the white man was ambitious to decline into the black. Hatteras was growing into an uncanny creature. His friend began to foresee a time when he should hold him in loathing and horror. And the next morning helped to confirm him in that forecast.

For Walker had to make an early start down river for Bonny town, and as he stood on the landing-stage Hatteras came down to him from the Residency.

“You heard that negro tried yesterday?” he asked with an assumption of carelessness.

“Yes, and condemned. What of him?”

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“He escaped last night. It’s a bad business, isn’t it?”

Walker nodded in reply and his boat pushed off. But it stuck in his mind for the greater part of that day that the prison adjoined the Court-house and so formed part of the ground floor of the Residency. Had Hatteras connived at his escape? Had the judge secretly set free the prisoner whom he had publicly condemned?

The question troubled Walker considerably during his month of absence, and stood in the way of his business. He learned for the first time how much he loved his friend, and how eagerly he watched for that friend’s advancement. Each day added to his load of anxiety. He dreamed continually of a black-painted man slipping among the tree-boles nearer and nearer, towards the red glare of a fire in some open space secure amongst the swamps, where hideous mysteries had their celebration. He cut short his business and hurried back from Bonny. He crossed at once to the Residency and found his friend in a great turmoil of affairs.

“Jim,” said Hatteras, starting up, “I’ve got a year’s leave; I’m going home.”

“Dicky!” cried Walker, and he nearly wrung Hatteras’ hand from his arm. “That’s grand news.”

“Yes, old man, I thought you would be glad; I sail in a fortnight.” And he did.

For the first month Walker was glad. A year’s leave would make a new man of Dick Hatteras, he thought, or at all events restore the old man, sane and sound, as he had been before he came to the West African coast. During the second month Walker began to feel lonely. In the third he bought a banjo and learnt it during the fourth and fifth. During the sixth he began to say to himself,

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“What a time poor Dick must have had all those years with these cursed forests about him. I don’t wonder—I don’t wonder.” He turned disconsolately to his banjo and played for the rest of the year—all through the wet season while the rain came down in a steady roar and only the curlews cried—until Hatteras returned. He returned at the top of his spirits and health. Of course he was hall-marked West African, but no man gets rid of that stamp. Moreover there was more than health in his expression. There was a new look of pride in his eyes, and when he spoke of a bachelor it was in terms of sympathetic pity.

“Jim,” said he, after five minutes of restraint, “I am engaged to be married.”

Jim danced round him in delight. “What an ass I have been,” he thought; “why didn’t I think of that cure myself?” And he asked, “When is it to be?”

“In eight months. You’ll come home and see me through.”

Walker agreed and for eight months listened to praises of the lady. There were no more solitary expeditions. In fact, Hatteras seemed absorbed in the diurnal discovery of new perfections in his future wife.

“Yes, she seems a nice girl,” Walker commented. He found her upon his arrival in England more human than Hatteras’ conversation had led him to expect, and she proved to him that she was a nice girl. For she listened for hours to his lectures on the proper way to treat Dick without the slightest irritation and with only a faintly visible amusement. Besides she insisted on returning with her husband to Bonny River, which was a sufficiently courageous thing to undertake.

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For a year in spite of the climate the couple were commonplace and happy. For a year Walker clucked about them like a hen after its chickens, and slept the sleep of the untroubled. Then he returned to England and from that time made only occasional journeys to West Africa. Thus for a while he almost lost sight of Hatteras, and consequently still slept the sleep of the untroubled. One morning, however, he arrived unexpectedly at the settlement and at once called on Hatteras. He did not wait to be announced, but ran up the steps outside the house and into the dining-room. He found Mrs. Hatteras crying. She dried her eyes, welcomed Walker, and said that she was sorry, but her husband was away.

Walker started, looked at her eyes, and asked hesitatingly whether he could help. Mrs. Hatteras replied with an ill-assumed surprise that she did not understand. Walker suggested that there was trouble. Mrs. Hatteras denied the truth of the suggestion. Walker pressed the point and Mrs. Hatteras yielded so far as to assert that there was no trouble in which Hatteras was concerned. Walker hardly thought it the occasion for a parade of manners, and insisted on pointing out that his knowledge of her husband was intimate and dated from his school-days. Therefore Mrs. Hatteras gave way.

“Dick goes away alone,” she said. “He stains his skin and goes away at night. He tells me that he must, that it’s the only way by which he can know the natives, and that so it’s a sort of duty. He says the black tells nothing of himself to the white man—never. You must go amongst them if you are to know them. So he goes, and I never know when he will come back. I never know whether he will come back.”

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“But he has done that sort of thing on and off for years, and he has always come back,” replied Walker.

“Yes, but one day he will not.”

Walker comforted her as well as he could, praised Hatteras for his conduct, though his heart was hot against him, spoke of risks that every man must run who serves the Empire. “Never a lotus closes, you know,” he quoted, and went back to the factory with the consciousness that he had been telling lies.

It was a sense of duty that prompted Hatteras, of that Walker assured himself he was certain, and he waited—he waited from darkness to daybreak in his compound, for three successive nights.

On the fourth he heard the scuffling sound at the corner of the fence. The night was black as the inside of a coffin. Half a regiment of men might have passed him and he not have seen them. Accordingly he walked cautiously to the palisade which separated the enclosure of the Residency from his own, felt along it until he reached the little gate and stationed himself in front of it. In a few moments he thought that he heard a man breathing, but whether to the right or the left he could not tell; and then a groping hand lightly touched his face and drew away again. Walker said nothing, but held his breath and did not move. The hand was stretched out again. This time it touched his breast and moved across it until it felt a button of Walker’s coat. Then it was snatched away, and Walker heard a gasping indraw of the breath and afterwards a sound as of a man turning in a flurry. Walker sprang forward and caught a naked shoulder with one hand, a naked arm with the other.

“Wait a bit, Dick Hatteras,” he said.

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There was a low cry, and then a husky voice addressed him respectfully as "Daddy" in trade-English.

"That won't do, Dick," said Walker.

The voice babbled more trade-English.

"If you're not Dick Hatteras," continued Walker, tightening his grasp, "you've no manner of right here. I'll give you till I count ten, and then I shall shoot."

Walker counted up to nine aloud and then——

"Jim," said Hatteras in his natural voice.

"That's better," said Walker. "Let's go in and talk."

He went up the steps and lighted the lamp. Hatteras followed him and the two men faced one another. For a little while neither of them spoke. Walker was repeating to himself that this man with the black skin, naked except for a dirty loincloth and a few feathers on his head, was a white man married to a white wife who was sleeping—nay, more likely crying—not thirty yards away.

Hatteras began to mumble out his usual explanation of duty and the rest of it.

"That won't wash," interrupted Walker. "What is it? A woman?"

"Good Heaven, no!" cried Hatteras suddenly. It was plain that that explanation was at all events untrue. "Jim, I've a good mind to tell you all about it."

"You have got to," said Walker. He stood between Hatteras and the steps.

"I told you how this country fascinated me in spite of myself," he began.

"But I thought," interrupted Walker, "that you had got over that since—why, man, you are married," and he came across to Hatteras and shook him by the shoulder. "Don't you understand? You have a wife!"

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“I know,” said Hatteras. “But there are things deeper at the heart of me than the love of woman, and one of these things is the love of horror. I tell you, it bites as nothing else does in the world. It’s like absinthe, that turns you sick at the beginning and that you can’t do without once you have got the taste of it. Do you remember my first landing? It made me sick enough at the beginning, you know. But now——” He sat down in a chair and drew it close to Walker. His voice dropped to a passionate whisper, he locked and unlocked his fingers with feverish movements, and his eyes shifted and glittered in an unnatural excitement.

“It’s like going down to hell and coming up again and wanting to go down again. Oh, you’d want to go down again. You’d find the whole earth pale. You’d count the days until you went down again. Do you remember Orpheus? I think he looked back, not to see if Eurydice was coming after him, but because he knew it was the last glimpse he would get of hell.” At that he broke off and began to chant in a crazy voice, wagging his head and swaying his body to the rhythm of the lines—

*Quum subita incautum dementia cepit amantem
Ignoscenda quidem scirent si ignoscere manes;
Restitit Eurydicenque suam jam luce sub ipsa
Immemor heu! victusque animi respexit.*

“Oh, stop that!” cried Walker, and Hatteras laughed. “For God’s sake, stop it!”

For the words brought back to him in a flash the vision of a classroom with its chipped desks ranged against the varnished walls, the droning sound of the form-master’s voice, and the swish of lilac bushes against the

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lower window panes on summer afternoons. Then he said, "Oh, go on, and let's have done with it."

Hatteras took up his tale again, and it seemed to Walker that the man breathed the very miasma of the swamp and infected the room with it. He spoke of leopard societies, murder clubs, human sacrifices. He had witnessed them at the beginning, he had taken his share in them at the last. He told the whole story without shame, with indeed a glowing enjoyment. He spared Walker no details. He related them in their loathsome completeness until Walker felt stunned and sick. "Stop," he said again, "stop! That's enough."

Hatteras, however, continued. He appeared to have forgotten Walker's presence. He told the story to himself, for his own amusement, as a child will, and here and there he laughed, and the mere sound of his laughter was inhuman. He only came to a stop when he saw Walker hold out to him a cocked and loaded revolver.

"Well?" he asked. "Well?"

Walker still offered him the revolver.

"There are cases, I think, which neither God's law nor man's law seems to have provided for. There's your wife, you see, to be considered. If you don't take it I shall shoot you myself now, here, and mark you I shall shoot you for the sake of a boy I loved at school in the old country."

Hatteras took the revolver in silence, laid it on the table, fingered it for a little.

"My wife must never know," he said.

"There's the pistol. Outside's the swamp. The swamp will tell no tales, nor shall I. Your wife need never know."

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Hatteras picked up the pistol and stood up.

"Good-bye, Jim," he said, and half pushed out his hand. Walker shook his head, and Hatteras went out on the verandah and down the steps.

Walker heard him climb over the fence and then followed as far as the verandah. In the still night the rustle and swish of the undergrowth came quite clearly to his ears. The sound ceased, and a few minutes afterwards the muffled crack of a pistol-shot broke the silence like the tap of a hammer. The swamp, as Walker prophesied, told no tales. Mrs. Hatteras gave the one explanation of her husband's disappearance that she knew, and returned broken-hearted to England. There was some loud talk about the self-sacrificing energy which makes the English a dominant race, and there you might think is the end of the story.

But some years later Walker went trudging up the Ogowe River in Congo Français. He travelled as far as Woermann's factory in Njob Island, and, having transacted his business there, pushed up stream in the hope of opening the upper reaches for trade purposes. He travelled for a hundred and fifty miles in a little stern-wheel steamer. At that point he stretched an awning over a whale-boat, embarked himself, his banjo and eight blacks from the steamer, and rowed for another fifty miles. There he ran the boat's nose into a clay cliff close to a Fan village, and went ashore to negotiate with the chief.

There was a slip of forest between the village and the river banks, and while Walker was still dodging the palm creepers which tapestried it he heard a noise of lamentation. The noise came from the village, and was general enough to assure him that a chief was dead. It

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rose in a chorus of discordant howls, low in note and very long drawn out—wordless, something like the howls of an animal in pain, and yet human by reason of their infinite melancholy.

Walker pushed forward, came out upon a hillock fronting the palisade which closed the entrance to the single street of huts, and passed down into the village. It seemed as though he had been expected. For from every hut the Fans rushed out towards him, the men dressed in their filthiest rags, the women with their faces chalked and their heads shaved. They stopped, however, on seeing a white man, and Walker knew enough of their tongue to ascertain that they looked for the coming of the witch-doctor. The chief, it appeared, had died a natural death, and since the event is of sufficiently rare occurrence in the Fan country, it had promptly been attributed to witchcraft, and the witch-doctor had been sent for to discover the criminal. The village was consequently in a lively state of apprehension, for the end of those who bewitch chiefs to death is not easy. The Fans, however, politely invited Walker to inspect the corpse. It lay in a dark hut, packed with the corpse's relations, who were shouting to it at the top of their voices on the off-chance that its spirit might think better of its conduct and return to the body. They explained to Walker that they had tried all the usual varieties of persuasion. They had put red pepper into the chief's eyes while he was dying; they had propped open his mouth with a stick; they had burned fibres of the oil-nut under his nose. In fact they had made his death as uncomfortable as possible, but none the less he had died.

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The witch-doctor arrived on the heels of the explanation, and Walker, since he was powerless to interfere, thought it wise to retire for a time. He went back to the hillock on the edge of the trees. Thence he looked across and over the palisade, and had the whole length of the street within his view.

The witch-doctor entered in from the opposite end to the beating of many drums. The first thing Walker noticed was that he wore a square-skirted eighteenth century coat and a tattered pair of brocaded knee breeches on his bare legs; the second was that he limped—ever so slightly. Still he limped, and with the right leg. Walker felt a strong desire to see the man's face, and his heart thumped within him as he came nearer and nearer down the street. But his hair was so matted about his cheeks that Walker could not distinguish a feature. "If I was only near enough to see his eyes," he thought. But he was not near enough, nor would it have been prudent for him to have gone nearer.

The witch-doctor commenced the proceedings by ringing a handbell in front of every hut. But that method of detection failed to work. The bell rang successfully at every door. Walker watched the man's progress, watched his trailing limb, and began to discover familiarities in his manner: "Pure fancy," he argued with himself. "If he had not limped I should have noticed nothing."

Then the doctor took a wicker basket, covered with a rough wooden lid. The Fans gathered in front of him; he repeated their names one after the other, and at each name he lifted the lid. But that plan appeared to be no improvement, for the lid never stuck. It came off readily

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at each name. Walker, meanwhile, calculated the distance a man would have to cover who walked across country from Bonny River to the Ogowe, and he reflected with some relief that the chances were several thousand to one that any man who made the attempt, be he black or white, would be eaten on the way.

The witch-doctor turned back the big square cuffs of his sleeves as a conjurer will do, and again repeated the names. This time, however, at each name he rubbed the palms of his hands together. Walker was seized with a sudden longing to rush down into the village and examine the man's right forearm for a bullet mark. The longing grew on him. The witch-doctor went steadily through the list. Walker rose to his feet and took a step or two down the hillock, when, of a sudden, at one particular name, the doctor's hands flew apart and waved wildly about him. A single cry from a single voice went up out of the group of Fans. The group fell back and left one man standing alone. He made no defence, no resistance. Two men came forward and bound his hands and his feet and his body with tie-tie. Then they carried him within a hut.

"That's sheer murder," thought Walker. He could not rescue the victim, he knew. But he could get a nearer view of the witch-doctor. Already the man was packing up his paraphernalia. Walker stepped back among the trees, and running with all his speed, made the circuit of the village. He reached the further end of the street just as the witch-doctor walked out into the open.

Walker ran forward a yard or so until he, too, stood plain to see on the level ground. The witch-doctor did

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see him and stopped. He stopped only for a moment and gazed earnestly in Walker's direction. Then he went on again towards his own hut in the forest.

Walker made no attempt to follow him. "He has seen me," he thought. "If he knows me he will come down to the river bank to-night." Consequently, he made the black rowers camp a couple of hundred yards down stream. He himself remained alone in his canoe.

The night fell noiseless and black, and the enclosing forest made it yet blacker. A few stars burned in the strip of sky above his head. Those stars and the glimmering of the clay bank to which the boat was moored were the only light which Walker had. It was as dark as that night when Walker waited for Hatteras at the wicket gate.

He placed his gun and a pouch of cartridges on one side, an unlighted lantern on the other, and then he took up his banjo, and again he waited. He waited for a couple of hours, until a light crackle as of twigs snapping came to him out of the forest. Walker struck a chord on his banjo, and played a hymn tune. He played, "Abide with me," thinking that some picture of a home, of a Sunday evening in England's summer time, perhaps of a group of girls singing about a piano, might flash into the darkened mind of the man upon the bank, and draw him as with cords. The music went tinkling up and down the river, but no one spoke, no one moved upon the bank. So Walker changed the tune, and played a melody of the barrel organs and Piccadilly Circus. He had not played more than a dozen bars, before he heard a sob from the bank, and then the sound of something sliding down the clay. The next instant, a figure shone

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black against the clay. The boat lurched under the weight of a foot upon the gunwale, and a man plumped down in front of Walker.

"Well, what is it?" asked Walker, as he laid down his banjo and felt for a match in his pocket.

It seemed as though the words roused the man to a perception that he had made a mistake. He said as much hurriedly in trade-English, and sprang up as though he would leap from the boat. Walker caught hold of his ankle.

"No, you don't," said he; "you must have meant to visit me. This isn't Henley," and he jerked the man back into the bottom of the boat.

The man explained that he had paid a visit out of the purest friendliness.

"You're the witch-doctor, I suppose," said Walker.

The other replied that he was, and proceeded to state that he was willing to give information about much that made white men curious. He would explain why it was of singular advantage to possess a white man's eyeball, and how very advisable it was to kill anyone you caught making Itung. The danger of passing near a cotton tree which had red earth at the roots provided a subject which no prudent man should disregard; and Tando, with his driver ants, was worth conciliating. The witch-doctor was prepared to explain to Walker how to conciliate Tando. Walker replied that it was very kind of the witch-doctor, but Tando did not really worry him. He was, in fact, very much more worried by an inability to understand how a native so high up the Ogowe River had learned to speak trade-English.

The witch-doctor waved the question aside, and re-

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marked that Walker must have enemies. "Pussin bad too much," he called them. "Pussin woh-woh. Berrah well! Ah send grand krau-krau and dem pussin die one time."

Walker could not recollect for the moment any "pussin" whom he wished to die one time, whether from grand krau-krau or any other disease. "Wait a bit," he continued, "there is one man—Dick Hatteras!" and he struck the match suddenly. The witch-doctor started forward as though to put it out.

Walker, however, had the door of the lantern open. He set the match to the wick of the candle, and closed the door fast. The witch-doctor drew back. Walker lifted the lantern and threw the light on his face. The witch-doctor buried his face in his hands, and supported his elbows on his knees. Immediately Walker darted forward a hand, seized the loose sleeve of the witch-doctor's coat, and slipped it back along his arm to the elbow. It was the sleeve of the right arm, and there on the fleshy part of the forearm was the scar of a bullet.

"Yes," said Walker. "By God, it is Dick Hatteras!"

"Well?" cried Hatteras, taking his hands from his face. "What the devil made you tum-tum 'Tommy Atkins' on the banjo? Damn you!"

"Dick, I saw you this afternoon."

"I know, I know. Why on earth didn't you kill me that night in your compound?"

"I mean to make up for that mistake to-night!"

Walker took his rifle on to his knee. Hatteras saw the movement, leaned forward quickly, snatched up the rifle, snatched up the cartridges, thrust a couple of car-

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tridges into the breech, and handed the loaded rifle back to his old friend.

“That’s right,” he said. “I remember. ‘There are some cases neither God’s law nor man’s law has quite made provision for.’” And then he stopped, with his finger on his lip. “Listen!” he said.

From the depths of the forest there came faintly, very sweetly the sound of church-bells ringing—a peal of bells ringing at midnight in the heart of West Africa. Walker was startled. The sound seemed fairy work, so faint, so sweet was it.

“It’s no fancy, Jim,” said Hatteras, “I hear them every night, and at matins and vespers. There was a Jesuit monastery here two hundred years ago. The bells remain, and some of the clothes.” He touched his coat as he spoke. “The Fans still ring the bells from habit. Just think of it! Every morning, every evening, every midnight, I hear those bells. They talk to me of little churches perched on hillsides in the old country, of hawthorn lanes, and women—English women. English girls—thousands of miles away, going along them to church. God help me! Jim, have you got an English pipe?”

“Yes; an English briarwood and some bird’s-eye.”

Walker handed Hatteras his briarwood and his pouch of tobacco. Hatteras filled the pipe, lit it at the lantern, and sucked at it avidly for a moment. Then he gave a sigh and drew in the smoke more slowly and yet more slowly.

“My wife?” he asked at last, in a low voice.

“She is in England. She thinks you dead.”

Hatteras nodded.

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“There’s a jar of Scotch whisky in the locker behind you,” said Walker.

Hatteras turned round, lifted out the jar and a couple of tin cups. He poured whisky into each and handed one to Walker.

“No, thanks,” said Walker. “I don’t think I will.”

Hatteras looked at his companion for an instant. Then he emptied deliberately both cups over the side of the boat. Next he took the pipe from his lips. The tobacco was not half consumed. He poised the pipe for a little in his hand. Then he blew into the bowl and watched the dull red glow kindle into sparks of flame as he blew. Very slowly he tapped the bowl against the thwart of the boat until the burning tobacco fell with a hiss into the water. He laid the pipe gently down and stood up.

“So long, old man,” he said, and sprang out on the clay. Walker turned the lantern until the light made a disc upon the bank.

“Good-bye, Jim,” said Hatteras, and he climbed up the bank until he stood in the light of the lantern. Twice Walker raised the rifle to his shoulder, twice he lowered it. Then he remembered that Hatteras and he had been at school together.

“Good-bye, Dicky,” he cried, and fired. Hatteras tumbled down to the boat-side. The blacks down river were roused by the shot. Walker shouted to them to stay where they were, and as soon as their camp was quiet he stepped ashore. He filled up the whisky jar with water, tied it to Hatteras’ feet, shook his hand, and pushed the body into the river. The next morning he started back to Fernan Vaz.

THE RANSOM

By CUTLIFFE HYNE

METHUEN wriggled himself into a corner of the hut, rested his shoulders against the *adobe* wall, and made himself as comfortable as the raw-hide thongs with which he was tied up would permit. "Well, Calvert," said he, "I hope you quite realise what an extremely ugly hole we're in?"

"Garcia will hang the pair of us before sunset," I replied, "and that's a certainty. My only wonder is we haven't been strung up before this."

"You think a rope and a tree's a sure thing, do you? I wish I could comfort myself with that idea. I wouldn't mind a simple gentlemanly dose of hanging. But there are more things in heaven and earth, Calvert——" He broke off and whistled drearily.

I moistened my dry, cracked lips, and asked him huskily what he meant.

"Torture, old man. That's what we're being saved for, I'm very much afraid. A Peruvian guerilla is never a gentle-minded animal at the best of times, and Garcia is noted as being the most vindictive brute to be found between the Andes and the Pacific. Then if you'll kindly remember how you and I have harried him, and shot down his men, and cut off his supplies, and made his life a torment and a thing of tremors for the last four weeks, you'll see he had got a big bill against us. If he'd hated

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us less, he'd have had us shot at sight when we were caught; as it is, I'm afraid he felt that a couple of bullets in hot blood wouldn't pay off the score."

"If he thinks the matter over calmly, he'll not very well avoid seeing that if he wipes us out there'll be reprisals to be looked for."

"And a fat lot," replied Methuen grimly, "he'll care for the chance of those. If we are put out of the way, he knows quite well that there are no two other men in the Chilian Service who can keep him on the trot as we have done. No, sir. We can't scare Garcia with that yarn. You think that because we're alive still there's hope. Well, I've sufficient faith in my theory for this: If anyone offered me a shot through the head now, I'd accept it, and risk the chance."

"You take the gloomy view. Now the man's face is not altogether cruel. There's humour in it."

"Then probably he'll show his funniness when he takes it out of us," Methuen retorted. "Remember that punishment in the 'Mikado'? That had 'something humorous' in it. Boiling oil, if I don't forget."

Involuntarily I shuddered, and the raw-hide ropes cut deeper into my wrists and limbs. I had no great dread of being killed in the ordinary way, or I should not have entered the Chilian Army in the middle of a hot war; and I was prepared to risk the ordinary woundings of action in return for the excitements of the fight. But to be caught, and held a helpless prisoner, and be deliberately tortured to death by every cruelty this malignant fiend, Garcia, could devise, was a possibility I had not counted on before. In fact, as the Peruvians had repeatedly given out that they would offer no quarter to

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us English in the Chilian Service, we had all of us naturally resolved to die fighting rather than be taken. And, indeed, this desperate feeling paid very well, since on two separate occasions when Methuen and myself had been cornered with small bodies of men, and would have surrendered if we could have been guaranteed our lives, we went at them each time so furiously that on each occasion we broke through and escaped. But one thinks nothing of the chances of death and maiming at those times. There is a glow within one's ribs which scares away all trace of fear.

"I suppose there's no chance of rescue?" I said.

"None whatever," said Methuen, with a little sigh. "Think it over, Calvert. We start out from the *hacienda* with an escort of five men, sing out our *adios*, and ride away to enjoy a ten days' leave in the mountains. The troops are left to recruit; for ten days they can drop us out of mind. Within twelve hours of our leaving them, Garcia cleverly ambushes us in a cañon where not three people pass in a year. The poor beggars who form our escort are all *gastados*."

"Yes, but are you sure of that?" I interrupted. "I saw them all drop off their horses when we were fired upon, but that doesn't prove they were dead. Some might have been merely wounded, and when the coast cleared, it is just possible they crawled back to our post with the news. Still, I own it's a small chance."

"And you may divest yourself of even that thin rag of hope. Whilst you were being slung senseless across a horse, I saw that man without the ears go round with a *machete*, and—well, when the brute had done, there was

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no doubt about the poor fellows being as dead as lumps of mud. Ah, and talk of the devil——”

The earless man swung into the hut.

“*Buenas, Señores,*” said he mockingly. “You will have the honour now of being tried, and I’m sure I hope you will be pleased with the result.”

“I suppose we shall find that out later,” said Methuen with a yawn; “but anyway, I don’t think much of your hospitality. A cup of wine now after that ugly ride we’ve had to-day would come in very handy, or even a nip of *aguardiente* would be better than nothing.”

“I fancy it might be a waste of good liquor,” was the answer; “but you must ask Garcia. He will see to your needs.”

A guard of twelve ragged fellows, armed with carbine and *machete*, had followed the earless man into the hut, and two of them, whilst he talked, had removed the seizings from our knees and ankles. They helped us to our feet, and we walked with them into the dazzling sunshine outside.

“I’ll trouble some of you for my hat,” said Methuen, when the glare first blazed down on him; and then, as no one took any notice of the request, he lurched against the earless man with a sudden swerve, and knocked his sombrero on to the brown baked turf. “Well, I’ll have yours, you flea-ridden *ladron,*” said he; “it’s better than nothing at all. Pick up the foul thing, and shake it, and put it on my head.”

The guerilla bared his teeth like an animal, and drew a pistol. I thought he would have shot my comrade out of hand, and by his look I could see that Methuen expected it. Indeed, he had deliberately invited the man

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to that end. But, either because the nearness of Garcia and fear of his discipline stayed him, or through thought of a finer vengeance which was to come, the earless man contented himself by dealing a battery of kicks and oaths, and bidding our guards to ward us more carefully.

In this way, then, we walked along a path between two fields of vines, and passed down the straggling street of the village which the guerillas had occupied, and brought up in a little *plaza* which faced the white-walled chapel. In the turret a bell was tolling dolefully with slow strokes, and as the sound came to me through the heated air, it did not require much imagination to frame it into an omen. In the centre of the *plaza* was a vast magnolia tree, filled with scented wax-like flowers, and splashed with cones of corral-pink.

We drew up before the *piazza* of the principal house. Seated under its shade in a split-cane rocker, Garcia awaited us, a small, meagre, dark man, with glittering teeth, and fingers lemon-coloured from cigarette juice.

He stared at us and spat; and the trial, such as it was, began.

I must confess that the proceedings astonished me. Animus there certainly was; the guerillas as a whole were disposed to give us short shrift; but their chief insisted on at least some parade of justice. The indictment was set forward against us: We had shot, hanged, and harried, and in fact used all the harshness of war. Had we been Chilians in the Chilian Service, this might have been pardonable; but we were aliens from across the sea; mere freebooters, fighting, not for a country, but each for his own hand; and as such we were beyond the pale of mili-

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tary courtesy. We had earned a punishment. Had we any word to speak why this should not be given?

Garcia looked towards us expectantly, and then set himself to roll a fresh cigarette.

I shrugged my shoulders. It seemed useless to say anything.

Methuen said: "Look here, sir! You've got us, there is no mistake about that. It seems to me you've two courses before you, and they are these: Either, you can kill us, more or less barbarously, in which case you will raise a most pestilential hunt at your heels; or, you can put us up to ransom. Now neither Calvert here, nor myself, are rich men; but if you choose to let us go with sound skins, we're prepared to pay ten thousand Chilian dollars apiece for our passports. Now, does that strike you?"

Garcia finished rolling his cigarette, and lit it with care. He inhaled a deep breath of smoke.

"Señor," he said (the words coming out from between his white teeth with little puffs of vapour), "you do not appear to understand. You fight as a soldier of fortune, and I am merely in arms as a patriot. I am no huckster to traffic men's lives for money, nor am I a timorous fool to be scared into robbing a culprit of his just dues."

"Very well, then," said Methuen, "murder the pair of us."

Garcia smiled unpleasantly. "You may be a very brave man," said he, "but you are not a judicious one. To a judge less just than myself this insolence might have added something to your punishment; but as it is I shall overlook what you have said, and only impose the penalty I had determined upon before you spoke."

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He lifted his thin yellow fingers, and drew a fresh breath of smoke. Then he waved the cigarette towards the magnolia tree in the centre of the *plaza*. "You see that bough which juts out towards the chapel?"

"It's made for a gallows," said Methuen.

"Precisely," said the guerilla, "and it will be used as one inside ten minutes. I shall string one of you up by the neck, to dangle there between heaven and earth. The other man shall have a rifle and cartridges, and if, standing where he does now, he can cut with a bullet the rope with which his friend is hanged, then you shall both go free."

"I hear you say it," said Methuen. "In other words you condemn one of us to be strangled slowly without chance of reprieve. But what guarantee have we that you will not slit the second man's throat after you have had your sport out of him?"

Garcia sprang to his feet with a stamp of passion, and the chair rolled over backwards. "You foul adventurer!" he cried. "You paid man-killer!" and then he broke off with a bitter "Pah!" and folded his arms, and for a minute held silence till he got his tongue in hand again. "Señor," he said coldly, "my country's wrongs may break my heart, but they can never make me break my word. I may be a hunted guerilla, but I still remain a gentleman."

"I beg your pardon," said Methuen.

"We will now," continued Garcia icily, "find out which of you two will play which part. Afterwards I will add another condition which may lend more skill to what follows. I will not coerce you. Kindly choose between yourselves which of you will hang and which will shoot."

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My comrade shrugged his shoulders. "I like you, Calvert, old man," said he, "but I'm not prepared to dance on nothing for you."

"It would be simplest to toss for exit," I said.

"Precisely; but, my dear fellow, I have both hands trussed up, and no coin."

"Pray let me assist you," said Garcia. "Señor Calvert, may I trouble you for an expression of opinion?"

He leant over the edge of the *piazza*, and span a dollar into the air. I watched it with a thumping heart, and when for an instant it paused, a dazzling splash of brightness against the red-tiled roof, I cried: "Heads!"

The coin fell with a faint thud in the dust a yard from my feet.

"Well?" said Methuen.

"I congratulate you, old fellow. I swing."

He frowned and made no reply. Garcia's voice broke the silence. "*Bueno*, Señor Methuen," he said. "I advise you to shoot straight, or you will not get home even now. You remember I said there was still another condition. Well, here you are: you must cut your friend down with a bullet before he is quite dead, or I'll string you up beside him."

Methuen let up a short laugh. "Remember what I said about that fellow in 'the Mikado,' Calvert? You see where the 'humour' comes in? We've had that coin spun for nothing. You and I must change positions."

"Not at all. I take what I've earned."

"But I say yes. It works this way: I took it that the man who was hanging stood a delicate chance anyway, and I didn't feel generous enough to risk it. But now the Señor here has put in the extra clause, the situation

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is changed altogether. You aren't a brilliant shot, old man, but you may be able to cut me down with a bullet if you remember what you're firing for, and shoot extra straight. But it's a certain thing that I couldn't do it if I blazed away till Doomsday. The utmost I could manage would be to fluke a pellet into your worthy self. So you see I must wear the hemp, and you must apply your shoulder to the rifle butt. Laugh, you fool," he added in English. "Grin, and say something funny, or these brutes will think we care for them."

But I was incapable of further speech. I could have gibed at the prospect of being hanged myself, but the horror of this other ordeal turned me sick and dumb. And at what followed I looked on mutely.

There was a well at one side of the *plaza*, and the earless man went and robbed the windlass of its rope. With clumsy landsman's fingers he formed a noose, took it to the great magnolia tree, and threw the loose end over the projecting branch. The bell of the little white chapel opposite went on tolling gravely, and they marched my friend up to his fate over the sun-baked dust. They passed a thong round his ankles; the earless man fitted the noose to his throat; a dozen of the guerillas with shouts and laughter laid hold of the hauling part of the line; and then a voice from behind fell upon my ear. Garcia was speaking to me. With a strain I dragged my eyes away from the glare of the *plaza*, and listened. He was smiling wickedly.

"——, and so your pluck has oozed away?" he was saying, as the cigarette smoke billowed up from between the white walls of his teeth. "Well, of course, if you do not care for the game, you can throw up your hand

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at once. You've only to say the word, and you can be dangling on that bough there inside a couple of minutes. It's quite strong enough to carry more fruit than it will bear just now. But it's rather hard on your friend not to try——”

My wits came to me again. “You dolt!” I cried; “how can I shoot with my arms trussed up like this? If the whole thing is not a mockery, cut me adrift and give me a rifle.”

He beckoned to one of his men, and the fellow came up and cut off the lashings from my wrists and elbows; and then, with a sour smile, he motioned to some of the others, who drew near and held their weapons at the ready. “I dare wager, Señor Calvert,” he said, “that if you'd me for a mark you would not score a miss. So I wish to insure that you do not shoot in this direction.” He raised his voice, and shouted across the baking sunlight: “Quite ready here, *amigos*. So up with the target.”

Now up to this point I am free to own that since our capture I had cut a pretty poor figure. I had not whined, but at the same time I had not seen my way to put on Methuen's outward show of careless brazen courage. But when I watched the guerillas tighten on the rope and sway him up till his stretched-out feet swung a couple of hand-spans above the ground, then my coolness returned to me, and my nerves set like icicles in their sockets. He was sixty yards away, and at that distance, the well-rope dwindled to the bigness of a shoemaker's thread. Moreover, the upper two-thirds of it was almost invisible, because it hung before a background of shadows.

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But the eighteen inches above my poor friend's head stood out clear and distinct against the white walls of the chapel beyond, and as it swayed to pulsing of the body beneath, it burnt itself upon my eyesight till all the rest of the world was blotted out in a red haze. I never knew before how thoroughly a man could concentrate himself.

They handed me the rifle, loaded and cocked. It was a single-shot Winchester, and I found out afterwards, though I did not know it then, that either through fiendish wish to further hamper my aim, or through pure forgetfulness, they had left the sights cocked up at three hundred yards. But that did not matter; the elevation was a detail of minor import; and besides, I was handling the weapon as a game shot fires, with head up, and eyes glued on the mark, and rifle-barrel following the eyes by instinct alone. You must remember that I had no stationary mark to aim at. My poor comrade was writhing and swaying at the end of his tether, and the well-rope swung hither and thither like some contorted pendulum.

Once I fired, twice I fired, six times, ten times, and still the rope remained uncut, and the bullets rattled harmlessly against the white walls of the chapel beyond. With the eleventh shot came the tinkle of broken glass, and the bell, after a couple of hurried nervous clangs, ceased tolling altogether. With the thirteenth shot a shout went up from the watching crowd. I had stranded the rope, and the body which dangled beneath the magnolia tree began slowly to gyrate.

Then came a halt in the firing. I handed the Winchester back to the fellow who was reloading, but somehow or other the exploded cartridge had jammed in the breach. I danced and raged before him in my passion

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of hurry, and the cruel brutes round yelled in ecstasies of merriment. Only Garcia did not laugh. He re-rolled a fresh cigarette, with his thin yellow fingers, and leisurely rocked himself in the split-cane chair. The man could not have been more unmoved if he had been overlooking a performance of Shakespeare.

At last I tore the Winchester from the hands of the fellow who was fumbling with it, and clawed at the jammed cartridge myself, breaking my nails and smearing the breech-lock with blood. If it had been welded into one solid piece, it could scarcely have been firmer. But the thrill of the moment gave my hands the strength of pincers. The brass case moved from side to side; it began to crumple; and I drew it forth and hurled it from me, a mere ball of shapeless, twisted metal. Then one of the laughing brutes gave me another cartridge, and once more I shouldered the loaded weapon.

The mark was easier now. The struggles of my poor friend had almost ceased, and though the well-rope still swayed, its movements were comparatively rhythmical, and to be counted upon. I snapped down the sights, put the butt-plate to my shoulder, and cuddled the stock with my cheek. Here for the first time was a chance of something steadier than a snap-shot.

I pressed home the trigger as the well-rope reached one extremity of its swing. Again a few loose ends sprang from the rope, and again the body began slowly to gyrate. But was it Methuen I was firing to save, or was I merely wasting shot to cut down a mass of cold dead clay?

I think that more agony was compressed for me into a few minutes then than most men meet with in a life-

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time. Even the onlooking guerillas were so stirred that for the first time their gibing ceased, and two of them of their own accord handed me cartridges. I slipped one home and closed the breech-lock. The perspiration was running in a stream from my chin. Again I fired. Again the well-rope was snipped, and I could see the loosened strands ripple out as a snake unwraps itself from a branch.

One more shot. God in heaven, I missed! Why was I made to be a murderer like this?

Garcia's voice came to me coldly. "Your last chance, Señor. I can be kept waiting here no longer. And I think you are wasting time. Your friend seems to have quitted us already."

Another cartridge. I sank to one knee and rested my left elbow on the other. The *plaza* was hung in breathless silence. Every eye was strained to see the outcome of the shot. The men might be inhuman in their cruelty, but they were human enough in their curiosity.

The body span to one end of its swing: I held my fire. It swung back, and the rifle muzzle followed. Like some mournful pendulum it passed through the air, and then a glow of certainty filled me like a drink. I knew I could not miss that time; and I fired; and the body, in a limp and shapeless heap, fell to the ground.

With a cry I threw the rifle from me and raced across the sunlit dust. Not an arm was stretched out to stop me. Only when I had reached my friend and loosened that horrible ligature from his neck, did I hear voices clamouring over my fate.

"And now this other Inglese, your excellency," the earless man said. "Shall we shoot him from here, or shall we string him up in the other's place?"

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But the answer was not what the fellow expected. Garcia replied to him in a shriek of passion. "You foul, slaughtering brute," he cried, "another offer like that and I'll pistol you where you stand. You heard me pass my word: do you dream that I could break it? They have had their punishment, and if we see one another again, the meeting will be none of my looking for. We leave this *puebla* in five minutes. See to your duties. Go."

The words came to me dully through the heated air. I was almost mad with the thought that my friend was dead, and that the fault was mine, *mine*, mine alone!

I listened for his breaths; they did not come. I felt for a heart-throb; there was not so much as a flutter. His neck was seared by a ghastly ring. His face was livid. And yet I would not admit even then that he was dead. With a cry I seized his arms, and moved them first above his head till he looked like a man about to dive, and then clapped them against his sides, repeating this an infinite number of times, praying that the airs I drew through his lungs might blow against some smouldering spark of humanity, and kindle it once more into life.

The perspiration rolled from me; my mouth was as a sandpit; the heavy scent of the magnolia blossoms above sickened me with its strength; the sight departed from my eyes. I could see nothing beyond a small circle of the hot dust around, which waved and danced in the sunlight, and the little green lizards which came and looked at me curiously, and forgot that I was human.

And then, of a sudden, my comrade gave a sob, and his chest began to heave of itself without my laborious aid. And after that for a while I knew very little more.

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The sun-baked dust danced more wildly in the sunshine, the lizards changed to darker colours, the light went out, and when next I came to my senses Methuen was sitting up with one hand clutching at his throat, looking at me wildly.

“What has happened?” he gasped. “I thought I was dead, and Garcia had hanged me. Garcia—— No one is here. The *puebla* seems deserted. Calvert, tell me.”

“They have gone,” I said. “We are alive. We will get away from here as soon as you can walk.”

He rose to his feet, swaying. “I can walk now. But what about you?”

“I am an old man,” I said, “wearily old. In the last two hours I have grown a hundred years. But I think I can walk also. Yes, look, I am strong. Lean on my arm. Do you see that broken window in the chapel? When I fired through that, the bell stopped tolling.”

“Let us go inside the chapel for a minute before we leave the village,” said Methuen. “We have had a very narrow escape, old man. I—I—feel thankful.”

There was a faint smell of incense inside that little white-walled chapel. The odour of it lingers by me still.

THE OTHER TWIN

By EDWIN PUGH

IT was the hour of siesta. Santa Plaza lay blistering, sweltering, in the white-hot glare of the noon-tide sun. The dust lay thick on the roads and terraces, the copings and the roofs of the houses, like untrodden snow. The sea shone like a shield of brass reflecting a brassy sky. There was not the least sign of movement anywhere.

Then Franker, the Englishman, came limping along the Lido, sat down in the shadow of the old sea-wall, and examined with grave solicitude a swollen and blistered foot swathed in filthy, blood-stained rags.

This Franker had once been a well-known figure in all the ports of those far-off southern seas. It was whispered that in the long ago he had been a gentleman. Now he was just the sport of circumstance, a jack of all trades, so long as they were indifferent honest; sailorman, stock-rider, storekeeper, croupier, crimp, anything that happened along in his hour of need. But lately he had disappeared from his old haunts, and it was unlikely that any of his old acquaintances would have recognised in that ragged and gaunt, unwashed and black-bearded wastrel on the beach the spruce adventurer of former days.

He had the look of a hunted creature. There was fear in his eyes. Even as he sat there nursing his aching foot, parched and hungry, haggard and weary, his head was

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perpetually turning from side to side, and ever and again he looked over his shoulder, to left and right, as if he were in dread expectation that at any moment some enemy might creep upon him unawares. And, indeed, he was in parlous case. For he had killed a man, not in itself an exceptional incident of course—only in this instance the man was one of twins, and the other twin had vowed a vendetta against him.

These twins were named Bibi and Bobo, and the extraordinary likeness between them was accentuated by their habit of always dressing alike, talking alike, thinking alike. There were some who said that they could distinguish one twin from the other, but these were foolish, vainglorious men. The thing was manifestly impossible. Even Franker did not know whether it was Bibi or Bobo he had killed.

It happened in a gambling den in Suranim, up country. They were playing the childish game of *boule*, and some silly dispute had arisen. Franker had lost his temper, and knocked one of the twins down. For once in a way the other twin had not been present, or most assuredly Franker would have been chived in the back before he could turn round. As it was, he saw his fallen adversary rise slowly, slowly draw a red smear across his face with the back of his hand, and then quicken on a sudden into antic activity. There was the flash of a knife. Franker dodged. The other men stood back to watch the fun—not to see fair play. Fair play was a jewel of little value in the estimation of that crew. A moment Franker hesitated, then whipped out his gun and fired point-blank at the twin. He dropped dead. Before the smoke had cleared away or the echoes of the

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report had subsided into stillness, Franker had left the gambling-house and was running for his life into the wilderness.

There, for three days, he lost himself. That was his idea: to lose himself. He wanted to be lost, utterly lost to the world. For he knew that so long as the other twin lived his own chances of living were reduced to the last recurring decimal. Bibi or Bobo—whichever it was—would never rest until he had wrought vengeance on his brother's murderer. Though it wasn't a murder, of course, but a duel in which each had taken the same risk of death. If Franker had not killed Bibi or Bobo, Bibi or Bobo would have killed him. He wished he knew which of the twins it was he had killed. So idiotic not to know. So confusing. It made your head ache, wondering. And in your sleep you dreamed of horrible, two-headed monsters coming at you crabwise, with arms and legs all round them.

On the third day of his sojourn in the wilderness the other twin had very nearly caught him napping. He had sunk down exhausted in a sandy hollow fringed with palms, and for a moment closed his eyes. And in that moment the redness of his lowered eyelids had been suddenly clouded by a shadow. In an instant he was on his feet, wide awake again. And there was the figure of the other twin in the act of flinging itself upon him. He fired an aimless shot at that black apparition, then bolted.

And all that day and all that night he had wound and wound an intorted course through virgin forest, hoping thus to shake off his pursuer. And all that day and all that night he had known that his pursuer followed him,

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shadowed him, stalked him, with a merciless delight in that persecution born of an insatiate hate.

Next day Franker, having doubled on his tracks, found himself on a quayside, and had shipped as a fore-castle hand on an old iron hooker bound for the Caribs with a mixed cargo. He never knew or cared what that mixed cargo consisted of. He was too busy sleeping, when he wasn't too sore from being kicked into wakefulness, to bother about trivial details. He could have left the ship at the first of the Caribs, but an island is a prison, and his yearning was for wide free spaces where a man can at least get a run for his money. So he had returned on the hooker, and had been paid off with the lurid compliments of the purser, and was once more adrift.

But the story of his wanderings and adventures over the greater part of the southern hemisphere would fill many books. Months passed, a year passed, two years, and all the while Franker was dogged by the avenger. Ever and again, just when he thought that he had at last shaken off that deadly pursuit, the other twin turned up again. And gradually it was borne in upon him that the other twin might have killed him long since had he wished. He had had numberless opportunities, and had not taken them. This puzzled Franker a bit, and then he hit upon the truth. There is more joy in the hunting than in the killing. There is more cat-like satisfaction in the slow torture of its victim than in the crunching up of its dead bones. He began to think of the other twin as a cat-like creature, exercising a cruelty of the mind far more subtle and devilish than any mere crude cruelty of tooth and claw. When the avenger tired of the sport, then he would strike. And not till then. Meanwhile,

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Franker was condemned to a daily round of unremitting vigilance, ceaseless watchfulness, unending apprehension.

He had been a big man, strong and fearless, with bold eyes and the voice of a bull. Now he had become a shuffling, whimpering, trembling thing of nerves and tears, who dared look no one in the face lest it should be the face of his enemy. In the old days, with no other resources than his health and vigour, bodily and mental, he had used to take chances with an overbearing recklessness, and thrust and curse his way through the mob of other roustabouts like unto himself, with whom he had fought for the means of existence. And he had been—he realised that now—quite happy then. There were times when he told himself that he would stand fast against his pursuer, force him into the open, then turn upon him and rend him, and so make an end of this long-drawn-out agony. But when the moment came his wits fled, he was distraught and afraid, he could think only of flight.

It was now a full fortnight since he had seen Bibi—or Bobo. But there had been other fortnights during which he had not seen him. And always, inevitably, he had reappeared. So would he reappear again.

Franker gazed out from the shadow of the old seawall across the glittering, limitless sea, and wished that he might drown himself in its depths. But he was not yet quite mad enough for that. Though life had become as a nightmare to him, and death as the awakening to the cool, calm peace of dawn; though life offered nothing but torment, and death offered surcease of pain, he still clung to life. It was in the nature of his being to cling to life. He was not of the stuff that gives in.

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But if only he could rest awhile! If only he could lie still in some sheltered place, safe from his enemy, and thus regain his old control over his faculties, recuperate his strength!

At the western end of the Lido, where the coast swept in a wide curve to the lighthouse and the harbour, there was a long white wall. And as he remembered what that wall enclosed, what it signified, Franker had an inspiration. His face was suddenly irradiated. He laughed aloud. What a fool!—God in Heaven!—what a fool he had been not to think of that before! He rose on trembling legs and began to shamble along the beach towards that far-off haven of refuge.

The prison official, in his gaudy livery of gold and scarlet and his immense cocked hat, conducted him to the chief inspector's office.

“Yes?”

Franker desired to be sworn. He had a crime to confess: it had troubled his conscience for years.

“Yes?”

An affair of opium smuggling, ship's papers forged, and customs burked. It was a true story enough, only Franker himself had not been implicated in it. The police had been so long on the track of that crime they had given it up as hopeless. And now here there was the chief criminal, a fine fat bird, dropping into the net of his own free will. The chief inspector rubbed his dry palms together as he thought of the luscious report he would send to the magistracy.

Then he committed Franker to the custody of another prison official, less gaudy than the first, and Franker was led away to the cell.

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This was a big, bare, barn-like place of stone, that sometimes contained as many as twenty prisoners huddled indiscriminately together. But just now crime was slack. Franker had the whole cell to himself.

As the gaoler slammed the door on him he fell on his knees with a weeping face, and offered up thanks for this blessed refuge, this safe harbour of retreat from his relentless enemy, this sanctuary. Here, at last, he was free from the fear of pursuit. Here, during the year or two of his imprisonment, he could rest and sleep, rest his mind and find his sleep that sweet relief from the tortures of the last two years which would gradually restore him again to health and sanity.

Even as he prayed he toppled down face forward and lay there quite still, breathing softly, evenly, in peaceful slumber.

The light was fading, there was a red stain of sunset on the wall when he awoke. It was a rattling and clanging of bolts and chains that had roused him. He sat up, blinking stupidly, at first not knowing where he was. Then, as he remembered, he shed tears of joy again, and clasped his hands together in an access of delight.

The sounds drew nearer. The heavy, barred door of the prison chamber was flung open. He saw the burly figure of a gaoler over-shadowing another smaller figure that seemed to be precipitated from behind into the misty vastness of the cell. It fell head-long at Franker's feet, and lay there stirring feebly like a wounded beetle.

Franker watched his writhings . . . and a slow, cold horror grew upon him.

His fellow-prisoner raised himself on all fours, then

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sat up and squatted there, cross-legged, like a Chinese bonze.

It was Bibi—or Bobo.

Franker uttered a cry.

“And hast thou found me, O mine enemy!”

The other twin had leapt to his feet. He shrank back, crouching, snarling, spitting like a cat. The moment for the happy dispatch was come at last. He drew his knife and fingered its keen blade lovingly, then came mincing on tiptoe towards Franker.

As Franker's hands closed round his throat he drove the blade deep into Franker's breast.

THE NARROW WAY

By R. ELLIS ROBERTS

I

AT his confirmation he had annoyed the Bishop of London (at that time it was Frederick Temple) by insisting on taking the additional names of Alfonso Mary Alexander. He had surprised him by the resolute manner in which he had answered his questions about the origin of taking names at confirmation; and enraged him by his explanation that he desired to be called Alexander in memory of that great Pope, the Lord Alexander VI, who had put the whole Christian world under an obligation by his discovery of the devotion of the Angelus. "This devotion," the boy murmured to the astounded Bishop, "as your Lordship no doubt knows, has been from eternity the privilege of the Holy Angels, and was not entrusted to men until the proximity of the horrible heresies of the German reformation rendered the patronage of Mary necessary for the protection of her son." The Bishop's chaplain had tried to prevent Frank Lascelles' indiscretion; but Temple's abrupt gesture had hindered his efforts. When Lascelles finished the Bishop gazed at him in silence for a minute.

"Well, I hope you'll live to grow out of this foolery. But you know your rights and you shall have 'em."

Temple, was, as his old foes had discovered years before, eminently just.

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More than twenty years had passed since that confirmation. Frank Alfonso Mary Alexander Lascelles had gone to Oxford and to Ely, and had been ordained to a small country parish in that diocese. After two years of his curacy, an injudicious layman presented him to the living of S. Uny and S. Petroc in the north of Cornwall. He had been there now for over nineteen years. When he had come he found his church empty; now it was full. It was full of children and boys. Occasionally a few mothers, and, when he was sober, the village drunkard, and, when she was penitent, the prostitute from the Church Town, came to Mass as well; but generally the Church of S. Uny, down by the beach, was filled only by children and boys.

This result Frank Lascelles had been long in attaining. The parish he served was predominantly Methodist. He had found a congregation of three—the publican, the ostler of the hotel, and an old maiden lady who rang the bell, and called herself the pew-opener. Lascelles soon shocked the respectability of the publican and the Protestantism of the ostler: but the old lady remained faithful to him. She did not stir when he had the three-decker cut down, and a new altar reared at the East end. She seemed to welcome the great images, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, The Sacred Heart, S. Joseph and S. Anthony which Lascelles put up in his church. She did not care whether he said Mass in Latin or English; and incense and holy water both left her tranquil. It was otherwise with the village. Though the Methodists never entered the church, except for a wedding or a funeral, they thought they had a right to control its services and its priest. There were stormy Easter vestries;

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there was a Protestant churchwarden. One horrible day the fishermen broke into the church and took out the images and threw them down the cliff: by next week new ones were in their places. Lascelles was boycotted by his parishioners, except a few would-be bold spirits; and was outlawed, in the genial English way, by his Bishop; but he stuck at his job, went on saying offices to an empty church, and singing Mass to his pew-opener and an occasional visitor. Then after five years or so the change began.

It was not along the usual lines of such changes. Generally priests of Lascelles' religion are eager, masculine people who soon win over the more turbulent elements in the parish, and put them, too, in search of the great adventure of Christianity. But Lascelles, though he had grown up, still remained the boy who had chosen Liguori and Alexander for his patrons. He was obsessed with the reality of the spiritual world, of good and evil. His pillow was wet with the tears he shed for the sins of his parish. He was horrified at the evil of the world, and yet constitutionally unable to defy it in any active way. He had only one strong human affection—and that was a great love for children.

At first this was not reciprocated. His odd figure, his shuffling walk, his stoop and his occasional outbursts of anger produced ridicule and fear rather than love. Then one child somehow found how large the heart of him was; and then another, and then another. He had won the children. But this would have availed him little had it not been for the arrival at S. Uny of the Rev. Paul Trengrowse. Mr. Trengrowse came to minister to the Primitives about three years after Lascelles' appointment to

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the parish. He was young, keen, and sincere. He had not been long in the village when the leading members of his congregation told him of the sins of the parish priest, and horrors of the parish church. Trengrowse prayed for light. He disliked interfering with the affairs of an alien church; but, if half he was told was true, Lascelles must be fought. So he paid a visit to the church, which was always open, and was duly distressed at the idols he saw there.

As he was gazing at the smirking fatuity of S. Anthony, he heard a footstep. It was Lascelles who was coming from the sacristy to the altar. Fortunately, before he began Mass, Lascelles looked down the church and saw "a congregation." So he said Mass in English.

Now Trengrowse was no ordinary minister. He was a man of personal holiness, and of real devotion; and that in his spirit which was sincere and mystical recognised in the Popish-seeming priest, muttering his Mass, a kindred soul. Lascelles' absorption in his work, his grave, yet joyful solemnity, his keen sense of the other world made an immense effect on Trengrowse. The Mass proceeded, and when Trengrowse heard "Therefore with Angels and Archangels and all the Company of Heaven," he felt that he had had the answer to his prayer. This man was a Christian, however erroneous he might be in details.

So the next Sunday the Primitives who were hoping for a strong sermon against the Scarlet Woman, were disagreeably surprised. "Mr. Lascelles may be wrong. I think he is wrong, sadly wrong, in many things; but he du love the Lord, and he du worship Him. And, brethren, no man calls Jesus Lord save by the Holy

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Ghost. Let us pray for Mr. Lascelles and the church people of S. Uny; and that we may all be led along the narrow way to everlasting life."

Had Trengrowse been a man of less character he might have failed in his defence of Lascelles. But he was an acceptable preacher, and a man whose plain love of his religion it was impossible to doubt. So, first with grumbling, later with a ready acquiescence, the villagers of S. Uny followed his lead.

The result was odd. Lascelles attracted the children more and more; and his services attracted them. This worried Trengrowse not a little; but when one of his congregation said scornfully, "Those bit games to the church be only fit for babes," he looked gravely at him and replied, "Ah! Eli, but the book says 'Unless ye become as little children.'" This silenced Eli, but it did not silence Trengrowse's own heart. How was it Lascelles could do anything with children, a good deal with boys up to fifteen or so, and nothing with men and women, and little with girls? Lascelles' own explanation was simple. His Bishop would not confirm his children until they were thirteen. Lascelles presented them year after year when they were six or seven. He preached an amazing sermon on the three great aids to the Devil in the parish of S. Uny—and the three heads of his sermon were: Lust, Hypocrisy and the Lord Bishop. The more respectable of the neighbouring clergy were furious, but the Bishop, who was a simple, humble-minded man (quite unlike to the ex-head-master who had inducted Lascelles), refused to take any notice of the attack; but also refused to relax his rule about the age of confirmation candidates. The Arch-deacon told Lascelles that his parish was the plague-spot

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of the diocese, and Lascelles retorted that in a mass of corruption any sign of health looks ominous and unusual. But, although he kept up a brave front to the disapprovers, his failure with his people galled him. He would not have minded if they had still been actively hostile. But that had long ceased. They were now fond of their priest. They liked and shared in his notoriety. They supported him against the officials; and when a malicious Protestant from London attempted to stir up a revolt against Lascelles, he was promptly put into the harbour; and Trenchowse started a petition to the Bishop, expressing the affection "all we, whether church people or Methodists, feel for Mr. Lascelles."

Lascelles' philosophy refused to permit him to see in his failure evidences of his incapacity for his work. He had the proud humility of the perfect priest. Regarding himself as a mere channel for divine grace, he forgot that his personality was so distinctive that it affected the way in which grace reached his people. Once an old friend had tried to make him see this; but the task was hopeless.

"My dear fellow," said Lascelles, "I don't see what you mean. All they want is the Gospel. And that I give them. I say Mass for them. I will hear their confessions. I instruct them. I lead their devotions. All beside is mere human embellishment. No doubt a more competent man would be more pleasing to them, but he could not do more than give them the Gospel, could he?"

On All Souls' Day, 1912, Lascelles was depressed. Early that morning he had gone up to the cemetery, and said a Requiem in the little chapel. Then there had been the early Mass at 8.30 in church. The church had been full. Not only were all his children there, but there were

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a good many fathers and mothers: for the services on the day of the dead appealed to a deep human instinct with a power which not even Lascelles could spoil. The *Dies Iræ*, sung in Latin, had sounded oddly from a congregation so predominantly childish: and Lascelles had preached a short sermon on the "Significance of Death."

"We exaggerate the importance of death. It is to us death matters, not to the dead. For them it is a release, for us it is a warning. Death of the body is only a symbol. It is death of the soul we must fear. Believe me, it would be worth while for every one of you in this church to die, if by dying, you could bring a soul to Jesus. God knows, I would die for you, if that would bring you. There are those here to-day—you, Penberthy, and you, Trevose—who have not been to Mass since you were boys. Make a new resolution to-day, and ask the Holy Souls to help you keep it. Come to your duties, and return to your church."

Lascelles felt at the time that his appeal lacked force. He knew that after Mass, Penberthy would say to Trevose:

"Bootivul service, bean't it, Tom?"

"Iss—it be that. I du like it for once or twice. But for usual give me the chapel. It be more nat'ral like."

"Iss—it be. Poor Mr. Lascelles, I did think he would have a slap at us."

"Iss—it be his way. My gosh! I don't mind."

So Lascelles was depressed. He sat among his books, reading a Renaissance treatise on "Death." He thought a great deal about death. Sometimes he feared it horribly. It seemed the great enemy of faith. It was so disconcerting a thing, so heartless, so unregarding. At

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other times he felt defiant. But never did he reach the spirit of S. Francis about death. He was too remote from natural life and the events of animal birth and death to understand death as an ordinary thing, something not less usual than the sunset.

“It may be”—he read, “that there be more deaths than one. For it is evident that some are so hardened in sin that the death of the body comes long after the man has been really dead. Such men are commonly gay and cheerful: for with the death of their soul, has died all godly fear, all apprehension of judgment, all hope of salvation. They become but as brutes. Wherefore the church has always held that heretics, if they be obstinate and beyond recall, may be handed over to the secular arm for the death of the body. It should not trouble us that they display ordinary human virtues: for these be common in the unregenerate, and are but devices of the devil who would persuade men that religion matters naught. They are his children, and may be lawfully treated as such by any godly prince. The church herself kills not: though the Lord Pope, being a Temporal King, has the power of the sword, and may exercise the same.”

Lascelles put the book down and stared at the fire. The words roused a train of thought that almost frightened him. But he was not the man to dismiss any idea because it was terrifying. He believed in giving the devil his due, and always insisted that all temptations should be met boldly, not evaded. He left his chair, and knelt at his prie-dieu, looking at the wounds of the great Crucifix which hung above it.

Half an hour later he rose with a look of resolution on his face.

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2

The first case of the plague, as the villagers insisted on calling it, happened just before Epiphany. It attacked Penberthy, who had never been ill before; and in four days he was dead. His disease puzzled the doctor from the market-town, but he put it down as a curious case of infantile paralysis. His colleague from Truro, whom he consulted after the third case had occurred, insisted that the symptoms did not disclose anything more definite than shock following on *status lymphaticus*. The most serious thing was, however, not their incapacity to name, but their inability to cure the mysterious disease, which was spreading in S. Uny. Except for a general weariness, a disinclination to move, and a curious "wambling in the innards," there were no definite symptoms at all to go on. After the second case they had an inquest, but it yielded no results at all, and Dr. Marlowe began to talk of getting an expert from London.

It was not until February, however, that anyone came. Then by a fortunate chance Sir Joshua Tomlinson came down to S. Ives for a holiday. The "plague" at S. Uny had got into the London paper. There had been ten deaths, and two women, the first to be attacked, were lying seriously ill. Dr. Marlowe called on Sir Joshua, and the great physician said he would come over and see the patients. Marlowe was glad that chance had sent him a great general physician rather than a surgeon or a specialist. Although he was willing to defy any specialist to find his pet disease in the mysterious sickness that had killed the ten fishermen, he was relieved that no specialist was to be given the opportunity.

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“You see, Lascelles,” he said to the priest, “it’s not as if we were in the fifteenth century. We may be in theology, but I’m hanged if we are in medicine. These men are dying like savages: but the savage makes up his mind he has got to die, and dies through sheer hysteria. These fellows want to live. They lust for life.”

“You are right, Marlowe. Their desire for life is a lust. It is scarcely decent in a Christian to cling so to this existence. But there—it’s not my business to judge. You know, Marlowe, I have sometimes thought this last month that this mysterious disease is a judgment on S. Uny. It is God’s hand held out over our village. Let us pray for those who are dead, and those who are dying, and most of all, dear God, for those who are not yet to die.”

Marlowe, though friendly with Lascelles, was more than a little afraid of him. The vicar had worked like two men during this distress. He had nursed the sick, he had consoled the mourners, he had said Masses and had a service of general humiliation. Somehow he had identified himself with his parish to a degree he had never reached before, and S. Uny was grateful to him. But the little doctor was rather afraid. Lascelles was strained and odd in manner. He spent too long a time in prayer, and not long enough at meals or in bed.

“No, Lascelles. I don’t agree with you there. Oh! I’m a good Catholic, I hope, and I know God could intervene; but I don’t see why He should.”

“No: you don’t see why. No one does, Marlowe, until He speaks, and then they are forced to.”

On the Saturday Sir Joshua came over, he saw Mrs. Pentreath and Mrs. Wichelo, and he shook his

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head over both of them. He asked them questions about their diet, and about their way of living, while Marlowe stood by, silent and impatient. Then, he said a few kindly, cheerful words, and left them in the big room, which the vicar had had fitted up as a hospital ward; for Marlowe thought the cases were better isolated.

“Well, sir, what do you think?”

“What sort of a man is your vicar? He seems liked.”

“Yes—he is. He’s an odd chap—a bit mad, I think. A very keen Catholic, and very depressed at his failure to keep the people.”

“Ah! they don’t go to church.”

“Well they *do* now. They have done since this damned illness. He’s been awfully good to them. And the children have always gone.”

“It’s a funny thing, Dr. Marlowe, that no child has been ill.”

“Isn’t it? That’s what I say to young Jones of Truro. He will insist on his shock theory, following on *status lymphaticus*. I keep on pointing out to him that most of the patients are men who have had shocks every week of their lives since they were twelve. They’d have all been dead long since.”

“Yes. I am sure Jones is wrong. But I don’t know what this disease is, Dr. Marlowe. I suspect, but I don’t know.”

“Here is the vicar coming, Sir Joshua. Shall I introduce you?”

“Please do.”

Lascelles was walking rapidly towards them. He looked ill but eager. His eyes were full of a fanatic pleasure, a kind of holy rapture that appeared to make

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him even taller than he actually was. He acknowledged the introduction with a bow, and would have passed on, but Sir Joshua stopped him with a question.

“You have come from your sick people, Mr. Lascelles?”

“Yes. They are no longer sick. I was just in time to hear their confessions and give them the viaticum.”

“Good God!” Sir Joshua was evidently shocked. “It’s not ten minutes since we left them.”

“No? The end has always been very sudden, hasn’t it, Marlowe?”

“Yes. But this is quicker than usual. Do you think, Sir Joshua”—and he lowered his voice—“a post-mortem?”

“No. It would be useless. At least it would be no help to me. By the way, Marlowe, how have you entered the cause of death?”

“Well, sir—I’ve frankly put ‘Heart failure, cause unknown.’ There seemed to be nothing between that and ‘Act of God.’ ”

“Ah! Marlowe, that’s what you should have put,” intervened Lascelles. “It is the hand of God—the hand of God.” Then, with a bow to Sir Joshua, he hurried away.

“So your vicar thinks it is the hand of God! He may be right. God works through human agents. He is an interesting man, Dr. Marlowe.”

“Yes: he is. But this trouble has worried him frightfully. I’m rather nervous for him. Have you got any theory, sir? You talked of suspicion.”

“Well, Dr. Marlowe, I’ll tell you what I think. Your patients have been murdered.”

Marlowe looked at the great physician, as if he was afraid for his sanity.

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“No, Dr. Marlowe, I’m not mad, though I have no proof of my assertion. All I ask is this, that I may be allowed to see the next patient within at least half an hour of the beginning of the illness. By the way, can they give me a bed here, do you think? Where do you put up?”

“Oh! I’m staying at the vicar’s. I expect he’d be charmed to have you.”

“No. I don’t think I will stay with Father Lascelles. I would rather not. I’ll find a room somewhere. I think there will be another case to-morrow night.”

3

That Sunday morning Lascelles preached on the “Hand of Judgment.” The church was packed. Trengrowse had his service at nine and brought all his congregation to the Mass at eleven. Lascelles seemed wonderfully better. His eye was clearer, his step gayer and his whole figure more buoyant. His tone as he gave out his text was exultant.

“They pierced his hands.

“The symbolism of the Divine Body is strangely arresting. The Jews thought of God as an eye watching, caring for them from heaven. We Christians watch God—here in the Tabernacle, or in the arms of Mary. His care for us we typify by his Hand—the Hand we pierced. This last month God has been with us very wonderfully. He is always with us in the Holy Sacrament: but lately he has been with us in the Sacrament of Death. His Hand of Judgment has been over, and under us; it has clasped us—and some of us it has not let go.

“Our natural feeling is one of fear. We are not used

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to such immediate handling as this of our God's. We have most of us tried to apply religion to our life, now we have to try and apply our life to religion. God will have us think of nothing but Him, speak to none save Him, hope for none save Him. His Hand is still with us. It will bear yet more away from S. Uny before we learn our lesson. Let me help you to learn that lesson right. Let us all take care that we renew our trust in God, that we recognise His Hand, that we answer His Love."

Sir Joshua had listened attentively to Lascelles' sermon. He seemed vaguely disappointed, and he was unwilling to discuss it with Marlowe afterwards. There was no doubt that Lascelles' almost fatalist attitude, while it annoyed the doctor, had a strange welcome from the villagers. They turned in a child-like way to the words of this man who spoke as one who knew the ways and the meaning of the Almighty. Never had Lascelles so much real devotion from his people as he secured during the "plague." It was not that they shared his feeling of complete abandonment to the Will of God; but the fact that he had such a feeling made their fate seem more tolerable.

On Sunday evening there was a new case, as Sir Joshua had expected. The disease attacked Mrs. Bodilly, the wife of the chief grocer in S. Uny. Marlowe was summoned immediately, but he found Sir Joshua already at the poor woman's bedside.

She was frankly terrified; in this her case differed from previous ones, in which the sufferers, though generally resentful, had been not the least afraid. Mrs. Bodilly had been at Mass that morning. She had got back and

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prepared the dinner. At tea-time she had "felt queer," but after tea she was better. Then, as she was getting ready to go to the special service of Exposition, she fell down and had to be carried up to her room by her husband and sons.

She was, unlike most of the tradesmen's wives, a nominal church woman, but she had never been confirmed and rarely went to church. The fit of external piety roused in her by the "plague" was frankly based on nervous alarm. She felt that God was taking it out of S. Uny in this way; and she was anxious to escape.

Her illness found her divided between anger and fear. She was angry that her efforts to placate Divine wrath had not been most successful—she was terrified of dying, terrified still more of death as a punishment. In the most desolate way she sought reassurances from Marlowe and Sir Joshua; but neither could give her any certain consolation. The disease presented no different aspects. It indeed presented no aspect at all, except extreme weakness, astonishing slowness of the pulse, and irregular beating of the heart. Although Sir Joshua was there within five minutes of the seizure, he admitted to Marlowe that he could discover nothing of what he suspected.

"I'll be frank, Dr. Marlowe, I suspected poison. I still suspect it. I believe all these people have been poisoned in an extremely subtle way by a man so fanatical as to be almost mad. But I can find no trace of the poison. In this case, I will, if you will permit me, conduct a post-mortem, but I expect I shall fail. If I do, I must take my own line, if you wish me to help you."

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“Really, Sir Joshua, you talk more like a detective than a physician.”

“This is a detective’s business, Dr. Marlowe. I wish it were not.”

Before they left Lascelles arrived. He had been summoned by Mr. Bodilly, and he came prepared to give Mrs. Bodilly the last rites. As the boy with the light and the bell approached the stairs, Sir Joshua whispered to Marlowe :

“Your vicar seems very certain of her death.”

Marlowe shrugged his shoulders. “We haven’t saved a case, you know.”

The post-mortem yielded no result. That evening Marlowe dined with Sir Joshua at the village inn, and after dinner the great physician told him of his suspicions. Marlowe listened at first angrily, then with an incredulous horror.

“It can’t be. The man lives for his parish, I tell you. Why, he would die for it.”

“Yes: I believe he would. Had I found what I looked for, he certainly would.”

“But, my dear sir, there isn’t a trace of any known drug. There’s no trace of anything.”

“No. I had expected to find—but never mind. I have a great deal of experience, Dr. Marlowe, and I am convinced that your vicar has been murdering his parishioners. And to-night I am coming to tell him so. I will walk home with you. You may be present or not, as you please.”

4

Lascelles looked up a little wearily when Sir Joshua had finished speaking.

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“Is that all?”

Marlowe intervened.

“Look here, old man—I only came because—you’ll forgive me, Sir Joshua—I didn’t want you to be alone under this monstrous, this fantastic accusation of Sir Joshua’s. You’ve only got to contradict him, and we’ll go.”

Lascelles looked gratefully at his friend.

“Thank you, Marlowe. But Sir Joshua is right in telling me his suspicions. You have finished, Sir Joshua?”

“Yes. I should like your explanation if you have one, or your admission of my charge, and your promise that this—this—plague shall cease.”

“You use strange words, sir, for a man who has no evidence for what he says.”

“Yes,” ejaculated Marlowe, “yes, by Jove, you do——”

“Please, Marlowe. You will not be content with having relieved your mind, Sir Joshua. You wish me to answer you?”

“I do. I require it.”

“You know, sir, you great doctors have one failing. It is one priests have, too. You cannot avoid talking to me as if I were your patient—a mental, a nervous case. You can’t help believing that your firm tone, your almost—may I say it—discourteous manner will impress me. Well, it doesn’t.”

Sir Joshua got red. Lascelles’ words too entirely diagnosed his method. He was annoyed that he should seem so transparent to a man whom he regarded as at least half-crazy.

“I beg your pardon. There is something in what

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you say. Men in all professions have their—ah! tricks.”

“Thank you.”

Lascelles got up and stood by the fireplace looking down on his visitor. In the last month he had changed. He seemed bigger and more masculine—more as if he now had personal responsibilities; he looked less of an official, more of a man. He spoke rather slowly.

“You have accused me of murder, Sir Joshua. You ask me to admit my crime, and to promise to cease. Well, I expected your visit. I have long been familiar with your Treatise on Renascence Toxicology; it is as complete as any published book. And I am glad you and Marlowe came to-night. I have my answer ready. I admit nothing, and I promise nothing.”

Sir Joshua looked with a puzzled air at the priest. For a moment his accusation seemed a monstrous thing to himself. Then his common sense surged back.

“Father Lascelles, your answer does not satisfy me. I must take other steps.”

“They will not lead anywhere, Sir Joshua. If *you* find no evidence, no other man can. You say my poor people were poisoned. Well, find the poison. Ah—you know you cannot. It is foolish to threaten me. But I will tell you what I had determined to tell Marlowe to-night. First, I do not expect there will be any more deaths from this plague for a long time.

“Secondly, I have a confession to make. Last All Hallows I was depressed. The work here has not gone as it should. I had the children, but not their parents. I thought much of Death and the Departed at that season of all the dead—and at last I prayed to God that if nothing else would move these people, He would send

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Death. Send Death mysterious and as a judgment. Death has come, and my people have learnt their lesson. All of those who died were reconciled to Holy Church before death. Of those who remain nearly all have adhered to the Church. This afternoon Mr. Trengrowse came and asked to be prepared for Confirmation——”

“Trengrowse, the minister——” cried Marlowe.

“And this evening I had notice that all who are competent intend to make their Communion next Sunday. This parish has been won for God, Sir Joshua, and at the cost of thirteen deaths. Isn't it worth it?”

“Father Lascelles, I cannot regard you as sane. You are not only practically admitting your crime, you are disclosing your motives.”

“I beg your pardon, I admit nothing. I acknowledge I prayed to God to visit this people, if necessary, by His secret Death. That is not a crime. Next Sunday I shall tell my people.”

“And have you *prayed* that the deaths shall cease?” asked Sir Joshua ironically.

“I was doing so when you entered,” replied Lascelles quietly.

“Good God, man, your hypocrisy sickens me. You prate of God's intervention, and all the time you've been sending man after man to death by some foul poison of your own.”

“Sir Joshua—do you believe God commonly works without human intervention?”

“Bah! That is sophistry.”

“You condemn the machinery of justice, the compromise of war, our human evasion of rope and guillotine?”

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“Surely, Marlowe,” exclaimed Sir Joshua, “you can’t sit and listen quietly to this damnable nonsense?”

Marlowe had been sitting dazed, looking at Lascelles as if he were fascinated. He replied in a remote voice.

“I don’t know. I’m wondering”—he gave a nervous laugh—“wondering if Lascelles is a saint or a devil.”

Lascelles went on imperturbably.

“You don’t answer me. You can’t. Why should you think I, an anointed priest, am less fit to be the door-keeper of death than Lord Justice Ommaney? At least I use no case-law. I am the slave of no precedent. I know my people. I know them individually. I love them as persons. And as persons I judge them.”

The tall figure of the man seemed to glow. His face was lit with an unnatural beauty as he stood looking down on the other two, and dared them to answer him.

Sir Joshua rose. He had lost his somewhat pompous judicial air. He was deeply, humanly moved; and he spoke with an anxiety far more impressive than his previous authoritative tone.

“Father Lascelles, I have nothing more to say. I believe you have done a very horrible, a very wicked thing. I have heard how you would defend yourself if you were legally brought to book for such an offence. Your defence has, as you are aware, no legal force. I think it has no moral force. You are deceiving yourself strangely. One day you will have a great loneliness of heart. You will realise how terrible a responsibility you have taken. Without the sanction of society, without the approval of your church, you have decided, alone, the fate of your fellow-creatures. I am sorry for you. Good-night.”

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The light left Lascelles' face. He looked suddenly ill and careworn. Then with a high, frantic gesture he flung his hand towards the Crucifix.

“He, too—He, too—was made sin.”

DAVY JONES'S GIFT

By JOHN MASEFIELD

“ONCE upon a time,” said the sailor, “the Devil and Davy Jones came to Cardiff, to the place called Tiger Bay. They put up at Tony Adam’s, not far from Pier Head, at the corner of Sunday Lane. And all the time they stayed there, they used to be going to the rum-shop, where they sat at a table, smoking their cigars, and dicing each other for different persons’ souls. Now you must know that the Devil gets landsmen, and Davy Jones gets sailor-folk; and they get tired of having always the same, so then they dice each other for some of another sort.

“One time they were in a place in Mary Street, having some burnt brandy, and playing red and black for the people passing. And while they were looking out on the street and turning the cards, they saw all the people on the sidewalk breaking their necks to get into the gutter. And they saw all the shop-people running out and kowtowing, and all the carts pulling up, and all the police saluting. ‘Here comes a big nob,’ said Davy Jones. ‘Yes,’ said the Devil; ‘it’s the Bishop that’s stopping with the Mayor.’ ‘Red or black?’ said Davy Jones, picking up a card. ‘I don’t play for bishops,’ said the Devil. ‘I respect the cloth,’ he said. ‘Come on, man,’ said Davy Jones. ‘I’d give an admiral to have a bishop. Come on, now; make your game. Red or black?’ ‘Well, I say

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red,' said the Devil. 'It's the ace of clubs,' said Davy Jones; 'I win; and it's the first bishop ever I had in my life.' The Devil was mighty angry at that—at losing a bishop. 'I'll not play any more,' he said; 'I'm off home. Some people gets too good cards 'for me. There was some queer shuffling when that pack was cut, that's my belief.'

“‘Ah, stay and be friends, man,' said Davy Jones. 'Look at what's coming down the street. I'll give you that for nothing.'

“Now, coming down the street there was a reefer—one of those apprentice fellows. And he was brass-bound fit to play music. He stood about six feet, and there were bright brass buttons down his jacket, and on his collar, and on his sleeves. His cap had a big gold badge, with a house-flag in seven different colours in the middle of it, and a gold chain cable of a chinstay twisted round it. He was wearing his cap on three hairs, and he was walking on both the sidewalks and all the road. His trousers were cut like wind-sails round his ankles. He had a fathom of red silk tie rolling out over his chest. He'd a cigarette in a twisted clay holder a foot and a half long. He was chewing tobacco over his shoulders as he walked. He'd a bottle of rum-hot in one hand, a bag of jam tarts in the other, and his pockets were full of love-letters from every port between Rio and Callao, round by the East.

“‘You mean to say you'll give me that?' said the Devil. 'I will,' said Davy Jones, 'and a beauty he is. I never see a finer.' 'He is, indeed, a beauty,' said the Devil. 'I take back what I said about the cards. I'm sorry I spoke crusty. What's the matter with some

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burnt brandy?' 'Burnt brandy be it,' said Davy Jones. So then they rang the bell, and ordered a new jug and clean glasses.

"Now the Devil was so proud of what Davy Jones had given him, he couldn't keep away from him. He used to hang about the East Bute Docks, under the red-brick clock-tower, looking at the barque the young man worked aboard. Bill Harker his name was. He was in the West Coast barque, the *Coronel*, loading fuel for Hilo. So at last, when the *Coronel* was sailing, the Devil shipped himself aboard her, as one of the crowd in the fo'c'sle, and away they went down the Channel. At first he was very happy, for Bill Harker was in the same watch, and the two would yarn together. And though he was wise when he shipped, Bill Harker taught him a lot. There was a lot of things Bill Harker knew about. But when they were off the River Plate, they got caught in a pampero, and it blew very hard, and a big green sea began to run. The *Coronel* was a wet ship, and for three days you could stand upon her poop, and look forward and see nothing but a smother of foam from the break of the poop to the jib-boom. The crew had to roost on the poop. The fo'c'sle was flooded out. So while they were like this the flying jib worked loose. 'The jib will be gone in a half a tick,' said the mate. 'Out there, one of you, and make it fast, before it blows away.' But the boom was dipping under every minute, and the waist was four feet deep, and green water came aboard all along her length. So none of the crowd would go forward. Then Bill Harker shambled out, and away he went forward, with the green seas smashing over him, and he lay out along the jib-boom and made the sail

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fast, and jolly nearly drowned he was. 'That's a brave lad, that Bill Harker,' said the Devil. 'Ah, come off,' said the sailors. 'Them reefers, they haven't got souls to be saved.' It was that that set the Devil thinking.

"By and by they came up with the Horn; and if it had blown off the Plate, it now blew off the roof. Talk about wind and weather. They got them both for shore aboard the *Coronel*. And it blew all the sails off her, and she rolled all her masts out, and the seas made a breach of her bulwarks, and the ice knocked a hole in her bows. So watch and watch they pumped the old *Coronel*, and the leak gained steadily, and they were hove to under a weather cloth, five and a half degrees to the south of anything. And while they were like this, just about giving up hope, the old man sent the watch below, and told them they could start prayers. So the Devil crept on to the top of the half-deck, to look through the scuttle, to see what the reefers were doing, and what kind of prayers Bill Harker was putting up. And he saw them all sitting round the table, under the lamp, with Bill Harker at the head. And each of them had a hand of cards, and a length of knotted rope-yarn, and they were playing able-whackets. Each man in turn put down a card, and swore a new blasphemy, and if his swear didn't come as he played the card, then all the others hit him with their teasers. But they never once had a chance to hit Bill Harker. 'I think they were right about his soul,' said the Devil. And he sighed, like he was sad.

"Shortly after the *Coronel* went down, and all hands drowned in her, saving only Bill Harker and the Devil. They came up out of the smothering green seas, and saw the stars blinking in the sky, and heard the wind

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howling like a pack of dogs. They managed to get aboard the *Coronel's* hen-house, which had come adrift, and floated. The fowls were all drowned inside, so they lived on drowned hens. As for drink, they had to do without for there was none. When they got thirsty they splashed their faces with salt water; but they were so cold they didn't feel thirst very bad. They drifted three days and three nights, till their skins were all cracked and salt-caked. And all the Devil thought of was whether Bill Harker had a soul. And Bill kept telling the Devil what a thundering big feed they would have as soon as they fetched to port, and how good a rum-hot would be, with a lump of sugar and a bit of lemon peel.

“And at last the old hen-house came bump on to Terra del Fuego, and there were some natives cooking rabbits. So the Devil and Bill made a raid of the whole jing bang, and ate till they were tired. Then they had a drink out of a brook, and a warm by the fire, and a pleasant sleep. ‘Now,’ said the Devil, ‘I will see if he's got a soul. I'll see if he give thanks.’ So after an hour or two Bill took a turn up and down and came to the Devil. ‘It's mighty dull on this forgotten continent,’ he said. ‘Have you got a h'penny?’ ‘No,’ said the Devil. ‘What in joy d'ye want with a ha'penny?’ ‘I might have played you pitch and toss,’ said Bill. ‘I give you up,’ said the Devil; ‘you've no more soul than the inner part of an empty barrel.’ And with that the Devil vanished in a flame of sulphur.

“Bill stretched himself, and put another shrub on the fire. He picked up a few round shells, and began a game of knucklebones.”

THE CALL OF THE HAND

(A Story of the Balkans)

By LOUIS GOLDING

I

NO one knew what sin Nikolai Kupreloff had committed to bring on his head so terrible a penalty. Year after year his wife and he had prayed for a child, to their ikons in the tiny basilica in the wood, and when his wife gave birth at last, it was neither a child nor children. She had given birth to two little boys, perfectly made, exquisitely proportioned, but there was a deadly thing had befallen them . . . the tiny right hand of the one was inexorably seized by the left hand of the other.

The little woodcutter's cottage of Nikolai lay deeply hidden in the great pine woods of Lower Serbia, miles from his nearest neighbour. Yet even in that wild country the fame of the intertwined children travelled far, and the wise old women from those parts came to see if herbs or chanting or any of their dark gifts might be of the least avail. They were no more useful than a real doctor who had studied at Belgrade, was practising at Monastir, and was stimulated to great interest by the account of these strange children. The case defied all the arts of black or white magic, and the interest of the episode flickered and died down.

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So it was that Nikolai reconciled himself to the inevitable, and as the boys grew older he would cross himself devoutly and say: "Thank God, it might have been a thousand times worse!" They were lads of extraordinary beauty. Peter and Ivan he called them, Ivan being the lad who held so irrevocably the wrist of his brother within his fingers. In appearance they were identical—the light, tough hair and the laughing blue eyes of the Serbian Slav, sturdy, well-knit limbs, and a sterling robustness of physique. It was only their parents and themselves who knew that between them there was one slight but unmistakable mark of distinction—below the knuckle of Ivan's thumb was marked dully a little red arrow. In fact, a stranger might not have known that this abnormal bond existed between the two brothers as he saw them swinging along under the pines. "What a loving little pair!" he would exclaim, as he heard them laugh and chatter in complete harmony, and look into each other's eyes with the understanding born of flawless love.

When they were about fifteen years old their mother died, and the father Nikolai began more and more to remain behind in his cottage attending to the frugal needs of the little family, while Peter and Ivan, as the years went on, grew even more skilful in the art of woodcutting; for Peter wielding the axe in his left hand, Ivan in his right, achieved such a fine reciprocity of movement, that Nikolai would laugh in his great yellow beard and mutter: "Truly the ways of God are inscrutable, for even out of their calamity has He made a great blessing!" The passing of time only knit closer their perfect intimacy, so that they almost did not notice

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when their father Nikolai sickened and died. Now they were left to their cottage and their woodcutting and their complete love, the whole being crowned by the splendid physique of young foresters at twenty-one; so that life, it seemed, had nothing in store for them but long years of undivided love and content.

Yet even into their seclusion rumours came of the great world beyond. Now and again they would catch glimpses of the marvels of Salonika in the eyes of travelled men. They would hear of a city where lovely women, infinitely more beautiful than the queen of the tousled gypsies who flickered from time to time along the forest paths, sang upon stages of golden wood, in gardens full of hanging lights. They would hear of the sea and glowing ships, and men who spoke low musical languages uttered in countries beyond the sea.

So it was the brothers determined to leave their woodcutting behind them for a season and adventure forth into the world of ships and songs and lovely women.

2

To Peter and Ivan Salonika was a revelation of wonders they barely thought actual. From a little room in the street of Johann Tschimiski they saw the multi-coloured tides of cosmopolitan humanity sweeping down from Egnatia Street, down Venizelos Street to the Place de la Concorde. They would walk along the quay-side past the great hotels to the Jardins de la Tour Blanche, and were sent into an ecstasy of delight by the *chic* little women who smiled archly at these two fair-headed lads from the up-country, who walked along hand clasped

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in wrist in so naïve and rustic a manner. Yet when they entered the Théâtre des Variétés at the White Tower it seemed to them that the very portals of heaven had opened wide. They would return in a daze of delight to their room and recount with an almost religious fervour the beauties and enchantments of the show. Each little Spanish or French girl who came to do her song or minuet had seemed to them more enchanting than the last. Never a cloud of disagreement came between them. There was a perfect coincidence in their tastes, and never, they felt, had their love for each other been so sympathetic and complete as it was now.

The brothers had no large sum of money at their disposal. The time of their holiday was drawing to a close. One evening they turned up at the theatre for the last time, their nerves keyed up to a pitch of delighted impatience, the more tense as the brothers knew that the next day would see them on the arduous road back to their Serbian forest. Turn followed turn with alluring consequence. Then at one stage the music ceased for some moments and there was an atmosphere of expectance in the air. It was then that a simple and delightful English girl came half-shyly from the wings. There was nothing flamboyant in her appearance or her manner. Yet at once she seemed to seize the house with the graceful and reticent winsomeness of her song. So she sang her song through, a dainty little ballad of old-world gardens and fragrant flowers and love unto death. Peter felt the fingers of Ivan tighten round his wrist. He himself had been so stirred to his depths by the gentle grace of the girl that it was with a slight feeling of resentment he realised that Ivan had been experiencing

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once again an identical emotion. As he involuntarily moved away his arm Ivan uttered a slight cry of impatience. He turned round and looked into Peter's eyes and found them aflame with a light deeper than mere appreciation. Peter was aware of his brother's glance and looked at Ivan in return to find his face flushed almost as if he were half-drunk.

That night for the first time in their history there occurred a slight bickering between the two. No mention of the little English actress passed between them, but each of them determined that some day, when his brother's interest had died away, he should broach the subject and the possibility of a rediscovery of the English actress at Salonika.

Next day they entrained for Monastir, and a few days later saw them installed once again in their father's cottage in the wood.

3

In proportion as the fortunes of the Kupreloff brothers increased, something that had once existed between them receded further away. The perfection of their old intimacy became a memory of the past. No longer did the most minute physical or spiritual experience of the one become automatically part of his brother's consciousness. So that now for the first time their indissoluble partnership became more and more galling.

There was no doubt of it. Everything dated from that last night at Salonika, when the English girl appeared on the stage. They would still occasionally revive something of the old fervour as they discussed from time to

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time their impressions of the unforgettable holiday. Yet never a word passed between them concerning the unconscious girl who had captured both their hearts. At night they would lie awake, each thinking that the other was asleep. Bitterly, definitely, they would confess to their own deep hearts: "She is mine, she is mine; I am hers for ever." And yet to each their love seemed hopeless beyond recall. There was the double sting that each of them loved the girl with an intensity reserved hitherto for his brother; but, if possible, more fatal was the despairing conviction that no girl could ever love the one of two brothers to whom the other would remain physically attached till death carried them both away. As the months passed by the friction between them increased. They were now in a position to buy land and a little livestock. But if Peter insisted upon keeping pigs, in the fashion of the majority of Serbians, Ivan would insist upon cattle. If Peter felt that he had done enough wood-cutting for the day, Ivan felt that the day was only just beginning.

One night in late autumn Peter lay tossing very heavily in his sleep. Ivan lay awake, thinking, thinking for ever of the girl, his whole heart full of rancour against the brother who must for ever prevent the consummation of his love. Heavily, wearily, Peter heaved on the bed. Outside the wind was howling. The dreariness of the wind seemed to enter Peter's heart. "My little girl," he murmured, "my little girl! When shall we meet, my little girl? Never, never, never!" Ivan's forehead contracted with hate. He was filled suddenly with a tremendous loathing of his brother. "Never, never, never!" moaned Peter. Suddenly, obeying a frantic impulse, Ivan

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pulled with all his strength away from his brother's wrist to which Fate had so viciously fastened him. With a great scream of pain Peter half leapt from the bed.

"What's this? What do you mean?" he shouted, his voice thick with pain and sleep. "Nothing! Nothing! I couldn't help it! I was dreaming!" replied Ivan savagely, and the brothers settled down again for the night.

Night after night the same thing happened. Peter would murmur for ever in his sleep, "My little girl, when shall we meet? Never, never, never!" Ivan would lie awake, hatred surging violently through his whole body, till his eyes would see nothing but flames in the darkness of their log-built room; and the sound of the branches in the forest would begin to mutter and moan: "Have done with it, Ivan, have done with it! She is waiting for you, waiting, always waiting. Have done with it! Have done with *him*—with *him*—with *him*!"

One desolate night towards mid-winter the room was full of the miserable sleep-cries of Peter. Outside thunder ripped among the clouds. A finger of lightning came suddenly through the windows and pointed with a gesture of flame towards the open breast of Peter. A sudden and terrible thought flooded into Ivan's soul! Whatever there was of human kindness and brother-love seemed in one sinister moment to be washed away from before the onset of the flood. All the branches upon all the trees shrieked across the night. "We shall be quiet, you shall have rest. She shall be yours. Have done with him, have done with him!"

A great calm settled down upon Ivan's soul—the issue was decided, the issue which had been hovering for so long in his subconsciousness was decided at last. There

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was nothing left to do. The mere deed was the mere snapping of a thread. With his eyes wide open, a terrible silence laying upon his soul, he stared into the night, waiting, waiting for the dawn.

Dawn came at last. The brothers washed and took food. There was a long way to go, far off into the woods. There was almost a tenderness in Ivan's attitude towards Peter. What mattered now? The issue was decided; the gods had taken the thing out of his hands. With their axes swinging they made their way into the woods, through a day sharp with frost. At last they arrived at the clearing where they were to continue their tree-felling. A brazier stood waiting there, and before work started they lit a fire in preparation for the midday meal. Then they picked up their axes and set to. Lustily their strokes rang through the wood. Chime rang upon chime. It was strenuous work, the work of men with strong muscles and keen eyes.

The morning went by steadily. There was no hate in Ivan's soul—only a deadly patience. He knew the moment would come. He knew when the moment came that he would act. For a few minutes they stopped and wiped their foreheads. Peter opened his shirt wide and exposed his breast to Ivan. The quick vision presented itself of Peter heaving darkly in their bed, the sudden finger of lightning, the naked breast.

“Come!” said Ivan thickly, “let us begin!”

They both took up their positions against a tree. Peter with the axe in his left hand struck against the tree. Ivan, quick as the lightning which last night had shown him his way, whirled his axe round, away from the tree, and the sharp edge went cracking through Peter's ribs, deep be-

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yond the heart. A great fountain of blood spurted into the air. A long, feeble moan left Peter's lips. Deeper than the axe had cut, his eyes looked sorrowfully into the soul of Ivan. His weight tottered and Ivan felt himself following to the ground. There was not a moment to lose. Again the axe whirled through the air. With the whole of a strong man's strength the axe came down upon his own wrist, and down fell the body of Peter with the hand of his brother indissoluble in death round his wrist, as it had been indissoluble in life.

The thing he had brought about was too monstrous for Ivan at that moment to understand. It was only the little things that his ear and eye seized—the frightened screech of a bird in a tree, the sullen shining of the little red arrow in the thumb of his own severed hand.

Ivan felt the blood streaming from the stump of his forearm. He knew that if he did not reassert complete mastery over himself he would bleed to death. All would be vain—the call of the far girl, the murder, the last look in Peter's eyes. He staggered over to the brazier and plunged his forearm for one swift instant into the embers. Then darkness overwhelmed him and he fell backward into unutterable night.

4

It was easy enough to explain. Not the least suspicion attached itself to Ivan. People came from remote cabins and farms to sympathise with the bereaved brother. What was more likely in the world than that Ivan's axe should slide from a knot in the tree and come crashing against Peter, who, even if he could see the axe coming,

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could not by any human means have disengaged himself from his brother. "I always thought something like this would happen," people muttered wisely to each other, and shook their heads and crossed their breasts.

Of course they all understood how Ivan could no longer remain in the cottage consecrated by memories of his brother. So Ivan sold his accumulation of timber and his land and what little stock the brothers had bought, and it was not many weeks after his forearm was healed that the jangling train from Monastir was bearing him through the Macedonian hills upon his quest for the English girl at Salonika.

In Salonika she was nowhere to be found. Forlornly he went from music-hall to music-hall, but she was gone. He haunted even the *cafés chantants* along Egnatia Street, even the degenerate *brasseries* on the Monastir Road, where the red-costumed women stood upon improvised platforms and sang to tipsy crowds with the accompaniment of feeble violins. But there was no trace of her in the whole city. From the director at the White Tower he learned that perhaps she had proceeded to Constantinople, perhaps she had returned to Athens, whence the European artistes generally came to Salonika on their round of the greater Levantine towns.

With all the fervour and idealism of a mediæval knight Ivan stepped upon the deck of a Messageries Maritimes boat returning to Marseilles by way of the Piræus. When the electric train from the harbour landed him at the station in Athens a mystic conviction filled him that here in this city, some day, the English girl would be revealed to him. Ambitiously he first tried the great *Opéra*, but she was not there. The weeks lengthened

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into months and failure followed failure, but the mysterious foreknowledge of his race held up his weary spirits and bade him put aside despair.

When at last she appeared upon the stage of one of the lesser music-halls, it was with no great start of surprise or welcome that he recognised her arrival. It was as if a mother or a sister had slipped back into the place from which for some reason she had been absent. Her features had become engraved upon every curve of his brain. She came upon the stage and filled his life again as naturally as day fills the place of night. Life became for him a thing of meaning and splendour. He realised that at last Life was to begin.

He knew little of the half-measures and half-advances of Western civilisation. He lost no time in appearing before the girl. After only a few words of difficult apology, with a voice of low and subdued passion he told her a fragment or two of his tale. It was a broken French that he talked—the French of which his mother long ago had taught her boys the few phrases she knew, and which his experiences in Salonika and Athens during the last few months had greatly improved.

The large grey eyes of the English girl opened wide in wonder as she listened, fascinated, to the stammering avowals of this tall stranger from a shadowy land. Half in fright she drew back against the wall of her wretched little dressing-room, but, even so soon she realised that the destiny was overwhelming her which was to bring an end to her wanderings. She consented shyly to his suggestion that she should see him for a little while next night, and it was with a thrill of delight and fear she saw his great figure waiting for her at the gate of the

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Museum, as the purple Athenian dusk came wandering down from the Acropolis and cast velvet glooms among the pillars of Pentelican marble.

For years since her mother had died and her father had become a confirmed drunkard, it was a very lonely life that Mary Weston had led. She had no great talent, and she had drifted from theatre to theatre upon the Continent, for to her England was a place of no kindly memories. Ivan Kupreloff began to mean for her what her mother had meant before she died and her father before he had taken to drink.

A few months had passed only. There was no escape from Ivan. There was nothing importunate about him, but he was irresistible. He was Life. Proudly he realised that he had conquered her. To world's end and Time's end she was his own.

They were married at length. Athens and all the cities she had known, the Serbian wood and the murdered brother—these passed utterly from their souls in the strong kiss which united them for all days.

5

Yet not for ever was the memory of his dead life to vanish from the heart of Ivan. Even during the times of his most passionate love for Mary there began to invade him moments of bitter memory and regret. There was something which prevented the entire fusion with Mary towards which he yearned and ached. It was something deep in his soul. It was something which gnawed at his forearm, bit with teeth of contrition at the place where the axe had fallen and severed the hand from the wrist.

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He tried to put all this futility from him. He would seize Mary more closely, look desperately into her eyes, and in the perfume of her lips and hair seek anodyne. Between them there was a sufficient store of money, small though it was, to allow them a few months of liberty, undisturbed by any thought of the future. They wandered lazily about Greece for a little time, finding in the Greek day and the immemorial hills a perfect setting for their love.

And yet ever more insistently came to him the call of the hand—the hand which had been his own and not his own, the hand which had united in so unique an embrace his brother with himself.

Again at night voices tormented him. Again, when winds were about, they called with living words: “The hand! The hand! It is calling you, calling! Answer! He wants you! Peter!” wailed the wind. “Peter! Peter!”

Lines began to draw across his forehead. With anxiety Mary saw shadows growing under his eyes, and in his eyes a hunger which grew more and more forlorn. “What is it, love?” she would murmur. “You’ve not slept well!”

“Nothing at all, love, nothing! All’s well!” he would reply, trying with a kiss to forget the wind and the hand and the call.

“There’s something you’re longing for. Tell me, Ivan. Let me help you. You must.”

“Nothing, Mary. I’ve got you. There’s nothing else in the world.” But the call of the hand did not abate. “Peter!” the winds wailed, “Peter! He wants you! Answer!”

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The urgency of the call grew more imperious. He was sickening and growing weak. There was a hot torpidity in the dry Greek noon which shrivelled his veins. He would drag his coat down from his neck and lift his head and try to breathe the deep breath he had known in his Serbian wood. But there was no spaciousness, no great draughts of cool air in the wind, only voices: "Peter! Peter! Peter!"

"We must go somewhere. We must go away," said Mary. "We must go to Athens and see a doctor, Ivan. I'm afraid!"

"Not Athens! No!" he replied with a shudder, his temples contracting as before the hot blast from an oven. Those dry marble spaces! The dusty pepper-trees! The sweating crowds in the shops, swallowing sweet cakes like swine swallowing husks in a sty! Athens became a nightmare.

He was lying awake one night, the body of Mary curled beside him, her hair floating vaguely on the pillow in the half-light of the moon. She stirred in her sleep, and her little white hand unconsciously sought his wrist and fastened tightly round it. That moment bridged the buried time. Unescapably Mary had brought back to him the sensation of Peter lying in the grasp of his own hand. Never before was the call of the hand so imperious. Never so clearly did the wind exclaim, "Peter! He wants you! Answer!"

An irresistible love for his murdered brother overwhelmed him. He raised himself from his bed and lifted helplessly his lopped arm into the whispering room. "Coming, my brother, I am coming! Wait! Peter!" he moaned, and the wind replied: "Peter! Peter!"

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He lay back in bed. He realised that the strongest claim in the world upon him was the call of the hand. As for Mary—she was nothing different from himself. For her as for him the call of the hand came dictatorially. In each other they were one, but without the hand their unity was uncompleted. The call of the hand must be obeyed. To-morrow they must leave Greece behind. To-morrow to Serbia, to-morrow the response to the hand.

Mary was not surprised when Ivan without warning explained that all their plans were altered. She was used to his unaccountable whims, the sudden mystic impulses of his Slavonic soul.

They packed up the few things which were all the impediment they possessed, and next day saw them well started on their way to Monastir, carefully skirting Athens. Arrived at Monastir, a few days elapsed before they appeared at the remote wood where Ivan was born. The cottage built by Ivan Kupreloff was not yet occupied. The strange character of its former inhabitants combined with the terrible nature of Peter's death had succeeded in keeping it empty! They obtained permission from its owner to occupy the cottage, and with a great sigh of content Ivan flung open the door where he and his brother had passed so frequently in former days.

In a little time Mary had made of the house such a palace of delight as it had not been since Ivan's mother was dead. Happily, Ivan took in large draughts of the Serbian pineland air, filling his lungs. Happily, with Mary beside him on the bed where he and Peter had lain entwined, the dark drowsy nights melted into dawn.

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He made his reply to the call of the hand. Only faintly, if at all, the wind or the branches whispered "Peter! Peter!" Peter seemed to be happy at last. The severed hand seemed at last to be tranquil round the wrist of the murdered brother. Then the winds died away, and there was no sound of "Peter!"; only fitfully a swaying of twigs and a rustle of pine-needles.

So it seemed. Till summer drooped her drowsing hair. Summer became wrinkled and old. Summer went and the swift autumn came. The days shortened into the rigours of winter, the days ever contracted towards the anniversary of that red day when the axe was lifted and Peter fell. Never a moment did it occur to Ivan that now when the fatal day was approaching he might leave behind him his Serbian wood. He knew that, more tightly than ever during his living days, the wrist of Peter lay within his own hand, tight, unescapable. Mary and he lay under the thumb of that severed hand wherefrom the red arrow glowed when the night was dark and the wood-fire threw leaping shadows over the log-walls. There was no gainsaying the call of the hand till the end of days. Ivan knew that never again would he leave behind his Serbian wood.

Came the night which was the anniversary of that dead, unburyable night when Peter's doom had been sealed. Again there was the rumbling of thunder, there were evil flashes of lightning that ran among the clouds. Never with so firm an embrace had Mary been clasped within his arms. Nothing in the world was so strong as his love for Mary. They had responded to the call of the hand. There was no further claim upon them. Ivan kissed her sleeping eyes and was lulled in the music of

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her breathing. A drowsiness came over him, and for a time he slid into sleep.

In his sleep something tightened round him, something growing so tight that it forced through the barriers of his sleep. Vaguely, faintly a half-consciousness came back to him. He was not awake. He was not asleep. He was in a borderland where the other world is not dead and this world is half-alive. Tighter grew the thing which pressed against his sleep. It was round his wrist, it was round the wrist where something had once come crashing down. What was it? What was it had come crashing down? An axe it was that had come crashing down. It was the hand of Mary growing tighter round his wrist. No, it could not be the hand of Mary. Mary had fallen from his arms. Mary was turned away from him. He could see her hands pale where she had lifted them in sleep above her head. It was not the hand of Mary growing tighter round his wrist. But it was a hand. No doubt of that. It was a hand. With a dull glow of flame a little red arrow gleamed like embers below the thumb of the hand. Where had he seen that arrow? Where and when? When his hand had fallen away from him, lopped at the wrist. It was the dead hand which was not dead. It was his own hand. It was the hand with the red arrow which had held Peter so tightly. It was the dead hand which was alive, the living hand which had arisen from the dead. Tighter round his wrist grew the pressure of the severed hand. The hand was tired of calling. The hand had come. There was no gainsaying the hand. So tight grew the clutch of the hand that his whole arm slowly lifted from his side. Irresistibly the shoulder

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followed the rising arm. There was no gainsaying the hand. Neither awake nor asleep, neither living nor dead, he followed the hand, he rose from the bed where Mary lay, sleeping sundered from him, his no more. Mary was alive. He was neither living nor dead. The door of the room was opened wide. Closed doors were no barrier against the hand which had arisen from the grave. Slowly, with steady feet, with wide, filmy eyes, Ivan passed through the door. Slowly through the outer door, slowly into the sound of thunder, into the gleam of lightning and the voices of winds moaning unceasingly, "Peter! Peter! He is calling you! Ivan! Peter is calling you! Follow!" and ever again unceasingly, "Peter! Peter!"

Tighter than the bonds of ice or granite hills, tight only as the bond of death, the arisen hand held the lopped wrist, drew the slow body of Ivan through the haunted night far into the wood, far through the talking trees, far to the place of that tree which had not been cut down, to the place where an axe had fallen through bones and flesh, where Peter had fallen, where Peter lay buried, not deep down; where Peter lay buried under twigs and loose earth.

Tightly round the wrist of the man neither alive nor dead clutched the resurrected hand. Nearer and nearer to the shallow grave the hand pulled down the body of Ivan. Methodically, steadily, working with no pause, the free hand of Ivan moved the twigs and the loose earth—methodically, with no pause, until at last the body of Peter lay revealed; not recognisable, dissolute beneath the change through which all men shall pass, recognisable only to those filmy eyes of Ivan, to that questing hungry

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soul of Ivan which had come to claim its own. Closer and closer to the dead brother the severed hand drew the body of Ivan down; so close, so close, until at last the hand clutched again and for ever that wrist to which Fate had fastened it long years ago. Alongside of his dead brother, quietly, with those eyes which neither saw nor did not see, Ivan lay down full length. Gradually the severed hand, the hand which had arisen from the dead to claim him, because the dead brother called and the severed hand called for its own, gradually the hand slipped from the lopped wrist; the wrist and the arm became one. The hand of Ivan had brought Ivan to his own. Indissolubly, Peter and Ivan lay joined together. But the death which lay cold in the heart and body of Peter passed from the clutched wrist, passed into the hand which clutched it, passed along the arm which had been severed once, and along Ivan's shoulder, until it made his eyes unseeing discs and of his heart cold stone which could beat no more.

As the grey light of dawn came emptily down the Serbian woods, the two brothers lay immortally one again, like the two babies the gods had given Nikolai Kupreloff upon a long-vanished night.

THE SENTIMENTAL MORTGAGE

By ARTHUR LYNCH

“I CAN account for the man,” said Carstairs, “but what I am curious about is the feelings of the girl. He blew out his brains in her presence, and he did it immediately after she had told him to be gone. Dramatic of him. He did it for love of her—a warm passion. I suppose that that would be the deepest idea in her mind.”

“He was a man of his word, at any rate,” said Miss Landells, “for of all the heroes who are eternally swearing they could die for a smile and all the rest of it, hardly one would wet his boots unless he thought he could gain something by it. . . . I dare say she had begun by despising him, and when he blew out his brains felt some respect for him. Probably if he were alive again, though, she would act in the same way.”

“I think I could put a harder case,” said the Colonel, “one where a man sacrificed more——”

“Sacrificed more?”

“Yes; a man might easily blow out his brains in a burst of rage or disappointment, but that proves little. Blantyre, the man of whom I was thinking, did more, and the girl—Miss Trafford—had therefore to deal with a more complex problem.”

With a warning that we might think the story gruesome, the Colonel told it.

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To understand the circumstances it is necessary to know something of Blantyre's character. When I knew him first he had the rank of Captain. I being second lieutenant and our relations not being very familiar, I only knew him from what might be called an outsider's point of view. I hardly think, however, that anyone knew him much better. That will give you a hint—he was a reserved man. Yet he had a fund of high-spirits; also a witty manner, which was at times playful and yet sometimes bitter.

He was an unusually handsome man. Above average height, slender but well-made and active, he had regular features, dark complexion and black, blue-black hair. It was said that he had a dash of the "tar-brush"—Indian, you know—and this fact, trivial as it may appear, had, I believe, a powerful influence on his life. I know as a fact, that he became more reserved after a rather unpleasant occurrence, when an ill-bred young spark, losing his temper in an argument, called him a Dago.

Blantyre was always a serious sort of chap. He wrote for the *United Service Review* and the *Engineering Magazine*, and other technical journals, partly of course for the interest he took in that sort of thing, but also because he was not well-off. That too was his reason for taking as little part as possible in dances, picnics and the other little flutters by which we amused ourselves. He seemed, in fact, rather a fish out of water, and I used to wonder why he remained in the Service; but he was not only of an energetic and resolute habit of mind, but also intensely ambitious.

He had the misfortune to fall in love with the prettiest, the most spoilt and, I believe, the most selfish, minx in

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England. The word "brilliancy" was always on her lips, and she thought of nothing but pleasure and excitement. She was then about twenty.

Imagine her reception of him when, carried off his feet, he proposed to her. She laughed in his face and, I am told, asked him if he were "an Indian Nabob"!

She probably only meant that the man who married her must be able to give her the sort of life to which she was accustomed; and had not realized—she took it all so lightly and really cared for Blantyre so little—what the phrase might mean to him. His poverty and his supposed origin—no words could have cut more deeply.

That very night, he set the wheels in motion and shortly after was transferred to the Indian battalion. For the next seven years he put in as much fighting on the frontiers as was humanly possible. He seemed the veriest glutton for danger, never spared himself, and yet people said he fought without enthusiasm or any warmth of blood. Oh, I grant you a queer chap!

At first his men rather disliked him, but in time they became impressed by his courage and dash, and they soon grew to rely on his steady, his inexorable justice. He was never a popular man, too stiff and too reserved, but his men would have followed him to certain death. They called him "The Sabre Prince."

After seven years Blantyre was back amongst us, but by that time he had risen to be Colonel, and his reputation was unique. He was then about thirty-five, still, you see, a young man, and quite naturally London went mad over him. He became the lion that particular season.

But India had left her marks on him. He had returned minus his right arm, and the once blue-black

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hair was grey. However, he was still as handsome as ever and had the air of a man who has seen and dealt with matters of importance. In other words he was *distingué*. Also he was still in love with Miss Trafford.

Nor had time and experience and that unique reputation of his failed of their effect on her. As often happens to a woman of her type she had failed to bring off a match commensurate with her ambitions, and at twenty-seven was still unmarried.

The news of their engagement set everybody gossiping. His infatuation was recalled, and it was said she had refused a great alliance in order to wait for him. The story even got into the newspapers.

I was not a little pleased, I can tell you, to hear that they were to be married. She was still wonderfully pretty and, rumour said, less vain and spoilt. It might be that she would settle down and make him a good wife. Anyway he wanted her, he had wanted her for a long time, and he was going to get what he wanted. Blantyre himself wrote to tell me, and I think the next few weeks were the happiest of his life.

Judge then, of my surprise—sorrow, too—to learn one day, and again from Blantyre himself that the marriage was off, that he had resigned his commission and got an engineering job abroad.

Of course I hurried to see him. He was much as usual, cool, collected, finely-tempered. In fact when I entered he looked up with a smile—and I had always thought his smile lighting up that austere face peculiarly winning.

It appeared that it was he who had broken off their engagement, and the matter can be put in a nutshell—

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he had found her out. Mercenary motives, no real affection—also, while he himself had grown and developed, she had remained the social butterfly.

He told me—what I had not known—the story of his rejection seven years previously. He had believed he was not worthy of her, and he had gone to India to fight his way up to her standard. When he came back he had believed her story, believed she had waited. . . .

Then he had heard things. People talk, you know. I don't know that he believed what he was told, but what wrung him to the very vitals was that he should have loved so deeply something that was—well, a poor thing, unworthy.

Miss Trafford was in no temper to be jilted. She even went the length of putting the case into her lawyer's hands for breach of promise.

“Before I leave England,” he said, “I mean as far as I can to satisfy justice. The law, I suppose, could not get more from me than I possess, and everything I have, I mean to give her. It was she who sent me to India, and I will strip myself for her of everything I gained there. Will you take my medals?” and he offered me a little mahogany, gold-ornamented box. “Keep them as a memento. I do not want them. I—I feel I may have won them fighting against my own people.”

In his words was a something of grief and even shame. I felt I was looking at a man who regretted what could not be helped, who would regret it for the remainder of his days.

“There is only now my property in Devonshire. That

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I have made over to Miss Trafford. The deeds are in this box. The property is a small one but it has now no encumbrances. I have been able to clear off everything; except—" he said musingly—"except something she may or may not regard as a detriment—it is a sort of Sentimental Mortgage."

"A skeleton in the cupboard?" said I, thinking of some ghost story, or creepy legend, or the like.

"Precisely. You have hit it. A skeleton in the cupboard."

"But, but," said I, trying to bring him back to the business side of the matter, "this is not justice, justice to yourself."

"When all is said and done," he returned quietly, "you will recognise that justice—inexorable justice. Money, position, even reputation are nothing to me now. . . . No, I am not going to kill myself. I have accepted a post in an enterprise which, if successful, will make a more enduring mark, bring me greater wealth, perhaps even fame, than those frontier exploits of mine."

I was relieved to hear of his fresh interests.

"I am undertaking the survey of a line to open up the hinterlands of Argentine. If that be successful, I shall hope to superintend the work. If I do not succeed—well, at any rate I shall have made a beginning, and my successor may find encouragement in the spirit in which I have led the way. But I am dreaming . . . I wish you to take this box containing the deeds, and present it to her—if you will do me that last favour."

I promised.

I brought the box to her and presented it with cere-

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mony. She was always charming. She begged me to wait while she opened it.

When I spoke of the "skeleton in the cupboard" I had little guessed how startlingly true the words must have sounded. It was her fault that Blantyre had gone to India, and with the gift lay the rebuke, for the skeleton grasped the deeds.

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"The skeleton, Colonel?"

"Yes, the skeleton of his right hand."

CAPTAIN SHARKEY: HOW THE GOVERNOR OF SAINT KITTS CAME HOME

By A. CONAN DOYLE

WHEN the great wars of the Spanish Succession had been brought to an end by the Treaty of Utrecht, the vast number of privateers which had been fitted out by the contending parties found their occupation gone. Some took to the more peaceful but less lucrative ways of ordinary commerce, others were absorbed into the fishing-fleets, and a few of the more reckless hoisted the Jolly Rodger at the mizzen and the bloody flag at the main, declaring a private war upon their own account against the whole human race.

With mixed crews, recruited from every nation, they scoured the seas, disappearing occasionally to careen in some lonely inlet, or putting in for a debauch at some outlying port, where they dazzled the inhabitants by their lavishness and horrified them by their brutalities.

On the Coromandel Coast, at Madagascar, in the African waters, and above all in the West Indian and American seas, the pirates were a constant menace. With an insolent luxury they would regulate their depredations by the comfort of the seasons, harrying New England in the summer and dropping south again to the tropical islands in the winter.

They were the more to be dreaded because they had

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none of that discipline and restraint which made their predecessors, the Buccaneers, both formidable and respectable. These Ishmaels of the sea rendered an account to no man, and treated their prisoners according to the drunken whim of the moment. Flashes of grotesque generosity alternated with longer stretches of inconceivable ferocity, and the skipper who fell into their hands might find himself dismissed with his cargo, after serving as boon companion in some hideous debauch, or might sit at his cabin table with his own nose and his lips served up with pepper and salt in front of him. It took a stout seaman in those days to ply his calling in the Caribbean Gulf.

Such a man was Captain John Scarrow, of the ship *Morning Star*, and yet he breathed a long sigh of relief when he heard the splash of the falling anchor and swung at his moorings within a hundred yards of the guns of the citadel of Basseterre. St. Kitt's was his final port of call, and early next morning his bowsprit would be pointed for Old England. He had had enough of those robber-haunted seas. Ever since he had left Maracaibo upon the Main, with his full lading of sugar and red pepper, he had winced at every topsail which glimmered over the violet edge of the tropical sea. He had coasted up the Windward Islands, touching here and there, and assailed continually by stories of villainy and outrage.

Captain Sharkey, of the 20-gun pirate barque *Happy Delivery*, had passed down the coast, and had littered it with gutted vessels and with murdered men. Dreadful anecdotes were current of his grim pleasantries and of his inflexible ferocity. From the Bahamas to the Main his coal-black barque, with the ambiguous name, had

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been freighted with death and many things which are worse than death. So nervous was Captain Scarrow, with his new full-rigged ship and her full and valuable lading, that he struck out to the west as far as Bird's Island to be out of the usual track of commerce. And yet even in those solitary waters he had been unable to shake off sinister traces of Captain Sharkey.

One morning they had raised a single skiff adrift upon the face of the ocean. Its only occupant was a delirious seaman, who yelled hoarsely as they hoisted him aboard, and showed a dried-up tongue like a black and wrinkled fungus at the back of his mouth. Water and nursing soon transformed him into the strongest and smartest sailor on the ship. He was from Marblehead, in New England, it seemed, and was the sole survivor of a schooner which had been scuttled by the dreadful Sharkey.

For a week Hiram Evanson, for that was his name, had been adrift beneath a tropical sun. Sharkey had ordered the mangled remains of his late captain to be thrown into the boat, "as provisions for the voyage," but the seaman had at once committed them to the deep, lest the temptation should be more than he could bear. He had lived upon his own huge frame until, at the last moment, the *Morning Star* had found him in that madness which is the precursor of such a death. It was no bad find for Captain Scarrow, for, with a short-handed crew, such a seaman as this big New Englander was a prize worth having. He vowed that he was the only man whom Captain Sharkey had ever placed under an obligation.

Now that they lay under the guns of Basseterre, all danger from the pirate was at an end, and yet the thought

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of him lay heavily upon the seaman's mind as he watched the agent's boat shooting out from the custom-house quay.

"I'll lay you a wager, Morgan," said he to the first mate, "that the agent will speak of Sharkey in the first hundred words that pass his lips."

"Well, captain, I'll have you a silver dollar, and chance it," said the rough old Bristol man beside him.

The negro rowers shot the boat alongside, and the linen-clad steersman sprang up the ladder.

"Welcome, Captain Scarrow!" he cried. "Have you heard about Sharkey?"

The captain grinned at the mate.

"What devilry has he been up to now?" he asked.

"Devilry! You've not heard, then! Why, we've got him safe under lock and key here at Basseterre. He was tried last Wednesday, and he is to be hanged to-morrow morning."

Captain and mate gave a shout of joy, which an instant later was taken up by the crew. Discipline was forgotten as they scrambled up through the break of the poop to hear the news. The New Englander was in the front of them with a radiant face turned up to heaven, for he came of the Puritan stock.

"Sharkey to be hanged!" he cried. "You don't know, Master Agent, if they lack a hangman, do you?"

"Stand back!" cried the mate, whose outraged sense of discipline was even stronger than his interest at the news. "I'll pay that dollar, Captain Scarrow, with the lightest heart that ever I paid a wager yet. How came the villain to be taken?"

"Why, as to that, he became more than his own com-

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rades could abide, and they took such a horror of him that they would not have him on the ship. So they marooned him upon the Little Mangles to the south of the Mysteriosa Bank, and there he was found by a Portobello trader, who brought him in. There was talk of sending him to Jamaica to be tried, but our good little governor, Sir Charles Ewan, would not hear of it. 'He's my meat,' said he, 'and I claim the cooking of it.' If you can stay till to-morrow morning at ten, you'll see the point swinging."

"I wish I could," said the captain wistfully, "but I am sadly behind time now. I should start with the evening tide."

"That you can't do," said the agent with decision. "The Governor is going back with you."

"The Governor!"

"Yes. He's had a dispatch from Government to return without delay. The fly-boat that brought it has gone on to Virginia. So Sir Charles has been waiting for you, as I told him you were due before the rains."

"Well, well!" cried the captain, in some perplexity, "I'm a plain seaman, and I don't know much of governors and baronets and their ways. I don't remember that I ever so much as spoke to one. But if it's in King George's service, and he asks a cast in the *Morning Star* as far as London, I'll do what I can for him. There's my own cabin he can have and welcome. As to the cooking, it's lobscouse and salmagundy six days in the week; but he can bring his own cook aboard with him if he thinks our galley too rough for his taste."

"You need not trouble your mind, Captain Scarrow," said the agent. "Sir Charles is in weak health just now,

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only clear of a quartan ague, and it is likely he will keep his cabin most of the voyage. Dr. Larousse said that he would have sunk had the hanging of Sharkey not put fresh life in him. He has a great spirit in him, though, you must not blame him if he is somewhat short in his speech."

"He may say what he likes and do what he likes so long as he does not come athwart my hawse when I am working the ship," said the captain. "He is Governor of St. Kitt's, but I am Governor of the *Morning Star*. And, by his leave, I must weigh with the first tide, for I owe a duty to my employer, just as he does to King George."

"He can scarce be ready to-night, for he has many things to set in order before he leaves."

"The early morning tide, then."

"Very good. I shall send his things aboard to-night, and he will follow them to-morrow early if I can prevail upon him to leave St. Kitt's without seeing Sharkey do the rogue's hornpipe. His own orders were instant, so it may be that he will come at once. It is likely that Dr. Larousse may attend him upon the journey."

Left to themselves, the captain and mate made the best preparations which they could for their illustrious passenger. The largest cabin was turned out and adorned in his honour, and orders were given by which barrels of fruit and some cases of wine should be brought off to vary the plain food of an ocean-going trader. In the evening the Governor's baggage began to arrive—great ironbound ant-proof trunks, and official tin packing-cases, with other strange-shaped packages, which suggested the cocked hat or sword within. And then there came a note,

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with a heraldic device upon the big red seal, to say that Sir Charles Ewan made his compliments to Captain Scarrow, and that he hoped to be with him in the morning as early as his duties and his infirmities would permit.

He was as good as his word, for the first grey of dawn had hardly begun to deepen into pink when he was brought alongside, and climbed with some difficulty up the ladder. The captain had heard the Governor was an eccentric, but he was hardly prepared for the curious figure who came limping feebly down his quarter-deck, his steps supported by a thick bamboo cane. He wore a Ramillies wig, all twisted into little tails like a poodle's coat, and cut so low across the brow that the large green glasses which covered his eyes looked as if they were hung from it. A fierce beak of a nose, very long and very thin, cut the air in front of him. His ague had caused him to swathe his throat and chin with a broad linen cravat, and he wore a loose damask powdering-gown secured by a cord round the waist. As he advanced he carried his masterful nose high in the air, but his head turned slowly from side to side in the helpless manner of the purblind, and he called in a high, querulous voice for the captain.

"You have my things?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir Charles."

"Have you wine aboard?"

"I have ordered five cases, sir."

"And tobacco?"

"There is a keg of Trinidad."

"You play a hand of piquet?"

"Passably well, sir."

"Then up anchor, and to sea!"

There was a fresh westerly wind, so by the time the

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sun was fairly through the morning haze, the ship was hull down from the islands. The decrepit Governor still limped the deck, with one guiding hand upon the quarter-rail.

“You are on Government service now, captain,” said he. “They are counting the days till I come to Westminster, I promise you. Have you all that she will carry?”

“Every inch, Sir Charles.”

“Keep her so if you blow the sails out of her. I fear, Captain Scarrow, that you will find a blind and broken man a poor companion for your voyage.”

“I am honoured in enjoying your Excellency’s society,” said the captain. “But I am sorry that your eyes should be so afflicted.”

“Yes, indeed. It is the cursed glare of the sun on the white streets of Basseterre which has gone far to burn them out.”

“I had heard also that you had been plagued by a quartan ague.”

“Yes; I have had a pyrexia, which has reduced me much.”

“We had set aside a cabin for your surgeon.”

“Ah, the rascal! There was no budging him, for he has a snug business amongst the merchants. But hark!”

He raised his ring-covered hand in the air. From far astern there came the low deep thunder of cannon.

“It is from the island!” cried the captain in astonishment. “Can it be a signal for us to put back?”

The Governor laughed.

“You have heard that Sharkey, the pirate, is to be hanged this morning. I ordered the batteries to salute

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when the rascal was kicking his last, so that I might know of it out at sea. There's an end of Sharkey!"

"There's an end of Sharkey!" cried the captain; and the crew took up the cry as they gathered in little knots upon the deck and stared back at the low, purple line of the vanishing land.

It was a cheering omen for their start across the Western Ocean, and the invalid Governor found himself a popular man on board, for it was generally understood that but for his insistence upon an immediate trial and sentence, the villain might have played upon some more venal judge and so escaped. At dinner that day Sir Charles gave many anecdotes of the deceased pirate; and so affable was he, and so skilful in adapting his conversation to men of lower degree, that captain, mate, and Governor smoked their long pipes and drank their claret as three good comrades should.

"And what figure did Sharkey cut in the dock?" asked the captain.

"He is a man of some presence," said the Governor.

"I had always understood that he was an ugly, sneering devil," remarked the mate.

"Well, I dare say he could look ugly upon occasions," said the Governor.

"I have heard a New Bedford whaleman say that he could not forget his eyes," said Captain Scarrow. "They were of the lightest filmy blue, with red-rimmed lids. Was that not so, Sir Charles?"

"Alas, my own eyes will not permit me to know much of those of others! But I remember now that the Adjutant-General said that he had such an eye as you describe, and added that the jury were so foolish as to be

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visibly discomposed when it was turned upon them. It is well for them that he is dead, for he was a man who would never forget an injury, and if he had laid hands upon any one of them he would have stuffed him with straw and hung him for a figure-head."

The idea seemed to amuse the Governor, for he broke suddenly into a high, neighing laugh, and the two seamen laughed also, but not so heartily, for they remembered that Sharkey was not the last pirate who sailed the western seas, and that as grotesque a fate might come to be their own. Another bottle was broached to drink for a pleasant voyage, and the Governor would drink just one other on top of it, so that the seamen were glad at last to stagger off—the one to his watch and the other to his bunk. But when after his four hours' spell the mate came down again, he was amazed to see the Governor in his Ramillies wig, his glasses, and his powdering-gown still seated sedately at the lonely table with his reeking pipe and six black bottles by his side.

"I have drunk with the Governor of St. Kitt's when he was sick," said he, "and God forbid that I should ever try to keep pace with him when he is well."

The voyage of the *Morning Star* was a successful one, and in about three weeks she was at the mouth of the British Channel. From the first day the infirm Governor had begun to recover his strength, and before they were half-way across the Atlantic he was, save only for his eyes, as well as any man upon the ship. Those who uphold the nourishing qualities of wine might point to him in triumph, for never a night passed that he did not repeat the performance of his first one. And yet he would be out upon deck in the early morning as fresh

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and brisk as the best of them, peering about with his weak eyes, and asking questions about the sail and the rigging, for he was anxious to learn the ways of the sea. And he made up for the deficiency of his eyes by obtaining leave from the captain that the New England seaman—he who had been cast away in the boat—should lead him about, and above all that he should sit beside him when he played cards and count the number of the pips, for unaided he could not tell the king from the knave.

It was natural that this Evanson should do the Governor willing service, since the one was the victim of the vile Sharkey, and the other was his avenger. One could see that it was a pleasure to the big American to lend his arm to the invalid, and at night he would stand with all respect behind his chair in the cabin and lay his great stub-nailed fore-finger upon the card which he should play. Between them there was little in the pockets either of Captain Scarrow or of Morgan, the first mate, by the time they sighted the Lizard.

And it was not long before they found that all they had heard of the high temper of Sir Charles Ewan fell short of the mark. At a sign of opposition or a word of argument his chin would shoot out from his cravat, his masterful nose would be cocked at a higher and more insolent angle, and his bamboo cane would whistle up over his shoulder. He cracked it once over the head of the carpenter when the man had accidentally jostled him upon the deck. Once, too, when there was some grumbling and talk of mutiny over the state of the provisions, he was of opinion that they should not wait for the dogs to rise, but that they should march forward and set upon them until they had trounced the devilment out of them. "Give me

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a knife and a bucket!" he cried with an oath, and could hardly be withheld from setting forth alone to deal with the spokesman of the seamen.

Captain Scarrow had to remind him that though he might be only answerable to himself at St. Kitt's, killing became murder upon the high seas. In politics he was, as became his official position, a stout prop of the House of Hanover, and he swore in his cups that he had never met a Jacobite without pistolling him where he stood. Yet for all his vapouring and his violence he was so good a companion, with such a stream of strange anecdote and reminiscence, that Scarrow and Morgan had never known a voyage pass so pleasantly.

And then at length came the last day, when, after passing the island, they had struck land again at the high white cliffs at Beachy Head. As evening fell the ship lay rolling in an oily calm, a league off from Winchelsea, with the long dark snout of Dungeness jutting out in front of her. Next morning they would pick up their pilot at the Foreland, and Sir Charles might meet the king's ministers at Westminster before the evening. The boatswain had the watch, and the three friends were met for a last turn of cards in the cabin, the faithful American still serving as eyes to the Governor. There was a good stake upon the table, for the sailors had tried on this last night to win their losses back from their passenger. Suddenly he threw all his cards down, and swept all the money into his long-flapped silken waistcoat.

"The game's mine!" said he.

"Heh, Sir Charles, not so fast!" cried Captain Scarrow; "you have not played out the hand, and we are not the losers."

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“Sink you for a liar!” said the Governor. “I tell you that I *have* played out the hand, and that you *are* a loser.” He whipped off his wig and his glasses as he spoke, and there was a high, bald forehead, and a pair of shifty blue eyes with the red rims of a bull terrier.

“Good God!” cried the mate. “It’s Sharkey!”

The two sailors sprang from their seats, but the big American castaway had put his huge back against the cabin door, and he held a pistol in each of his hands. The passenger had also laid a pistol upon the scattered cards in front of him, and he burst into his high, neighing laugh.

“Captain Sharkey is the name, gentlemen,” said he, “and this is Roaring Ned Galloway, the quartermaster of the *Happy Delivery*. We made it hot, and so they marooned us: me on a dry Tortuga cay, and him in an oarless boat. You dogs—you poor, fond, water-hearted dogs—we hold you at the end of our pistols!”

“You may shoot, or you may not!” cried Scarrow, striking his hand upon the breast of his frieze jacket. “If it’s my last breath, Sharkey, I tell you that you are a bloody rogue and miscreant, with a halter and hell-fire in store for you!”

“There’s a man of spirit, and one of my own kidney, and he’s going to make a pretty death of it!” cried Sharkey. “There’s no one aft save the man at the wheel, so you may keep your breath, for you’ll need it soon. Is the dinghy astern, Ned?”

“Ay, ay, captain!”

“And the other boats scuttled?”

“I bored them all in three places.”

“Then we shall have to leave you, Captain Scarrow.

CAPTAIN SHARKEY

You look as if you hadn't quite got your bearings yet. Is there anything you'd like to ask me?"

"I believe you're the devil himself!" cried the captain. "Where is the Governor of St. Kitt's?"

"When last I saw him his Excellency was in bed with his throat cut. When I broke prison I learnt from my friends—for Captain Sharkey has those who love him in every port—that the Governor was starting for Europe under a master who had never seen him. I climbed his verandah and I paid him the little debt that I owed him. Then I came aboard you with such of his things as I had need of, and a pair of glasses to hide these tell-tale eyes of mine, and I had ruffled it as a Governor should. Now, Ned, you can get to work upon them."

"Help! Help! Watch ahoy!" yelled the mate; but the butt of the pirate's pistol crashed down on his head, and he dropped like a pithed ox. Scarrow rushed for the door, but the sentinel clapped his hand over his mouth, and threw his other arm round his waist.

"No use, Master Scarrow," said Sharkey. "Let us see you go down on your knees and beg for your life."

"I'll see you—" cried Scarrow, shaking his mouth clear.

"Twist his arm round, Ned. Now will you?"

"No; not if you twist it off."

"Put an inch of your knife into him."

"You may put six inches, and then I won't."

"Sink me, but I like his spirit!" cried Sharkey. "Put your knife in your pocket, Ned. You've saved your skin, Scarrow, and it's a pity so stout a man should not take to the only trade where a pretty fellow can pick up a living. You must be born for no common death, Scarrow,

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since you have lain at my mercy and lived to tell the story. Tie him up, Ned."

"To the stove, captain?"

"Tut, tut! there's a fire in the stove. None of your rover tricks, Ned Galloway, unless they are called for, or I'll let you know which one of us two is captain and which is quartermaster. Make him fast to the table."

"Nay, I thought you meant to roast him!" said the quartermaster. "You surely do not mean to let him go?"

"If you and I were marooned on a Bahama cay, Ned Galloway, it is still for me to command and for you to obey. Sink you for a villain, do you dare to question my orders?"

"Nay, nay, Captain Sharkey, not so hot, sir!" said the quartermaster, and, lifting Scarrow like a child, he laid him on the table. With the quick dexterity of a seaman, he tied his spreadeagled hands and feet with a rope which was passed underneath, and gagged him securely with the long cravat which used to adorn the chin of the Governor of St. Kitt's.

"Now, Captain Scarrow, we must take our leave of you," said the pirate. "If I had half a dozen of my brisk boys at my heels I should have had your cargo and your ship, but Roaring Ned could not find a foremast hand with the spirit of a mouse. I see there are some small craft about, and we shall get one of them. When Captain Sharkey has a boat he can get a smack, when he has a smack he can get a brig, when he has a brig he can get a barque, and when he has a barque he'll soon have a full-rigged ship of his own—so make haste into London town, or I may be coming back, after all, for the *Morning Star*."

Captain Scarrow heard the key turn in the lock as they

CAPTAIN SHARKEY

left the cabin. Then, as he strained at his bonds, he heard their footsteps pass up the companion and along the quarter-deck to where the dinghy hung in the stern. Then, still struggling and writhing, he heard the creak of the falls and the splash of the boat in the water. In a mad fury he tore and dragged at his ropes, until at last, with flayed wrists and ankles, he rolled from the table, sprang over the dead mate, kicked his way through the closed door, and rushed hatless on to the deck.

“Ahoy! Peterson, Armitage, Wilson!” he screamed. “Cutlasses and pistols! Clear away the long-boat! Clear away the gig! Sharkey, the pirate, is in yonder dinghy. Whistle up the larboard watch, bo’sun, and tumble into the boats all hands.”

Down splashed the long-boat and down splashed the gig, but in an instant the coxswains and crews were swarming up the falls on to the deck once more.

“The boats are scuttled!” they cried. “They are leaking like a sieve.”

The captain gave a bitter curse. He had been beaten and outwitted at every point. Above was a cloudless, starlit sky, with neither wind nor the promise of it. The sails flapped idly in the moonlight. Far away lay a fishing-smack, with the men clustering over their net.

Close to them was the little dinghy, dipping and lifting over the shining swell.

“They are dead men!” cried the captain. “A shout all together, boys, to warn them of their danger.”

But it was too late.

At that very moment the dinghy shot into the shadow of the fishing-boat. There were two rapid pistol-shots, a scream, and then another pistol-shot, followed by silence.

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The clustering fishermen had disappeared. And then, suddenly, as the first puffs of a land-breeze came out from the Sussex shore, the boom swung out, the mainsail filled, and the little craft crept out with her nose to the Atlantic.

VIOLENCE

By ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

“**B**UT what seems so odd to me, so horribly pathetic, is that such people don’t resist,” said Leidall, suddenly entering the conversation. The intensity of his tone startled everybody; it was so passionate, yet with a beseeching touch that made the women feel uncomfortable a little. “As a rule, I’m told, they submit willingly, almost as though——”

He hesitated, grew confused, and dropped his glance to the floor; and a smartly-dressed woman, eager to be heard, seized the opening. “Oh, come now,” she laughed; “one always hears of a man being *put* into a strait waistcoat. I’m sure he doesn’t slip it on as if he were going to a dance!” And she looked flippantly at Leidall, whose casual manners she resented. “People are *put* under restraint. It’s not in human nature to accept it—healthy human nature, that is?” But for some reason no one took her question up. “That is so, I believe, yes,” a polite voice murmured, while the group at tea in the Dover Street Club turned with one accord to Leidall as to one whose interesting sentence still remained unfinished. He had hardly spoken before, and a silent man is ever credited with wisdom.

“As though—you were just saying, Mr. Leidall?” a quiet little man in a dark corner helped him.

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“As though, I meant, a man in that condition of mind is not insane all through,” Leidall continued stammeringly; “but that some wise portion of him watches the proceeding with gratitude, and welcomes the protection against himself. It seems awfully pathetic. Still”—again hesitating and fumbling in his speech—“er—it seems queer to me that he should yield quietly to enforced restraint—the waistcoat, handcuffs, and the rest.” He looked round hurriedly, half suspiciously, at the faces in the circle, then dropped his eyes again to the floor. He sighed, leaning back in his chair. “I cannot understand it,” he added, as no one spoke, but in a very low voice, and almost to himself. “One would expect them to struggle furiously.”

Someone had mentioned that remarkable book, *The Mind that Found Itself*, and the conversation had slipped into this serious vein. The women did not like it. What kept it alive was the fact that the silent Leidall, with his handsome, melancholy face, had suddenly wakened into speech, and that the little man opposite to him, half invisible in his dark corner, was assistant to one of London’s great hypnotic doctors, who could, an he would, tell interesting and terrible things. No one cared to ask the direct question, but all hoped for revelations, possibly about people they actually knew. It was a very ordinary tea-party indeed. And this little man now spoke, though hardly in the desired vein. He addressed his remarks to Leidall across the disappointed lady.

“I think, probably, your explanation is the true one,” he said gently, “for madness in its commoner forms is merely want of proportion; the mind gets out of right and proper relations with its environment. The majority

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of madmen are mad on one thing only, while the rest of them is as sane as myself—or you.”

The words fell into the silence. Leidall bowed his agreement, saying no actual word. The ladies fidgeted. Someone made a jocular remark to the effect that most of the world was mad anyhow, and the conversation shifted with relief into a lighter vein—the scandal in the family of a politician. Everybody talked at once. Cigarettes were lit. The corner soon became excited and even uproarious. The tea-party was a great success, and the offended lady, no longer ignored, led all the skirmishes—towards herself. She was in her element. Only Leidall and the little invisible man in the corner took small part in it; and presently, seizing the opportunity when some new arrivals joined the group, Leidall rose to say his adieux, and slipped away, his departure scarcely noticed. Dr. Hancock followed him a minute later. The two men met in the hall; Leidall already had his hat and coat on. “I’m going West, Mr. Leidall. If that’s your way too, and you feel inclined for the walk, we might go together.” Leidall turned with a start. His glance took in the other with avidity—a keenly-searching, hungry glance. He hesitated for an imperceptible moment, then made a movement towards him, half inviting, while a curious shadow dropped across his face and vanished. It was both pathetic and terrible. The lips trembled. He seemed to say, “God bless you; *do* come with me!” But no words were audible.

“It’s a pleasant evening for a walk,” added Dr. Hancock gently; “clean and dry under foot for a change. I’ll get my hat and join you in a second.” And there was a hint, the merest flavour, of authority in his voice.

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That touch of authority was his mistake. Instantly Leidall's hesitation passed. "I'm sorry," he said abruptly, "but I'm afraid I must take a taxi. I have an appointment at the Club, and I'm late already." "Oh, I see," the other replied, with a kindly smile; "then I mustn't keep you. But if you ever have a free evening, won't you look me up, or come and dine? You'll find my telephone number in the book. I should like to talk with you about—those things we mentioned at tea." Leidall thanked him politely and went out. The memory of the little man's kindly sympathy and understanding eyes went with him.

"Who was that man?" someone asked, the moment Leidall had left the tea-table. "Surely he's not the Leidall who wrote that awful book some years ago?"

"Yes—the *Gulf of Darkness*. Did you read it?"

They discussed it and its author for five minutes, deciding by a large majority that it was the book of a madman. Silent, rude men like that always had a screw loose somewhere, they agreed. Silence was invariably morbid.

"And did you notice Dr. Hancock? He never took his eyes off him. That's why he followed him out like that. I wonder if *he* thought anything!"

"I know Hancock well," said the lady of the wounded vanity. "I'll ask him and find out." They chattered on, somebody mentioned a *risqué* play, the talk switched into other fields, and in due course the tea-party came to an end.

And Leidall, meanwhile, made his way towards the Park on foot, for he had not taken a taxi after all. The suggestion of the other man, perhaps, had worked upon him. He was very open to suggestion. With hands deep

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in his overcoat pockets, and head sunk forward between his shoulders, he walked briskly, entering the Park at one of the smaller gates. He made his way across the wet turf, avoiding the paths and people. The February sky was shining in the west; beautiful clouds floated over the houses; they looked like the shore-line of some radiant strand his childhood once had known. He sighed; thought dived and searched within; self-analysis, that old, implacable demon, lifted its voice; introspection took the reins again as usual. There seemed a strain upon the mind he could not dispel. Thought circled poignantly. He knew it was unhealthy, morbid, a sign of those many years of difficulty and stress that had marked him so deeply, but for the life of him he could not escape from the hideous spell that held him. The same old thoughts bored their way into his mind like burning wires, tracing the same unanswerable questions. From this torture, waking or sleeping, there was no escape. Had a companion been with him it might have been different. If, for instance, Dr. Hancock——

He was angry with himself for having refused—furious; it was that vile, false pride his long loneliness had fostered. The man was sympathetic to him, friendly, marvellously understanding; he could have talked freely with him, and found relief. His intuition had picked out the little doctor as a man in ten thousand. Why had he so curtly declined his gentle invitation? Dr. Hancock *knew*; he guessed his awful secret. But how? In what had he betrayed himself?

The weary self-questioning began again, till he sighed and groaned from sheer exhaustion. He *must* find people, companionship, someone to talk to. The Club—it

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crossed his tortured mind for a second—was impossible; there was a conspiracy among the members against him. He had left his usual haunts everywhere for the same reason—his restaurants where he had his lonely meals; his music-hall, where he tried sometimes to forget himself; his favourite walks, where the very policeman knew and eyed him. And, coming to the bridge across the Serpentine just then, he paused and leaned over the edge, watching a bubble rise to the surface.

“I suppose there *are* fish in the Serpentine?” he said to a man a few feet away.

They talked a moment—the other was evidently a clerk on his way home, and then the stranger edged off and continued his walk, looking back once or twice at the sad-faced man who had addressed him. “It’s ridiculous, that with all our science we can’t live under water as the fish do,” reflected Leidall, and moved on round the other bank of the water, where he watched a flight of duck whirl down from the darkening air and settle with a long, mournful splash beside the bushy island. “Or that, for all our pride of mechanism in a mechanical age, we cannot really fly.” But these attempts to escape from self were never very successful. Another part of him looked on and mocked. He returned ever to the endless introspection of self-analysis, and in the deepest moment of it—ran into a big, motionless figure that blocked his way. It was the Park policeman, the one who had always eyed him. He sheered off suddenly towards the trees, while the man, recognising him, touched his cap respectfully. “It’s a pleasant evening, sir; turned quite mild again.” Leidall mumbled some reply or other, and hurried on to hide himself among the shadows of the trees. The police-

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man stood and watched him, till the darkness swallowed him. "He knows too!" groaned the wretched man. And every bench was occupied; every face turned to watch him; there were even figures behind the trees. He dared not go into the street, for the very taxi-drivers were against him. If he gave an address, he would not be driven to it; the man would *know*, and take him elsewhere. And something in his heart, sick with anguish, weary with the endless battle, suddenly yielded.

"There *are* fish in the Serpentine," he remembered the stranger had said. "And," he added to himself, with a wave of delicious comfort, "they lead secret, hidden lives that no one can disturb." His mind cleared surprisingly. In the water he could find peace and rest and healing. Good Lord! How easy it all was! Yet he had never thought of it before. He turned sharply to retrace his steps, but in that very second the clouds descended upon his thought again, his mind darkened, he hesitated. Could he get out again when he had had enough? Would he rise to the surface? A battle began over these questions. He ran quickly, then stood still again to think the matter out. Darkness shrouded him. He heard the wind rush laughing through the trees. The picture of the whirring duck flashed back a moment, and he decided that the best way was by air, and not by water. He would fly into the place of rest, not sink or merely float; and he remembered the view from his bedroom window, high over old smoky London town, with a drop of eighty feet on to the pavements. Yes, that was the best way. He waited a moment, trying to think it all out clearly, but one moment the fish had it, and the next the birds. It was really impossible to decide. Was there no one who

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could help him, no one in all this enormous town who was sufficiently on his side to advise him on the point? Some clear-headed, experienced, kindly man?

And the face of Dr. Hancock flashed before his vision. He saw the gentle eyes and sympathetic smile, remembered the soothing voice and the offer of companionship he had refused. Of course, there was one serious drawback: Hancock *knew*. But he was far too tactful, too sweet and good a man to let that influence his judgment, or to betray in any way at all that he did know.

Leidall found it in him to decide. Facing the entire hostile world, he hailed a taxi from the nearest gate upon the street, looked up the address in a chemist's telephone book, and reached the door in a condition of delight and relief. Yes, Dr. Hancock was at home. Leidall sent his name in. A few minutes later the two men were chatting pleasantly together, almost like old friends, so keen was the little man's intuitive sympathy and tact. Only Hancock, patient listener though he proved to be, was uncommonly full of words. Leidall explained the matter very clearly. "Now, what is your decision, Dr. Hancock? Is it to be the way of the fish or the way of the duck?" And, while Hancock began his answer with slow, well-chosen words, a new idea, better than either, leaped with a flash into his listener's mind. It was an inspiration. For where could he find a better hiding-place from all his troubles than Hancock himself? The man was kindly; he surely would not object. Leidall this time would not hesitate a second. He was tall and broad; Hancock was small; yet he was sure there would be room. He sprang upon him like a wild animal. He felt the warm, thin throat yield and bend between his great hands . . .

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then darkness, peace and rest, a nothingness that surely was the oblivion he had so long prayed for. He had accomplished his desire. He had secreted himself forever from persecution—inside the kindest little man he had ever met—inside Hancock. . . .

He opened his eyes and looked about him into a room he did not know. The walls were soft and dimly coloured. It was very silent. Cushions were everywhere. Peaceful it was, and out of the world. Overhead was a skylight, and one window, opposite the door, was heavily barred. Delicious! No one could get in. He was sitting in a deep and comfortable chair. He felt rested and happy. There was a click, and he saw a tiny window in the door drop down, as though worked by a sliding panel. Then the door opened noiselessly, and in came a little man with smiling face and soft brown eyes—Dr. Hancock.

Leidall's first feeling was amazement. "Then I didn't get into him properly after all! Or I've slipped out again, perhaps! The dear, good fellow!" And he rose to greet him. He put his hand out, and found that the other came with it in some inexplicable fashion. Movement was cramped. "Ah, then I've had a stroke," he thought, as Hancock pressed him, ever so gently, back into the big chair. "Do not get up," he said soothingly but with authority; "sit where you are and rest. You must take it very easy for a bit; like all clever men who have over-worked——"

"I'll get in the moment he turns," thought Leidall. "I did it badly before. It must be through the back of his head, of course, where the spine runs up into the brain," and he waited till Hancock should turn. But Hancock never turned. He kept his face towards him all the time,

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while he chatted, moving gradually nearer to the door. On Leidall's face was the smile of an innocent child, but there lay a hideous cunning behind that smile, and the eyes were terrible.

"Are those bars firm and strong," asked Leidall, "so that no one can get in?" He pointed craftily, and the doctor, caught for a second unawares, turned his head. That instant Leidall was upon him with a roar, then sank back powerless into the chair, unable to move his arms more than a few inches in any direction. Hancock stepped up quietly and made him comfortable again with cushions.

And something in Leidall's soul turned round and looked another way. His mind became clear as daylight for a moment. The effort perhaps had caused the sudden change from darkness to great light. A memory rushed over him. "Good God!" he cried. "I am violent. I was going to do you an injury—you who are so sweet and good to me!" He trembled dreadfully, and burst into tears. "For the sake of Heaven," he implored, looking up, ashamed and keenly penitent, "put me under restraint. Fasten my hands before I try it again." He held both hands out willingly, beseechingly, then looked down, following the direction of the other's kind brown eyes. His wrists, he saw, already wore steel handcuffs, and a strait waistcoat was across his chest and arms and shoulders.

THE REWARD OF ENTERPRISE

By WARD MUIR

THIS is how it happened [said my friend Harborough].

I'm a novelist, as you know, but if I hadn't *had* to take to writing I'd have been a rolling stone by profession and by inclination. In my more philosophic moods I perceive that, really, it was sheer luck . . . this occurrence about which you've asked me to tell you. I should never have made a success of any other trade but authorship. I'd have starved; instead I'm rather well off, as things go. But still——

You understand I was by way of being a bit venturesome, as a young man. I did a certain amount of journalism, from time to time, but my secret hopes were set on all that is implied in that specious phrase, "seeing the world." I wanted to see the world.

Keeping this object in view I shipped on a tramp steamer, with whose captain I had struck up an acquaintanceship. Nominally I was the purser, actually I was the Captain's guest. Cargo boats such as the S.S. *Peterhof* do not employ a purser.

No need to narrate the history of that voyage nor dwell upon the trivial particulars of our life on board. Suffice it to say that in mid-Atlantic our engines had a breakdown. The *Peterhof* came to a standstill.

If it has ever happened to you during a big voyage you

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will know that there is something portentous about the cessation of a steamer's machinery in mid-ocean. To be becalmed on a sailing ship may be boring: to be becalmed—if such an expression can be used—on a steamer is almost too queer to be boring. Day and night the engines have throbbed until their throbbing has penetrated into your very marrow, and when the throbbing abruptly dies you are sensible of a shock. When the *Peterhof* halted I ran up on deck as speedily as though we had had a collision. I saw, all round, nothing but sea, sea, sea, and it was far more amazing than if I had beheld an island or an iceberg or a raft of shipwrecked mariners, or any of the other picturesque phenomena which my fertile fancy had hastened to invent as an explanation for our stoppage.

The *Peterhof's* engines were antiquated, break-downs had occurred before, and our two engineers, I learnt, would be able to effect a repair. Twenty-four hours' labour would set us going again—it turned out to be only a slightly over-optimistic prophecy—and meanwhile, we were free to admire, as best we might, the somewhat monotonous beauties of the Atlantic.

There was not a breath of wind; the sun blazed from a cloudless sky; as long as the *Peterhof* had been in motion we had considered the temperature fairly cool, but now that her motion was arrested the heat became very noticeable. The sea was, in a sense, absolutely smooth; but its smoothness did not imply flatness, any more than the smoothness of a carpet's pile implies flatness if the carpet is being shaken. On the contrary, the *Peterhof* was rolling upon the undulations of a heavy groundswell. The surface of that groundswell was without a

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wrinkle, polished and glossy like lacquer; but its hills and its dales were gigantically high and deep; far higher and far deeper than I had realised until the engines relinquished their task of propelling us athwart them. Now, lying helpless upon the water, we swooped up to a glazed summit, swooped down to the bottom of a satiny gulf, swooped up again and down again, in a splendid, even oscillation—and (this was what seemed so extraordinary to a landsman)—in absolute silence. It was uncanny. Those fabulous billows never broke. There was not even a hiss of foam against the side of the steamer. The *Peterhof* just tobogganned down one stupendous gradient and up the next as though she had been sliding on oil.

The thing fascinated me. I stood by the rail, revelling in this prodigious sea-saw, and only gradually did it dawn upon me that we were not really rushing down one slant and up the next, we were only being lifted up and down vertically.

This discovery sounds foolish, but I can't tell you how it excited me. I got an empty biscuit tin from the steward and threw it into the sea, as far as I could, and then watched it floating. You'd have said that that biscuit tin would have been drawn away by the strength of the swell, or else dashed against the *Peterhof's* side; instead it simply sat there at exactly the spot where it had fallen; and an hour after I had thrown it into the water it had shifted, perhaps, only six or eight inches nearer the steamer.

A project was forming in my mind. I looked at the water. It was a peculiar, vitreous green, closer under the steamer, was transparent to the depth of many feet. Beneath my shoe-soles the poop was hot; over-side, the

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sea looked inexpressibly inviting. And on a sudden I turned to the drowsing Captain and exclaimed: "I want to bathe."

"To *bathe*?" The Captain gazed at me.

"Why not?"

The Captain yawned out some lethargic suggestion to the effect that to bathe would be dangerous because of the depth—as though I'd be more apt to drown in three miles of water than in three fathoms.

Seafaring people are odd in that way—I don't mean in their ignorance of swimming, though, to be sure, the average sailor is seldom a swimmer. They're so—how shall I express it?—so unenterprising. In the midst of adventure and romance they are stirred by no recognition either of the adventures or the romantic.

I was a city-bred youngster, who had never been out of hail of the homeland before, and I possessed more enterprise in my little finger than that far-travelled Captain had in the whole of his weather-worn, hulking lump of a carcass. I wanted to bathe. I wanted to bathe in the mid-Atlantic. I had learnt to bathe in the public swimming-bath near my old school, and now I wanted to try a swimming-bath three miles deep and tilting continuously at an angle of I don't know how many degrees. The notion was gorgeous.

"I can swim," I said. "You needn't be afraid."

"But the waves'll sweep you away."

"There aren't any waves. Watch this biscuit tin. The top of the Atlantic, at this moment, is like a string which is being twanged. The vibrations are a hundred yards across, or more, and they look as though they were travelling along the string; I suppose they *are* travelling along

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the string; but a fly sitting on the string doesn't travel along with the vibrations, it only travels up and down. If I go in to bathe I shan't be swept away."

The Captain hadn't thought of it in that light. He tried to argue—but my biscuit tin answered his argument. And eventually he allowed me to have the ladder lowered; I stripped, descended the ladder, and launched myself into the sea.

I struck out, to get clear of the ship, then ceased swimming and looked around me. The sea was coldish, but not unendurable—and anyhow I was too much in love with my situation to bother about that. Behind me the *Peterhof* towered, like a cliff; I had never realised, before, how big a five-thousand-ton vessel looks from the water. At her rail I could see a cluster of the crew, watching me; the Captain on the poop. From somewhere in the interior of the ship came the sound of hammering—the engineers at work—and I noticed that this sound reached me more clearly now than when I was on board.

But if the *Peterhof* appeared strange, from the water, how much stranger was the view in the opposite direction! Or rather, the absence of view!

The ground-swell had looked formidable when I was on the *Peterhof's* deck; here its aspect was terrific. The crystalline slope in which I was cradled seemed to reach the sky; yet, without having climbed it, I immediately found myself, instead of looking up the slope, looking down it—down an oblique abyss of gleaming profundity. I seemed to fall and fall and fall; nevertheless, there was no spasm of nausea; although I was falling I was supported, sensuously, in my fall . . . and I never reached the finish of the fall; it merged, imperceptibly, into an

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ascent ; and a moment later I was surveying a fresh trough of glassiness, or else gazing audaciously downward, downward on to the deck of the *Peterhof*.

It was overwhelming. Never in all my life have I attained to a rapture comparable with that bathe in mid-Atlantic. I knew, even at the time, that it would be unforgettable. I had aspired to be able to say that I had swum in water three miles deep . . . oh, never mind what vain boast I had promised myself. Boasting was forgotten. I was experiencing. I was surrendered to an ecstasy, an enchantment, a glee, beyond expression grandiose and delicious. I lolled in the pellucid water, not troubling to swim. I let myself go, in those dizzy soarings and sinkings; I abandoned myself to this vast and beautiful force; I felt at once infinitely little and infinitely great.

The whole adventure was half terrifying and half . . . well, comfortable. Perched on the crown of one of those flawless ridges I felt, as I toppled over, that I must either be smashed to pieces at the end of the plunge or engulfed in some horrid under-tow. But I knew that nothing of the sort would happen. Quietly I paddled with my arms and feet; almost contemptuously I gave myself to the puissant and colossal rhythm which swayed me as high as a cathedral at every swing and then gently rocked me down as deep as a valley. I tell you, the sensation was sublime . . . and I hadn't even got my hair wet!

I remembered, in the middle of my bliss, this perfectly incongruous fact that I hadn't got my hair wet, and I prepared to "duck." But at that moment I heard a shout from the deck of the *Peterhof*.

I turned in the water, and saw that the Captain was

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gesticulating to me, but I couldn't hear what he was saying. The crew were shouting also, and one of them had got a coil of rope over his arm and seemed to be making ready to throw it. What did they mean?

Stupidly, in the tingling ardour and gusto of my enjoyment, I didn't make out, for a minute, what they were driving at; it occurred to me that they had taken it into their heads that because I wasn't swimming I had got cramp. I signalled cheerily to them, to reassure them; but they did not cease shouting . . . and then, as I turned again, a little, in the water, I *knew*. . . .

Near the skyline rim of the superb mountain-range upon which I was commencing to rise I saw, shadowy in the translucent green, an unmistakable shape—the shape of a great fish: a shark. Its fin cut the surface like a knife. For one instant I stared, and in that instant I observed, with a vivid clearness, all manner of minute details—the burnished sheen on the water, the glistening tautness of its lofty skyline, the sapphire blue of the sky itself, and, most lucidly of all, the silhouette of the shark. Every movement of the shark was now plain to me; and it was moving, there was no doubt of it: a trail of bubbles streamed from its flank and a tiny streak of froth fluttered behind the fin. The shark was not passive, in the element, as I was; it was monarch of the waves, it could drive through them with the precision of a torpedo. I had invaded a realm which I had no business to invade . . . and its guardian was come to punish me.

An astonishingly coherent train of reflections such as these whirled round my brain. They must have occupied a fraction of a second. I know that, at all events, I struck out for the *Peterhof* without any apparent pause. My

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arms and legs worked frantically; I swum as I had never swum before. I hurled myself through the water.

Fortunately I had gone only a very short distance from the foot of the steamer's ladder. It seemed remote enough, though, I can tell you! My eyes were bursting out of their sockets, but I could dimly see the Captain leaning on the rail and shouting, and some of the men running down the ladder to receive me. Then the rope was flung. It splashed across me. I grasped it. I dug my nails into it. I clung to it with a grip so fierce that I felt as though I was crushing it. Simultaneously the men at the other end of the rope began pulling, and I was jerked through the water in a lather of spray which swirled round my shoulders. My arms and head were above the water, I was being dragged so fast up the steamer's side. I could still see the Captain, vaguely, confusedly. His mouth was open, his hands were waving. But I wasn't interested in him, I was only interested in what was pursuing behind me. Gad! That was an awful moment. I dream of it, sometimes, even now: the disgusting, obscene terror of that dash for safety . . . and I wake sweating with the horror of it.

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Harborough paused.

"And how did your adventure end?" I asked.

"I don't know. I lost consciousness. But I kept tight on to the rope. They hauled me on board . . . they told me afterwards that I hadn't even got my hair wet . . . but . . ." he hesitated.

"I'd had my experience—a never-to-be-forgotten experience. Dash it!" he laughed. "It was almost worth it, I swear . . . and I'm making money, now, as a

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novelist, whereas if I'd continued my life of rolling stone I'd certainly have arrived in prison or the poorhouse. Yes, I suppose that every disaster has its compensations.

“But I confess I didn't think so when I awoke on board the *Peterhof*—we were plug-plugging onwards again by that time—and found that I'd got only one leg.”

GREAR'S DAM

By MORLEY ROBERTS

THERE was dust everywhere; it was a red-hot world of dust. It lay upon the roads where the labouring wheel tracks marked them out; but the whole long plain was dust as well. Neither grass nor any green thing showed, and dead, dry salt-bush, eaten by the sheep till it looked like broken peasticks, was dust colour to the dancing horizon of that world of thirst. For seven months and a week, by Wilson's almanac, there had been no rain, and what dew had fallen the hot air drank when the fierce sun rose. And now not even the little fenced garden at Warribah showed any sign of verdure. Water was precious, and each day the north wind drank the water-holes drier and drier yet.

But, though the world of desolate Warribah was brown, in the roots of grass and the mere sticks of salt-bush was sufficient nourishment to keep life in the sheep who moved across the burnt paddocks of the station; what they needed, and what they began to suffer for was water, and the cloudless sky, luminous and terrible, bent over their world and breathed fire upon them. The wind out of the Austral tropics was as fierce as a blowpipe flame, or so it seemed. Hope and prosperity melted under it, and the home at Warribah dissolved.

"I shall go mad," said Wilson. And having said it, he sent his wife away to the south. He could not keep a

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cheerful face before her; it was easier to lie upon paper, easier to drift into silence that was not disturbed by her tears. He was a lonely man again, as lonely as when he had first fought with the bush, and conquered a space for himself where no water ran.

And now the conquered territory that he had hoped to keep for the uses of civilisation called in the sun and the north wind, and there was a great fight in progress between man and nature. As he walked over what he had won, or as he galloped, the caked and cracked earth fell into powder, and rose choking and impalpable, as fine as flour. The gaunt, spare box trees of the plains were powdered with its red-white film; their dry verdure was obscured. The dust was mud upon his lips, mud upon his cheeks as he sweated ice, to think the day was coming when there could be no hope for him and no help.

“How long now?” he asked himself.

And all about the plains rose columns of dust as the uneasy, fretful sheep, to whom his men doled water, moved up the wind seeking more.

“After ten years—this,” said Wilson, and he laughed. But those who heard him laugh shivered, and contracted their brows. For he was a hard worker, and had slaved for this—for bankruptcy, a sky of brass.

“The boss is crazy,” said the men at the hut.

An immense, intolerable sense of pity for the sheep possessed him. He had no children, and the land he held had been as a child to him. Now the plains he had delighted in were become ingrate. They refused him help. The sheep were his children and his delight. He knew thousands of them by sight, for he had the shepherd's

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eye. There was a character about the Warribah sheep that he had bestowed by his care and by his choice. He had fenced them in against straying; had chased the cowardly dingo and had slain him; he had rejoiced in the grass and the whitening cotton-bush, and the succulence of thick-fleshed salt-bush. How often he had ridden out and watched the sheep graze; it was a happy world when the rains in their due season ceased, and the time for shearing came. It was a riotous pleasure to hear the click of the shears. How the white inner fleece gleamed and fell over, and parted and showed its woven beauty! The movements of the shearers, and the sound of them, and the sound of the pent or loosened sheep wove itself into a kind of fabric; in the loom of time and the due sweet season pleasure grew, and success, and the joy of well-doing.

And now there was death in the air and in the north wind. And behind it ruin. There his ten thousand children would perish off the face of the inexorable earth and be no more than white bones lying heaped against a northern fence where no water was. He laughed a thin, crackling laugh, and walked to and fro in front of his lonely house.

“The boss is crazy,” his men had said. Now in the hot and idle noon they sat in the southward shadow of the crackling hut and watched him. The old cook, a blear-eyed outcast thrown up by the seas upon the coast of Australia, broke suddenly into a drivelling yarn.

“I knew it worse nor this—hell’s flames never beat it, on the Bogan that year——”

He mumbled on.

“So they died, and the horses, too. Oh, it was cruel,

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cruel. And Webber cut his throat from ear to ear, cut his crazy 'ead 'arf off."

"What of your paddock, Jim?" asked Hill, the old hand of Warribah. The young boundary rider spat drily.

"The jumbucks is suckin' mud. The water stinks of yolk. You can smell it a mile off. Ter-morrer I'll have to fetch 'em in."

The black and red ants ran riot in the hut and outside of it. The insect world flourished and abounded. But for all their bronze there was a pallid look about the men. Nature was no friend of theirs; they looked out on fire and blinding light.

"I never knowed it worse."

But old Blear Eyes had.

"So *he* blew his brains out."

"Oh, dry up," said Hill, but the cook murmured of ancient disasters on the Darling and the Macquarie.

"Did you die of thirst, you old croaker, and jump up to choke us?"

And still Wilson wandered to and fro in the sunlight, though the sky was inexorable.

"He'll be shakin' his fist at it yet," said the cook, "and when a man does that he never comes to no good. It's all up with them as shakes a fist at 'eaven. I've seen it myself. Now it was in '79 that Jones of Quandong Flats went mad. He shook 'is fist at the sky. I seen him, and the next morning 'e was ravin' 'orrid, as though the 'orrors of drink was on 'im. And well I knowed 'em then."

The boss came towards them through the hot sand, and he leant in the shade against the pole on which the men's saddles hung. The men looked downcast and half-

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ashamed. Sydney Jim lost all his flashness and moved uneasily. And the old cook shambled into his kitchen and fell to work upon his bread.

“There’s little water in the Ten-Mile Tank, Jim?”

“They was suckin’ mud this morning, sir,” said Jim.

Wilson tugged at his grizzled beard and pulled his sun-burnt hat over his eyes.

“We should have put down wells,” said Hill.

Wilson broke into sudden blasphemy, and checked it with a kind of gasp, as though he felt that madness lay just beyond the limits of his self-control.

“So we should,” he said; “so we should.”

And he walked away.

“You took that cursin’ very quiet,” said Jim. And there was somethin’ in Hill’s eye that made him flinch.

“Oh, well,” he said apologetically, and Hill glared at him. The heat was in more than one.

“My son,” said Hill, “I’ve half a mind——”

And then he rose and followed Wilson. He caught him up and talked hard till Wilson shook his head and went inside and slammed the door.

“He should make it up with Grear, and if Grear let him down on to the river he might save some.”

For Warribah was in the back-blocks, and Grear held all the river frontage for twenty miles.

“But they hate each other, and Wilson ain’t the man to crawl,” said Hill. “He’s a good sort. I’ll go myself.”

He went back to the hut and, taking his saddle and bridle, walked to the horse paddock, which seemed as barren as a stockyard. He caught his horse, that was standing at the gate and looking wistfully towards the stable as if he knew that good feed was there.

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"Come," said Hill, and he rode south through the pine scrub towards Grear's. He came to the station as the sun went down, and when he asked for the boss Grear came out.

"Oh you!" he said roughly. "And what d'ye want?"

He was a long, thin man with a cold eye and thin lips, and as he looked at him Hill felt that it was a foolish errand he had come on. The man was worse than he had imagined. It seemed that Wilson was right. To ask Grear for anything was to invite insult. And though Hill had come twenty miles to ask he turned away.

"I haven't seen you for nigh on a year," said he, "and now I've seen you, why, I shan't weep if I never see you again."

He got upon his horse solemnly and turned away, leaving Grear with an open mouth.

"I was a fool to come," said Hill, as he ploughed his way among the sandhills. "He used to reckon that all the back-blocks was his, and Wilson took 'em up. Grear don't forgive."

The night had come upon the land, but there was no remission of the hot north wind. The heated earth radiated heat still, while in the clear obscure of the heavens the stars glittered like sharp points of steel. They stabbed Hill's very heart as he rode and looked into the rainless depths of heaven. For the sky was no overarching dome at that season. It was an awful emptiness without form; it was space itself, unmitigated and terrible, and heaven's lamps were near and far and farther still, while black, starless spaces showed like unfathomable patches in a silent sea.

"Good God!" said Hill, and fear got hold of him

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suddenly. He roused his horse to a canter for the sake of the noise of the motion. The sky appalled him, and a peculiar sense of reversion took him. He was hung over depths, and seemed to cling to the suspended earth.

"I'm crazy myself," said Hill, with a quiver in his voice. And his very voice broke the silence like a pistol-shot. It made him start until he heard a sheep's faint baa in the distance. And then a mopoke called its mate in the trees by an old dry creek. Hill pulled up.

"But it ain't a creek after all," he said to himself. "It's a Billabong, but it's twenty years since water came out of the Lachlan so far as Warribah, and Gear put a dam there fifteen years ago. Ah! if the river only rose up, and came down roarin'. But it won't; it won't."

As he dreamed of the river, now like a low water-hole with never a current in it, Wilson, at home, lay in an uneasy sleep. He, too, dreamed, and dreamed of rain, and he woke himself shouting, "Rain!" and in his confusion called "Mary" to his wife five hundred miles away.

"Oh God! I dreamt it again," he said. "I dreamed of rain in our old place east, and the river came down with thunder and floods, and the land grew green in an hour—green, green!"

He fell asleep again, and when he woke at dawn he was oddly cheerful. Perhaps the rest from anxiety in that happy dream had taken part of the strain from his weary mind.

"I do feel as if it had rained somewhere," he said; "and if the weather only breaks anywhere we may have it here."

"Don't you think it cooler?" he said to Hill next morning. But the sky was brass and the sun white hot.

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That evening a man riding through to Conoble from Condobolin told him that he had heard it had rained east of Forbes. And another man who camped at the Ten-Mile Clump said he knew there had been a great thunderstorm to the east.

"I dreamed it, so I did!" cried Wilson; "and the Lachlan's coming down."

His jaw fell even as he spoke. What use was the Lachlan to him out in the beyond, when Grear's lay between? He had no river frontage. Grear had it all.

In such a country, in spite of its apparent desolation, news travels fast. They heard that the Lachlan, so quiet at Condobolin, was running hard at Forbes. It was out in the flats, where the felled trees marked the old mining camp. There had been a storm, a great cloudburst, in its head waters, and the river grew alive. Wilson saddled up and rode thirty miles to see it, and came to the gum-lined ditch just in time to hear the stream awake. It stirred before his eyes, it became turbid, grew grey, bubbled, moved and ran, with sticks and leaves and branches on its full tide.

And still the sky overhead was fire, and the sun a flame. Wilson cursed it, and prayed to the beautiful grey water. Why should not rain come there? And soon. But as he rode back he came to sheep of his that stood against a fence, and pressed on it, as though water was beyond it. Pity stirred him; he drove them through a gate, and let them suck his last low tank.

That night Wilson came to the men's hut under its pines in the sand dune, and called to Hill.

"Hill, I want to speak to you," he said, and presently

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his man came out into the night. The stars were brilliant. Jupiter was like a little moon, and cast faint shadows.

"There'll be no rain here," said Wilson. "Were you sleeping? I can't sleep! Do you hear?"

He waved his hand around the barren horizon.

"I hear," said Hill.

He heard the sheep.

"You say that old Billabong once came down to Warri-bah?" asked Wilson.

Hill nodded.

"So they say. But Grear's dam would stop it."

"He's no right to have it there," said Wilson, savagely. "Look, Hill, I can't sleep. I'll ride out to the dam."

"I'll come with you," said Hill.

"You're a good sort, Jack," cried the boss. And they rode together through the wonderful night, that was so terrible to them, with its hot, dry air out of the oven of the north.

When they came at last to the long, low dam they tied their horses to saplings, and sat down. Wilson spoke after a quarter of an hour's silence.

"It would be hard to lose it after these years," he said. "And here's Grear's dam with a fence atop of it. He's a hard one, Jack!"

"Ay," said Hill, "he's hard."

And Wilson, who had not really slept for days, lay down upon the earth and dozed, while the star shadows of the gaunt thin boxes moved a foot. In the hollow of the Billabong some dry reeds, like a cane-brake, rustled faintly in the air. The leaves of the trees crackled, and under-

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neath these sharper sounds was the hum of the insect world. Far away, on every side, the sheep called uneasily for water. What had seemed silence grew into a very chorus, organic with the earth. The horses champed their bits and pawed the dusty soil; and once one whinnied, and was answered by a far-off call from Grear's.

"I wonder what the river's like," thought Hill. He pulled out his pipe and lighted it. The flare of the match extinguished the starlight for a moment, and then the darkness melted once more, and he saw each separate tree, each leaf, each reed.

"I wonder."

For if the river was in high flood, and over the banks, the Billabong must be full at Grear's. And suddenly he heard a sound that he knew well. He laid his hand upon Wilson's shoulder.

"D'ye hear it, sir? What is it?"

But both knew. Grear's sheep were moving from east and west towards water.

"The blackfellows were right," said Wilson. "The Billabong is coming down."

The horses trampled uneasily, and seemed aware of a change. Perhaps they too smelt the grey flood as it crawled. And all the air seemed full of whispers, loud and louder yet. For even the thinned bush is alive, and holds carnival at midnight and beyond it. A snake crawled by them on the dam, and suddenly being aware of nigh enemies, it slipped away hastily, and hid in the hollow trunk of a fallen dwarf box. The sheep on Warribah grew more uneasy; he heard a distant baa, and then a nearer cry, and a plaintive chorus came down the dry, hot wind.

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"I can't listen to 'em," said Wilson. "It makes me mad."

He rested his head upon his knees, and kept his hands to his ears. But suddenly he rose up.

"If the water comes we'll cut the dam, Hill."

"I would," said Hill.

"Go back and fetch Jim, and bring shovels," said Wilson. "I'll cut it. If the water comes, I've a right to it."

And Hill rode homeward fast. And as he rode the boss sat still upon the dam, and looked upon the faintly-outlined hollow of the ancient waterway. And again he dozed, and did not see that round the far bend of the hollow came a sneaking, quiet band of grey water, like a crawling snake. But as he slept the night chorus increased, and away to the south the full sheep baa'ed with content. The Warribah sheep heard and knew, and moved south through the night: and suddenly ten thousand broke into a gallop, and stayed in a heap against the fence that topped the dam. Their voices agonised; they woke Wilson suddenly, and he reached out his hand and touched water.

And he heard horses galloping. This was Hill returning.

"Thank God!" said Wilson, and he prayed to Heaven with sudden thankfulness.

But then he started, for the horses came from the south. They came from Grear's, and he knew what that meant.

"I'll do it if I have to kill him," said Wilson. For behind him the painful chorus of the sheep was deafening. He saw them packed against the bulging wires. His heart bled for them, his children.

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And then three horses burst through the thin bush.

"Oh, we're in time," said Grear. "I thought as much, but we're in time. Who's that?"

"Wilson of Warribah," said Wilson. "Grear, you will let the water through."

And Grear laughed.

"To you that sneaked in and took up my back-lots? Oh, it's likely, likely!"

"But the sheep are dying, Grear."

"Mine ain't," said Grear. "Get over the fence and off my land. I'll not have you here."

And Wilson burst into a passionate appeal that was almost a scream.

"Look here, man, if you are a man. I'll give you ten per cent of 'em to cut the dam. They're dying. Oh, my God! hear 'em, Grear; hear 'em! And I've bred 'em. I watched 'em grow. Oh, Grear, I'll give you half!"

And Grear swore horribly.

"I'll see them die, and see you get out. I don't want you here."

And now in the noise the sheep made it was difficult to hear a man speak. But the water grew up silently, and spread out, filling the hollow—a grateful and splendid sheet.

"'Tain't all yours," screamed Wilson. "The dam's not legal. You've no right to rob me and my sheep."

"Then go to law, you dog, and have it proved," said Grear. And as he spoke Hill came galloping, and with him Jim and two other men. And they carried shovels.

"Look," said Wilson. "We're five to you three, you and your men. I mean to have the water."

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“Never!” cried Grear, and getting off his horse he walked up the dam to where Wilson stood.

“Get over the fence,” he said.

And Wilson leant against the fence and the sheep behind him. He dabbled with his hand in their wool. Their hot breath fanned him.

“Don’t, Grear, don’t,” he pleaded. “What would you think if I did the same to you?”

“You can’t,” said Grear, and he laughed. “I’ve the river at my back.”

And Hill with a spade in his hand pressed through the sheep, until he came to Wilson. He touched the boss’s shoulder, and Wilson calmed as he took the spade.

“You don’t mean that they’re to die, Grear, do you?” he asked, with a catch in his voice.

“What’s that to me?”

“It’s much to me,” said Wilson. “Oh, Grear, I’d rather be hanged than let it be.”

“Would you? Then be hanged, you rat!” said Grear.

And Wilson lifted the spade, and split Grear’s head with it, and the man fell back into the water, and dyed it with his blood. But he was dead before he touched the silver grey stream that had slain him.

And Wilson fell to work digging.

“Good God!” said Hill, and the dead squatter’s men cried out.

“Dig, dig,” said Wilson. “Dig! Grear’s got his water. I’ll have mine.”

When the sun rose his sheep were content.

“Now we’ll see what the law says,” cried Wilson. And he rode south to find the law.

THE KING OF MALEKA

By H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

I

CONNART had started in life with a fine, open, believing disposition, and with that disposition for his chief asset he had entered the world of business. At thirty he had lost nearly everything but his heart, yet it was stolen from him, also, by one Mary Bateman of Boston, a quiet-looking little woman, endowed with common sense, a few thousand dollars and a taste for travel. It was this taste, combined with a slight weakness of the lungs, that induced Connart to go into the Pacific trade, also a legacy, from an English relation, amounting to some two thousand pounds odd, which enabled him to make the new start in business without calling on his wife's capital.

Dobree of San Francisco gave him the pitch. Connart had the qualities of his defects. Men robbed him, but they liked him. Men are queer things. Dobree, in business, was a very tough person indeed, quite without any finer feelings, and never giving a cent or a chance away, yet, taking a liking to Connart, he gave him a house, a go-down, and the chance of success on this Island, by name of Maleka, for nothing.

"I had a station there up to six months ago," said Dobree, "but I'm getting rid of my copra interests. You

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can have the house, charter a schooner and fill up with trade and go down there, it's a good climate and will suit your wife. You won't make a fortune, but you won't do badly if you stick to your guns and don't let the Kanakas get the weather gauge on you. There's only one man there, Seedbaum is his name, he's a tough customer by all accounts, but there's copra enough for two—I know a schooner you can have, the *Golden Gleam*; she's owned by old Tom Bowlby. I've got a fellow at a station on Tomasu, that's a hundred and fifty miles west of Maleka. There's a cargo waiting shipment there. Bowlby can drop you and your stuff at Maleka, then pick up my cargo at the other place. You won't have your copra ready for some months and you can make arrangements with him to come back for it. You might make arrangements to work in future with Bowlby, he's a straight man. You might work with him as partner."

It was easy to be seen that Dobree was not only giving things away, but going out of his course to make things smooth. Connart felt glowingly thankful.

"It's more than good of you," said he, "but it seems to me you will lose over this, for a location like that is worth money."

"So are cigars," said Dobree, "but if I give a box of cigars to a friend he doesn't complain that the gift is worth money. D——n money," continued this money-grubber, "it's worth nothing but the fun of making it—well, will you take your cigars, or shall I give the box to someone else?"

Connart said no more. In three weeks' time the *Golden Gleam*, which was lying at the wharves, had taken her cargo of all the multiudinous things that go by the

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name of "trade," and one bright morning, tacking against the wind from the sea, she left the Golden Gate behind her.

Mrs. Connart stood on deck, watching bald Tamalpais across the blue, scudding sea of the wake.

When you go to the Pacific Islands you die to all the things you have known, but you are at least sure that you are going to heaven—if you avoid the low islands.

Mrs. Connart knew the first fact. Down below in her cabin she carried with her the relics of the life she would no longer lead, down to a well-worn riding habit and a whip that would most likely never touch horse again, but she was not despondent, quite the reverse.

You may be sea-sick in a Pacific schooner, bucking against the swell and bending to the north-west trades, you may be mutinous, or angry, or tipsy, but despondency, that low fever of cities and civilisation, has no place out there.

"You ain't feelin' the sea, ma'am?" said Captain Bowlby, ranging up alongside of her.

"No," said she, "I'm a good sailor."

"I bet you are," said the captain.

Bowlby had a keen eye for ships and women. He had taken a liking to Mrs. Connart at first sight. She had a steady eye and sure smile that pleased him, and some days later, alone with Ambrose the mate, he voiced his opinions.

"Looks like a mouse, don't she? Well, there ain't no mouse about her barring her look. She's one of them quiet sorts that'd back-chat a congressman if she was put to it, or take a lion by the tail if it was makin' for one of her kids. I bet she's rudder and compass both to Con-

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nart. She and he fit as if they was welded. Did you ever take notice that there's chaps you meet that're only half men till they get a woman that fits them clapped on to them? If she don't fit they go under the first beam sea they meet; if she do, weather won't hurt them."

Ambrose concurred. He was a concurring individual, with few opinions of his own on any matters outside his trade.

"I reckon you're right," said he, "though I don't know much about women—I never had the time," he finished, apologetically.

2

They raised Maleka at six o'clock one brilliant morning, and by nine it had developed before them, mountainous and green, showing, through the glasses, the blowing foliage, torrent traces and the foam on the barrier reef.

To Connart and his wife there seemed something miraculous in the unfolding of this island from the wastes of the blue and desolate sea. They had pictured this new home often in their minds, but they had pictured nothing like this. It had been waiting for them all their lives, and it seemed to them now that the souls of all the pleasant places they had ever seen or dreamed of were waiting to greet them on that summer-girdled reef.

As they passed the break and entered the lagoon the true island beach of blinding white sand showed its curve lipped by the emerald waters, and through the foliage came glimpses of the white houses of the little town.

"Look," said Mrs. Connart, wide-eyed and drawing deep breaths as if to inhale the strangeness and beauty

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of the scene before her, "there are people on the beach, natives, and look at the canoes."

"There's a boat pushing off," said Connart, "and a big fellow in a striped suit in her."

"That's Seedbaum," said Captain Bowlby; "wonder what he wants, comin' to inspect—gin, likely."

The anchor fell, waking the echoes of the woods, and the *Golden Gleam*, swinging to the tide that was just beginning to steal out of the lagoon, lay with her nose pointing to the beach whilst the boat came alongside, and the man in the striped suit scrambled on board.

He was a big man, with bulging eyes, a shaved head, and feet encased in worn-out tennis shoes. The suit seemed made of flannelette.

Mrs. Connart at first sight took a profound dislike to this individual.

Seedbaum—for Seedbaum it was—saluted Bowlby, gave him good-day, cast his eye at the strangers and opened up.

"I knew you before you made the anchorage," said he, "dropped in for water, I suppose."

"No, I've water enough till I fetch Tomasu," replied Bowlby, "I've brought some trade."

"Trade," said Seedbaum, offering a cigar. "Well, I don't mind taking some prints and knives off you at a reasonable price. I'm full up with canned goods and tobacco, still—at a reasonable figure——"

"The trade's not mine," said Bowlby, lighting the cigar. "It belongs to the new trader—that gentleman there, Mr. Connart's his name, let me make you known. Mr. Connart, this is Mr. Seedbaum."

"Glad to make your acquaintance," said Connart.

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Seedbaum, fingering an unlit cigar, stared at Connart.

"Well, this gets me," said he. "Why, Dobree cleared his last man out for good, there's not business enough in this island for two—that's flat—what'd he want sending you for?"

"He didn't send me," replied Connart.

"Then," said Seedbaum, "what brought you here, anyway?"

"I think," said Mrs. Connart, "this ship brought us here—and, excuse me—do you own this island?"

Seedbaum stared at her, then his glance fell before that quiet, unwavering gaze, and he turned to Bowlby.

"Well," said he, "it's none of my affair if the whole continent of the States comes here to find copra—if it's to be found—but it seems to me this is a pretty dry ship."

"Come down below," said Bowlby.

They went below and the pop of a beer-bottle cork followed upon their descent.

"Oh, what a creature!" said Mrs. Connart. "George, why is it that humanity alone produces things like that?"

"I don't know," said Connart, "but I wish humanity had not produced it here."

Seedbaum came on deck again mollified by beer. Despite the set-down he had received he nodded to the new-comers as he went over the side, and as they watched him being rowed ashore, Bowlby, leaning on the rail, spat into the water and spoke.

"I didn't much trouble tellin' you of that chap on the way out," said Bowlby. "There's no use in meetin' troubles half way, and there's not an island in the hull Pacific you won't find trouble of some sort in. If you go in for Pacific tradin' there's two things you have to

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face, cockroaches and men. I've kept the old *Gleam* pretty free of 'roaches by fumigatin', but you can't fumigate islands. If you could I reckon you'd see more rats with hands and feet takin' to the water than's ever been seen since the Ark discharged cargo. Seedbaum'd be one of them, but you have his measure now and you'll know enough to go careful with him. Wiart, the last man that was here, got on all right with him. You see, they were pretty much of a pair, and it's my belief they were hand in glove, as you might say, but I reckon you won't have much use for a glove like that. Well, I'll get you ashore now to see your house and I'll help to fix it up for you. We'll begin gettin' the cargo ashore to-morrow."

He ordered a boat to be lowered and they rowed ashore.

Never, not even in dreamland, had Mrs. Connart experienced anything so strange as that stepping on shore from the bow of the boat run high and dry on the shelving beach, never anything like the touch of land after the long, long weeks of seafaring, and the sights, the sounds, the perfumes all new, belonging to a new life to be lived in a new world.

The white houses set in a little garden at the far end of the village pleased her as much as the place. Her house is almost as much as her husband to a woman, for, to a woman a house implies so much more than to a man. There are good houses and bad houses, crazy houses exhibiting the folly of their builders in stucco turrets or mad chimney pots, and stupid houses without character or proper sculleries and sinks. The house at Maleka, though small and possessing few rooms, was cheerful and had a pleasant personality of its own, but it did not possess a stick of furniture. Mrs. Connart with the

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prescience of a woman and assisted by the advice of Bowlby, had brought with them from San Francisco articles of furniture not to be obtained in the islands, unless at a ruinous cost. Mats, cane chairs and hammocks could be obtained from the natives. All the same, there had been furniture in the house and it was gone. Dobree had given them a list of things and amongst them was an article on which Mrs. Connart had, woman-like, set her heart. "One red cedar chest, four foot six by three foot," was its specification.

"But who can have taken them?" said she, as they stood in the empty front room, after a tour of inspection. "There was crockery ware, besides, and oh, ever so many things, and Mr. Dobree was so kind. He would not take a penny for them. You remember, George, he said: 'When I give a friend a box of cigars I don't take the bands off them, whatever is there you can have'—and now there's nothing!"

"Maybe the Kanakas have taken them," said Bowlby.

"Or Seedbaum," said Connart.

"As like as not," replied the captain. "He seems to look on the blessed place as his. He told me down in the cabin he reckoned he was king of Maleka, and that all the Kanakas jumped to his orders as if he was king. He's got a clutch on the place, there's no denying that, and he manages to keep missionaries away somehow or 'nother. I'm afraid you're going to have trouble with that chap."

"I'm not afraid of him," said Connart. "I've got a revolver and can use it if worst comes to the worst."

"Oh, it's not revolvers I'm thinkin' of," said the captain, "it's trickery; he'd trick the devil out of his hoofs and then make gelatine of them, would Seedbaum; have

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no trade dealin's with him; take my advice, just stick to the Kanakas."

"Let's go and ask him, right now, if he knows where the things have gone to," said Mrs. Connart.

"Well, that's not a bad idea," said Bowlby. "He's sure to lie; anyhow, it'll clear matters."

Seedbaum's house was a substantially built coral-lime-washed building, with a broad verandah in which hung a cage containing a parrot, the garden was neat and well-tended, and the whole place had an air of quiet prosperity, neatness and order, as though the better part of the owner's character were here exhibited for the general view.

Seedbaum was seated on the verandah, reading a San Francisco paper obtained from Bowlby.

Seeing them approach he rose to greet them.

"I've come to ask you about the furniture in our house," said Connart. "There were quite a lot of things left by the last man, and I have a list of them, but everything has gone, been taken away—do you know anything of the matter?"

"I don't know anything of what you call furniture," said the other. "Wiart sold me his sticks when he left for fifty dollars, and a bad bargain it was."

"He sold you them?"

"Yes."

"But they belonged to Mr. Dobree."

"Oh, did they; well, Dobree will have to dispute that with Wiart. Wiart said they were his."

"Have you his receipt?"

"Lord, no, there was no receipt in the matter. I handed him over the dollars and he handed me over the rubbish. It was a favour to him."

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"Was there a cedar-wood chest?" asked Mrs. Connart.

"There was. It's in my house now, there; you can see it through the door."

Through the open door which gave a view of the front room Mrs. Connart saw the object of her desire. It was a beauty, solid, moth-defying, with brass corners and brass handles. It was hers by all right, and Seedbaum had tricked her out of it. She spoke:

"That chest is mine," said she. "Mr. Dobree gave it to me, it was his property, and Mr. Wiart had no right to sell it."

"Well," said Seedbaum, "he sold it, and if there's any trouble over it it will be between Dobree and Wiart, and Wiart was going to Japan, so he said when he left here, so Dobree had better go to Japan and have it out with him."

Mrs. Connart turned.

"Come," said she to the others, "there is no use talking any more to this person. I will write to Mr. Dobree."

They turned away and Seedbaum sat down again to read his newspaper.

"That's what I said," spoke Bowlby. "Monkey tricks; you see how he's placed; Wiart's gone Lord knows where, and Pacific Coast law don't run here. The way for you to do is to lay low and fetch him in the eye unexpected, somehow, though if you take my advice you'll give him a wide offing. There's no use in fightin' with alligators; better leave them be. Hullo, what's that?"

They turned.

Seedbaum had come out of the verandah.

A passing native had drawn his ire for some reason or another, and the redoubtable Seedbaum was storming

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at him. Then he kicked the native, and the latter, a big, powerful man, turned and ran.

"The coward!" said Mrs. Connart.

"I expect that chap ain't a coward," said Bowlby. "He's just 'feared of Seedbaum. I reckon there're some curious things in nature. I've seen a whole ship's company livin' in terror of a hazin' captain. They could have hove him overboard and swore he fell over—for the after guard was as set against him as the fo'c'sle—but they didn't. Just let themselves be driv' like sheep and kicked like terriers. It's the same with the Kanakas on this island, I expect."

"He's got a personal ascendancy over them," said Connart.

"I reckon he's got something like that," said Captain Bowlby.

3

In a week they were settled down, and a few days later, the cargo having been landed and stored, the *Golden Gleam* took her departure.

They went down to the beach to see her off; they watched her topsails vanish beyond the reef, and they returned, feeling very much alone in the world. A good man is warmth and light even to the souls of sinners. Captain Bowlby was illiterate; his language was free; he was not a saint, but he was a good, human man right through. The sea turns out characters like this just as she turns out shells. It is a pity that they have to cling to the ocean and the beaches; the cities want them.

"I feel just as if I had lost a near relation," said Mrs. Connart.

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“Well, we’ll have him back soon,” said her husband. “It’s up to us now to get the copra to give him a cargo.”

Next morning the new trader began business by laying out a selection of goods on the verandah of his store. Mrs. Connart, who knew something of the Polynesian dialects and who had the art of picking up unknown tongues, had already got in touch with the Kanakas; they charmed and pleased her, especially the children, and wherever she went she was greeted by friendly faces. It seemed to her that the population of this island, leaving out Seedbaum, her husband and herself, consisted entirely of children, children of different sizes and different ages, but children all the same.

Returning that day from a long walk in the woods she found Connart smoking a pipe on the verandah of their house. He looked rather depressed.

“I can’t make it out,” said he; “there’s no trade doing.”

“Maybe they don’t know you have started in business yet.”

“Oh, yes, they do; lots of them have passed and seen the store open; they’ve turned to look at the goods, and they seemed attracted, but they went on.”

“Well, give them time,” said she.

“Look,” said Connart, “there’s copra going to Seedbaum’s; they’re trading with him, right enough.”

Mrs. Connart watched the copra bearers, but said nothing.

In her heart she felt that Seedbaum was moving against them by some stealthy means. At first she thought that it might be possible he had worked upon the native mind and induced the Kanakas to put a taboo upon the newcomers, but she dismissed this idea at once. There was

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no taboo. The Kanakas were not a bit afraid of either her or her husband, on the contrary, there was every evidence of friendliness.

“Well,” she said that night, when the store was closed for the day without a knife or a stick of tobacco changing hands, “there’s nothing to be done till we find out why they are acting so. It’s that creature, I am sure. He began by robbing me of my beautiful cedar-wood chest, and he’s going on to rob you of your chances in business. Well, let him beware. I’m Christian enough not to wish to hurt him, but I’m Christian enough to believe there’s a power that punishes the wicked, and he’s wicked. I knew him for a wicked man directly he came on board the ship.”

“He keeps to himself, and that’s one good thing,” said Connart; “but I don’t see how he can stop the natives from trading with us.”

“I don’t, either, but I know he does,” said she.

The next day passed without business being done, and the next.

“We may as well shut up shop, it seems to me,” said Connart. “How would it be if you spoke to some of these people and asked them what is the matter?”

“I’ve thought of that,” said his wife, “and I held off because—because—oh, I don’t know, it seems sort of indelicate to ask people why they don’t come to one’s store. I’ll do it to-morrow morning first thing. One mustn’t let one’s feelings stand in the way when one’s living is concerned.”

“I wish we had never come here,” said he, “for your sake.”

“Never come here?” she cried. “Why, I wouldn’t for

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the earth have gone anywhere else! I love the place and I love people, and what are difficulties? Why, difficulties are the main excitement in life. If life wasn't an obstacle race, it would be a very flat affair. George, we have got to beat that man, and I'm going to, you wait and see."

He kissed her and blessed her, and they sat down that night to a game of cribbage, Seedbaum and the wickedness of the world forgotten.

Next morning after breakfast Mrs. Connart went out. She passed through the village and on to the beach, brilliant in the morning light, breeze-blown and filled with the murmurs of the reef; some natives were pulling in a net and she watched them, chatting to them and playing with the children who had come down to secure the little fish. Then she had a talk with a woman who was standing by, a woman dark and straight as an arrow, a woman mild-eyed and with a voice sweet as the sound of running water.

Leaving her, Mrs. Connart passed to a man who was engaged in mending an outrigger of one of the canoes hauled up on the beach; she had a talk with him.

Then she returned, walking slowly and thoughtfully to the house, where she found her husband.

"George," said she. "I am right. It is that Creature. The people hate him, but they are afraid of him. It seems absolutely absurd, but it is so. He holds them in a spell. He kicks them and beats them, but they are not afraid of that. It's just him."

"Good Lord," said Connart, "why on earth don't they rise against him, and tell him to go to the devil; he's only one man, anyway."

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"I don't know," said she. "It's a mystery of human nature. He's the tyrant type, and it's always been the same in the world; there's some sort of magnetism in that type that keeps folk under. History is full of that. It's the soft man and the kindly man and the good man that's assassinated, but tyrants seem to go free. He's what he said he was, the king of this place—well, we must see what we can do to pull him from his throne. I wish there were more whites here."

"That's the bother," said Connart.

Next morning they found a basket of fruit on their verandah, a gift from some unknown person. It was as though the Kanakas, afraid to show their sympathy and friendliness openly for the strangers, had done it in this manner. But no one came to trade.

That night two chickens, some sweet potatoes and another basket of fruit were deposited in the same place.

"And we can't thank them," said Mrs. Connart; "but I believe these haven't all come from one person. I think it's everyone here—they all like us. Oh, George, isn't it maddening that we can't have them openly our friends, just because of that Beast!"

"It is," said George.

Now at eleven o'clock that morning, Mrs. Connart, seated on the verandah and engaged on some needle-work, noticed a little native girl, who, pausing at the garden gate and seeming undecided, at last picked up courage, opened the gate and came towards the house.

Connart was in the house, going over some accounts, when his wife ran in to him.

"George, come at once," cried she; "such a dreadful thing—they've risen against Seedbaum and they are kill-

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ing him somewhere in the woods, and they want us to go and see!"

"Good Lord!" cried he, "*killing* him! Want us to go and see! Are they mad?"

He picked up his hat and came out on the verandah, where the pretty little native girl was waiting, a flower of the scarlet hibiscus in her hair and calm contentment in her eyes.

"I can't quite make out all she says," said Mrs. Connart; "but I can make out her meaning."

"You'd better stay here," said he, "whilst I go; there may be trouble."

"I am not afraid," she replied. "Come on, we may be too late."

They followed the child.

"Tell her to hurry," said Connart.

"She says we need not hurry," replied she; "as far as I can make out they are only going to kill him—I expect they have him a prisoner somewhere; well, much as I hate him, I am glad we will be able to save him."

"That depends on how the natives take it," said he.

The child led them from the road by a path trod by the copra gatherers, a path running through the wonderland of the woods, a green gloom where the soaring palms shot upwards through a twilight roofed with moving shadows and sun sparkles

They reached a glade where a number of natives were seated in a circle above them and swinging by a cord from two trees was hanging a little disk about half the size of a tambourine; the disk was made of cane, and so constructed as to leave a small hole in the centre. An old native woman seated under the disk was clapping her

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hands and repeating something that sounded like an incantation. Every pair of eyes in the whole of that assembly was fixed upon the disk.

The child whispered something to Mrs. Connart. Then she turned from the child and whispered to her husband.

"It's only witchcraft. That's a soul trap. They are waiting for a fly to pass through the hole in that thing. If it does, then Seedbaum will die."

"Good heavens," murmured Connart, with a half-laugh. "Why, the fellow hasn't any soul—not enough to furnish out a fly."

They watched patiently for ten minutes. There were plenty of flies; they rested on the little tambourine, crawled round its edge, but not one went through the hole.

"Come," whispered Connart.

They withdrew, taking the path back.

"It's pathetic," murmured she.

"It's damned foolishness," he repeated. "They trade with him, and let him kick them, and then go on with that nonsense. If they refused him copra, they would bring him to his senses quick enough."

"Anyhow they hate him," said she.

"Much good that is," he replied.

4

Now it came about that the soul trap—turning out a dead failure, since not a single fly went through the hole—instead of destroying Seedbaum, fixed him on a pedestal more secure than that which he had hitherto occupied.

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He was indestructible, and the power which he exercised over the native mind threatened to be as indestructible as himself.

However, vengeance was coming. Retribution for all the wrongs he had committed, his swindlings, brutalities and beatings.

It came in this wise :

One afternoon Mrs. Connart, seated on the verandah and reading *The Moths of the Limberlost*, heard the cries of a child.

Right in front of the house, King Seedbaum was beating a native child for some fault or fancied disrespect towards his royal highness, cuffing it and cuffing it, whilst the squeals of the cuffed one affronted the heavens and the ears of all listeners.

Now, to touch a child or dog or cat in Mrs. Connart's presence was to raise a devil. White as death she rushed into the house and white as death she rushed out again. She held her riding-whip, a Mexican quirt, ladies' size, but horribly efficient in energetic hands.

Seedbaum saw her coming, couldn't understand, caught the first lash on his right arm and along his back—he was wearing the pyjama suit—and his yell brought the village flocking and Connart running from a field where he was laying out some plants.

He saw the quirt lashing over Seedbaum's shoulder, across his legs, and across the back, for the King of Maleka was now running, running and pursued for ten yards or so whilst the quirt got one last blow in.

Then he had his wife in his arms, and she was weeping. "Did he touch you?" cried Connart.

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"No—it was a child," she gasped. "Beast! Look, he has run into his house."

The street was filled with a crowd that all through the beating had remained spell-bound. Now it broke up into knots and small parties, all talking together excitedly.

Connart, with his arm around his wife, drew her into the house.

She sat down on a couch and laughed and sobbed. She was half hysterical, but not for long.

"I couldn't help it," she said. "I would do it again. It's not because of us—but because he was beating a child."

"Brute!" said Connart. "I'll go down now and give him more. I want to have it out with him right now." He turned to the door. She caught him.

"No," she cried, "he's had enough. He won't do it again. Listen, what's that?"

From away in the direction of Seedbaum's house came a sound like the swarming of angry bees, also shouts.

They rushed to the door and saw Seedbaum. Seedbaum with fifty people round him, and every person trying to beat him at the same time.

"Good God," said Connart, "you've taught them the trick—they'll kill him."

"He's got away," cried Mrs. Connart.

Seedbaum, breaking from the crowd, was making up the street, the whole village was after him; he passed the Connarts' house and headed for the woods where he disappeared. Then his pursuers drew off, and, rushing to the house of Connart, swarmed at the railings, shouting and waving and laughing, whilst Mrs. Connart interpreted.

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“They say he’ll never come back to the village again,” said she, “for they’ll kill him if he does; that he’ll have to live in the woods. Oh, George! I’m frightened—what will be the end of it all?”

The end was a whale ship that came into the lagoon. Seedbaum, living in the woods and supported by the generosity of the Connarts, was given notice by the three chiefs of the island, Matua, Tamura and Ratupea by name, that if he did not go away in the whale ship he would be killed before the next ship arrived. And he went.

He was almost friendly with the Connarts, in return for their food and protection, at the last, and as the natives would allow him to take nothing with him, he had to leave everything behind him, including the red cedar-wood chest, which thus came back to its rightful owner.

He did not even threaten the natives with governmental retribution; he knew he was done and placed out of court by his own conduct.

But the thing that always remained with Connart out of this affair was the fact that a population of active and vigorous people would still have been down-trodden by a merciless tyrant but for a little, quiet, calm-eyed woman, who had unconsciously and just from an uprising of her own spirit, “shown them the trick.”

Spirit—after all, what else is there in the world beside it?

ALLELUIA

By T. F. POWYS

FOLLOW me into one of those shining days of April, when the blue in the sky has lost its March iciness and the village of Wallbridge pauses in its usual grey monotony to look for events.

Events come indeed, as they always do, for those who wait long enough for them. The first intimation that something was going to happen chanced to be picked up in the road by Mr. Tapper, labourer of Ford's Farm.

Mr. Tapper had once found a penny in the mud, and ever since that eventful day the good man had kept his eye fixed upon the road when he walked abroad.

Mr. Tapper handed the paper he had found when tea-time came round to his daughter Lily, remarking as he did so:

“ 'Tain't nothink,” which merely meant, of course, that the paper wasn't a penny.

Lily—the pretty Lily—gave her head a little shake, and read at the top of the printed sheet the word “Alleluia.”

It was all out then, of course, as soon as the pretty Lily had got hold of it, all the whole merry matter of the coming of Alleluia into Wallbridge. After he had handed in those papers at the doors—with the exception of the ones that he wisely dropped in the road, well knowing

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that anything picked up always interests—invited everyone to his meetings, Alleluia for he must have known everyone would call him Alleluia, began to preach and sing in a devout manner in the handsome tent that he had set up near to his van. He was so gentle and polite and so good at starting those emotional tunes—invented by Mr. Moody—that Wallbridge at once praised and patronised him.

Alleluia had come down from Oxford, and his confident and childlike look, together with his silky moustache, had led him into the bypaths and hedges and so on and on until he reached the village of Wallbridge.

There were, of course, troubles in even so gentle a young man's path; there were difficulties and doubts—little worries—so that Alleluia's eyes were not always without their tears.

The Wallbridge people were not always so loving as they should be. The Rev. John Sutton, the vicar, disapproved of the preacher's looks and was even slightly contemptuous of the glory hymns. This unkindness hit the young man hard, because, outwardly, the vicar seemed pleased with the work that he was doing.

And there was Lily. Lily had to be considered even by Mr. Tapper, her father, as something female. Mr. Tapper put her down entirely, with her mother included, to the simple fact that he had stayed too long out one lovely June fair day at the Stickland revels. Even that day he saw as all Lily's fault, feeling, truly perhaps, that the child brings her parents together.

Even then Mr. Tapper was middle-aged, but that only made him blame Lily the more. If it had not been for Lily, Mr. Tapper might have gone on hawking saucepan

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lids and receiving beer in exchange for the country matters in his tavern songs.

When Lily was eighteen a very important event happened to her. She bought a new looking-glass to replace a cracked one that had always given her face such an ugly cut down the middle. Before this new one—she had stolen the money for it from her drunken parent's pocket—she could touch herself and preen herself, and wonder at a red mark on her bosom that looked almost like a bite.

That must not happen again; of course it wouldn't after Alleluia's preaching; young Wakely would have to take her home more gently in future. Following the lovely hymns, it was not quite proper to be covered and eaten and bitten by kisses all the way home.

“No you mustn't, Tom.”

Pretty Lily said the words before her glass in order to practise them. She used to sit quite near to the young preacher, and had got his child's look and his silky upper lip quite by heart. He would be always speaking about love and about doing kind actions to one another, and every hymn was filled with the delicious savour of subdued sin.

Lily was quite moved by all the excitement, but she wished to be more careful about Tom, and so she was. . . .

Alleluia had grown fond of looking upwards too, and for many nights he had seen only one face in the sky. Alleluia was forced to allow that the pretty face in the sky had nothing whatever to do with the hymns he had been singing; he knew it was not God's face, nor David's, nor any other heavenly person's. But, alas, it so pleased

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Alleluia that he wandered abroad in search of it sometimes, and often it was midnight before the preacher opened his van door to go to bed.

The excessive longing for events to happen in a village sometimes over-reaches itself; it did, indeed, over-teach itself this time in Wallbridge.

As usual, events pass in a sober grey way in the country. The dismal sermons of all the Rev. John Suttons are nearly always of the same dismal colour. And even the Wallbridge quarrel between old Mother Wimple and Farmer Told had become dull coloured, too. The sun shone as best it could, and sometimes the moon would appear, though none of these heavenly lights proved strong enough to break the leaden colouring.

But the people had longed, and when the people long something happens.

It came in this wise. A morning dawned with a splash of red, that splashed the grey sod, that splashed the hills and the meadows, and even gave to Farmer Told's white cow a red blood-stained look.

Her hymn-book soaked, her pretty Sunday clothes so sadly torn, her pretty lily face rudely beaten and broken: there was quite a little pool of blood in the chalk-pit, the grey colour lurid for once.

This was more than peaceful Wallbridge had wished for. This dreadful dash of red made even the April sunshine look a little queer. It could never be the same usual Wallbridge wind that blew upon the stalwart forms of the inspectors and policemen who had the case in hand.

Alleluia had been found, almost crazed, near the chalk-

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pit; he had been looking for pretty Lily all night, he said, and had only found her at dawn. There was blood upon his clothes, he had held her body in his arms.

Others told so much, too. They had been seen together very often; they had been followed, watched, and the stars needs must have blushed, so folks said. Tom Wakely had been away that red night, so it could not have been he who had done it.

Honest Mr. Tapper gave the strongest evidence, and Alleluia was hanged.

Perhaps this was a little hard upon Alleluia, but all men said he should have stuck to his hymn-singing and not gone out to look for pretty lilies at night-time. One wit even remarked that he could have sung his hymns in the town in a cheaper fashion without a stretch of the neck at the end of it.

The red splash of pretty Lily's blood coloured some dozen or so years of Wallbridge life, but after that time was passed the old grey began to hang heavy again and an owl hooted.

The owl must have settled upon Mr. Tapper's chimney, so near did the sound of its hooting seem to Mr. Tapper.

It was midnight, two old women—one was Mrs. Tapper—were sitting by the dying man's side.

"'E do die 'ard," Mrs. Tapper remarked in a friendly tone.

Mr. Tapper was thoughtful.

"If only he hadn't wandered off into the lanes on that fair day in June! He might even have been drinking beer instead of dying hard."

The owl perched upon the cottage chimney hooted

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again. The ice upon Ford's pond cracked—the midnight frost was abroad.

Mr. Tapper spoke his last words.

“Our Lily, she weren't murdered by thik young preacher,” said Mr. Tapper.

“Who did kill she?” the old women whispered excitedly.

“'Twas I,” said Mr. Tapper, “because young Wakely never give I thik beer 'e'd promised. I did blame she for it.”

The owl hooted, the old women looked at one another—and Mr. Tapper's jaw slowly dropped.

THE MONKEY'S PAW

By W. W. JACOBS

I

WITHOUT, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlour of Laburnam Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were at chess, the former, who possessed ideas about the game involving radical changes, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary perils that it even provoked comment from the white-haired old lady knitting placidly by the fire.

"Hark at the wind," said Mr. White, who, having seen a fatal mistake after it was too late, was amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it.

"I'm listening," said the latter, grimly surveying the board as he stretched out his hand. "Check."

"I should hardly think that he'd come to-night," said his father, with his hand poised over the board.

"Mate," replied the son.

"That's the worst of living so far out," bawled Mr. White, with sudden and unlooked-for violence; "of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in, this is the worst. Pathway's a bog, and the road's a torrent. I don't know what people are thinking about. I suppose because only two houses in the road are let, they think it doesn't matter."

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“Never mind, dear,” said his wife, soothingly; “perhaps you’ll win the next one.”

Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to intercept a knowing glance between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty grin in his thin grey beard.

“There he is,” said Herbert White, as the gate banged to loudly and heavy footsteps came toward the door.

The old man rose with hospitable haste, and opening the door, was heard condoling with the new arrival. The new arrival also condoled with himself so that Mrs. White said, “Tut tut!” and coughed gently as her husband entered the room, followed by a tall, burly man, beady of eye and rubicund of visage.

“Sergeant-Major Morris,” he said, introducing him.

The sergeant-major shook hands, and taking the proffered seat by the fire, watched contentedly while his host got out whiskey and tumblers and stood a small copper kettle on the fire.

At the third glass his eyes got brighter, and he began to talk, the little family circle regarding with eager interest this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair and spoke of wild scenes and doughty deeds; of wars and plagues and strange peoples.

“Twenty-one years of it,” said Mr. White, nodding at his wife and son. “When he went away he was a slip of a youth in the warehouse. Now look at him.”

“He don’t look to have taken much harm,” said Mrs. White, politely.

“I’d like to go to India myself,” said the old man, “just to look round a bit, you know.”

“Better where you are,” said the sergeant-major, shak-

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ing his head. He put down the empty glass, and sighing softly, shook it again.

"I should like to see those old temples and fakirs and jugglers," said the old man. "What was that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw or something, Morris?"

"Nothing," said the soldier, hastily. "Leastways, nothing worth hearing."

"Monkey's paw?" said Mrs. White, curiously.

"Well, it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps," said the sergeant-major, off-handedly.

His three listeners leaned forward eagerly. The visitor absent-mindedly put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. His host filled it for him.

"To look at," said the sergeant-major, fumbling in his pocket, "it's just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy."

He took something out of his pocket and proffered it. Mrs. White drew back with a grimace, but her son, taking it, examined it curiously.

"And what is there special about it?" inquired Mr. White as he took it from his son, and having examined it, placed it upon the table.

"It had a spell put on it by an old fakir," said the sergeant-major, "a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it."

His manner was so impressive that his hearers were conscious that their light laughter jarred somewhat.

"Well, why don't you have three, sir?" said Herbert White, cleverly.

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The soldier regarded him in the way that middle-age is wont to regard presumptuous youth. "I have," he said, quietly, and his blotchy face whitened.

"And did you really have the three wishes granted?" asked Mrs. White.

"I did," said the sergeant-major, and his glass tapped against his strong teeth.

"And has anybody else wished?" persisted the old lady.

"The first man had his three wishes. Yes," was the reply; "I don't know what the first two were, but the third was for death. That's how I got the paw."

His tones were so grave that a hush fell upon the group.

"If you've had your three wishes, it's no good to you now, then, Morris," said the old man at last. "What do you keep it for?"

The soldier shook his head. "Fancy, I suppose," he said, slowly. "I did have some idea of selling it, but I don't think I will. It has caused enough mischief already. Besides, people won't buy. They think it's a fairy tale; some of them, and those who do think anything of it want to try it first and pay me afterward."

"If you could have another three wishes," said the old man, eyeing him keenly, "would you have them?"

"I don't know," said the other. "I don't know."

He took the paw, and dangling it between his forefinger and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire. White, with a slight cry, stooped down and snatched it off.

"Better let it burn," said the soldier, solemnly.

"If you don't want it, Morris," said the other, "give it to me."

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"I won't," said his friend doggedly. "I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't blame me for what happens. Pitch it on the fire again like a sensible man."

The other shook his head and examined his new possession closely. "How do you do it?" he inquired.

"Hold it up in your right hand and wish aloud," said the sergeant-major, "but I warn you of the consequences."

"Sounds like the Arabian Nights," said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the supper. "Don't you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me?"

Her husband drew the talisman from pocket, and then all three burst into laughter as the sergeant-major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm.

"If you must wish," he said gruffly, "wish for something sensible."

Mr. White dropped it back in his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. In the business of supper the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat listening in an enthralled fashion to a second instalment of the soldier's adventures in India.

"If the tale about the monkey's paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us," said Herbert, as the door closed behind the guest, just in time for him to catch the last train, "we shan't make much out of it."

"Did you give him anything for it, father?" inquired Mrs. White, regarding her husband closely.

"A trifle," said he, colouring slightly. "He didn't want it, but I made him take it. And he pressed me again to throw it away."

"Likely," said Herbert, with pretended horror. "Why, we're going to be rich, and famous and happy. Wish to

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be an emperor, father, to begin with; then you can't be henpecked."

He darted round the table, pursued by the maligned Mrs. White armed with an antimacassar.

Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it dubiously. "I don't know what to wish for, and that's a fact," he said, slowly. "It seems to me I've got all I want."

"If you only cleared the house, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you?" said Herbert, with his hand on his shoulder. "Well, wish for two hundred pounds then; that'll just do it."

His father, smiling shamefacedly at his own credulity, held up the talisman, as his son, with a solemn face, somewhat marred by a wink at his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few impressive chords.

"I wish for two hundred pounds," said the old man distinctly.

A fine crash from the piano greeted the words, interrupted by a shuddering cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him.

"It moved," he cried, with a glance of disgust at the object as it lay on the floor. "As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake."

"Well, I don't see the money," said his son as he picked it up and placed it on the table, "and I bet I never shall."

"It must have been your fancy, father," said his wife, regarding him anxiously.

He shook his head. "Never mind, though; there's no harm done, but it gave me a shock all the same."

They sat down by the fire again while the two men

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finished their pipes. Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man started nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. A silence unusual and depressing settled upon all three, which lasted until the old couple rose to retire for the night.

"I expect you'll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed," said Herbert, as he bade them good-night, "and something horrible squatting up on top of the wardrobe watching you as you pocket your ill-gotten gains."

He sat alone in the darkness, gazing at the dying fire, and seeing faces in it. The last face was so horrible and so simian that he gazed at it in amazement. It got so vivid that, with a little uneasy laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing a little water to throw over it. His hand grasped the monkey's paw, and with a little shiver he wiped his hand on his coat and went up to bed.

2

In the brightness of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table he laughed at his fears. There was an air of prosaic wholesomeness about the room which it had lacked on the previous night, and the dirty, shrivelled little paw was pitched on the sideboard and with a carelessness which betokened no great belief in its virtues.

"I suppose all old soldiers are the same," said Mrs. White. "The idea of our listening to such nonsense! How could wishes be granted in these days? And if they could, how could two hundred pounds hurt you, father?"

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"Might drop on his head from the sky," said the frivolous Herbert.

"Morris said the things happened so naturally," said his father, "that you might if you so wished attribute it to coincidence."

"Well, don't break into the money before I come back," said Herbert as he rose from the table. "I'm afraid it'll turn you into a mean, avaricious man, and we shall have to disown you."

His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him down the road; and returning to the breakfast table, was very happy at the expense of her husband's credulity. All of which did not prevent her from scurrying to the door at the postman's knock, nor prevent her from referring somewhat shortly to retired sergeant-majors of bibulous habits when she found that the post brought a tailor's bill.

"Herbert will have some more of his funny remarks, I expect, when he comes home," she said, as they sat at dinner.

"I dare say," said Mr. White, pouring himself out some beer; "but for all that, the thing moved in my hand; that I'll swear to."

"You thought it did," said the old lady soothingly.

"I say it did," replied the other. "There was no thought about it; I had just—— What's the matter?"

His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, peering in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. In mental connection with the two hundred pounds, she noticed that the stranger was well dressed, and wore a silk hat of glossy newness.

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Three times he paused at the gate, and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand upon it, and then with sudden resolution flung it open and walked up the path. Mrs. White at the same moment placed her hands behind her, and hurriedly unfastening the strings of her apron, put that useful article of apparel beneath the cushion of her chair.

She brought the stranger, who seemed ill at ease, into the room. He gazed at her furtively, and listened in a preoccupied fashion as the old lady apologised for the appearance of the room, and her husband's coat, a garment which he usually reserved for the garden. She then waited as patiently as her sex would permit, for him to broach his business, but he was at first strangely silent.

"I—was asked to call," he said at last, and stooped and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from 'Maw and Meggins.'"

The old lady started. "Is anything the matter?" she asked, breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?"

Her husband interposed. "There, there, mother," he said, hastily. "Sit down, and don't jump to conclusions. You've not brought bad news, I'm sure, sir;" and he eyed the other wistfully.

"I'm sorry——" began the visitor.

"Is he hurt?" demanded the mother, wildly.

The visitor bowed in assent. "Badly hurt," he said, quietly, "but he is not in any pain."

"Oh, thank God!" said the old woman, clasping her hands. "Thank God for that! Thank——"

She broke off suddenly as the sinister meaning of the

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assurance dawned upon her, and she saw the awful confirmation of her fears in the other's averted face. She caught her breath, and turning to her slow-witted husband, laid her trembling old hand upon his. There was a long silence.

"He was caught in the machinery," said the visitor at length in a low voice.

"Caught in the machinery," repeated Mr. White, in a dazed fashion, "yes."

He sat staring blankly out at the window, and taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he had been wont to do in their old courting-days nearly forty years before.

"He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor. "It is hard."

The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. "The firm wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss," he said, without looking around. "I beg that you will understand I am only their servant and merely obeying orders."

There was no reply; the old woman's face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath inaudible; on the husband's face was a look such as his friend the sergeant might have carried into his first action.

"I was to say that Maw and Meggins disclaim all responsibility," continued the other. "They admit no liability at all, but in consideration of your son's services, they wish to present you with a certain sum as compensation."

Mr. White dropped his wife's hand, and rising to his feet, gazed with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words. "How much?"

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"Two hundred pounds," was the answer.

Unconscious of his wife's shriek, the old man smiled faintly, put out his hands like a sightless man, and dropped, a senseless heap, to the floor.

3

In the huge new cemetery, some two miles distant, the old people buried their dead, and came back to a house steeped in shadow and silence. It was all over so quickly that at first they could hardly realise it, and remained in a state of expectation as though of something else to happen—something else which was to lighten this load, too heavy for old hearts to bear.

But the days passed, and expectation gave place to resignation—the hopeless resignation of the old, sometimes miscalled, apathy. Sometimes they hardly exchanged a word, for now they had nothing to talk about, and their days were long to weariness. It was about a week after that the old man, waking suddenly in the night, stretched out his hand and found himself alone. The room was in darkness, and the sound of subdued weeping came from the window. He raised himself in bed and listened.

"Come back," he said, tenderly. "You will be cold."

"It is colder for my son," said the old woman, and wept afresh.

The sound of her sobs died away on his ears. The bed was warm, and his eyes heavy with sleep. He dozed fitfully, and then slept until a sudden wild cry from his wife awoke him with a start.

"*The paw!*" she cried wildly. "The monkey's paw!"

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He started up in alarm. "Where? Where is it? What's the matter?"

She came stumbling across the room toward him. "I want it," she said, quietly. "You've not destroyed it?"

"It's in the parlour, on the bracket," he replied, marvelling. "Why?"

She cried and laughed together, and bending over, kissed his cheek.

"I only just thought of it," she said, hysterically. "Why didn't I think of it before? Why didn't *you* think of it?"

"Think of what?" he questioned.

"The other two wishes," she replied, rapidly. "We've only had one."

"Was not that enough?" he demanded, fiercely.

"No," she cried, triumphantly; "we'll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again."

The man sat up in bed and flung the bed-clothes from his quaking limbs. "Good God, you are mad!" he cried, aghast.

"Get it," she panted; "get it quickly, and wish—— Oh, my boy, my boy!"

Her husband struck a match and lit the candle. "Get back to bed," he said, unsteadily. "You don't know what you are saying."

"We had the first wish granted," said the old woman, feverishly; "why not the second?"

"A coincidence," stammered the old man.

"Go and get it and wish," cried his wife, quivering with excitement.

The old man turned and regarded her, and his voice

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shook. "He has been dead ten days, and besides he—I would not tell you else, but—I could only recognise him by his clothing. If he was too terrible for you to see then, how now?"

"Bring him back," cried the old woman, and dragged him toward the door. "Do you think I fear the child I have nursed?"

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the parlour, and then to the mantelpiece. The talisman was in its place, and a horrible fear that the unspoken wish might bring his mutilated son before him ere he could escape from the room seized upon him, and he caught his breath as he found that he had lost the direction of the door. His brow cold with sweat, he felt his way round the table, and groped along the wall until he found himself in the small passage with the unwholesome thing in his hand.

Even his wife's face seemed changed as he entered the room. It was white and expectant, and to his fears seemed to have an unnatural look upon it. He was afraid of her.

"*Wish!*" she cried, in a strong voice.

"It is foolish and wicked," he faltered.

"*Wish!*" repeated his wife.

He raised his hand. "I wish my son alive again."

The talisman fell to the floor, and he regarded it fearfully. Then he sank trembling into a chair as the old woman, with burning eyes, walked to the window and raised the blind.

He sat until he was chilled with the cold, glancing occasionally at the figure of the old woman peering through the window. The candle-end, which had burned below

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the rim of the china candlestick, was throwing pulsating shadows on the ceiling and walls, until, with a flicker larger than the rest, it expired. The old man, with an unspeakable sense of relief at the failure of the talisman, crept back to his bed, and a minute or two afterward the old woman came silently and apathetically beside him.

Neither spoke, but lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse scurried noisily through the wall. The darkness was oppressive, and after lying for some time screwing up his courage, he took the box of matches, and striking one, went downstairs for a candle.

At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another; and at the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door.

The matches fell from his hand and spilled in the passage. He stood motionless, his breath suspended until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and fled swiftly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

"What's that?" cried the old woman, starting up.

"A rat," said the old man in shaking tones—"a rat. It passed me on the stairs."

His wife sat up in bed listening. A loud knock resounded through the house.

"It's Herbert!" she screamed. "It's Herbert!"

She ran to the door, but her husband was before her, and catching her by the arm, held her tightly.

"What are you going to do?" he whispered hoarsely.

"It's my boy; it's Herbert!" she cried, struggling me-

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chanically. "I forgot it was two miles away. What are you holding me for? Let go. I must open the door."

"For God's sake don't let it in," cried the old man, trembling.

"You're afraid of your own son," she cried, struggling. "Let me go. I'm coming, Herbert; I'm coming."

There was another knock, and another. The old woman with a sudden wrench broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the landing, and called after her appealingly as she hurried downstairs. He heard the chain rattle back and the bottom bolt drawn slowly and stiffly from the socket. Then the old woman's voice, strained and panting.

"The bolt," she cried loudly. "Come down. I can't reach it."

But her husband was on his hands and knees groping wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If he could only find it before the thing outside got in. A perfect fusillade of knocks reverberated through the house, and he heard the scraping of a chair as his wife put it down in the passage against the door. He heard the creaking of the bolt as it came slowly back and at the same moment he found the monkey's paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish.

The knocking ceased suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair drawn back, and the door opened. A cold wind rushed up the staircase, and a long loud wail of disappointment and misery from his wife gave him courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate beyond. The street lamp flickering opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

THE CREATURES

By WALTER DE LA MARE

IT was the ebbing light of evening that recalled me out of my story to a consciousness of my whereabouts. I dropped the squat little red book to my knee and glanced out of the narrow and begrimed oblong window. We were skirting the eastern coast of cliffs, to the very edge of which a ploughman, stumbling along behind his two great horses, was driving the last of his dark furrows. In a cleft far down between the rocks a cold and idle sea was soundlessly laying its frigid garlands of foam. I stared over the flat stretch of waters, then turned my head, and looked with a kind of suddenness into the face of my one fellow-traveller.

He had entered the carriage, all but unheeded, yet not altogether unresented, at the last country station. His features were a little obscure in the fading daylight that hung between our four narrow walls, but apparently his eyes had been fixed on my face for some little time.

He narrowed his lids at this unexpected confrontation, jerked back his head, and cast a glance out of his mirky glass at the slip of greenish-bright moon that was struggling into its full brilliance above the dun, swelling uplands.

"It's a queer experience, railway-travelling," he began abruptly, in a low, almost deprecating voice, drawing his

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hand across his eyes. "One is cast into a passing privacy with a fellow-stranger and then is gone." It was as if he had been patiently awaiting the attention of a chosen listener.

I nodded, looking at him. "*That* privacy, too," he ejaculated, "all that!" My eyes turned towards the window again: bare, thorned, black January hedge, inhospitable salt coast, flat waste of northern water. Our engine driver promptly shut off his steam, and we slid almost noiselessly out of sight of sky and sea into a cutting.

"It's a desolate country," I ventured to remark.

"Oh, yes, 'desolate,'" he echoed a little wearily. "But what frets me is the way we have of arrogating to ourselves the offices of judge, jury, and counsel all in one. As if this earth. . . . I never forget it—the futility, the presumption. It *leads* nowhere. We drive in—into all this silence, this—this, 'forsakenness,' this dream of a world between her lights of day and night time. We desecrate. Consciousness! What restless monkeys men are." He recovered himself, swallowed his indignation with an obvious gulp. "As if," he continued, in more chastened tones—"as if that other gate were not for ever ajar, into God knows what of peace and mystery." He stooped forward, lean, darkened, objurgatory. "Don't we *make* our world? Isn't that our blessed, our betrayed responsibility?"

I nodded, and ensconced myself, like a dog in straw, in the basest of all responses to a rare, even if eccentric, candour—caution.

"Well," he continued, a little weariedly, "that's the indictment. Small wonder if it will need a trumpet to blare us into that last 'Family Prayers.' Then perhaps a

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few solitaries—just a few—will creep out of their holes and fastnesses, and draw mercy from the merciful on the cities of the plain. The buried talent will shine none the worse for the long, long looming of its napery spun from dream and desire.

“Years ago—ten, fifteen, perhaps—I chanced on the queerest specimen of this order of the ‘talented.’ Much the same country, too. This”—he swept his glance out towards the now invisible sea—“this is a kind of dwarf replica of it. More naked, smoother, more sudden and precipitous, more ‘forsaken,’ moody! Alone! The trees are shorn there, as if with monstrous shears, by the winter gales. The air’s salt. It is a country of stones and emerald, meadows, of green, meandering, aimless lanes, of farms set in their cliffs and valleys like rough time-bedimmed jewels, as if by some angel of humanity, wandering between dark and daybreak.

“I was younger then—in body: the youth of the mind is for men of a certain age; yours, maybe, and mine. Even then, even at that, I was sickened of crowds, of that unimaginable London—swarming wilderness of mankind in which a poor, lost, thirsty dog from Otherwhere tastes first the full meaning of that idle word ‘forsaken.’ ‘Forsaken by whom?’ is the question I ask myself now. Visitors to my particular paradise were few then—as if, my dear sir, we are not all of us visitors, visitants, revenants, on earth, panting for time in which to tell and share our secrets, roving in search of marks that shall prove our quest not vain, not unprecedented, not a treachery. But let that be.

“I would start off morning after morning, bread and cheese in pocket, from the bare old house I lodged in,

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bound for that unforeseen nowhere for which the heart, the fantasy, aches. Lingering hot noondays would find me stretched in a state half-comatose, yet vigilant, on the close-flowered turf of the fields or cliffs, on the sun-baked sands and rocks, soaking in the scene and life around me like some pilgrim chameleon. It was in hope to lose my way that I would set out. How shall a man find his way unless he lose it? Now and then I succeeded. That country is large, and its land and sea marks easily cheat the stranger. I was still of an age, you see, when my 'small door' was ajar, and I planted a solid foot to keep it from shutting. But how could I know what I was after? One just shakes the tree of life, and the rare fruits come tumbling down, to rot for the most part in the lush grasses.

"What was most haunting and provocative in that far-away country was its fleeting resemblance to the country of dream. You stand, you sit, or lie prone on its bud-starred heights, and look down; the green, dispersed, treeless landscape spreads beneath you, with its hollow and mounded slopes, clustering farmstead, and scatter of village, all motionless under the vast wash of sun and blue, like the drop-scene of some enchanted playhouse centuries old. So, too, the visionary bird-haunted headlands, veiled faintly in a mist of unreality above their broken stones and the enormous saucer of the sea.

"You cannot guess there what you may not chance upon, or whom. Bells clash, boom, and quarrel hollowly on the edge of darkness in those breakers. Voices waver across the fainter winds. The birds cry in a tongue unknown yet not unfamiliar. The sky is the hawks' and the stars'. *There* one is on the edge of life, of the un-

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foreseen, whereas our cities—are not our desiccated, jaded minds ever continually pressing and edging further and further away from freedom, the vast unknown, the infinite presence, picking a fool's journey from sensual fact to fact at the tail of that he-ass called Reason? I suggest that in that solitude the spirit within us realises that it treads the outskirts of a region long since called the Imagination. I assert we have strayed, and in our blindness abandoned——”

My stranger paused in his frenzy, glanced out at me from his obscure corner as if he had intended to stun, to astonish me with some violent heresy. We puffed out slowly, laboriously from a “Halt” at which in the gathering dark and moonshine we had for some while been at a standstill. Never was wedding-guest more desperately at the mercy of ancient mariner.

“Well, one day,” he went on, lifting his voice a little to master the resounding heart-beats of our steam-engine —“one late afternoon, in my goalless wanderings, I had climbed to the summit of a steep grass-grown cart-track, winding up dustily between dense, untended hedges. Even then I might have missed the house to which it led, for, hair-pin fashion, the track here abruptly turned back on itself, and only a far fainter footpath led on over the hill-crest. I might, I say, have missed the house and—and its inmates, if I had not heard the musical sound of what seemed like the twangling of a harp. This thin-drawn, sweet, tuneless warbling welled over the close green grass of the height as if out of space. Truth cannot say whether it was of that air or of my own fantasy. Nor did I ever discover what instrument, whether of

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man or Ariel, had released a strain so pure and yet so bodiless.

“I pushed on and found myself in command of a gorse-strewn height, a stretch of country that lay a few hundred paces across the steep and sudden valley in between. In a V-shaped entry to the left, and sunwards, lay an azure and lazy tongue of the sea. And as my eye slid softly thence and upwards and along the sharp, green horizon line against the glass-clear turquoise of space, it caught the flinty glitter of a square chimney. I pushed on, and presently found myself at the gate of a farmyard.

“There was but one straw-mow upon its staddles. A few fowls were sunning themselves in their dust-baths. White and pied doves preened and cooed on the roof of an outbuilding as golden with its lichens as if the western sun had scattered its dust for centuries upon the large slate slabs. Just that life and the whispering of the wind: nothing more. Yet even at one swift glimpse I seemed to have trespassed upon a peace that had endured for ages; to have crossed the viewless border that divides time from eternity. I leaned, resting, over the gate, and could have remained there for hours, lapsing ever more profoundly into the blessed quietude that had stolen over my thoughts.

“A bent-up woman appeared at the dark entry of a stone shed opposite to me, and, shading her eyes, paused in prolonged scrutiny of the stranger. At that I entered the gate and, explaining that I had lost my way and was tired and thirsty, asked for some milk. She made no reply, but after peering up at me, with something between suspicion and apprehension on her weather-beaten old face, led me towards the house which lay to the left on

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the slope of the valley, hidden from me till then by plummy bushes of tamarisk.

“It was a low grave house, grey-chimneyed, its stone walls traversed by a deep shadow cast by the declining sun, its dark windows rounded and uncurtained, its door wide open to the porch. She entered the house, and I paused upon the threshold. A deep unmoving quiet lay within, like that of water in a cave renewed by the tide. Above a table hung a wreath of wild flowers. To the right was a heavy oak settle upon the flags. A beam of sunlight pierced the air of the staircase from an upper window.

“Presently a dark, long-faced, gaunt man appeared from within, contemplating me, as he advanced, out of eyes that seemed not so much to fix the intruder as to encircle his image, as the sea contains the distant speck of a ship on its wide, blue bosom of water. They might have been the eyes of the blind; the windows of a house in dream to which the inmate must make something of a pilgrimage to look out upon actuality. Then he smiled, and the long, dark features, melancholy yet serene, took light upon them, as might a bluff of rock beneath a thin passing wash of sunshine. With a gesture he welcomed me into the large dark-flagged kitchen, cool as a cellar, airy as a belfry, its sweet air traversed by a long oblong of light out of the west.

“The wide shelves of the painted dresser were laden with crockery. A wreath of freshly-gathered flowers hung over the chimney-piece. As we entered, a twittering cloud of small birds, robins, hedge-sparrows, chaffinches fluttered up a few inches from floor and sill and window-seat, and once more, with tiny starry-dark eyes

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observing me, soundlessly alighted. I could hear the infinitesimal *tic-tac* of their tiny claws upon the slate. My gaze drifted out of the window into the garden beyond, a cavern of clearer crystal and colour than that which astounded the eyes of young Aladdin.

“Apart from the twisted garland of wild flowers, the shining metal of range and copper candlestick, and the bright-scoured crockery, there was no adornment in the room except a rough frame, hanging from a nail in the wall, and enclosing what appeared to be a faint patterned fragment of blue silk or fine linen. The chairs and table were old and heavy. A low, light warbling, an occasional *skirr* of wing, a haze-like drone of bee and fly—these were the only sounds that edged a quiet intensified in its profundity by the remote stirrings of the sea.

“The house was stilled as by a charm, yet thought within me asked no questions; speculation was asleep in its kennel. I sat down to the milk and bread, the honey and fruit which the old woman laid out upon the table, and her master seated himself opposite to me, now in a low sibilant whisper—a tongue which they seemed to understand—addressing himself to the birds, and now, as if with an effort, raising those strange grey-green eyes of his to bestow a quiet remark upon me. He asked, rather in courtesy than with any active interest, a few questions, referring to the world, its business and transports—*our* beautiful world—as an astronomer in the small hours might murmur a few words to the chance-sent guest of his solitude concerning the secrets of Uranus or Saturn. There is another, an inexorable side to the moon. Yet he said enough for me to gather that he, too, was of that small tribe of the aloof and wild to which

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our cracked old word 'forsaken' might be applied, hermits, lamas, clay-matted fakirs, and such-like; the snowy birds that play and cry amid mid-oceanic surges; the living of an oasis of the wilderness; which share a reality only distantly dreamed of by the time-driven thought-corroded congregations of man.

"Yet so narrow and hazardous I somehow realised was the brink of fellow-being (shall I call it?) which we shared, he and I, that again and again fantasy within me seemed to hover over that precipice Night knows as fear. It was he, it seemed, with that still embracive contemplation of his, with that far-away yet reassuring smile, that kept my poise, my balance. 'No,' some voice within him seemed to utter, 'you are safe; the bounds are fixed; though hallucination chaunt its decoy, you shall not irretrievably pass over. Eat and drink, and presently return to life.' And I listened, and, like that of a drowsy child in its cradle, my consciousness sank deeper and deeper, stilled, pacified into the dream which, at it seemed, this soundless house of stone now reared its walls.

"I had all but finished my meal when I heard footsteps approaching on the flags without. The murmur of other voices, distinguishably shrill yet guttural even at a distance, and in spite of the dense stones and beams of the house which had blunted their timbre, had already reached me. Now the feet halted. I turned my head—cautiously, even perhaps apprehensively—and confronted two figures in the doorway.

"I cannot now guess the age of my entertainer. These children—for children they were in face and gesture and effect, though as to form and stature apparently in their last teens—these children were far more problematical.

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I say 'form and stature,' yet obviously they were dwarfish. Their heads were sunken between their shoulders, their hair thick, their eyes disconcertingly deep-set. They were ungainly; their features peculiarly irregular, as if two races from the ends of the earth had in them intermingled their blood and strangeness; as if, rather animal and angel had connived in their creation.

"But if some inward light lay on the still eyes, on the gaunt, sorrowful, quixotic countenance that now was fully and intensely bent on mine, emphatically that light was theirs also. He spoke to them; they answered—in English, my own language, without a doubt: but an English slurred, broken, and unintelligible to me, yet clear as a bell, haunting, penetrating, pining as voice of nix or siren. My ears drank in the sound as an Arab parched with desert sand falls on his dried belly and gulps in mouthfuls of crystal water. The birds hopped nearer as if beneath the rod of an enchanter. A sweet continuous clamour arose from their small throats. The exquisite colours of plume and bosom burned, greened, melted in the level sun-ray, in the darker air beyond.

"A kind of mournful gaiety, a lamentable felicity, such as rings in the cadences of an old folk-song welled into my heart. I was come back to the borders of Eden, bowed and outwearied, gazing from out of dream into dream, homesick, 'forsaken.'

"Well, years have gone by," muttered my fellow-traveller deprecatingly, "but I have not forgotten that Eden's primeval trees and shade.

"They led me out, these bizarre companions, a he and a she, if I may put it as crudely as my apprehension of them put it to me then. Through a broad door they con-

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ducted me—if one who leads may be said to be conducted—into their garden. Garden! A full mile long, between undiscerned walls, it sloped and narrowed towards a sea at whose dark unfoamed blue, even at this distance, my eyes dazzled. Yet how can one call that a garden which reveals no ghost of a sign of human arrangement, of human slavery, of spade or hoe?

“Great boulders shouldered up, tessellated, embossed, powdered with a thousand various mosses and lichens, between a flowering greenery of weeds. Wind-stunted, clear-emerald, lichen-tufted trees smoothed and crisped the inflowing airs of the ocean with their leaves and spines, sibilating a thin scarce-audible music. Scanty, rank, and uncultivated fruits hung close their vivid-coloured cheeks to the gnarled branches. It was the harbourage of birds, the small embowering parlour of their house of life, under an evening sky, pure and lustrous as a water-drop. It cried, ‘Hospital’ to the wanderers of the universe.

“As I look back in ever-thinning, nebulous remembrance on my two companions, hear their voices gutturally sweet and shrill, catch again their being, so to speak, I realise that there was a kind of Orientalism in their effect. Their instant courtesy was not Western, the smiles that greeted me, whenever I turned my head to look back at them, were infinitely friendly, yet infinitely remote. So ungainly, so far from our notions of beauty and symmetry were their bodies and faces, those heads thrust heavily between their shoulders, their disproportioned yet graceful arms and hands, that the children in some of our English villages might be moved to stone them, while their elders looked on and laughed.

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“Dusk was drawing near; soon night would come. The colours of the sunset, sucking its extremest dye from every leaf and blade and petal, touched my consciousness even then with a vague fleeting alarm.

“I remember I asked these strange and happy beings, repeating my question twice or thrice, as we neared the surfy entry of the valley upon whose sands a tiny stream emptied its fresh water—I asked them if it was they who had planted this multitude of flowers, many of a kind utterly unknown to me and alien to a country inexhaustibly rich. ‘We wait; we wait!’ I think they cried. And it was as if their cry awoke echo from the green-walled valleys of the mind into which I had strayed. Shall I confess that tears came into my eyes as I gazed hungrily around me on the harvest of their patience?

“Never was actuality so close to dream. It was not only an unknown country, slipped in between these placid hills, on which I had chanced in my ramblings. I had entered for a few brief moments a strange region of consciousness. I was treading, thus accompanied, amid a world of welcoming and fearless life—oh, friendly to me!—the paths of man’s imagination, the kingdom from which thought and curiosity, vexed scrutiny and lust—a lust it may be for nothing more impious than the actual—had prehistorically proved the insensate means of his banishment. ‘Reality,’ ‘Consciousness’: had he for ‘the time being’ unwittingly, unhappily missed his way? would he be led back at length to that garden wherein cockatrice and basilisk bask, harmlessly, at peace?

“I speculate now. In that queer, yes, and possibly sinister company, sinister only because it was alien to me, I did not speculate. In their garden, the familiar was

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become the strange—‘the strange’ that lurks in the inmost heart, unburdens its riches in trance, flings its light and gilding upon love, gives heavenly savour to the intemperate bowl of passion, and is the secret of our incommunicable pity. What is yet queerer, these things were evidently glad of my company. They stumped after me (as might yellow men after some Occidental quadruped never before seen) in merry collusion of nods and wreathed smiles at this perhaps unprecedented intrusion.

“I stood for a moment looking out over the placid surface of the sea. A ship in sail hung phantom-like on the horizon. I pined to call my discovery to its seamen. The tide gushed, broke, spent itself on the bare boulders, I was suddenly cold and alone, and gladly turned back into the garden, my companions instinctively separating to let me pass between them. I breathed in the rare, almost exotic heat, the tenuous, honeyed, almond-laden air of its flowers and birds—gull, sheldrake, plover, wag-tail, finch, robin, which as I half-angrily, half-sadly realised fluttered up in momentary dismay only at *my* presence—the embodied spectre of their enemy, man. Man? Then who were these? . . .

“I lost again a way lost early that morning, as I trudged inland at night. The dark came, warm and starry. I was dejected and exhausted beyond words. That night I slept in a barn and was awakened soon after daybreak by the crowing of cocks. I went out, dazed and blinking into the sunlight, bathed face and hands in a brook near by, and came to a village before a soul was stirring. So I sat under a thrift-cushioned, thorn-crowned wall in a meadow, and once more drowsed off and fell asleep. When again I awoke, it was ten o’clock. The church

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clock in its tower knelled out the strokes, and I went into an inn for food.

“A corpulent, blonde woman, kindly and hospitable, with a face comfortably resembling her own sow’s, that yuffed and nosed in at the open door as I sat on my stool, served me with what I called for. I described—not without some vanishing shame, as if it were a treachery—my farm, its whereabouts.

“Her small blue eyes ‘pigged’ at me with a fleeting expression which I failed to translate. The name of the farm, it appeared, was Trevarras. ‘And did you see any of the Creatures?’ she asked me in a voice not entirely her own. ‘The Creatures’? I sat back for an instant and stared at her; then realised that Creature was the name of my host, and Maria and Christus (though here her dialect may have deceived me) the names of my two gardeners. She spun an absurd story, so far as I could tack it together and make it coherent. Superstitious stuff about this man who had wandered in upon the shocked and curious inhabitants of the district and made his home at Trevarras—a stranger and pilgrim, a ‘foreigner,’ it seemed, of few words, dubious manners, and both uninformative.

“Then there was something (she placed her two fat hands, one of them wedding-ringed, on the zinc of the bar-counter, and peered over at me, as if I were a delectable ‘wash’), then there was something about a woman ‘from the sea.’ In a ‘blue gown,’ and either dumb, inarticulate, or mistress of only a foreign tongue. She must have lived in sin, moreover, those pig’s eyes seemed to yearn, since the children were ‘simple,’ ‘naturals’—as God intends in such matters. It was useless. One’s

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stomach may sometimes reject the cold sanative aerated water of 'the next morning,' and my ridiculous intoxication had left me dry but not yet quite sober.

"Anyhow, this she told me, that my blue woman, as fair as flax, had died and was buried in the neighbouring churchyard (the nearest to, though miles distant from Trevarras). She repeatedly assured me, as if I might otherwise doubt so sophisticated a fact, that I should find her grave there, her 'stone.'

"So indeed I did—far away from the elect, and in a shade-ridden north-west corner of the sleepy, cropless acre: a slab, scarcely rounded, of granite, with but a name bitten out of the dark, rough surface, '*Femina Creature.*'"

THE TAIPAN

By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

NO one knew better than he that he was an important person. He was number one in not the least important branch of the most important English firm in China. He had worked his way up through solid ability, and he looked back with a faint smile at the callow clerk who had come out to China thirty years before. When he remembered the modest home he had come from, a little red house in a long row of little red houses, in Barnes, a suburb which, aiming desperately at the genteel, achieves only a sordid melancholy, and compared it with the magnificent stone mansion, with its wide verandahs and spacious rooms, which was at once the office of the company and his own residence, he chuckled with satisfaction. He had come a long way since then. He thought of the high tea to which he sat down when he came home from school (he was at St. Paul's), with his father and mother and his two sisters, a slice of cold meat, a great deal of bread and butter and plenty of milk in his tea, everybody helping himself, and then he thought of the state in which now he ate his evening meal. He always dressed, and whether he was alone or not he expected the three boys to wait at table. His number one boy knew exactly what he liked, and he never had to bother himself with the details of housekeeping; but he always had a set dinner with soup

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and fish, entree, roast, sweet and savoury, so that if he wanted to ask anyone in at the last moment he could. He liked his food, and he did not see why when he was alone he should have less good a dinner than when he had a guest.

He had indeed gone far. That was why he did not care to go home now; he had not been to England for ten years, and he took his leave in Japan or Vancouver where he was sure of meeting old friends from the China coast. He knew no one at home. His sisters had married in their own station, their husbands were clerks and their sons were clerks; there was nothing between him and them; they bored him. He satisfied the claims of relationship by sending them every Christmas a piece of fine silk, some elaborate embroidery, or a case of tea. He was not a mean man, and as long as his mother lived he had made her an allowance. But when the time came for him to retire he had no intention of going back to England, he had seen too many men do that and he knew how often it was a failure; he meant to take a house near the race-course in Shanghai: what with bridge and his ponies and gold he expected to get through the rest of his life very comfortably. But he had a good many years before he need think of retiring. In another five or six Higgins would be going home, and then he would take charge of the head office in Shanghai. Meanwhile he was very happy where he was; he could save money, which you couldn't do in Shanghai, and have a good time into the bargain. This place had another advantage over Shanghai: he was the most prominent man in the community and what he said went. Even the consul took care to keep on the right side of him. Once a consul and he had

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been at loggerheads, and it was not he who had gone to the wall. The taipan thrust out his jaw pugnaciously as he thought of the incident.

But he smiled, for he felt in an excellent humour. He was walking back to his office from a capital luncheon at the Hong-Kong and Shanghai Bank. They did you very well there. The food was first rate and there was plenty of liquor. He had started with a couple of cocktails, then he had had some excellent sauterne, and he had finished up with two glasses of port and some fine old brandy. He felt good. And when he left he did a thing that was rare with him: he walked. His bearers with his chair kept a few paces behind him in case he felt inclined to slip into it, but he enjoyed stretching his legs. He did not get enough exercise these days. Now that he was too heavy to ride, it was difficult to get exercise. But if he was too heavy to ride he could still keep ponies, and as he strolled along in the balmy air he thought of the spring meeting. He had a couple of griffins that he had hopes of and one of the lads in his office had turned out a fine jockey (he must see they didn't sneak him away, old Higgins in Shanghai would give a pot of money to get him over there) and he ought to pull off two or three races. He flattered himself that he had the finest stable in the city. He pouted his broad chest like a pigeon. It was a beautiful day, and it was good to be alive.

He paused as he came to the cemetery. It stood there, neat and orderly, as an evident sign of the community's opulence. He never passed the cemetery without a little glow of pride. He was pleased to be an Englishman. For the cemetery stood in a place, valueless when it was chosen,

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which with the increase of the city's affluence was now worth a great deal of money. It had been suggested that the graves should be moved to another spot and the land sold for building, but the feeling of the community was against it. It gave the taipan a sense of satisfaction to think that their dead rested on the most valuable site on the island. It showed that there were things they cared for more than money. Money be blowed! When it came to "the things that mattered" (this was a favourite phrase with the taipan), well, one remembered that money wasn't everything.

And now he thought he would take a stroll through. He looked at the graves. They were neatly kept, and the pathways were free from weeds. There was a look of prosperity. And as he sauntered along he read the names on the tombstones. Here were three side by side; the captain, the first mate, and the second mate of the barque *Mary Baxter*, who had all perished together in the typhoon of 1908. He remembered it well. There was a little group of two missionaries, their wives and children, who had been massacred during the Boxer troubles. Shocking thing that had been! Not that he took much stock in missionaries; but, hang it all, one couldn't have these damned Chinese massacring them. Then he came to a cross with a name on it he knew. Good chap, Edward Mulock, but he couldn't stand his liquor, drank himself to death, poor devil, at twenty-five: the taipan had known a lot of them do that; there were several more neat crosses with a man's name on them and the age, twenty-five, twenty-six, or twenty-seven; it was always the same story; they had come out to China: they had never seen so much money before, they were

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good fellows, and they wanted to drink with the rest: they couldn't stand it, and there they were in the cemetery. You had to have a strong head and a fine constitution to drink drink for drink on the China coast. Of course it was very sad, but the taipan could hardly help a smile when he thought how many of those young fellows he had drunk underground. And there was a death that had been useful, a fellow in his own firm, senior to him and a clever chap too: if that fellow had lived he might not have been taipan now. Truly the ways of fate were inscrutable. Ah, and here was little Mrs. Turner, Violet Turner, she had been a pretty little thing, he had had quite an affair with her; he had been devilish cut up when she died. He looked at her age on the tombstone. She'd be no chicken if she were alive now. And as he thought of all those dead people, a sense of satisfaction spread through him. He had beaten them all. They were dead, and he was alive, and by George he'd scored them off. His eyes collected in one picture all those crowded graves and he smiled scornfully. He very nearly rubbed his hands.

"No one ever thought I was a fool," he muttered.

He had a feeling of good-natured contempt for the gibbering dead. Then, as he strolled along, he came suddenly upon two coolies digging a grave. He was astonished, for he had not heard that anyone in the community was dead.

"Who the devil's that for?" he said aloud.

The coolies did not even look at him, they went on with their work, standing in the grave, deep down, and they shovelled up heavy clods of earth. Though he had been so long in China he knew no Chinese, in his day it was

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not thought necessary to learn the damned language, and he asked the coolies in English whose grave they were digging. They did not understand. They answered him in Chinese and he cursed them for ignorant fools. He knew that Mrs. Broome's child was ailing, and it might have died, but he would certainly have heard of it, and besides that wasn't a child's grave, it was a man's and a big man's too. It was uncanny. He wished he hadn't gone into that cemetery; he hurried out and stepped into his chair. His good humour had all gone and there was an uneasy frown on his face. The moment he got back to his office he called to his number two:

"I say, Peters, who's dead, d'you know?"

But Peters knew nothing. The taipan was puzzled. He called one of the native clerks and sent him to the cemetery to ask the coolies. He began to sign his letters. The clerk came back and said the coolies had gone and there was no one to ask. The taipan began to feel vaguely annoyed: he did not like things to happen of which he knew nothing. His own boy would know; his boy always knew everything, and he sent for him; but the boy had heard of no death in the community.

"I knew no one was dead," said the taipan irritably. "But what's the grave for?"

He told the boy to go to the overseer of the cemetery and find out what the devil he had dug a grave for when no one was dead.

"Let me have a whisky and soda before you go," he added, as the boy was leaving the room.

He did not know why the sight of the grave had made him uncomfortable. But he tried to put it out of his mind. He felt better when he had drunk the whisky,

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and he finished his work. He went upstairs and turned over the pages of *Punch*. In a few minutes he would go to the club and play a rubber or two of bridge before dinner. But it would ease his mind to hear what his boy had to say, and he waited for his return. In a little while the boy came back, and he brought the overseer with him.

"What are you having a grave dug for?" he asked the overseer point blank. "Nobody's dead."

"I no dig glave," said the man.

"What the devil do you mean by that? There were two coolies digging a grave this afternoon."

The two Chinese looked at one another. Then the boy said they had been to the cemetery together. There was no new grave there.

The taipan only just stopped himself from speaking.

"But damn it all, I saw it myself," were the words on the tip of his tongue.

But he did not say them. He grew very red as he choked them down. The two Chinese looked at him with their steady eyes. For a moment his breath failed him.

"All right. Get out," he gasped.

But as soon as they were gone he shouted for the boy again, and when he came, maddeningly impassive, he told him to bring some whisky. He rubbed his sweating face with a handkerchief. His hand trembled when he lifted the glass to his lips. They could say what they liked, but he had seen the grave. Why, he could hear still the dull thud as the coolies threw the spadefuls of earth on the ground above them. What did it mean? He could feel his heart beating. He felt strangely ill at ease. But he pulled himself together. It was all nonsense. If there

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was no grave there it must have been an hallucination. The best thing he could do was to go to the club, and if he ran across the doctor, he would ask him to give him a look over.

Everyone in the club looked just the same as ever. He did not know why he should have expected them to look different. It was a comfort. These men, living for many years with one another lives that were methodically regulated, had acquired a number of little idiosyncrasies—one of them hummed incessantly while he played bridge, another insisted on drinking beer through a straw—and these tricks which had so often irritated the taipan now gave him a sense of security. He needed it, for he could not get out of his head that strange sight he had seen; he played bridge very badly; his partner was censorious, and the taipan lost his temper. He thought the men were looking at him oddly. He wondered what they saw in him that was unaccustomed.

Suddenly he felt he could not bear to stay in the club any longer. As he went out he saw the doctor reading *The Times* in the reading-room, but he could not bring himself to speak to him. He wanted to see for himself whether that grave was really there, and, stepping into his chair he told his bearers to take him to the cemetery. You couldn't have an hallucination twice, could you? And besides, he would take the overseer in with him, and if the grave was not there, he wouldn't see it, and if it was he'd give the overseer the soundest thrashing he'd ever had. But the overseer was nowhere to be found. He had gone out and taken the keys with him. When the taipan found he could not get into the cemetery, he felt suddenly exhausted. He got back into his chair and told

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his bearers to take him home. He would lie down for half an hour before dinner. He was tired out. That was it. He had heard that people had hallucinations when they were tired. When his boy came in to put out his clothes for dinner, it was only by an effort of will that he got up. He had a strong inclination not to dress that evening, but he resisted it: he made it a rule to dress, he had dressed every evening for twenty years, and it would never do to break his rule. But he ordered a bottle of champagne with his dinner, and that made him feel more comfortable. Afterwards he told the boy to bring him the best brandy. When he had drunk a couple of glasses of this he felt himself again. Hallucinations be damned! He went to the billiard room and practised a few difficult shots. There could not be much the matter with him when his eye was so sure. When he went to bed he sank immediately into a sound sleep.

But suddenly he awoke. He had dreamed of that open grave and the coolies digging leisurely. He was sure he had seen them. It was absurd to say it was an hallucination when he had seen them with his own eyes. Then he heard the rattle of the night watchman going his rounds. It broke upon the stillness of the night so harshly that it made him jump out of his skin. And then terror seized him. He felt a horror of the winding multitudinous streets of the Chinese city, and there was something ghastly and terrible in the convoluted roofs of the temples with their devils grimacing and tortured. He loathed the smells that assaulted his nostrils. And the people. Those myriads of blue clad coolies, and the beggars in their filthy rags, and the merchants and the magistrates, sleek, smiling, and inscrutable, in their long black gowns. They

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seemed to press upon him with menace. He hated the country. China! Why had he ever come? He was panic-stricken now. He must get out. He would not stay another year, another month. What did he care about Shanghai?

“Oh, my God!” he cried, “if I were only safely back in England!”

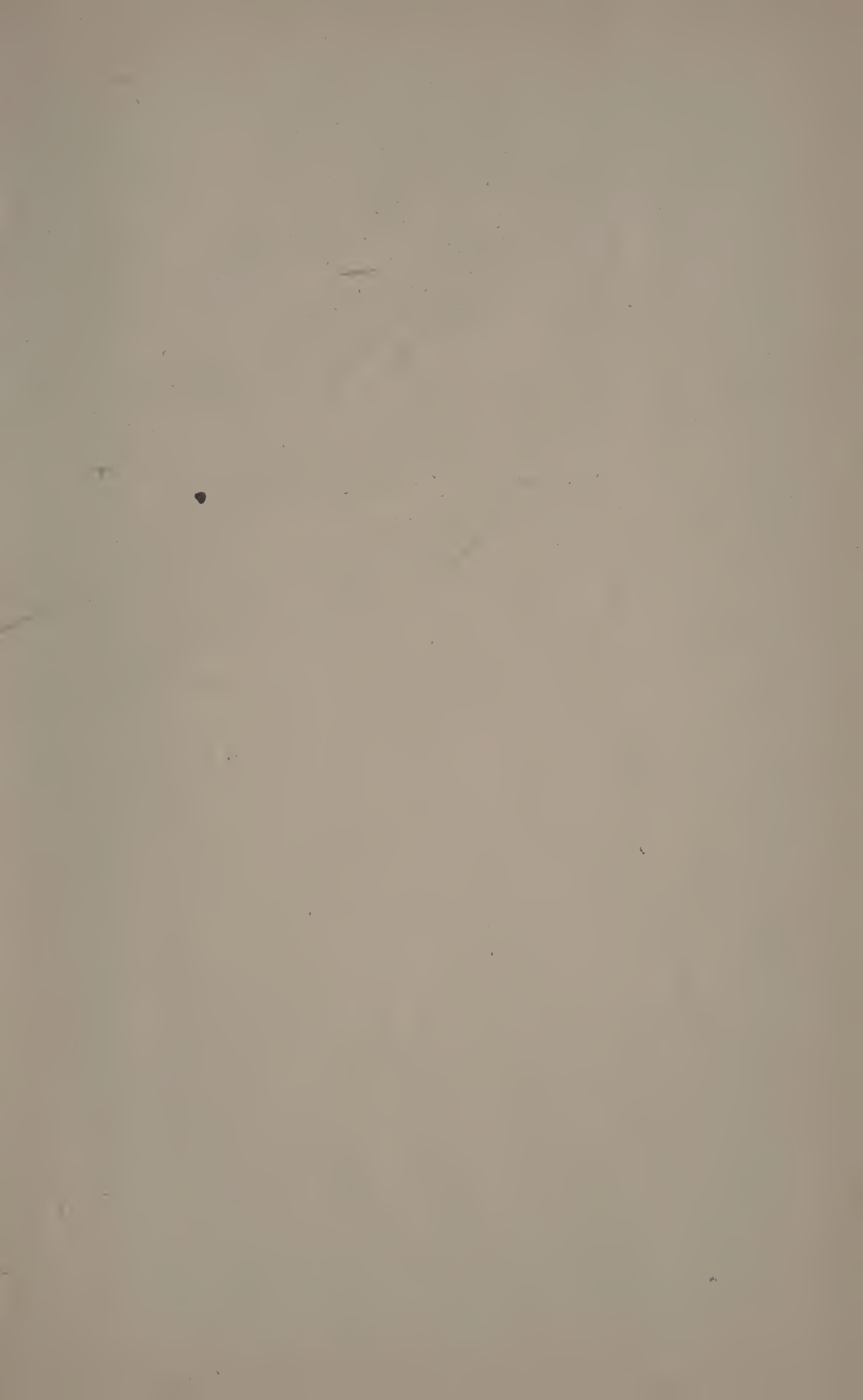
He wanted to go home. If he had to die, he wanted to die in England. He could not bear to be buried among all these yellow men, with their slanting eyes and their grinning faces. He wanted to be buried at home, not in that grave he had seen that day. He could never rest there. Never. What did it matter what people thought? Let them think what they liked. The only thing that mattered was to get away while he had the chance.

He got out of bed and wrote to the head of the firm and said he had discovered he was dangerously ill. He must be replaced. He could not stay longer than was absolutely necessary. He must go home at once.

They found the letter in the morning clenched in the taipan's hand. He had slipped down between the desk and the chair. He was stone dead.

(1)

THE END



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