The Times Red Cross Story Book by Famous Novelists Serving in His Majesty's Forces

Various

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Opening pages

[Illustration: Dimoussi. *Frontispiece.*]

=The Times'= *RED CROSS STORY BOOK*

BY FAMOUS NOVELISTS SERVING IN HIS MAJESTY'S FORCES

ILLUSTRATED

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BY HODDER AND STOUGHTON LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

Manchester Regiment

In the maps of Morocco you will see, stretching southwards of the city of Mequinez, a great tract of uncharted country. It is lawless and forbidden land. Even the Sultan Mulai el Hassen, that great fighter, omitted it from his expeditions.

But certain tribes are known to inhabit it, such as the Beni M'tir, and certain villages can be assigned a locality, such as Agurai, which lies one long day's journey from the Renegade's Gate of Mequinez.

At Agurai Dimoussi was born, and lived for the first fifteen years of his life—Dimoussi the Englishman, as he was called, though in features and colour he had the look of an Arab with just a strain of Negro blood.

At the age of fifteen a desire to see the world laid hold upon Dimoussi. As far as the eye could see from any mound about the village, there stretched on every side a rolling plain, silent and empty. Hardly a bird sang in the air above it; and everywhere it was dark with bushes wherein the flowers of asphodel gleamed pale and small.

Dimoussi wearied of the plain. One thin, reddish line meandered uncertainly from north to south, a stone's throw from the village, where the feet of men and mules passing at rare intervals through many centuries had beaten down a path. Along this path Dimoussi allowed his fancies to carry him into a world of enchantment; and one spring morning his feet carried him along it, too.

For half a dozen men of the Beni M'tir carrying almonds and walnuts into Mequinez happened to pass Agurai at a moment when Dimoussi was watching, and his mother was at work on a patch of tilled ground out of sight. Dimoussi had no other parent than his mother.

He ran into the hut, with its tent roof of sacking and its sides of rough hurdles, which was his home, searched in a corner for a big brass-barrelled pistol which had long been the pride of the establishment, and, hiding it under his ragged jellaba, he ran down the track and joined himself on to the tiny caravan. The next morning he came to Mequinez, where he parted company with the tribesmen.

Dimoussi had not so much as a copper flouss upon him, but, on the other hand, he had a pistol and the whole world in front of him. And what reasonable boy could want more? All that day he wandered about the streets, gaping at the houses, at the towers of the mosques, and at the stalls in the markets, but as the afternoon declined, hunger got hold of him. His friends of yesterday had vanished. Somehow he must get food.

He fingered the pistol under his jellaba irresolutely. He walked along a street which he came to know afterwards as the Sôk Kubba. In the middle was built a square tent of stone with an open arch at each side and a pointed roof of fluted tiles trailed over by a vine. Just beyond this stone tent the street narrowed, and on the left-hand side a man who sold weapons squatted upon the floor of a dark booth.

“How much?” asked Dimoussi, producing his pistol, but loth to let it go.

The shopman looked at Dimoussi, and looked at the pistol. Then he tossed it carelessly behind him into the litter of his booth.

“It is no good. As sure as my name is Mustapha, it would not kill a rabbit. But see! My heart is kind. I will give you three dollars.”

He counted them out. Dimoussi stolidly shook his head. “Seven,” said he.

Mustapha reached behind him for the pistol, and flung it down at Dimoussi’s feet.

“Take it away!” said he. “I will not haggle with foolish boys who have stolen a thing of no value, and wish to sell it at a great price. Take it away! Yet, out of my charity, I will give you four dollars.”

“Five,” said Dimoussi.

And five he received.

He bought rice and eggs in the market, and turned under an old archway of green tiles into the Fondak Henna. There he cooked his food at a fire, ate, and proposed to sleep.

But Fate had laid her hand upon Dimoussi. He slept not at all that night. He sat with his back propped against the filigree plaster of one of the pillars, and listened to a Moor of the Sherarda tribe, who smoked keef and talked until morning.

“Yes,” said the Sherarda man, “I have travelled far and wide. Now I go to my own village of Sigota, on Jebel Zarhon.”

“Have you been to Fez?” asked Dimoussi eagerly.

“I have lived in Fez. I served in the army of my lord the Sultan until I was bored with it. It is a fine town and a large one. The river flows in a hundred streams underneath the houses. In every house there is running water. But it is nothing to the town of Mulai Idris.”

Dimoussi clasped his hands about his knees.

“Oh, tell me! Tell me!” he cried so loudly that in the shadows of the Fondak men stirred upon their straw and cursed him.

“I have also travelled to Rabat, a great town upon the sea, whither many consools come in fireships. A great town draped with flowers and cactus. But it is nothing to Mulai Idris. There are no consools in Mulai Idris.”

All through his talk the name of Mulai Idris, the sacred city on the slope of Jebel Zarhon, came and went like a shuttle of a loom.

The Sherarda Moor thought highly of the life in Mulai Idris, since it was possible to live there without work.

Pilgrims came to visit the shrine of the founder of the Moorish Empire, with offerings in their hands; and the whole township lived, and lived well, upon those offerings. Moreover, there were no Europeans, or "consools," as he termed them.

The Moor spoke at length, and with hatred, of the Europeans—pale, ungainly creatures in ridiculous clothes, given over to the devil, people with a clever knack of invention, no doubt, in the matter of firearms and cameras and spy-glasses, but, man for man, no match for any Moor.

"Only three cities are safe from them now in all Morocco: Sheshawan in the north, Tafilat in the south, and Mulai Idris. But Mulai Idris is safest. Once a party of them—Englishmen—came rising up the steep road to the gate even there, but from the walls we stoned them back. God's curse on them! Let them stay at home! But they must always be pushing somewhere."

Dimoussi, recognising in himself a point of kinship with the "consools," said gravely:

"I am an Englishman."

The Sherarda man laughed, as though he had heard an excellent joke, and continued to discourse upon the splendours of Mulai Idris until the sleepers waked in their corners, and the keeper flung open the door, and the grey daylight crept into the Fondak.

"Oh, tell me!" said Dimoussi. "The city is far from here?"

"Set out now. You will be in Mulai Idris before sunset."

Dimoussi rose to his feet.

“I will go to Mulai Idris,” said he, and he went out into the cool, clear air. The Sherarda Moor accompanied Dimoussi to the Bordain Gate, and there they parted company, the boy going northward, the Moor following the eastward track towards Fez. He had done his work, though what he had done he did not know.

At noon Dimoussi came out upon a high tableland, as empty as the plains which stretched about his native Agurai. Far away upon his left the dark, serrated ridge of Jebel Gerouan stood out against the sky. Nearer to him upon his right rose the high rock of Jebel Zarhon. In some fold of that mountain lay this fabulous city of Mulai Idris.

Dimoussi walked forward, a tiny figure in that vast solitude. There were no villages, there were no trees anywhere. The plateau extended ahead of him like a softly heaving sea, as far as the eye could reach. It was covered with bushes in flower; and here and there an acre of marigolds or a field of blue lupins decked it out, as though someone had chosen to make a garden there.

Then suddenly upon Dimoussi’s right the hillside opened, and in the recess he saw Mulai Idris, a city high-placed and dazzlingly white, which tumbled down the hillside like a cascade divided at its apex by a great white mosque.

The mosque was the tomb of Mulai Idris, the founder of the empire. Dimoussi dropped upon his knees and bowed his forehead to the ground. “Mulai Idris,” he whispered, in a voice of exaltation. Yesterday he had never even heard the name of the town. To-day the mere sight of it lifted him into a passion of fervour.

Those white walls masked a crowded city of filth and noisome smells. But Dimoussi walked on air; and his desire to see more of the world died away altogether.

He was in the most sacred place in all Morocco; and there he stayed. There was no need for him to work. He had the livelong day wherein to store away in his heart the sayings of his elders. And amongst those sayings there was not one that he heard more frequently than this:

“There are too many Europeans in Morocco.”

Fanaticism was in the very stones of the town. Dimoussi saw it shining sombrely in the eyes of the men who paced and rode about the streets; he felt it behind the impassivity of their faces. It came to him as an echo of their constant prayers. Dimoussi began to understand it.

Once or twice he saw the Europeans during that spring. For close by in the plain a great stone arch and some broken pillars showed where the Roman city of Volubilis had stood. And by those ruins once or twice a party of Europeans encamped.

Dimoussi visited each encampment, begged money of the “consools,” and watched with curiosity the queer mechanical things they carried with them—their cameras, their weapons, their folding mirrors, their brushes and combs. But on each visit he became more certain that there were too many Europeans in Morocco.

“A djehad is needed,” said one of the old men sitting outside the gate—“a holy war—to exterminate them.”

“It is not easy to start a djehad,” replied Dimoussi.

The elders stroked their beards and laughed superciliously.

“You are young and foolish, Dimoussi. A single shot from a gun, and all Moghrebbin is in flame.”

“Yes; and he that fired the shot certain of Paradise.”

Not one of them had thought to fire the shot. They were chatterers of vain words. But the words sank into Dimoussi’s mind; for Dimoussi was

different. He began to think, as he put it; as a matter of fact, he began to feel.

He went up to the tomb of Mulai Idris, bribed the guardian, who sat with a wand in the court outside the shrine, to let him pass, and for the first time in his life stood within the sacred place. The shrine was dark, and the ticking of the clocks in the gloom filled Dimoussi's soul with awe and wonderment.

For the shrine was crowded with clocks: grandfather clocks with white faces, and gold faces, and enamelled faces, stood side by side along the walls, marking every kind of hour. Eight-day clocks stood upon pedestals and niches; and the whole room whirred, and ticked, and chimed; never had Dimoussi dreamed of anything so marvellous. There were glass balls, too, dangling from the roof on silver strings, and red baize hanging from the tomb.

Dimoussi bowed his head and prayed for the djehad. And as he prayed in that dark and solitary place there came to him an inspiration. It seemed that Mulai Idris himself laid his hand upon the boy's head. It needed only one man, only one shot to start the djehad. He raised his head and all the ticking clocks cried out to him: "Thou art the man." Dimoussi left the shrine with his head high in the air and a proudness in his gait. For he had his mission.

Thereafter he lay in wait upon the track over the plain to Mequinez, watching the north and the south for the coming of the traveller.

During the third week of his watching he saw advancing along the track mules carrying the baggage of Europeans. Dimoussi crouched in the bushes and let them pass with the muleteers. A good way behind them the Europeans rode slowly upon horses. As they came opposite to Dimoussi, one, a dark, thin man, stretched out his arm and, turning to his companion, said:

“Challoner, there is Mulai Idris.”

At once Dimoussi sprang to his feet. He did not mean to be robbed of his great privilege. He shook his head.

“Lar, lar!” he cried. “Bad men in Mulai Idris. They will stone you. You go to Mequinez.”

The man who had already spoken laughed.

“We are not going to Mulai Idris,” he replied. He was a man named Arden who had spent the greater part of many years in Morocco, going up and down that country in the guise of a Moor, and so counterfeiting accent, and tongue, and manners, that he had even prayed in their mosques and escaped detection.

“You are English?” asked Dimoussi.

“Yes. Come on, Challoner!”

And then, to his astonishment, as his horse stepped on, Dimoussi cried out actually in English:

“One, two, three, and away!”

Arden stopped his horse.

“Where did you learn that?” he asked; and he asked in English.

But Dimoussi had spoken the only five words of English he knew, and even those he did not understand.

Arden repeated the question in Arabic; and Dimoussi answered with a smile:

“I, too, am English.”

“Oh! are you?” said Arden, with a laugh; and he rode on. “These Moors love a joke. He learned the words over there, no doubt, from the tourists at Volubilis. Do you see those blocks of stone along the track?”

“Yes,” answered Challoner. “How do they come there?”

“Old Mulai Ismail, the sultan, built the great palace at Mequinez two hundred years ago from the ruins of Volubilis. These stones were dragged down by the captives of the Salee pirates.”

“And by the English prisoners from Tangier?” said Challoner suddenly.

“Yes,” replied Arden with some surprise, for there was a certain excitement in his companion’s voice and manner. “The English were prisoners until the siege ended, and we gave up Tangier and they were released. When Mulai Ismail died, all these men dragging stones just dropped them and left them where they lay by the track. There they have remained ever since. It’s strange, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Challoner thoughtfully. He was a young man with the look of a student rather than a traveller. He rode slowly on, looking about him, as though at each turn of the road he expected to see some Englishman in a tattered uniform of the Tangier Foot leaning upon a block of masonry and wiping the sweat from his brow.

“Two of my ancestors were prisoners here in Mequinez,” he said. “They were captured together at the fall of the Henrietta Fort in 1680, and brought up here to work on Mulai Ismail’s palace. It’s strange to think that they dragged these stones down this very track. I don’t suppose that the country has changed at all. They must have come up from the coast by the same road we followed, passed the same villages, and heard the pariah dogs bark at night just as we have done.”

Arden glanced in surprise at his companion.

“I did not know that. I suppose that is the reason why you wish to visit Mequinez?”

Challoner’s sudden desire to travel inland to this town had been a mystery to Arden. He knew Challoner well, and knew him for a dilettante, an amiable amateur of the arts, a man always upon the threshold of a new interest, but never by any chance on the other side of the door, and, above all, a stay-at-home. Now the reason was explained.

“Yes,” Challoner admitted. “I was anxious to see Mequinez.”

“Both men came home when peace was declared, I suppose?” said Arden.

“No. Only one came home, James Challoner. The other, Luke, turned renegade to escape the sufferings of slavery, and was never allowed to come back. The two men were brothers.

“I discovered the story by chance. I was looking over the papers in the library one morning, in order to classify them, and I came across a manuscript play written by a Challoner after the Restoration. Between the leaves of the play an old, faded letter was lying. It had been written by James, on his return, to Luke’s wife, telling her she would never see Luke again. I will show you the letter this evening.”

“That’s a strange story,” said Arden. “Was nothing heard of Luke afterwards?”

“Nothing. No doubt he lived and died in Mequinez.”

Challoner looked back as he spoke. Dimoussi was still standing amongst the bushes watching the travellers recede from him. His plan was completely formed. There would be a djehad to-morrow, and the honour of it would belong to Dimoussi of Agurai.

He felt in the leathern wallet which swung at his side upon a silk orange-coloured cord. He had ten dollars in that wallet. He walked in the rear of the travellers to Mequinez, and reached the town just before sunset. He went at once to the great square by the Renegade's Gate, where the horses are brought to roll in the dust on their way to the watering fountain.

There were many there at the moment; and the square was thick with dust like a mist.

But, through the mist, in a corner, Dimoussi saw the tents of the travellers, and, in front of the tents, from wall to wall, a guard of soldiers sitting upon the ground in a semicircle.

Dimoussi was in no hurry. He loitered there until darkness followed upon the sunset, and the stars came out.

He saw lights burning in the tents, and, through the open doorway one, the man who had spoken to him, Arden, stretched upon a lounge-chair, reading a paper which he held in his hand.

Dimoussi went once more to the Fondak Henna, and made up for the wakeful night he had passed here with a Moor of the Sherarda tribe by sleeping until morning with a particular soundness.

II

The paper which Arden was reading was the faded letter written at “Berry Street, St. James’s” on April 14, 1684, by the James Challoner who had returned to the wife of Luke Challoner who had turned renegade.

Arden took a literal copy of that letter; and it is printed here from that copy:

“BERRY STREET, ST. JAMES’S, “*April 14, 1684*.

“MY DEAR PAMELA,

“I have just now come back from Whitehall, where I was most graciously received by his Majestie, who asked many questions about our sufferings among the Moors, and promised rewards with so fine a courtesy and condescension that my four years of slavery were all forgotten. Indeed, my joy would have been rare, but I knew that the time would come when I must go back to my lodging and write to you news that will go near to break your heart. Why did my brother not stay quietly at home with his wife, at whose deare side his place was? But he must suddenlie leave his house, and come out to his younger brother at Tangier, who was never more sorry to see any man than I was to see Luke. For we were hard pressed: the Moors had pushed their trenches close under our walls, and any night the city might fall. And now I am come safely home, though there is no deare heart to break for me, and Luke must for ever stay behind. For that is the bitter truth. We shall see noe more of Luke, and you, my deare, are widowed and yet no widow. Oh, why did you let him goe, knowing how quick he is to take fire, and how quick to cool? I, too, am to blame, for I kept him by me out of my love for him, and that was his undoing.

“In May ... I commanded the Henrietta Fort, and Luke was a volunteer with me. For five days we were attacked night and day, we were cut off from the town, there was no hope that way, and all our ammunition and water consumed, and most of us wounded or killed. So late on the night of the 13th we were compelled to surrender upon promise of our lives. Luke and I were carried up to Mequinez, and there set to build a wall, which was to stretch from that town to Morocco city, so that a blind man might travel all those many miles safely without a guide. I will admit that our sufferings were beyond endurance. We slept underground in close, earth dungeons, down to which we must crawl on our hands and knees; and at day we laboured in the sunlight, starved and thirsting, no man knowing when the whip of the taskmaster would fall across his back, and yet sure that it would fall. Luke was not to be blamed—to be pitied rather. He was of a finer, more delicate nature. What was pain to us was anguish and torture to him. One night I crept down into my earth alone, and the next day he walked about Mequinez with the robes of a Moor. He had turned renegade.

“I was told that the Bashaw had taken him into his service, but I never had the opportunity of speech with him again, although I once heard his voice. That was six months afterwards, when peace had been re-established between his Maj. and the Emperor. Part of the terms of the peace was that the English captives should be released and sent down to the coast, but the renegade must stay behind. I pleaded with the Bashaw that Luke might be set free too, but could by no means persuade him. We departed from Mequinez one early morning, and on the city wall stood the Bashaw’s house; and as I came opposite to it I saw a hand wave farewell from a narrow window-slit, and heard Luke’s voice cry, ‘Farewell!’ bravely, Pamela, bravely!

“JAMES CHALLONER.”

When Arden had finished this letter he walked out of the tent, passed through the semicircle of sentinels, and stood in front of the Renegade's Gate. There Challoner joined him, and both men looked at the great arch for a while without speaking. It rose black against a violet and starlit sky. The pattern of its coloured tiles could not be distinguished; but even in the darkness something of its exquisite delicacy could be perceived.

"Luke Challoner very likely worked upon that arch," said Arden. "Yet, as I read that letter, it seemed so very human, very near, as though it had been written yesterday."

"I wonder what became of him?" said Challoner. "From some house on the city wall he waved his hand to his brother, and cried 'Farewell!' bravely. I wonder what became of him?"

"I will take a photograph of that gate to-morrow," said Arden.

III

The next morning Dimoussi came out of the Fondak Henna and walked to the little booth in the Sôk Kubba. Mustapha was squatting upon the floor, and with a throbbing heart Dimoussi noticed the familiar pistol shining against the dark wall behind. It had not been sold.

“Give it to me,” he said.

Mustapha took the pistol from the nail on which it hung.

“It is worth fourteen dollars,” said he. “But, see, to every man his chance comes. I am in a good mind to-day. My health is excellent and my heart is light. You shall have it for twelve.”

Dimoussi took the pistol in his hand. It had a flint lock and was mounted in polished brass, and a cover of brass was on the heel of the butt.

“It is not worth twelve. I will give you seven for it.”

Mustapha raised his hands in a gesture of indignation.

“Seven dollars!” he cried in a shrill, angry voice. “Hear him! Seven dollars! Look, it comes from Agadhir in the Sus country where they make the best weapons.”

He pointed out to Dimoussi certain letters upon the plate underneath the lock. “There it is written.”

Dimoussi could not read, but he nodded his head sagely.

“Yes. It is worth seven,” said he.

The shopman snatched it away from the boy.

“I will not be angry, for it is natural to boys to be foolish. But I will tell you the truth. I gave eight dollars for it after much bargaining. But it has hung in my shop for a year, and no one any more has money. Therefore, I will sell it to you for ten.”

He felt behind his back and showed Dimoussi a tantalising glint of the brass barrel. Dimoussi was unshaken.

“It has hung in your shop for four months,” said he.

“A year. That is why I will sell it to you at the loss of a dollar.”

“Liar, and son of a liar,” replied the boy, without any heat, “and grandson of a liar. I sold it to you for five dollars four months ago. I will give you eight for it to-day.”

He counted out the eight dollars one by one on the raised floor of the booth, and the shopman could not resist.

“Very well,” he cried furiously. “Take it, and may your children starve as mine surely will!”

“You are a pig, and the son of a pig,” replied Dimoussi calmly. “Have you any powder?”

He changed his ninth dollar and bought some powder.

“You will need bullets, too,” said Mustapha. “I will sell you them very cheap. Oh, you are lucky! Do you see those signs upon the barrel? The pistol is charmed and cannot miss.”

Dimoussi looked at the signs engraved one above the other on the barrel. There was a crown, and a strange letter, and a lion. He had long wondered what those signs meant. He was very glad now that he understood.

“But I will not buy lead bullets,” said Dimoussi wisely. “The pistol may be enchanted so that it cannot miss, but there are also enchantments against lead bullets so that they cannot hurt.”

So Dimoussi walked away, and begged a lump of rock salt from another booth instead. He cut down the lump until it fitted roughly into the hexagonal barrel of his pistol. Then he loaded the pistol, and hiding the weapon in the wide sleeve of his jellaba, sauntered to the great square before the Renegade’s Gate. There were groups of people standing about watching the tents, and the inevitable ring of sentries. But while Dimoussi was still loitering—he would have loitered for a fortnight if need be, for there were no limits to Dimoussi’s patience—Arden came out of the tent with his camera, and Challoner followed with a tripod stand.

The two consools passed the line of guards and set up the camera in front of the Renegade’s Gate. Dimoussi was quite impartial which of the two should be sacrificed to begin the djehad, but again an ironical fate laid its hand upon him. It was Arden who was to work the camera. It was Arden, therefore, who was surrounded by the idlers, and was safe. Challoner, on the other hand, had to stand quite apart, so as to screen the lens from the direct rays of the sun.

“A little more to the right, Challoner,” said Arden. “That’ll do.”

He put his head under the focussing cloth, and the next instant he heard a loud report, followed by shouts and screams and the rush of feet; and when he tore the focussing cloth away he saw Challoner lying upon the ground, the sentries agitatedly rushing this way and that, and the bystanders to a man in full flight.

Dimoussi had chosen his opportunity well. He stood between two men, and rather behind them, and exactly opposite Challoner. All eyes were fixed upon the camera, even Challoner’s. It was true that he did see the

sun glitter suddenly upon something bright, that he did turn, that he did realise that the bright thing was the brass barrel of a big flintlock pistol. But before he could move or shout, the pistol was fired, and a heavy blow like a blow from a cudgel struck him full on the chest.

Challoner spoke no more than a few words afterwards. The lump of rock salt had done the work of an explosive bullet. He was just able to answer a question of Arden's.

"Did you see who fired?"

"The boy who came from Mulai Idris," whispered Challoner. "He shot me with a brass-barrelled pistol." That seemed to have made a most vivid impression upon his mind, for more than once he repeated it.

But Dimoussi was by this time out of the Renegade's Gate, and running with all his might through the olive grove towards the open, lawless country south of Mequinez. By the evening he was safe from capture, and lifted up with pride.

Certainly no djehad had followed upon the murder, and that was disappointing. But it was not Dimoussi's fault. He had done his best according to his lights. Meanwhile, it seemed prudent to him to settle down quietly at Agurai. He was nearly sixteen now. Dimoussi thought that he would settle down and marry.

Here the episode would have ended but for two circumstances. In the first place Dimoussi carried back with him from Mequinez the brass-barrelled pistol; and in the second place Arden, two years later, acted upon a long-cherished desire to penetrate the unmapped country south of Mequinez.

He travelled with a mule as a Jew pedlar, knowing that such a man, for the sake of his wares, may go where a Moor may not. Of his troubles during his six months' wanderings now is not the time to speak. It is

enough that at the end of the six months he set up his canvas shelter one evening by the village of Agurai.

The men came at once and squatted, chattering, about his shelter.

“Is there a woman in the village,” asked Arden, “who will wash some clothes for me?”

And the sheikh of the village rose up and replied:

“Yes; the Frenchwoman. I will send her to you.”

Arden was perplexed. It seemed extraordinary that in a little village in a remote and unusually lawless district of Morocco there should be a French blanchisseuse. But he made no comment, and spread out his wares upon the ground. In a few moments a woman appeared. She had the Arab face, the Arab colour. But she stood unconcernedly before Arden, and said in Arabic:

“I am the Frenchwoman. Give me the clothes you want washing.”

Arden reached behind him for the bundle. He addressed her in French, but she shook her head and carried the bundle away. Her place was taken by another, a very old, dark woman, who was accompanied by a youth carrying a closed basket.

“Pigeons,” said the old woman. “Good, fat, live pigeons.”

Arden was fairly tired of that national food by this time, and waved her away.

“Very well,” said she. She took the basket from the youth, placed it on the ground, and opened the lid. Then she clapped her hands and the pigeons flew out. As they rose into the air she laughed, and cried out in English—“One, two, three, and away!”

Arden was fairly startled.

“What words are those?” he exclaimed.

“English,” the old woman replied in Arabic. “I am the Englishwoman.”

And the men of the village who were clustered round the shelter agreed, as though nothing could be more natural:

“Yes, she is the Englishwoman.”

“And what do the words mean?”

The old woman shrugged her shoulders.

“My father used them just as I did,” she said. She spoke with a certain pride in the possession of those five uncomprehended words. “He learned them from his father. I do not know what they mean.”

It was mystifying enough to Arden that, in a country where hardly a Moor of a foreign tribe, and certainly no Europeans, had ever been known to penetrate, there should be a Frenchwoman who knew no French, and an Englishwoman with five words of English she did not understand.

But there was more than this to startle Arden. He had heard those same words spoken once before, by a Moorish boy who had declared himself to be an Englishman, and that Moorish boy had murdered his friend Challoner.

Arden glanced carelessly at the youth who stood by the old woman’s side.

“That is your son?” said he.

“Yes. That is Dimoussi.”

Dimoussi’s cheeks wore the shadow of a beard. He had grown.

Arden could not pretend to himself that he recognised the boy who had sprung up from the asphodel-bushes a few miles from Mulai Idris.

He bethought himself of a way to test his suspicions. He took from his wares an old rusty pistol and began to polish it. A firearm he knew to be a lure to any Moor. Dimoussi drew nearer. Arden paid no attention, but continued to polish his pistol. A keen excitement was gaining on him, but he gave no sign. At last Dimoussi reached out his hand. Arden placed the pistol in it. Dimoussi turned the pistol over, and gave it back.

“It is no good.”

Arden laughed.

“There is no better pistol in Agurai,” said he contemptuously. In his ears there was the sound of Challoner’s voice repeating and repeating: “He shot me with a brass-barrelled pistol—a brass-barrelled pistol.”

The contempt in his tone stung Dimoussi.

“I have a better,” said he, and at that the old woman touched him warningly on the arm. Dimoussi stopped at once, and the couple moved away.

Arden wondered whether this was the end. There was a chance that it was not. Dimoussi might return to compare his pistol with Arden’s, and to establish its superiority. Arden waited all the evening in a strong suspense; and at ten o’clock, when he was alone, Dimoussi stepped noiselessly into the shelter, and laid his brass-barrelled pistol on the ground in the light of the lamp.

“It is better than yours. It comes from Agadhir, in the Sus country, where the best pistols are made. See, those letters prove it.”

Arden had no doubt that he had now Challoner’s murderer sitting at his side. But he looked at the letters on the pistol-barrel to which Dimoussi

pointed. The letters were in English, and made up the name “Bennett.” There was also engraved upon the brass of the barrel “London.” The pistol was an old horse-pistol of English make. Even its period was clear to Arden. For above the lion and the crown was the letter C. Arden pointed to those marks.

“What do they mean?”

“They are charms to prevent it missing.”

Arden said nothing. His thoughts were busy on other matters. This pistol was a pistol of the time of Charles II, of the time of the Tangier siege.

“How long have you had it?” he asked.

“My father owned it before me.”

“And his father before him?”

“Very likely. I do not know.”

Arden’s excitement was increasing. He began to see dim, strange possibilities. Suppose, he reasoned, that this pistol had travelled up to Mequinez in the possession of an English prisoner. Suppose that by some chance the prisoner had escaped and wandered; and suddenly he saw something which caught his breath away. He bent down and examined the brass covering to the heel of the butt. Upon that plate there was an engraved crest. Yes! and the crest was Challoner’s!

Arden kept his face bent over the pistol. Questions raced through his mind. Had that pistol belonged to Luke Challoner, who had turned renegade two hundred years ago? Had he married in his captivity? Had his descendants married again, until all trace of their origin was lost except this pistol and five words of English, and the name “Englishwoman”? Ah! but if so, who was the Frenchwoman?

It was quite intelligible to Arden why Dimoussi had slain Challoner. Fanaticism was sufficient reason. But supposing Dimoussi were a descendant of Luke! It was all very strange. Challoner was the last of his family, the last of his name. Had the family name been extinguished by a Challoner?

Arden returned to Mequinez the next day, and, making search, through the help of the Bashaw, who was his friend, amongst documents which existed, he at last came upon the explanation.

The renegades, who were made up not merely of English prisoners of Tangier, but of captives of many nationalities taken by the Salee pirates, had, about the year 1700, become numerous enough to threaten Mequinez. Consequently the Sultan had one fine morning turned them all out of the town through the Renegade's Gate and bidden them go south and found a city for themselves.

They had founded Agurai, they had been attacked by the Beni M'tir; with diminishing numbers they had held their own; they had intermarried with the natives; and now, two hundred years later, all that remained of them were the Frenchwoman, Dimoussi, and his mother.

There could be no doubt that Challoner had been murdered because he was a European, by one of his own race.

There could be no doubt that the real owner of the Challoner property, which went to a distant relation on the female side, was a Moorish youth living at the village of Agurai.

But Arden kept silence for a long while.

The Woman

By A. A. Milne

Royal Warwick Regiment

I

It was April, and in his little bedroom in the Muswell Hill boarding-house, where Mrs. Morrison (assisted, as you found out later, by Miss Gertie Morrison) took in a few select paying guests, George Crosby was packing. Spring came in softly through his open window; it whispered to him tales of green hedges and misty woods and close-cropped rolling grass. “Collars,” said George, trying to shut his ears to it, “handkerchiefs, ties—I knew I’d forgotten something: ties.” He pulled open a drawer. “Ties, shirts—where’s my list?—shirts, ties.” He wandered to the window and looked out. Muswell Hill was below him, but he hardly saw it. “Three weeks,” he murmured. “Heaven for three weeks, and it hasn’t even begun yet.” There was the splendour of it. It hadn’t begun; it didn’t begin till to-morrow. He went back in a dream to his packing. “Collars,” he said, “shirts, ties—ties——”

Miss Gertie Morrison had not offered to help him this year. She had not forgotten that she had put herself forward the year before, when George had stammered and blushed (he found blushing very easy in the Muswell Hill boarding-house), and Algy Traill, the humorist of the establishment, had winked and said, “George, old boy, you’re in luck; Gertie never packs for me.” Algy had continued the joke by smacking his left hand with his right, and saying in an undertone, “Naughty boy, how dare you call her Gertie?” and then in a falsetto voice: “Oh, Mr. Crosby, I’m sure I never meant to put myself forward!” Then Mrs. Morrison from her end of the table called out——

But I can see that I shall have to explain the Muswell Hill ménage to you. I can do it quite easily while George is finishing his packing. He is looking for his stockings now, and that always takes him a long time, because he hasn’t worn them since last April, and they are probably under the bed.

Well, Mrs. Morrison sits at one end of the table and carves. Suppose it is Tuesday evening. “Cold beef or hash, Mr. Traill?” she asks, and Algy probably says “Yes, please,” which makes two of the boarders laugh. These are two pale brothers called Fossett, younger than you who read this have ever been, and enthusiastic admirers of Algy Traill. Their great ambition is to paint the town red one Saturday night. They have often announced their intention of doing this, but so far they do not seem to have left their mark on London to any extent. Very different is it with their hero and mentor. On Boat-race night four years ago Algy Traill was actually locked up—and dismissed next morning with a caution. Since then he has often talked as if he were a Cambridge man; the presence of an Emmanuel lacrosse blue in the adjoining cell having decided him in the choice of a university.

Meanwhile his hash is getting cold. Let us follow it quickly. It is carried by the servant to Miss Gertie Morrison at the other end of the table, who slaps in a helping of potatoes and cabbage. “What, asparagus *again*?” says Algy, seeing the cabbage. “We *are* in luck.” Mrs. Morrison throws up her eyes at Mr. Ransom on her right, as much as to say, “Was there ever such a boy?” and Miss Gertie threatens him with the potato spoon, and tells him not to be silly. Mr. Ransom looks approvingly across the table at Traill. He has a feeling that the Navy, the Empire, and the Old Country are in some way linked up with men of the world such as Algy, or that (to put it in another way) a Radical Nonconformist would strongly disapprove of him. It comes to the same thing; you can’t help liking the fellow. Mr. Ransom is wearing an M.C.C. tie; partly because the bright colours make him look younger, partly because unless he changes *something* for dinner he never feels quite clean, you know. In his own house he would dress every night. He is fifty; tall, dark, red-faced, black-moustached, growing stout; an insurance agent. It is his great sorrow that the country is going to the dogs, and he dislikes the setting of class against class. The proper thing to do is to shoot them down.

Opposite him, and looking always as if he had slept in his clothes, is Mr. Owen-Jones—called Mr. Joen-Owns by Algy. He argues politics fiercely across Mrs. Morrison. “My dear fellow,” he cries to Ransom, “you’re nothing but a reactionary!”—to which Ransom, who is a little doubtful what a reactionary is, replies, “All I want is to live at peace with my neighbours. I don’t interfere with them; why should they interfere with me?” Whereupon Mrs. Morrison says peaceably, “Live and let live. After all, there are two side to *every* question—a little more hash, Mr. Owen-Jones?”

George has just remembered that his stockings are under the bed, so I must hurry on. As it happens, the rest of the boarders do not interest me much. There are two German clerks and one French clerk, whose broken English is always amusing, and somebody with a bald, dome-shaped head who takes in *Answers* every week. Three years ago he had sung “Annie Laurie” after dinner one evening, and Mrs. Morrison still remembers sometimes to say, “Won’t you sing something, Mr. ——?” whatever his name was, but he always refuses. He says that he has the new number of *Answers* to read.

There you are; now you know everybody. Let us go upstairs again to George Crosby.

Is there anything in the world jollier than packing up for a holiday? If there is, I do not know it. It was the hour (or two hours or three hours) of George’s life. It was more than that; for days beforehand he had been packing to himself; sorting out his clothes, while he bent over the figures at his desk, making and drawing up lists of things that he really mustn’t forget. In the luncheon hour he would look in at hosiers’ windows and nearly buy a blue shirt because it went so well with his brown knickerbocker suit. You or I would have bought it; it was only five and sixpence. Every evening he would escape from the drawing-room—that terrible room—and hurry upstairs to his little bedroom, and there sit with

his big brown kit-bag open before him ... dreaming. Every evening he had meant to pack a few things just to begin with: his tweed suit and stockings and nailed shoes, for instance; but he was always away in the country, following the white path over the hills, as soon as ever his bag was between his knees. How he ached to take his body there too ... it was only three weeks to wait, two weeks, a week, three days—to-morrow! To-morrow—he was almost frightened to think of it lest he should wake up.

Perhaps you wonder that George Crosby hated the Muswell Hill boarding-house; perhaps you don't. For my part I agree with Mrs. Morrison that it takes all sorts to make a world, and that as Mr. —— (I forget his name: the dome-shaped gentleman) once surprised us by saying, "There is good in everybody if only you can find it out." At any rate there is humour. I think if George had tried to see the humorous side of Mrs. Morrison's select guests he might have found life tolerable. And yet the best joke languishes after five years.

I had hoped to have gone straight ahead with this story, but I shall have to take you back five years; it won't be for long. Believe me, no writer likes this diving back into the past. He is longing to get to the great moment when Rosamund puts her head on George's shoulder and says—but we shall come to that. What I must tell you now, before my pen runs away with me, is that five years ago George was at Oxford with plenty of money in his pocket, and a vague idea in his head that he would earn a living somehow when he went down. Then his only near relation, his father, died ... and George came down with no money in his pocket, and the knowledge that he would have to earn his living at once. He knew little of London east of the Savoy, where he had once lunched with his father; I doubt if he even knew the Gaiety by sight. When his father's solicitor recommended a certain Islington boarding-house as an establishment where a man of means could be housed and fed for as little as thirty shillings a week, and a certain firm in Fenchurch Street as

another establishment where a man of gifts could earn as much as forty shillings a week, George found out where Islington and Fenchurch Street were, and fell mechanically into the routine suggested for him. That he might have been happier alone, looking after himself, cooking his own meals or sampling alone the cheaper restaurants, hardly occurred to him. Life was become suddenly a horrible dream, and the boarding-house was just a part of it.

However, three years of Islington was enough for him. He pulled himself together ... and moved to Muswell Hill.

There, we have him back at Muswell Hill now, and I have not been long, have I? He has been two years with Mrs. Morrison. I should like to say that he is happy with Mrs. Morrison, but he is not. The terrible thing is that he cannot get hardened to it. He hates Muswell Hill; he hates Traill and the Fossetts and Ransom; he hates Miss Gertie Morrison. The whole vulgar, familiar, shabby, sociable atmosphere of the place he hates. Some day, perhaps, he will pull himself together and move again. There is a boarding-house at Finsbury Park he has heard of....

II

If you had three weeks' holiday in the year, three whole weeks in which to amuse yourself as you liked, how would you spend it? Algy Traill went to Brighton in August; you should have seen him on the pier. The Fossett Brothers adorned Weymouth, the Naples of England. They did good, if slightly obvious, work on the esplanade in fairly white flannels. This during the day; eight-thirty in the evening found them in the Alexandra Gardens—dressed. It is doubtful if the Weymouth boarding-house would have stood it at dinner, so they went up directly afterwards and changed. Mr. Ransom spent August at Folkestone, where he was understood to have a doubtful wife. She was really his widowed mother. You would never have suspected him of a mother, but there she was in Folkestone, thinking of him always, and only living for the next August. It was she who knitted him the M.C.C. tie; he had noticed the colours in a Piccadilly window.

Miss Gertie went to Cliftonville—not Margate.

And where did George go? The conversation at dinner that evening would have given us a clue; or perhaps it wouldn't.

"So you're off to-morrow," Mrs. Morrison had said. "Well, I'm sure I hope you'll have a nice time. A little sea air will do you good."

"Where are you going, Crosby?" asked Ransom, with the air of a man who means to know.

George looked uncomfortable.

"I'm not quite sure," he said awkwardly. "I'm going a sort of walking-tour, you know; stopping at inns and things. I expect it—er—will depend a bit, you know."

“Well, if you *should* happen to stop at Sandringham,” said Algy, “give them all my love, old man, won’t you?”

“Then you won’t have your letters sent on?” asked Mrs. Morrison.

“Oh no, thanks. I don’t suppose I shall have any, anyhow.”

“If you going on a walking-tour,” said Owen-Jones, “why don’t you try the Welsh mountains?”

“I always wonder you don’t run across to Paris,” said the dome-shaped gentleman suddenly. “It only takes——” He knew all the facts, and was prepared to give them, but Algy interrupted him with a knowing whistle.

“Paris, George, aha! Place me among the demoiselles, what ho! I don’t think. Naughty boy!”

Crosby’s first impulse (he had had it before) was to throw his glass of beer at Algy’s face. The impulse died down, and his resolve hardened to write about the Finsbury Park boarding-house at once. He had made that resolution before, too. Then his heart jumped as he remembered that he was going away on the morrow. He forgot Traill and Finsbury Park, and went off into his dreams. The other boarders discussed walking-tours and holiday resorts with animation.

Gertie Morrison was silent. She was often silent when Crosby was there, and always when Crosby’s affairs were being discussed. She knew he hated her, and she hated him for it. I don’t think she knew why he hated her. It was because she lowered his opinion of women.

He had known very few women in his life, and he dreamed dreams about them. They were wonderful creatures, a little higher than the angels, and beauty and mystery and holiness hung over them. Some day he would meet the long-desired one, and (miracle) she would love him, and they would live happy ever afterwards at—— He wondered sometimes whether an angel *would* live happy ever afterwards at Bedford Park.

Bedford Park seemed to strip the mystery and the holiness and the wonder from his dream. And yet he had seen just the silly little house at Bedford Park that would suit them; and even angels, if they come to earth, must live somewhere. She would walk to the gate every morning, and wave him good-bye from under the flowering laburnum—for I need not say that it was always spring in his dream. That was why he had his holiday in April, for it must be spring when he found her, and he would only find her in the country.... Another reason was that in August Miss Morrison went to Cliftonville (not Margate), and so he had a fortnight in Muswell Hill without Miss Morrison.

For it was difficult to believe in the dreams when Gertie Morrison was daily before his eyes. There was a sort of hard prettiness there, which might have been beauty, but where were the mystery and the wonder and the holiness? None of that about the Gertie who was treated so familiarly by the Fossetts and the Traills and their kind, and answered them back so smartly. “You can’t get any change out of Gertie,” Traill often said on these occasions. Almost Crosby wished you could. He would have had her awkward, bewildered, indignant, overcome with shame; it distressed him that she was so lamentably well-equipped for the battle. At first he pitied her, then he hated her. She was betraying her sex. What he really meant was that she was trying to topple over the beautiful image he had built.

I know what you are going to say. What about the girl at the A B C shop who spilt his coffee over his poached egg every day at one thirty-five precisely? Hadn’t she given his image a little push too? I think not. He hardly saw her as a woman at all. She was a worker, like himself; sexless. In the evenings perhaps she became a woman ... wonderful, mysterious, holy ... I don’t know; at any rate he didn’t see her then. But Miss Morrison he saw at home; she was pretty and graceful and feminine; she might have been, not *the* woman—that would have been presumption on his part—but a woman ... and then she went and called Algy Traill “a

silly boy," and smacked him playfully with a teaspoon! Traill, the cad-about-town, the ogler of women! No wonder the image rocked.

[Illustration: "Let's sit down," he said. "I thought you always went to Mar—to Cliftonville for your holiday?" (page 27).]

Well, he would be away from the Traills and the Morrisons and the Fossetts for three weeks. It was April, the best month of the year. He was right in saying that he was not quite sure where he was going, but he could have told Mrs. Morrison the direction. He would start down the line with his knapsack and his well-filled kit-bag. By-and-by he would get out—the name of the station might attract him, or the primroses on the banks—leave his bag, and, knapsack on shoulder, follow the road. Sooner or later he would come to a village; he would find an inn that could put him up; on the morrow the landlord could drive in for his bag.... And then three weeks in which to search for the woman.

III

A south wind was blowing little baby clouds along a blue sky; lower down, the rooks were talking busily to each other in the tall elms which lined the church; and, lower down still, the foxhound puppy sat himself outside the blacksmith's and waited for company. If nothing happened in the next twenty seconds he would have to go and look for somebody.

But somebody was coming. From the door of "The Dog and Duck" opposite, a tall, lean, brown gentleman stepped briskly, in his hand a pair of shoes. The foxhound puppy got up and came across the road sideways to him. "Welcome, welcome," he said effusively, and went round the tall, lean, brown gentleman several times.

"Hallo, Duster," said the brown gentleman; "coming with me to-day?"

"Come along," said the foxhound puppy excitedly. "Going with you? I should just think I am! Which way shall we go?"

"Wait a moment. I want to leave these shoes here."

Duster followed him into the blacksmith's shop. The blacksmith thought he could put some nails in; gentlemen's shoes and horses' shoes, he explained, weren't quite the same thing. The brown gentleman admitted the difference, but felt sure that the blacksmith could make a job of anything he tried his hand at. He mentioned, which the blacksmith knew, that he was staying at "The Dog and Duck" opposite, and gave his name as Carfax.

"Come along," said Duster impatiently.

"Good morning," said the brown gentleman to the blacksmith. "Lovely day, isn't it?... Come along, old boy."

He strode out into the blue fresh morning, Duster all round him. But when they got to the church—fifty yards, no more—the foxhound puppy changed his mind. He had had an inspiration, the same inspiration which came to him every day at this spot. He stopped.

“Let’s go back,” he said.

“Not coming to-day?” laughed the brown gentleman. “Well, good-bye.”

“You see, I think I’d better wait here, after all,” said the foxhound puppy apologetically. “Something might happen. Are you really going on? Well—you’ll excuse me, won’t you?”

He ambled back to his place outside the blacksmith’s shop. The tall, lean, brown gentleman, who called himself Carfax, walked on briskly with spring in his heart. Above him the rooks talked and talked; the hedges were green; and there were little baby clouds in the blue sky.

Shall I try to deceive you for a page or two longer, or shall we have the truth out at once? Better have the truth. Well, then—the gentleman who called himself Carfax was really George Crosby. You guessed? Of course you did. But if you scent a mystery you are wrong.

It was five years ago that Crosby took his first holiday. He came to this very inn, “The Dog and Duck,” and when they asked him his name he replied “Geoffrey Carfax.” It had been an inspiration in the train. To be Geoffrey Carfax for three weeks seemed to cut him off more definitely from the Fenchurch Street office and the Islington boarding-house. George Crosby was in prison, working a life sentence; Geoffrey Carfax was a free man in search of the woman. Romance might come to Geoffrey, but it could never come to George. They were two different persons; then let them be two different persons. Besides, glamour hung over the mere act of giving a false name. George had delightful thrills when he remembered his deceit; and there was one heavenly moment of panic, on the last day of his first holiday, when (to avoid detection) he

shaved off his moustache. He was not certain what the punishment was for calling yourself Geoffrey Carfax when your real name was George Crosby, but he felt that with a clean-shaven face he could laugh at Scotland Yard. The downward path, however, is notoriously an easy one. In subsequent years he let himself go still farther. Even the one false name wouldn't satisfy him now; and if he only looked in at a neighbouring inn for a glass of beer, he would manage to let it fall into his conversation that he was Guy Colehurst or Gervase Crane or—he had a noble range of names to choose from, only limited by the fact that "G.C." was on his cigarette-case and his kit-bag. (His linen was studiously unmarked, save with the hieroglyphic of his washerwoman—a foolish observation in red cotton which might mean anything.)

The tall, lean, brown gentleman, then, taking the morning air was George Crosby. Between ourselves we may continue to call him George. It is not a name I like; he hated it too; but George he was undoubtedly. Yet already he was a different George from the one you met at Muswell Hill. He had had two weeks of life, and they had made him brown and clear-eyed and confident. I think I said he blushed readily in Mrs. Morrison's boarding-house; the fact was he felt always uneasy in London, awkward, uncomfortable. In the open air he was at home, ready for he knew not what dashing adventure.

It was a day of spring to stir the heart with longings and memories. Memories, half-forgotten, of all the Aprils of the past touched him for a moment, and then, as he tried to grasp them, fluttered out of reach, so that he wondered whether he was recalling real adventures which had happened, or whether he was but dreaming over again the dreams which were always with him. One memory remained. It was on such a day as this, five years ago, and almost in this very place, that he had met the woman.

Yes, I shall have to go back again to tell you of her. Five years ago he had been staying at this same inn; it was his first holiday after his sentence to prison. He was not so resigned to his lot five years ago; he thought of it as a bitter injustice; and the wonderful woman for whom he came into the country to search was to be his deliverer. So that, I am afraid, she would have to have been, not only wonderful, mysterious, and holy, but also rich. For it was to the contented ease of his early days that he was looking for release; the little haven in Bedford Park had not come into his dreams. Indeed, I don't suppose he had even heard of Bedford Park at that time. It was Islington or The Manor House; anything in between was Islington. But, of course, he never confessed to himself that she would need to be rich.

And he found her. He came over the hills on a gentle April morning and saw her beneath him. She was caught, it seemed, in a hedge. How gallantly George bore down to the rescue!

"Can I be of any assistance?" he said in his best manner, and that, I think, is always the pleasantest way to begin. Between "Can I be of any assistance?" and "With all my worldly goods I thee endow" one has not far to travel.

"I'm caught," she said. "If you could——" Observe George spiking himself fearlessly.

"I say, you really *are*! Wait a moment."

"It's very kind of you."

There—he has done it.

"Thank you so much," she said, with a pretty smile. "Oh, you've hurt yourself!"

The sweet look of pain on her face!

“It’s nothing,” said George nobly. And it really was nothing. One can get a delightful amount of blood and sympathy from the most insignificant scratch.

They hesitated a moment. She looked on the ground; he looked at her. Then his eyes wandered round the beautiful day, and came back to her just as she looked up.

“It is a wonderful day, isn’t it?” he said suddenly.

“Yes,” she breathed.

It seemed absurd to separate on such a day when they were both wandering, and Heaven had brought them together.

“I say, dash it,” said George suddenly: “what are you going to do? Are you going anywhere particular?”

“Not very particular.”

“Neither am I. Can’t we go there together?”

“I was just going to have lunch.”

“So was I. Well, there you are. It would be silly if you sat here and ate—what *are* yours, by the way?”

“Only mutton, I’m afraid.”

“Ah, mine are beef. Well, if you sat here and ate mutton sandwiches and I sat a hundred yards farther on and ate beef ones, we *should* look ridiculous, shouldn’t we?”

“It *would* be rather silly,” she smiled.

So they sat down and had their sandwiches together.

“My name is Carfax,” he said, “Geoffrey Carfax.” Oh, George! And to a woman! However, she wouldn’t tell him hers.

They spent an hour over lunch. They wandered together for another hour. Need I tell you all the things they said? But they didn't talk of London.

"Oh, I must be going," she said suddenly. "I didn't know it was so late. No, I know my way. Don't come with me. Good-bye."

"It can't be good-bye," said George in dismay. "I've only just found you. Where do you live? Who are you?"

"Don't let's spoil it," she smiled. "It's been a wonderful day—a wonderful little piece of a day. We'll always remember it. I don't think it's meant to go on; it stops just here."

"I *must* see you again," said George firmly. "Will you be there to-morrow, at the same time—at the place where we met?"

"I might." She sighed. "And I mightn't."

But George knew she would.

"Then good-bye," he said, holding out his hand.

"My name is Rosamund," she whispered, and fled.

He watched her out of sight, marvelling how bravely she walked. Then he started for home, his head full of strange fancies....

He found a road an hour later; the road went on and on, it turned and branched and doubled—he scarcely noticed it. The church clock was striking seven as he came into the village.

It was a wonderful lunch he took with him next day. Chicken and tongue and cake and chocolate and hard-boiled eggs. He ate it alone (by the corner of a wood, five miles from the hedge which captured her) at half-past three. That day was a nightmare. He never found the place again, though he tried all through the week remaining to him. He had no hopes after that day of seeing her, but only to have found the hedge

would have been some satisfaction. At least he could sit there and sigh—and curse himself for a fool.

He went back to Islington knowing that he had had his chance and missed it. By next April he had forgotten her. He was convinced that she was not the woman. *The* woman had still to be found. He went to another part of the country and looked for her.

And now he was back at “The Dog and Duck” again. Surely he would find her to-day. It was the time; it must be almost the place. Would the loved one be there? He was not sure whether he wanted her to be the woman of five years ago or not. Whoever she was, she would be the one he sought. He had walked some miles; funny if he stumbled upon the very place suddenly.

Memories of five years ago were flooding his mind. Had he really been here, or had he only dreamed of it? Surely that was the hill down which he had come; surely that clump of trees on the right had been there before. And—could that be the very hedge?

It was.

And there was a woman caught in it.

IV

George ran down the hill, his heart thumping heavily at his ribs.... She had her back towards him.

“Can I be of any assistance?” he said in his best manner. But she didn’t need to be rich now; there was that little house at Bedford Park.

She turned round.

It was Gertie Morrison!

Silly of him; of course, it wasn't Miss Morrison; but it was extraordinarily like her. Prettier, though.

"Why, Mr. Crosby!" she said.

It *was* Gertie Morrison.

"You!" he said angrily.

He was furious that such a trick should have been played upon him at this moment; furious to be reminded suddenly that he was George Crosby of Muswell Hill. Muswell Hill, the boarding-house—Good Lord! Gertie Morrison! Algy Traill's Gertie.

"Yes, it's me," she said, shrinking from him. She saw he was angry with her; she vaguely understood why.

Then George laughed. After all, she hadn't deliberately put herself in his way. She could hardly be expected to avoid the whole of England (outside Muswell Hill) until she knew exactly where George Crosby proposed to take his walk. What a child he was to be angry with her.

When he laughed, she laughed too—a little nervously.

"Let me help," he said. He scratched his fingers fearlessly on her behalf. What should he do afterwards? he wondered. His day was spoilt anyhow. He could hardly leave her.

"Oh, you've hurt yourself!" she said. She said it very sweetly, in a voice that only faintly reminded him of the Gertie of Muswell Hill.

"It's nothing," he answered, as he had answered five years ago.

They stood looking at each other. George was puzzled.

"You are Miss Morrison, aren't you?" he said. "Somehow you seem different."

“You’re different from the Mr. Crosby I know.”

“Am I? How?”

“It’s dreadful to see you at the boarding-house.” She looked at him timidly. “You don’t mind my mentioning the boarding-house, do you?”

“Mind? Why should I?” (After all, he still had another week.)

“Well, you want to forget about it when you’re on your holiday.”

Fancy her knowing that.

“And are you on your holiday too?”

She gave a long deep sigh of content.

“Yes,” she said.

He looked at her with more interest. There was colour in her face; her eyes were bright; in her tweed skirt she looked more of a country girl than he would have expected.

“Let’s sit down,” he said. “I thought you always went to Mar—to Cliftonville for your holiday?”

“I always go to my aunt’s there in the summer. It isn’t really a holiday; it’s more to help her; she has a boarding-house too. And it really is Cliftonville—only, of course, it’s silly of mother to mind having it called Margate. Cliftonville’s much worse than Margate really. I hate it.”

(This can’t be Gertie Morrison, thought George. It’s a dream.)

“When did you come here?”

“I’ve been here about ten days. A girl friend of mine lives near here. She asked me suddenly just after you’d gone—I mean about a fortnight ago. Mother thought I wasn’t looking well and ought to go. I’ve been before once or twice. I love it.”

“And do you have to wander about the country by yourself? I mean, doesn’t your friend—I say, I’m asking you an awful lot of questions. I’m sorry.”

“That’s all right. But, of course, I love to go about alone, particularly at this time of year. *You* understand that.”

Of course he understood it. That was not the amazing thing. The amazing thing was that she understood it.

He took his sandwiches from his pocket.

“Let’s have lunch,” he said. “I’m afraid mine are only beef.”

“Mine are worse,” she smiled. “They’re only mutton.”

A sudden longing to tell her of his great adventure of five years ago came to George. (If you had suggested it to him in March!)

“It’s rather funny,” he said, as he untied his sandwiches—“I was down here five years ago——”

“I know,” she said quietly.

George sat up suddenly and stared at her.

“It was you!” he cried.

“Yes.”

“You. Good Lord!... But your name—you said your name was—wait a moment—that’s it! Rosamund!”

“It is. Gertrude Rosamund. I call myself Rosamund in the country. I like to pretend I’m not the”—she twisted a piece of grass in her hands, and looked away from him over the hill—“the horrible girl of the boarding-house.”

George got on to his knees and leant excitedly over her.

“Tell me, do you hate and loathe and detest Traill and the Fossetts and Ransom as much as I do?”

She hesitated.

“Mr. Ransom has a mother in Folkestone he’s very good to. He’s not really bad, you know.”

“Sorry. Wash out Ransom. Traill and the Fossetts?”

“Yes. Oh yes. Oh yes, yes, yes.” Her cheeks flamed as she cried it, and she clenched her hands.

George was on his knees already, and he had no hat to take off, but he was very humble.

“Will you forgive me?” he said. “I think I’ve misjudged you. I mean,” he stammered—“I mean, I don’t mean—of course, it’s none of my business to judge you—I’m speaking like a prig, I—oh, you know what I mean. I’ve been a brute to you. Will you forgive me?”

She held out her hand, and he shook it. This had struck him, when he had seen it on the stage, as an absurdly dramatic way of making friends, but it seemed quite natural now.

“Let’s have lunch,” she said.

They began to eat in great content.

“Same old sandwiches,” smiled George. “I say, I suppose I needn’t explain why I called myself Geoffrey Carfax.” He blushed a little as he said the name. “I mean, you seem to understand.”

She nodded. “You wanted to get away from George Crosby; *I* know.”

And then he had a sudden horrible recollection.

“I say, you must have thought me a beast. I brought a terrific lunch out with me the next day, and then I went and lost the place. Did you wait for me?”

Gertie would have pretended she hadn’t turned up herself, but Rosamund said, “Yes, I waited for you. I thought perhaps you had lost the place.”

“I say,” said George, “what lots I’ve got to say to you. When did you recognise me again? Fancy my not knowing you.”

“It was three years, and you’d shaved your moustache.”

“So I had. But I could recognise people just as easily without it.”

She laughed happily. It was the first joke she had heard him make since that day five years ago.

“Besides, we’re both different in the country. I knew you as soon as I heard your voice just now. Never at all at Muswell Hill.”

“By Jove!” said George, “just fancy.” He grinned at her happily.

After lunch they wandered. It was a golden afternoon, the very afternoon they had had five years ago. Once when she was crossing a little stream in front of him, and her foot slipped on a stone, he called out, “Take care, Rosamund,” and thrilled at the words. She let them pass unnoticed; but later on, when they crossed the stream again lower down, he took her hand and she said, “Thank you, Geoffrey.”

They came to an inn for tea. How pretty she looked pouring out the tea for him—not for him, for them; the two of them. She and he! His thoughts became absurd....

Towards the end of the meal something happened. She didn’t know what it was, but it was this. He wanted more jam; she said he’d had enough. Well, then, he wasn’t to have much, and she would help him herself.

He was delighted with her.

She helped him ... and something in that action brought back swiftly and horribly the Gertie Morrison of Muswell Hill, the Gertie who sat next to Algy and helped him to cabbage. He finished his meal in silence.

She was miserable, not knowing what had happened.

He paid the bill and they went outside. In the open air she was Rosamund again, but Rosamund with a difference. He couldn't bear things like this. As soon as they were well away from the inn he stopped. They leant against a gate and looked down into the valley at the golden sun.

"Tell me," he said, "I want to know everything. Why are you—what you are, in London?"

And she told him. Her mother had not always kept a boarding-house. While her father was alive they were fairly well off; she lived a happy life in the country as a young girl. Then they came to London. She hated it, but it was necessary for her father's business. Then her father died, and left nothing.

"So did my father," said George under his breath.

She touched his hand in sympathy.

"I was afraid that was it.... Well, mother tried keeping a boarding-house. She couldn't do it by herself. I had to help. That was just before I met you here.... Oh, if you could know how I hated it. The horrible people. It started with two boarders. Then there was one—because I smacked the other one's face. Mother said that wouldn't do. Well, of course, it wouldn't. I tried taking no notice of them. Well, that wouldn't do either. I had to put up with it; that was my life.... I used to pretend I was on the stage and playing the part of a landlady's vulgar daughter. You know what I mean; you often see it on the stage. That made it easier—it was really rather fun sometimes. I suppose I overplayed the part—made it

more common than it need have been—it's easy to do that. By-and-by it began to come natural; perhaps I am like that really. We weren't anybody particular even when father was alive. Then you came—I saw you were different from the rest. I knew you despised me—quite right too. But you really seemed to hate me, I never quite knew why. I hadn't done you any harm. It made me hate you too.... It made me want to be specially vulgar and common when you were there, just to show you I didn't mind what you thought about me.... You were so superior.

"I got away in the country sometimes. I just loved that. I think I was really living for it all the time.... I always called myself Rosamund in the country.... I hate men—why are they such beasts to us always?"

"They *are* beasts," said George, giving his sex away cheerfully. But he was not thinking of Traill and the Fossetts; he was thinking of himself. "It's very strange," he went on; "all the time I thought that the others were just what they seemed to be, and that I alone had a private life of my own which I hid from everybody. And all the time *you*.... Perhaps Traill is really somebody else sometimes. Even Ransom has his secret—his mother.... What a horrible prig I've been!"

"No, no! Oh, but you were!"

"And a coward. I never even tried.... I might have made things much easier for you."

"You're not a coward."

"Yes, I am. I've just funked life. It's too much for me, I've said, and I've crept into my shell and let it pass over my head.... And I'm still a coward. I can't face it by myself. Rosamund, will you marry me and help me to be braver?"

"No, no, no," she cried, and pushed him away and laid her head on her arms and wept.

Saved, George, saved! Now’s your chance. You’ve been rash and impetuous, but she has refused you, and you can withdraw like a gentleman. Just say “I beg your pardon,” and move to Finsbury Park next month ... and go on dreaming about the woman. Not a landlady’s vulgar little daughter, but——

George, George, what are you doing?

He has taken the girl in his arms! He is kissing her eyes and her mouth and her wet cheeks! He is telling her....

I wash my hands of him.

V

John Lobey, landlord of “The Dog and Duck,” is on the track of a mystery. Something to do with they anarchists and such-like. The chief clue lies in the extraordinary fact that on three Sundays in succession Parson has called “George Crosby, bachelor, of this parish,” when everybody knows that there isn’t a Crosby in the parish, and that the gentleman from London, who stayed at his inn for three weeks and comes down Saturdays—for which purpose he leaves his bag and keeps on his room—this gentleman from London, I tell you, is Mr. Geoffrey Carfax. Leastways it was the name he gave.

John Lobey need not puzzle his head over it. Geoffrey Carfax is George Crosby, and he is to be married next Saturday at a neighbouring village church, in which “Gertrude Rosamund Morrison, spinster, of this parish,” has also been called three times. Mr. and Mrs. Crosby will then go up to London and break the news to Mrs. Morrison.

“Not until you are my wife,” said George firmly, “do you go into that boarding-house again.” He was afraid to see her there.

“You dear,” said Rosamund; and she wrote to her mother that the weather was so beautiful, and she was getting so much stronger, and her friend so much wanted her to stay, that ... and so on. It is easy to think of things like that when you are in love.

On the Sunday before the wedding George told her that he had practically arranged about the little house in Bedford Park.

“And I’m getting on at the office rippingly. It’s really quite interesting after all. I shall get another rise in no time.”

“You dear,” said Rosamund again. She pressed his hand tight and....

But really, you know, I think we might leave them now. They have both much to learn; they have many quarrels to go through, many bitter misunderstandings to break down; but they are alive at last. And so we may say good-bye.

The Cherub

By Oliver Onions

Army Service Corps

It was provided in the roster of Garrison Duties, Section “Guards and Picquets,” that a sentry should march and return along that portion of the grey wall that lay between the Sowgate Steps and the Tower of the ancient South Bar, a hundred yards away; but fate alone had determined that that sentry should be Private Hey. And, since Private Hey was barely tall enough to look forth from the grey embrasures of the outer wall to the pleasant Maychester Plain where the placid river wound, the same fate had further decreed that his gaze should be directed inwards, over the tall trees below him, to the row of Georgian houses of mellow plum-like brick that stood beyond the narrow back gardens, and past these again to other trees and other houses, to where the minster towers arose in the heart of the ancient city. Only occasionally did a fleeting, pathetic wonder cross Private Key’s mind whether there was an irony in this.

A lithograph of uniforms outside the post office (guards, artillery, and militia, all in one frame) had turned his thoughts to the Army seven years before, and the recruiting-sergeant had clinched the matter. Until then he had been a builder’s clerk. He was just five-and-twenty. He had a pink, round face, wide-open blue eyes, the slightest of blond moustaches, and his soft, slack mouth seemed only to be held closed by his chin-strap. He always looked hot and on the point of perspiration.

Knowing something of the building trade, it had been his amusement, while on his lofty beat, to work out in his mind the interiors of the Georgian houses of which he saw only the outsides. With the chimney-stacks thus and thus, the fireplaces were probably distributed after such and such a fashion; white-sashed windows irregularly placed among the ivy doubtless gave on landings; waste and cistern-pipes were traceable to sources here and there; and Private Hey had his opinion on each of the chimney-cowls that turned this way and that with the wind.

He knew the habits, too, of the folk on whose back gardens he looked down. The nurse in native robes reminded him of his five years in India; the old lady in black merino who fed the birds was familiar; and he liked to see the children who spread white cloths on the grass beneath the pear and cherry trees and held their small tea-parties. Sometimes he wondered whether, to them, so far above them, he did not look like one of the scarlet geraniums of their own window-boxes.

It had been during the previous spring that the incoming of a new tenant to the end house of the row had interested him mildly. He had watched the white-jacketed house-painters at work, and had reflected that the small window they were covering with a coloured transparency was probably that of a bathroom. Then the new tenants had moved in, and one day a small, plump woman's figure had appeared shaking a table-cloth at the top of the narrow garden. The sentry had stopped suddenly in his beat, and broken into the sweat he always seemed on the point of. Even at that distance he had recognised her; and when, after some minutes, he had begun to think again, the only idea that had come to him was, why, during the seven years in which he had not ceased to think of Mollie Westwood, had he never once pictured her in a blue gown?

But she was Mollie Hullah now; he knew that. And he knew Hullah, too, architect and surveyor. Hullah had been the foreman of Peterson's building yard in the days when he, Tom Hey, civilian, had been Peterson's junior clerk. He remembered him as an ambitious sort of chap, who (while Tom Hey had "flown his kite," as he put it) had bought himself a case of instruments and a reel-tape, and studied, and made himself an architect. Tom Hey's duties had been confined to the day-book; Hullah and Peterson between them contained the true account of the Peterson business; and Hey had not guessed the reason for this until, in India, he had received the newspaper that contained the account of Peterson's bankruptcy. Then he had "tumbled." The examination showed Peterson's books to have been ill-kept with a sagacity and

foresight that had drawn forth ironical compliments from the registrar himself. “Your chief witness abroad, too; excellent!” the registrar had commented.... No; Hullah was not the fellow to tell all he knew about contractors and palm-oil and peculating clerks-of-works. Hullah was the kind of man who got on.

Since Hullah had come to live in the end house, Private Hey, eyes-right when he turned at the South Bar, and eyes-left when he turned again at the Sowgate Steps, had counted the days when Mollie had appeared at the windows or shaken the table-cloth in the narrow garden. His amusement was no longer with chimney-pots and bath-rooms; it was, to tell over to himself the dissolute life he had led since Mollie had turned her back on him. Somehow, it seemed to exalt her.

It was not that he had ever lied, or stolen, or left a friend in trouble. To the pink-faced private these things were not merely wicked; they were “dead off”—a much worse thing. He drew the line at things that were “off.” But he had committed a monotonous routine of other sins, beginning usually at the canteen, continuing at the “regulation” inns or at the Cobourg Music-hall, and ending on the defaulter-sheet with a C.B. And one day his colonel had said to him: “Hey, you remind me of a cherub who kicks about in the mud and glories to think himself an imp.” That had puzzled and troubled Hey, for he liked the fine old colonel.

[Illustration: “He forgot everything except little Mollie Westwood” (page 35).]

For he had ranked himself with the magnificently wicked. In amours, short of anything that was “off,” was he not a Juan? In the matter of inebriety, and for brawling in the streets, why, his officers might make war with ceremony and all that, but (the cherub flattered himself) he was an item of the reckless, heroic, glorious stuff they had to do it with. And since Mollie, by refusing him, had driven him to all this, the sight of her ought surely to have inspired him in his courses; it troubled him that it

did not do so. On the contrary, he never felt less inclination to fuddle himself or to click his heels over the gallery-rail of the Cobourg than when he had seen her. When he did not see her, these things were less difficult, and that again was wrong. To regulate his conduct at all by the sight of another man's wife was, of all dead-off things, the deadest.

Now Hullah, as the sentry knew, had no family; but when, the following spring, the apple trees put forth their pink, and the white clouds sailed high over Maychester, and the note of the cuckoo floated on the air, the cherub became moody and bashful and changed colour ten times in an hour. Thrushes and blackbirds flew back and forth from their nests; and Mollie, too, her figure dwarfed by his point of vantage, sunned herself in the garden. Sometimes the cherub blushed red as his tunic. He ought to have gone to the Cobourg and played the very deuce; instead, off duty, he wandered unhappily alone. Then one day he missed her, and his eyes scanned the house and her windows timorously.

Six weeks passed. Then one morning he saw that the white blinds were drawn. His face became white as wax.

The next day he saw the tail of a coach beyond the end of the house. He exceeded his beat, descended the Sowgate Steps, and stood, trembling and watching. Then he gave a great sob of relief. The coach had turned; the horse wore white conical peaks of linen on its ears—the mark of a child's funeral. The small procession passed, and the cherub resumed his beat.

That evening the colonel stopped him as he crossed the barrack yard.

"Ah, Hey!... I'm glad you've given us so little trouble lately. I'd try to keep it up if I were you."

"Yes, sir," said the cherub, saluting; and the colonel nodded kindly and passed on.

* * * * *

The July sun beat fiercely down on the grey walls, and the sentry's tunic was of a glaring bull's red. Not a breath moved the trees below, and the click of his heels sounded monotonously.

Within the shadow of the South Bar, where the steps wound down to the street, a frock-coated, square-built man of forty, with clipped whiskers and crafty eyes, watched the sentry approach. For the second time he cleared his throat and said "Tom!"

This time the sentry turned. "I ain't allowed to talk on duty," he said.

The man within the shadow waited.

He waited for half an hour, and then the clatter of the relief was heard ascending the turret. Presently Private Hey passed him without looking at him. He descended after him, and in the street spoke again.

"I ain't off duty yet; you can come to the Buttercup," said Private Hey.

The bar of the Buttercup was below the level of the street, and a gas-jet burned all day over its zinc-covered counter. In the back parlour behind it Hullah awaited Private Hey.

The cherub's voice was heard shouting an order, and he entered the snug. The uncoated barman followed him with the liquor, and retired.

"Did you want to speak to me?" the cherub demanded.

"I did, Tom, I did. How—how are you getting on?"

"Spit it out."

Hullah murmured smoothly: “Ah, the same blunt-spoken, honest Tom that was at Peterson’s! You remember Peterson’s and the old days, Tom?”

“I’d let the old days drop if I was you. I thought you had done.”

“So did I, Tom, so did I; but every breast has its troubles. You’ve heard the expression, Tom, that there is no cupboard without its skeleton?”

“Keep your cupboards and skeletons to yourself.... Does the new bathroom answer all right?”

“Nicely, Tom, I thank you.... Did you know Peterson was back in Maychester?”

“Ho, is he? I expect he wants to talk over the old days with his friend Hullah, same as you with me. Well, you was a precious pair o’ rascals—though for myself, mark you, I like to see honour among such.”

“Hush, Tom!... He’s back, and seeking you. He’d better be careful; it’s twenty years, is that. But what I wanted to say, Tom, is that it would save a lot of trouble—a lot of trouble—if you weren’t to see him.”

“Ho!... Hullah, my man.”

“Yes, Tom.”

“Do you know what I think you are?”

Hullah stammered. It was so hard to get a start in business—the competition—he’d gone straight except for that once.

“I think you’re the blackguardest, off-est scamp in the trade, and I wouldn’t be found dead in a ditch with you. That’s juicy, coming from me. *I’m* no saint, but just a common-or-garden Tommy, with a defaulter sheet it’s a sin to read; and *I* say you’re a blackguard, and dead-off.”

Hullah cringed. He'd gone straight since—Peterson had already pushed him for twice what he'd had out of it—it was hard to be persecuted like this, hard. The cherub revolved in his mind phrases of elaborate and over-done irony.

Suddenly Hullah mentioned his wife, and the pink of the cherub's face deepened.

"Come into the yard," he said.

Hullah followed him into a dusty plot, where hens scratched and cases and barrels lay scattered everywhere.

"What did you say?" the soldier demanded.

The architect's face was of an unwholesome white, and Hey spat. He saw that Hullah feared he was going to strike him.

"She's been ill, Tom, and must be got away to the Mediterranean. Peterson's sucking me dry; he thinks I'm afraid of him. You used to be fond of her, Tom."

All at once Private Hey's wrath gave place to utter wretchedness, and he began to stride up and down the yard. Tears rose into his eyes, and presently rolled unchecked down his cheeks. He approached Hullah, and said in a quavering voice: "A fortnight ago—was that?"

"A boy," Hullah murmured.

"It's a mercy he's dead, if he'd ha' been like you," the cherub sobbed.

And then he forgot all about Hullah. He forgot everything except that little Mollie Westwood had been through an agony, was ill, must be got away, and that he might help her. An ineffable, soft thrill stirred at his heart; he, wicked Tom Hey, might help her. And presently he stood before Hullah again, looking wistfully at him.

“You ain’t lying, Hullah?”

“Oh, Tom!”

“And suppose—suppose I was to think Peterson’s as big a thief as you, and treat him as such—treat him as such, if he dares to speak to me; you understand, Hullah?”

“Don’t put it that way, Tom ... then I may take it, Tom——?”

“Oh, go, go! I want to me by myself!” the poor cherub moaned; and Hullah, turning once to dart a hateful glance at him over his shoulder, passed through the public-house.

* * * * *

“It’s Siberia for you this time, Tom,” the guard whispered, adjusting his pipe-clayed belt; “what in thunder made you go and do it?”

The cherub’s tunic was unbelted, and the colour had fled from his simple face. He made no reply.

“Was you drunk? Barker says you hadn’t been in the canteen. Anyway, the chap’s in ’orspital. A blooming civilian, too!”

He saluted stiffly; the major had passed on his way to the outbuilding that had been furnished for a court-martial; and the barrack clock struck eleven.

Half a dozen officers in full uniform sat about a long trestle-table, and the sunlight that came through the tall windows lay across the pens and ink and pink blotting-paper that were spread before the Court. The colonel, at the head of the table, talked to Warren, the regimental surgeon.

“I’m absurdly upset, Warren. It’s ridiculous, the faith I have in the fellow. Moreover, I have reason to know that he hasn’t touched drink for weeks.”

“He’s been in the habit, and in such cases a sudden discontinuance sometimes.... But the point isn’t whether he was drunk or not; it’s an unprovoked attack on this fellow Peterson, or whatever his name is.”

The colonel sighed. “Ah, well, I can’t overlook this. Are you ready, gentlemen?”

An orderly opened the door, and the prisoner was brought in between two armed guards. He saluted the Court, and then stood at attention. The guards fell back. Two or three witnesses sat on a bench within the door.

The colonel did not once look at Private Hey, and the charge was read. The principal witness lay in hospital, but sufficient evidence of the fact of the assault would be produced, and the president desired the prisoner to plead. The plea was scarcely audible, but it was understood to be “Not guilty,” and the first witness was called.

The cherub knew not in what queer way it hurt him that his colonel refused to look at him. He didn’t much care what happened, but he would have liked the colonel to think well of him. A witness was telling how the prisoner had reeled, spoken thickly, offered his bayonet, and finally flung the man down the steps of the turret of the South Bar. Would the witness consider the prisoner to have been drunk? the Court asked, and the witness replied that he should. The steps were old and worn; might not the man have slipped? the Court suggested, and the witness reminded the Court that the prisoner had staggered and offered his bayonet. Had the injured man spoken to the prisoner? The witness thought not; he had seemed to be on the point of speaking, but the prisoner had cut him short, exclaiming: “I don’t want to talk to dead-off’s—like you!”

Asked if he had anything to say, the prisoner shook his head. “I wasn’t drunk, sir,” he said.

Other witnesses were called; the case went drowsily forward, and the major yawned. The colonel was whispering to the doctor again, and then for the first time he looked at the prisoner.

“Do you know this Peterson?”

“I worked for him when I was a civilian, sir,” the prisoner answered.

“Have you any grudge against him?”

“I didn’t want to talk to him, sir.”

“But suppose he should speak to you again?”

A brief gleam of satisfaction crossed the cherub’s mild blue eyes. “I frightened him too bad for that, sir,” he said; and then, as the colonel’s grave eyes did not cease to regard him, there came a quick little break in his voice.

“I wasn’t drunk, sir. I wouldn’t tell you a lie, sir, nor do nothing that’s off—there’s marks against me a many, but not for things that’s off; I ask you to believe I wasn’t drunk, sir——”

“Clear the Court,” said the colonel.

The guard, the prisoner, and the witnesses filed out and the door closed, and the colonel leaned forward in his chair. He seemed disproportionately moved.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “if the prisoner is to be seriously punished, I ask you to remember it’s dismissal and imprisonment. Let me make a suggestion. It was a very hot day—he’s been in India—possibly an old sunstroke——”

“A bit discredited, that,” observed the doctor.

“He would be punished, of course, but more leniently. It’s all I can put forward. It rests with the Court.”

He leaned back again, troubled. In the hum of consultation he heard Warren's slightly sarcastic laugh, and thought he heard the major say: "Oh, let it go at that; Neville seems to want it."

"Very well, sir," said the major by and by; "we are agreed."

And as the cherub, returning with the guard, received the milder sentence, he looked humbly and gratefully at his colonel. He recognised that there are things that a commanding officer cannot overlook, but that a private gentleman, on occasion, may.

An Impossible Person

By W. B. Maxwell

Royal Fusiliers

Using the cant phrase, people often said that General Sir John Beckford was a quite impossible person. A brave soldier, a true gentleman, a splendid creature physically—just so, but rendering himself absurd and futile by notions so old-fashioned that they had been universally exploded before he was born. A man who obstinately refused to move with the times, who in manner, costume, and every idea belonged, and seemed proud to belong, to the past.

Even his own relatives admitted the impossibility of him when, at the age of sixty, he gave effect to the most old-fashioned of all conceivable notions by marrying for love. If an elderly widower with a little son of nine wants somebody to make a home and help to rear the child, he should invite some middle-aged female cousin to come to his assistance; but if he wants a charming, attractive girl to renounce the joys and hopes of youth in order to soothe and gladden his dull remnant of years—well, he *oughtn't* to want it, and really it is not quite nice when he does.

Lady Jane Armitage, an ancient aunt, put this thought into very plain words and forced Sir John to listen to them. A mistake—not even a fair

bargain. What is Cynthia to get, on her side? A seat in a carriage, a liberal dress allowance, perhaps a few more loose sovereigns than she has been accustomed to carry in that silly little gold purse of hers!

“The idea of money,” said Sir John gruffly, “has never entered Cynthia’s head.”

“Perhaps not. But what else can you offer her? To hold your landing-net while you do your stupid fishing; to perform the duties of a nursery-governess for Jack; to enjoy the privilege of playing hostess when you entertain half a dozen other generals and their frumpish wives.”

Sir John echoed his aunt’s last adjective ironically.

“Yes,” said Lady Jane, “but I’m different. I *know* I’m a frump, and your friends aren’t aware of their misfortune. No, John, I tell you frankly, it isn’t a fair bargain.”

Sir John bit his grey moustache, ran a strong hand through his shock of grey hair, contracted his heavy brows, and then laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“Inexplicable to you, eh, Aunt Jane? Well, let’s leave it at that. But be kind to Cynthia all the same, won’t you? Save her from the *other* frumps,” and, ceasing to laugh, he stared at Lady Jane almost fiercely.

He was one of those men who consider it beneath their dignity to betray tender emotion, and who perhaps look sternest and most forbidding when they are feeling unusually soft and gentle. At any rate, he would not explain to his aunt that he believed the marriage to be an eminently fair bargain—an old-fashioned exchange—love for love—as much love on the girl’s side as on his.

Lady Jane made no promise, but she proved very kind indeed to her new niece; endeavouring to find innocent amusement for pretty Cynthia,

acting as her chaperon, watching over her, and growing fonder and fonder of her. She said that the young Lady Beckford was a model wife and a pattern stepmother. No one could have been more devoted to or wiser in her training of Master Jack.

Now, after five years, the boy was ready to go to a public school, and during these long summer days a holiday tutor had been giving him final preparation, ultimate crammed knowledge, and topmost polish of tone and manners. August had been spent at the Beckfords' country house in Devonshire, and the early weeks of September at their flat in Victoria Street. Lady Jane approved of everything that concerned these arrangements, except one thing. She approved of the public school, of the engaging of a holiday tutor, of all the care, devotion, and forethought with which the little man was being launched from the home circle; but she did not approve of the fact that Sir John had thrown the whole burden on Cynthia's slender shoulders, while he did his stupid salmon-fishing four hundred miles away in Scotland.

Not quite fair to Cynthia—leaving her all alone with a schoolboy and his tutor. Lady Jane, at considerable inconvenience, ran down to Devonshire to cheer and enliven her. Came back to London and at worse inconvenience stayed there, so as to be handy to act as companion, chaperon, advisory ally, whenever Cynthia wanted her.

But Cynthia wanted her scarcely at all, and allowed poor Lady Jane to perceive at last that uninvited companions are sometimes a tedium rather than a solace.

* * * * *

It was the last night of the holidays. To-morrow Master Jack and his tutor would disappear from Victoria Street.

Dinner had been ordered at an early hour, and Jack was scampering through his meal with excited swiftness. One last treat had been arranged for him. He was to be dispatched to a theatre presently in charge of George, the footman.

“I wish you were coming,” said Jack, and as he turned to Mr. Ridsdale his eyes expressed eloquently enough the hero-worship that is so easy to kindle in young and ingenuous hearts.

“It would be scarcely polite,” said Mr. Ridsdale, “for both of us to desert Lady Beckford.”

“No,” said Jack; “but I wish she’d come with us,” and he turned to his stepmother. “Won’t you change your mind?”

“I really don’t feel up to it, Jack. I’m tired—I’ve had a headache since the day before yesterday.”

“It might drive the headache away,” said Jack, eagerly. “They say it’s a tip-top piece.”

His stepmother and his tutor both smiled as they looked at his bright and animated face. Lady Beckford’s smile was simply affectionate; Mr. Ridsdale’s was indulgent and patronising.

“A rousing melodrama, Jack! All noise and stamping.”

“Yes,” cried Jack, enthusiastically. “Murder and sudden death—just what I like.”

“But not,” said Mr. Ridsdale, “exactly indicated as a cure for a headache.”

“Well, if I can’t persuade you——” and Jack turned to Yates, the butler. “Has George changed his things?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then I’ll be off.” Jack pushed his plate away with a gesture that elegant Mr. Ridsdale could not approve of. It was too childish for a boy of fourteen—a little more polish required, in spite of so much polishing. “Good night,” and Jack kissed Lady Beckford. “I shan’t say good night to you, Mr. Ridsdale, because you won’t have turned in before I get back, will you?”

“No; I’ll sit up for you,” and Mr. Ridsdale, smiling, spoke with rather strained facetiousness. “I’ll be waiting to hear how the heroine was extricated from her misfortunes, how the villain got scored off by the funny man, and how virtue triumphed all round in the end. There! Cut along. Your escort is waiting for you.”

Master Jack hurried gaily from the dining-room, and his boyish voice sounded for a few moments as he prattled to the footman. Then the hall door of the flat opened and shut, and the two elders were left alone to finish their dinner at leisure.

“Ah!” Mr. Ridsdale drew in his breath with a little sigh, and, looking at his hostess, spoke quietly and meditatively. “I know you often read people’s thoughts, but I wonder if you could guess what I’m thinking now?”

“I’ll try, if you like. You were thinking that perhaps, after all, Jack is too young still for the rough-and-tumble life of a big school.”

“Oh, no,” said Mr. Ridsdale, carelessly. “Jack’ll do all right. They’ll soon lick him into shape. No”—and his tone softened and deepened, though he

was speaking almost in a whisper—“no; I was thinking this is the last night of my—my holidays; possibly the last time I shall ever sit in this pleasant room, or see you wearing that beautiful dress, or hear you playing classical music, that I don’t understand, but love to listen to.”

Truly it seemed a pleasant room, a remarkably pleasant room for a London flat. The evening was just cold enough to justify a fire, and small logs of wood in a basket grate sent dancing flames to light up the oak panels of the walls; electric lamps flashed brightly on silver and glass; a golden basket of peaches and another of grapes made the table appear a symbolised announcement of ease, luxury, even of sumptuousness; the butler, moving to and fro so promptly and yet so sedately, offered one delicate food and stimulating wine. It was all very, very pleasant.

Pretty things wherever one glanced—a mirror in a sculptured frame, some blue and white china on a long shelf, and, seen faintly, with the electric light just indicating their existence, rows of handsomely bound books behind latticed glass; altogether what would be described in stage language as a charming interior.

Any tutor, accustomed to the hard seats and coarse fare of a school hall, might feel regret at leaving such a room irrevocably, and might long afterwards yearn to see again the pretty things that it contained. But just now Mr. Ridsdale was looking only at his hostess, and he repeated the compliment about her dress.

“I admire you in that more than in any of the others,” he said, softly, and rather sorrowfully.

“Because it is black, I suppose. It’s quite old. But men always like black dresses. My husband does.”

The dress was made of velvet, with some silver decoration across the front of the bodice, and it certainly appeared becoming. In it Cynthia Beckford looked very slim and young; fair-haired, but dark-eyed,

naturally pale, but with a rapid flicker of colour; a person of frank, kind outlook, a simple and truthful sort of person, and yet with underlying depths of character or sensibility that proved astoundingly interesting to the few people who had studied her closely. Frenchmen would describe her beauty, such as it was, as belonging to the order that slowly troubles rather than quickly fascinates.

“But I’m not like the General,” said Mr. Ridsdale. “I admire *that* black dress, not *any* black dress.”

He said it with a perceptible insistence, quietly but obstinately; as if conscious of subtle values in his own taste, and unwilling that it should be confounded with the ordinary likes and dislikes of another person—even though that person were as worthy and respectable as his temporary employer.

Mr. Ridsdale was a good-looking man of thirty, tall and thin, of easy carriage and elegant manners. Boys, big and small, among whom he had passed the better part of his life, always looked up to him, and sometimes adored him, as a perfect type of school-trained manhood; and girls, too, were frequently subjugated by his charms. He was the sort of man who is not as a rule dreaded by other men as likely to prove a dangerous rival; and yet one might well suppose that in certain circumstances he would be dangerous—for instance, if paying slow and unhindered court to a foolish and otherwise neglected woman. The dark eyes, the smooth, silky voice, the insidious flattery of its softening tones, might all be effective in a protracted attack on feminine foolishness of a certain age.

“To-morrow,” he said, dreamily; “to-morrow—almost to-day,” and he sighed as he took a peach from the gold basket.

Yates, the butler, had put cigarettes and matches on the table, and was about to leave the room, when the outer bell rang shrilly and sharply.

“Who can that be?” said Ridsdale, looking up. “A visitor! Oh, do tell him to say you’re not at home.”

The butler paused, waiting for instructions.

“It can’t be a visitor,” said Cynthia Beckford. “Some tradesman’s messenger!”

“It may be old Lady Jane.”

“She wouldn’t come so late as this.”

“I don’t know,” said Ridsdale, eagerly. “She comes at all hours. With your headache she would bore you to death.” He leaned forward in his chair and spoke very softly. “And, remember, my last evening! You—you promised that you would play to me.”

Cynthia Beckford hesitated a moment, and then told the butler that she was not at home.

“Yes, my lady. Not at home to anybody?”

“No.”

The flicker of colour showed in her pale cheeks as she added explanatorily to Ridsdale, “It can’t be anybody of importance.”

Mr. Ridsdale sat listening. Then he got up, and spoke with an impatience that he did not attempt to conceal.

“That fool has let some one in—a man!”

Yes, a man’s heavy footstep in the hall, and a man’s voice—loud and assured, not making polite inquiries, but issuing curt directions.

“I have left my tackle and luggage at Euston. Get a cab presently and go and fetch it. Take this ticket.”

“Yes, Sir John. Her ladyship is in the dining-room.”

“Open the door, then.”

Cynthia Beckford ran across the room to meet her husband; but, encumbered with a hand-bag and a travelling-rug, he was not able at once to accept her welcoming embrace.

“Well, Cynthia, my dear! Ridsdale, my dear fellow, how are you? But where’s Jack?”

General Beckford put his hand-bag on a chair by the sideboard, dropped his rug upon the floor, and, coming to the table, took Master Jack’s vacated seat.

“We have sent him to a theatre,” said Cynthia, “with George. I’d no idea that you were coming home, of course.”

“Oh, I see. Gone to the play—with George?”

“We were all three going,” said Mr. Ridsdale, “but Lady Beckford had a headache, so I strongly advised her to stay at home,” and he smiled. “Rather fortunate—or you would have had a double disappointment.”

“It would have been my own fault,” and the General smiled too. “I ought to have sent you a telegram, Cynthia.”

“What has brought you back so unexpectedly?”

“Impulse.”

“Fish not rising?” asked Ridsdale.

“No. Wretchedly poor sport. So this morning I suddenly made up my mind that I’d had enough of it, and that home, sweet home, was the place for me. Well, well, what about the home news?”

Cynthia Beckford was instructing Yates as to her husband’s dinner, but the General declared that he had eaten all he wanted in the train.

“I can’t call it dinner,” and he laughed good-humouredly. “But nothing more, thank you—unless perhaps a biscuit and a whisky-and-soda. Now, sit ye down. Don’t let me disturb you. Go on with your dessert, Ridsdale—and then I’ll join you in a cigarette, if my lady permits us,” and he bowed to his wife with the antiquated air of courtesy that always seems so odd in these free-and-easy times.

They sat together, talking of Jack’s health, his progress, his future career; and Mr. Ridsdale was able to speak most favourably of his pupil’s prospects.

“Capital,” said the General. “I’m enormously indebted to you, Ridsdale. You seem to have done wonders. But I knew you would; I knew the boy was in good hands—— Seen much of Aunt Jane?” he asked his wife, abruptly.

“Yes.” Cynthia was looking at the painted decoration on her dessert-plate, and she answered slowly. “Yes; Aunt Jane was with us at Lynton for a fortnight—quite a fortnight.”

“I know; but I mean after that. She is in London, isn’t she?”

Then Cynthia smilingly confessed that the long fortnight in Devonshire had exhausted the attraction of Lady Jane’s society, and that she had lately avoided it.

“She is too kind for words, but”—Cynthia looked at her husband deprecatingly—“dear Aunt Jane can be rather boring.”

The General laughed tolerantly.

“Ah, no companion for *you*. She belongs to another generation.” His bushy eyebrows contracted and his voice became grave. “*My* generation. We old folk are poor companions.”

“She doesn’t belong to your generation.” Cynthia flushed, and her lips trembled. She put out her hand and laid it on her husband’s arm. “You are the best of companions—a companion that I have missed dreadfully.”

“There!” General Beckford laughed gaily. “Did you hear that, Ridsdale? That’s the sort of thing we old chaps like—even if we aren’t vain enough to think we deserve it. Leave that where it is, Yates.”

Yates was about to remove the hand-bag and take it to his master’s room.

“Very good, Sir John.”

“And you can go to Euston now—no hurry. Take a bus.”

“Yes, Sir John.”

“Smoking permitted?” And the General bowed again to his wife. “Light your cigarette, Ridsdale. No, I mustn’t have any coffee on top of whisky and soda.”

The little group at the table sat comfortably enough and talked lightly and easily. But somehow the presence of General Beckford had destroyed the graceful charm of the room.

He looked too big, too rough and shaggy for his delicately pretty surroundings. His grey hair was rumpled and unbrushed after the journey; his coarse grey suit suggested wild moorlands and brawling streams; his whole aspect was savagely picturesque rather than neatly refined.

No contrast could have been greater than that offered by the smooth, well-brushed, nicely polished young man who sat opposite to him on the other side of the small round table. The electric light shone upon Mr. Ridsdale’s black cloth and black silk, his stiff white shirt and soft white waistcoat, his jewelled buttons, his pearl studs, his butterfly tie, his white hand fingering a cigarette-tube, his smooth forehead, and his sleek hair

plastered and brushed back with studious art and infinite care. He seemed elegant, shapely, even beautiful, when you compared him with his travel-stained, unkempt host.

All the charm had been banished by the new-comer. It was another room now. And the ugly hand-bag on the distant chair seemed like an aggressive symbol of proprietorship. It seemed to be saying that, although one might wish the General at the deuce, one could not ask him to go there, because in sober fact the room belonged to him.

Yet, to an understanding eye, there was something noble and knightlike about the man; the ruggedness seemed blended with a certain fine simplicity, and even the old-fashioned tricks of manner and speech, by removing him from the commonplace mode of the hour, served to stimulate an effort to get at the man's real character. Certainly no *poseur*—a direct, straightforward creature. On reflection one might perhaps guess that a young romantic girl, whose imagination had been fired by the splendour of his fighting life, his deeds of daring, and so forth, could quite conceivably be cajoled into giving her untried heart to him.

"One more question, Cynthia." The conversation had languished while the General puffed at his second cigarette. "How's the music? Have you been assiduous in your practice?"

"Yes; I've played nearly every evening."

Mr. Ridsdale was conscious of an irksome constraint. Two are company and three are none. Deciding to leave the husband and wife together, he pushed back his chair and got up.

But the General would not let him go.

“No, no,” he said. “Sit ye down, my dear fellow.” Then to his wife: “If the headache isn’t too bad, play something this evening. Run over your latest studies. Ridsdale and I will follow you directly.”

Cynthia Beckford rose obediently and turned towards the drawing-room door. Her husband reached the door before Mr. Ridsdale could get to it, and he held it open for her, bowing low as she passed out.

“There!” He had switched on the light in the other room, and he stood in the doorway watching her. “Now delight our ears with your deft touch.”

Lady Beckford seated herself at the piano and began to play a plaintive and dreamy prelude by Bach.

“Beautiful! Your hand has not lost its cunning. Now go on playing—and don’t think me ungallant if for a few minutes I close the door. A word or two with Ridsdale—on business. But we shall hear you, even through the door.” Then he gently, and as if regretfully, shut the drawing-room door and came back to the table.

“Ridsdale”—and there was an apologetic tone in the General’s lowered voice—“that wasn’t quite honest of me. A ruse! I asked her to play the piano because I didn’t want her to disturb us—and I didn’t want her to hear what we were saying.”

“Oh, really?” Ridsdale smiled, and glanced at the closed door.

“A confidence! I may trust you, mayn’t I?”

“Of course.”

“Implicitly, eh? But that goes without saying. I *have* trusted you so greatly already, haven’t I? The boy to consign him to your guidance. Well, you know what he is to me. I couldn’t have better shown the faith I had in you——”

“You’re very kind, General. I—I’ve done my best with him.”

“Exactly. But—well, this isn’t about the boy. It’s about myself. I am in trouble.”

“Really?”

“I wasn’t honest, either, in my explanation of why I came hurrying home. No, Ridsdale, it wasn’t a sudden caprice. I had serious reasons for coming.”

“Oh, had you?”

“Yes. I am in great trouble.” And the General looked at Ridsdale keenly, as if seeking in his impassive face some expression of sympathy or encouragement; then he dropped his eyes and paused before he continued speaking. “I wonder if I ought to tell you? Yes, I will. You are one of ourselves. We have *made* you one of ourselves—something more than an acquaintance—a *friend*, eh? Yes, I’ll tell you the whole thing.”

“I am all attention.”

“Thank you.”

From the other room came the sound of Cynthia’s plaintive melody, and, half-consciously listening to it, the General seemed to have transferred its wistful cadence to his own voice. His manner had changed completely. He looked preternaturally grave and sad, as he sat frowning at the tablecloth and tracing a small circle of its pattern with a strong brown finger, while he murmured his story.

“No, Ridsdale, what brought me home was a letter—a warning letter—about my wife.”

“Before you tell me any more, may I say this? As a schoolmaster I often have to deal with anonymous letters, and my experience has convinced me that the only thing to do with them is just to chuck them into the——”

“Just so. But this wasn’t an anonymous letter.”

“No?”

“No. The writer is a tried friend—a person of my own blood. I have the letter in my pocket here, but I won’t bother you to read it. The warning conveyed was simple enough. It amounted to this: I was to guard my wife carefully if I did not want to risk losing her—because a man was attacking my peace and honour.”

“Oh, I say”—Mr. Ridsdale spoke indignantly—“it would be an insult to Lady Beckford not to treat such a communication with the absolute contempt and——”

“But, my dear Ridsdale,” said the General, sombrely, “it is the communication that I have always prepared myself to receive, that I have been expecting to receive at any hour in the last few years.”

“Nothing,” said Mr. Ridsdale, firmly, “would persuade me to suspect Lady Beckford of——”

“No, no, of course not. Please leave her out of it. I’m not thinking of her. I’m thinking only of myself—the attempted blow to *me*.”

“You shouldn’t for one moment believe——”

“Why not?” said the General, sadly. “One is vain, but there are limits to one’s vanity. One hopes just at first, perhaps—but later one begins to think and to understand. You know, with Cynthia and me, it was a convenient marriage—although it wasn’t a marriage of convenience.”

“Indeed, no—I know that well.”

“Regard—and more than regard—entered into it. But there was the difference of years. At my age one has not the adaptability of youth; one cannot change one’s ways, even if one wishes to. So I foresaw that with

marriages of that sort a crisis sooner or later comes. Well, our crisis has come."

"I—I am sure you are mistaken."

"You heard what she said about Lady Jane boring her. Well, *I* bore her. Recently she has shown it plainly. In fact, that is why I went away—not to give myself, but to give her, a holiday."

"My good sir," said Mr. Ridsdale, earnestly, almost irritably, "I can assure you she has spoken of you every day in the most affectionate terms—regretting your absence, saying how she missed you, and so on."

"Has she?" said the General, with a sigh. "That may have been from a sense of duty—contrition—remorse. Pity for the old fogey whose presence could but weary her."

He got up, went to the drawing-room door, and opened it.

"Thank you, Cynthia. Charming! Don't stop playing. Please go on," and he shut the door again.

Ridsdale, rising from the table also, had gone to the fireplace. He pulled out a cambric handkerchief, and rubbed the palms of his hands with it. Then he put his hands in his pockets, and, standing with his back to the fire, turned towards the General, politely attentive to, if not cordially sympathetic with, the General's doubts and fears.

"Now, look here, Ridsdale, that's all about it. I've given you the facts, and I ask you to help me."

"Delighted. But how could I possibly——"

"Help me to find the man."

"Why, I don't believe he exists."

"Oh, yes, he does."

“Did your friend give you no hints—of any kind?”

“None whatever.”

“Ah, just what I thought! Believe me, it’s some ridiculous misapprehension.”

“No; my informant is not a fool, or a person who supposes that I am lightly to be trifled with.”

The General’s manner had changed again. The sadness had gone from his eyes and the wistfulness from his voice. Pride was the note that sounded now in the carefully suppressed voice. He squared his big shoulders, threw back his massive head, and, indeed, looked somebody who would be extremely unlikely to be trifled with, either by chance acquaintances or old friends.

“I am a soldier, and I think as soldiers used to think in the bygone days, when we were taught that we ought to harden our thoughts until they become as undeviating as instincts. If I’m called upon to guard and defend something placed in my charge, the thought of what to do *is* an instinct—to go out and meet the danger half-way. The safest method of defence is to deal promptly with the enemy that threatens. Now, where is the enemy? Help me if you can. His name has been withheld from me—for obvious reasons”—and the General snorted scornfully. “I am advised to be moderate, to avoid a scandal. It was a woman who wrote to me. It was Lady Jane”—and he gave another snort. “She didn’t want to make mischief—as she calls it—and she implores me not to be old-fashioned. But I *am* old-fashioned—I’m not ashamed of it either—so old-fashioned that when I have found my man I shall force him to give me satisfaction.”

“A duel?”

“Yes.”

Mr. Ridsdale laughed deprecatingly.

“That’s all very well; but, really, Sir John, you can’t put back the clock quite so far as that. This is 1912, not 1812, you know.”

“I don’t care whether it is or it isn’t.”

Though he did not raise his voice, the General spoke with so much intensity that Ridsdale started.

“That may be; but—ah—Sir John, you won’t easily get—ah—other people to share your opinions.”

“I’ll get *him* to share them, and that’ll be enough for me. Ridsdale, you’re not a woman—*you* needn’t take your cue from Lady Jane and urge moderation. At least you can guess at what I’m feeling.”

“Yes; but I think without cause—quite without cause.”

“This century or the last, it must be the same code when things dearer than life are at stake. That’s how I feel. So you may guess if I’ll follow the mode of 1912, and seek aid from a private detective office, or ask for reparation in a court of law.”

“No, I’d never suggest that you should. What I beg you—what your best friend of either sex would beg you—is not to do anything rash, not to excite yourself needlessly.”

In truth, General Beckford was exciting himself. His voice vibrated harshly; one could see the immense effort required to keep it at its low pitch. He stared and glared, shook his shaggy hair, and looked altogether like some grey old lion who had been brought to bay in a cruel hunt, and was ready to spring upon his closest tormentors.

“All right, Ridsdale. But help me, don’t preach to me. There, I swear I’ll do nothing without thought. I *have* thought. I have thought it all out. Bring me face to face with my enemy. I answer for the rest. Now, who is

he? We don't know so many people, she and I. Help me to run over their names, or, better still, use your brains on my behalf. She has been more or less under your observation lately. You must have seen her comings and goings—the people she was in touch with. Have you observed anything suspicious?"

"No; nothing whatever."

"Some too attentive visitor?"

"No."

"It doesn't matter." The General shook his grey mane and paced to and fro. "I'll find him unassisted," and he stopped abruptly. "Ridsdale, so surely as I stand here, I'll find that man, and compel him to satisfy me."

Ridsdale drew out the cambric handkerchief and passed it across his forehead. Then he laughed lightly. "General, please forgive me for laughing. But really when any one is so carried away by excitement—well, you yourself will laugh to-morrow when you remember the wild things you have said in your excitement."

"You think that the fellow perhaps isn't a gentleman, and that he may try to refuse?"

"I think that, whether he is a gentleman or not, he will certainly refuse to break the law of the land at your bidding."

"Yes; but I'm prepared." And the General smiled grimly, and spoke with a kind of sly triumph. "I shall ignore his refusal. I shall put a pistol into his hand and *make* him fight."

"I doubt it."

"An unloaded revolver! Ridsdale, don't you see? I'll give him an unloaded revolver, with six cartridges. I'll have the same myself—and I'll begin to load. When he sees me load he'll know that he must do

something if he means to save his skin. When he sees me load my weapon, *he'll load his weapon too*. I shall watch him as a cat watches a mouse. If he raises his arm, up goes mine. If he fires, I fire. We bang at each other at the same moment."

"Impossible."

"Why impossible? If I get him alone he can't help himself."

"He'd treat you as a madman—give you in charge to the nearest policeman."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't. I'd get between him and the door."

"Apart from the fact that it would be murder if you succeeded, you wouldn't succeed."

"I should. You don't know how the pressure of immediate peril quickens people's movements. Point by point I'd press him down the line I meant him to take. It's so simple—not a weak spot in the infallible logic of the thing. The clock would be put back as rapidly as if destiny moved its hands."

Ridsdale laughed again, very lightly.

"Look here," said the General, eagerly, "try it. You don't understand what I mean. Let me show you what I mean. Act it with me."

"Act it? I—I don't follow."

"Rehearse it. Let me show you how it works. We'll go through it point by point—and if you can show me a weak spot, I'll thank you with all my heart."

As he spoke, eagerly and enthusiastically, but still almost in a whisper, the General had hurried across to the chair that held his ugly leather bag.

“See here!” He had opened his bag, and the electric light flashed upon the bright metal of a pistol. “Here—another one,” and the light flashed again. “A revolver for him and for me. Now help me to rehearse the trick. Here. Take your weapon. You see it’s open at the breech.”

He had come to the fireplace and was offering one of the two revolvers.

Mr. Ridsdale hesitated about taking it. “Really, you know, General, I doubt if I ought to encourage you in——”

“Catch hold. You’re not afraid of firearms, are you?” And the General smiled.

“No, of course not.”

Mr. Ridsdale took the pistol, and the General hurried across the room to the door that led into the hall.

“Watch me carefully,” he whispered. “I am locking this door.”

For the second time the aspect of the pleasant, comfortable room had altered; the prettiest things in it looked ungraceful, grim, forbidding; its atmosphere—even the air one breathed—was different. What was happening in the room seemed dream-like, grotesque, quite unreal; and this sense of unreality involved one’s perception of the material, unaltered world outside the room. The sounds of music floated towards one as if from an immeasurable distance.

But probably the queer notion of unsubstantiality in surrounding objects was directly caused by the strangeness and oddness of the General’s antics. He was no longer himself; he was a person acting a part—as it would be acted on a brilliantly lighted stage.

“See!” he whispered, as he came creeping back towards the leather bag. “I have manœuvred you into the worst possible position. I have cut you off from escape. That door is locked. This door I guard.”

One could hear one's heart beating above the far-off ripple of the music.

"Watch me," said the General. "Never take your eyes off my hands. See! Here are six cartridges—and I put them down, so—on your side of the table." He stepped back swiftly and cautiously. "See! Here are six cartridges for me—on my side of the table." And he sprang away, to his old post in front of the drawing-room door. "It is all fair play. I give as good a chance as I take myself. We stand at equal lengths from our ammunition. You follow it all, don't you? You catch my meaning?"

Mr. Ridsdale, staring at his empty revolver, nodded.

"Very well. Now, if you value your life, prepare to defend it. See! I am going to load."

The General's acting was rather good. Deriving stimulus from his natural emotions, he achieved some fine artistic effects. His flushed face, his bent brows, his fierce attitude and swift movements, indicated the determination of implacable wrath.

[Illustration: "'The coward!' she wailed. 'The miserable coward!'" (page 49).]

And Ridsdale, too, represented his assumed character well enough. His cheeks were livid, his breath came gaspingly, the hand that carried the revolver shook perceptibly—altogether an excellent simulation of surprise, apprehensive doubts, if not of craven fear.

"One!"

The General had crept to the table, taken a cartridge, and was slipping it into the chamber.

"There!" he whispered. "Automatically you have done it too. I told you so. Wait! Lift your hand at your peril. My turn. Two!"

Ridsdale, copying the General's slightest movement, was loading as the General loaded.

"Three! That's it. Three left. When you take the last, step back. I'll not raise my arm till you are back on the hearth. I swear it. Four!"

The music had ceased, but neither of them noticed. In a silence broken only by the sound of panting respirations, they loaded the fifth and sixth cartridges, and simultaneously sprang away from the table.

"Now!" The General had been the quicker. His arm was up. "Now answer me." The ferocity in the hissing words was terrible to hear. "Are you the man?"

"I—I—— Upon my word, I—don't understand such folly."

"You blackguard! This is not acting." The concentrated passion behind the words seemed to send forth waves that struck one's beating heart with flame and ice. "Now answer me, or—so help me, God!—I'll shoot you."

Then the drawing-room door opened. The General, instinctively dropping his arm and turning, shouted at his wife:

"Go back! Go back, I tell you!"

There was a blaze as if all the electric lamps had exploded, and a crash that seemed to shake the walls. Then again came the flash and the roar. Mr. Ridsdale had fired twice.

For a moment the room was full of smoke. Then the dusty cloud rose, grew thin. The lamplight, shining unimpeded, showed General Beckford still upon his feet, standing square and erect, with Cynthia desperately clinging to his breast.

“What’s this?” said the General, loudly and sternly. “Has the smoke blinded you, Cynthia? Why have you come to me? Your place is not here. Go to your lover’s arms.”

But she clung to him closer. She was stretching her slender figure to its fullest height, trying to cover his limbs with her limbs, his face with her face, madly straining to make a shield of trembling flesh large enough to protect him from danger.

“The coward!” she wailed. “The miserable coward! He shot at you when you weren’t looking. He tried to kill you!”

“Then get out of the way,” said the General, “and let him try again. Can’t you see how you’re hampering him? This is his chance and yours. Don’t spoil it. Let him set you free.”

But Cynthia only trembled, sobbed, and clung.

“Very well,” and the General laughed harshly. “We have been interrupted, and my opponent must kindly understand that his chance is gone. Cynthia, do you hear? He won’t shoot again. Now, stop whimpering, and answer me.”

“Yes, I want to tell you everything.”

“Is this man your lover?”

“No—no.”

“But he has endeavoured to be?”

“Yes.”

“Then why has he remained here?”

“I was afraid to send him away.”

“Why? What were you afraid of?”

“You. I thought if you knew you’d do something dreadful.”

It was curious, but it seemed as if suddenly these two—the husband and the wife—were quite alone. If the man they spoke of had been swept a thousand miles from the room, they could not have disregarded him more completely than they did now. Cynthia had linked her hands round the General’s neck; she was looking up into his stern, unflinching eyes, her voice was strong and clear as she answered each question.

“When did he first insult you?”

“Two days ago.”

“But you knew what he meant before that?”

“No, I didn’t. I knew he admired me—and I thought it rather amusing; but I never dreamed he would dare. And then, when he did dare, I thought if you heard or guessed it would be too dreadful. I blamed myself—yes, I blamed myself. But I thought it was only two days, and then he’d be gone for ever—with no fuss and no scandal. My darling, don’t you believe me?”

“Is there nothing else to tell?”

The General was glaring down into his wife’s eyes.

“Before God, that is all. Oh, don’t you believe me?”

“Before God, I do.”

Very gently Sir John released himself from the clinging hands, held one of them for a moment; then, bowing ceremoniously, kissed it.

“Mr. Ridsdale!” His manner was perfectly calm as he turned to the ignored guest, and he spoke quietly but heavily, with an old-fashioned style of humour that was too pompous to be quite successful. “My wife called you a coward just now; but, honestly, I could not apologise if she

had called you a fool as well. Those are blank cartridges that we have been playing with. Oh, yes, it would have been dangerous otherwise. But I'm always careful. In fact, when I have to deal with gentlemen of your kidney, I'm almost as afraid of firearms as you are yourself. And, à propos, the hall door is open I didn't really lock it."

Mr. Ridsdale silently crossed the room.

"Then good night to you. Yates will be back directly, and when he has packed your things, where shall he take them?"

"Ah—er—say, the St. Pancras Hotel."

"And I may send your cheque to that address? Thank you. Good night!"

The Veil *of* Flying Water

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

1st Canadian Expeditionary Force

I

In those days an active man could not keep on friendly terms with everybody. If he acted honestly by his own clan, or his own village, he was sure to be in bad odour with some other clan or tribe. So it was with Walking Moose, a young chief of that clan of the Maliseets that had a white salmon for its totem.

This Walking Moose was chief of a sub-tribe that had its habitation and hunting-grounds far to the west, within twenty miles of the source of old Woolastook. Here the great river, beloved of Gluskap and his children, which advances seaward so placidly throughout the latter half of its course, dashes between walls of rock and gloomy curtains of spruce-trees that cling with brown, exposed roots that suggest the gripping fingers of giants. Rapids of twisting green and writhing white clang and shout in its narrow valley. Here and there are amber pools and green-black eddies; here and there a length of shallows that flashes silver and gold at noon; and here is that roaring place where the river leaps a sheer fall of thirty feet in one unbroken white curve—the Veil of Flying Water.

This is a rough country, full of shaggy forests and broken hills alive with game, and swift water alive with fish; and in the days of Walking Moose the Mohawks had their black lodges of undressed hides close to its western borders. The Mohawks were the age-old enemies of the Maliseets. Before Walking Moose grew to manhood and power, the peace-loving Maliseets had been content to flee down river and seek the protection of the larger villages whenever word came to them that the Mohawks contemplated a raid. Walking Moose was not content to flee periodically from his good hunting-grounds, however, and so the enmity of the raiders became bitter against him. Walking Moose hemmed three sides of his village with a tangle of fallen trees—the river kept the fourth side—lopped the upper and outer branches of these prostrate trees to

within three or four feet of the trunks, and sharpened the ends and hardened them with fire. Also, he dug pits and covered them with brush, and set up many sharp posts in unexpected places. These things were good, but Walking Moose was not satisfied. He brought twenty families from one of the more sheltered villages, built lodges for them within his defences, and gave them equal rights of hunting with the older villagers. During that summer the Mohawks came three times, and three times they went away without so much as a scalp or a back-load of smoked salmon. During the winter Walking Moose's men were busy at making shields and weapons; and late in March, when the depths of snow were covered with a tough crust, a war party of the people of the White Salmon went swiftly to the westward and fell upon and destroyed a village of the Mohawks. But the only men who died at the hands of the victors were those who fell fighting. No prisoners were made on that occasion. The women and children were not harmed, the lodges and storehouses were spared. Only the weapons of the warriors were taken.

"We do not want your food and furs," said Walking Moose, "for we have plenty of our own. We do not want your women, for we have better women of our own."

Then he returned to his own country, with the victorious warriors at his heels. Some of these warriors had to be drawn on toboggans; a few remained behind, their spirits sped to even finer hunting-grounds than those of their nativity.

Walking Moose's first raid into the land of the Mohawks made a deep impression on that warlike people. History contained no record of any previous outrage of the kind. In the old, old days Gluskap had smitten the Mohawks on more than one occasion, so tradition said, but to be smitten with magic by a god and victoriously invaded by Maliseets were misfortunes of a very different nature. The warriors were furious, and the insulting fact that Walking Moose had left their lodges standing, their

storehouses full, and their families beside them added to their fury. They bandaged their wounds, put their dead away, and sent the only uninjured man of the village to carry the outrageous news westward and raise a war-party. But worse than this was planned. Hawk-in-the-Tree, the daughter of the chief of the defeated village, brooded darkly over the scornful words of Walking Moose. His gaze had been upon her face when he had said, “We do not want your women, for we have better women of our own.” Yes, his gaze had been fair upon the face of Hawk-in-the-Tree, and she was the woman whom three great chiefs wanted in marriage, many warriors had fought for, and Long Tongue had made songs about. She sat in her father’s lodge and thought of the words of the young Maliseet and recalled the look in his eyes. Her slim hands were clasped tightly in her lap, her small, sleek head was bowed demurely, and her beautiful eyes were upon the beaded hem of her skirt of dressed moosehide. A tender pink shone in her dusky cheeks, her red lips were parted in a faint smile, but there was no mirth in her vain and angry heart.

[Illustration: “He saw a girl’s face looking timidly out, and a pair of dark eyes gazing shyly down upon him” (page 54).]

Walking Moose was unmarried. All his thoughts were given to the pursuit of power—of power for himself and his tribe. He was great in the chase, and greater on the warpath. His mind and hand were at once subtle and daring. Though he forgot the words he had said about the women of the Mohawk village, he remembered everything else that he had said and done on that expedition; and so he suspected that the enemy would strike back before long, with all their strength and cunning. He sent swift runners down river with word of his raid and victory. These returned after five days with a band of daring young braves from the more sheltered villages of the tribe—adventurous spirits who were attracted by the promise of warfare against the Mohawks under a successful leader. Walking Moose welcomed these reinforcements cordially.

It was not until all the snow was gone from the hills and the ice from the river that the Mohawks returned Walking Moose's call. They had planned their arrival for the dark hours between midnight and dawn, but the sentries brought word of their approach to Walking Moose, and so it happened that instead of their finding him in his own lodge, he found them in a little valley two miles distant from the village. By dawn all the invaders had vanished save those who had lost command of their legs. And the Maliseets had vanished from the little valley also, on the trail of the retreating Mohawks. They followed that trail all day and half the night, and at last overtook and made an end to that war party. One young man escaped, one whose lungs were stronger than his heart. He carried word of the disaster throughout the Mohawk country.

Spring passed and summer came. The village of which Walking Moose was chief enjoyed quiet and security. The warriors of the White Salmon carried on their fishing in all the swift brooks and rivers, but they kept their shields and war clubs beside them, and far-sighted runners were on guard in the hills, day and night.

In the Mohawk country quiet reigned also. But it was a sinister, brooding quiet. Big chiefs met and parted, only to meet again. Rage gnawed them, but they were afraid to strike openly at the strong village of the Maliseets. About this time, Hawk-in-the-Tree spoke to her father, standing modestly before him with her glance cast down at her beaded moccasins.

"The strength of that village is all in the head and heart of Walking Moose," she said.

"It is so," replied the chief.

"Then if death should find him——"

"What death?" returned her father, testily. "The medicine-men have been questioned in this matter. You are but a squaw, my child, and cannot see the truth of these things."

“True, I am but a squaw,” returned Hawk-in-the-Tree, modestly. “But will not my father tell me the words of the medicine-men?”

So the chief told her what the wise ones of the nation had said about Walking Moose. He did not know that, as usual, their wise words were nothing more than a clever fiction to mystify the warriors and retain the awe of the laity for the dark arts. To soothe the injured pride of the chiefs they had said that the prowess of Walking Moose was due to magic; that he could not be killed in battle, or by the spilling of blood, or by fire; that starvation only could kill him, and that within bowshot of his own village. It was a clever invention. No wonder the chiefs and warriors were puzzled and impressed.

“To be starved within bowshot of his own village?” repeated Hawk-in-the-Tree, reflectively. “Then he must first be caught and bound—then hidden in a place where his warriors cannot find him.”

“It is so,” replied the chief.

Hawk-in-the-Tree drew him into the lodge. The scornful words and heedless glance of the Maliseet were hot and clear in her memory. She talked to her father for a long time. He smiled sneeringly at first, but after a while he began to nod his head.

II

Walking Moose did not devote all his time in the summer months to the catching and smoking of salmon and trout. He wandered about the country, in seeming idleness, but in reality his brain was busy with ambitious plans. And always his eyes were open and his ears alert. He did not expect another attack from the Mohawks before the time of the hunter's moon, but he continued to place his outposts far and near, and to visit them at unexpected moments. Though his village had doubled in size within the year, and leapt into fame, he was not satisfied. He wanted to drive the Mohawks far to the westward and break them so that they would never again venture into the fringes of the Maliseet country, and he dreamed of the day when all the scattered clans and villages of the Maliseets would name him for their head chief.

One morning in July he followed the edge of Woolastook's rocky valley for a distance of about five miles above the village, then clambered down the bank and crossed the brawling stream—for at this point old Woolastook, the father of Maliseet rivers, was no more than a lively brook. Beneath the farther bank was a flat rock and an amber pool. He laid aside his shield and bow, and reclined on the rock to dream his ambitious dreams. So he lay for an hour, and the sunlight slanted in upon him and gilded his dreams.

Suddenly Walking Moose sprang to his feet and turned, his shield on his left arm and his bow in his right hand. His glance flashed to the overhanging fringe of spruce branches above his head. He saw a girl's face looking timidly out, and a pair of dark eyes gazing shyly down upon him. He did not know the face. It was not that of any girl of his own village.

“What do you want?” he asked, watchful for some sight or sound to betray the presence of some hidden menace.

Hawk-in-the-Tree answered him in his own tongue, for she had learned it from a prisoner when she was a child. Until recently, the Mohawks had never lacked opportunity of acquiring the Maliseet language.

“I sometimes fish in that pool, chief. But I will go away and fish somewhere else,” she replied, modestly.

“Do not go,” he said. “Come down and fish here if you want to. The pools of the river are free to all honest Maliseets.”

Without more ado, the girl crawled forward, turned, and slid down to the flat rock beside Walking Moose. In her left hand she held a short coil of transparent fish-line made from the intestines of some animal. Her small face was flushed. She stood beside Walking Moose with downcast eyes. The young man gazed at her with frank interest.

“You are a stranger,” he said. “You do not belong to my village.”

She met his glance for a second.

“Have you ever seen me before, chief?” she asked.

“I am not sure,” he replied, puckering his brows in reflection. “But I know that you do not live in my village. You do not look like those young women.”

“They are more pleasant of appearance, perhaps?”

He smiled at that.

“Perhaps you say the truth, but I think your cheeks are pinker and your eyes brighter than the young women I know.”

The girl turned her face away from him.

“I must fish,” she said, “else my poor old grandfather will go hungry.”

Walking Moose, feeling an interest that was new to him, and prompted by a little devil that had never troubled him before, dropped his bow and put out his hand and took the coiled fish-line from the girl. Their fingers touched—and he was astonished at the thrill which he felt.

“You must tell me who you are, and where you come from,” he said, and his voice had a foolish little break in it. This vocal tremor was not lost on the girl.

“I belong to a small village on the great river, three days’ journey from here,” she said. “My old grandfather is my only friend. His name is Never Sleep. Because of his sharp tongue he became disliked by the people of the village, and so we journeyed to this place, and built a little hidden lodge. Never Sleep is very old, and spends all his days in brewing healing liquors from roots and barks. It is my work to keep the pot boiling.”

Walking Moose was impressed.

“You are a good girl to take such care of your old grandfather,” he said. “But why have you not brought him into my village to dwell?”

“The noises of a village disturb him,” she replied. “And though his heart is kind, his tongue is bitter. He fears no one when he is angered, and rushes out of his lodge and calls people terrible names. He fears a great chief no more than a giggling papoose.”

The young man smiled.

“Then it is well that he should continue to live in quiet,” he said. “But you have not told me your name,” he added.

She glanced at him swiftly, and as swiftly away again, and the glow deepened in her cheeks.

“My name is poor and unknown,” she said. “It is for mighty chieftains such as Walking Moose to give names to their people.”

At this Walking Moose, who planned greatness and fought battles without disturbing a line of his thin face, looked delighted and slightly confused.

“Sit down,” he said, “while I catch some fish for you and your grandfather; and while I am fishing I may think of a name for you.”

The girl sat down, smiling demurely. Walking Moose uncoiled the transparent line, placed a fat grasshopper on the hook, and cast it lightly upon the surface of the pool. He stepped close to the edge of the rock and, with his right hand advanced, flicked the kicking bait artfully. The sun was in front of him, so his shadow did not fall upon the pool. Suddenly there was a movement in the amber depths as swift as light, and next instant the grasshopper vanished in a swirl of bubbling water. The line, held taut, cut the surface of the pool in a half-circle like a hissing knife-blade. The line was strong, and in those days men fished for the pot and gave little thought to the sport. So Walking Moose pulled strongly, to judge the resistance, then took a lower hold with his right hand and gave a quick and mighty jerk on the line. The big trout came up like a bird, described a graceful curve in the sunlight, and descended smack upon the rock. He was dispatched in a moment by a blow at the base of the head.

“There is a fine trout for your cooking-pot,” said Walking Moose, boyishly delighted with his success. “Now I’ll see if there is another in the pool.”

“But you have not made a name for me yet,” said the girl.

“True,” replied the young man. “Catching fish is easier.” He looked shyly at the girl, then very steadily at the gleaming dead trout. “You are like a trout,” he said, with hesitation. “You are bright—and slender—and the beads on your skirt are red and blue like the spots along the trout’s

sides. I might name you Beautiful Trout, or Little Trout—but your eyes——" He paused and glanced at her uncertainly.

She did not return his glance, but sat with her head bent and her hands clasped loosely in her beaded lap. Her hair, in two dusky braids, was drawn in front of her slender shoulders, and hung down her breast.

"They are not like a trout's," he said. "No, they are not at all like the eyes of a fish."

"What are they like?" she asked, her voice small and shy.

Walking Moose fiddled with the line in his fingers and shuffled his feet uneasily. "How should I know? I cannot see them."

"But you have seen them. Can't you remember?"

"I remember. They are like—like things that have never been seen by any man alive, for they are like black stars."

The girl laughed, and the sound was like the music of thin water flittering over small pebbles.

"Is Walking Moose a poet as well as the conqueror of the Mohawks, that he makes a fool of a poor young woman with talk of black stars?" she asked, turning her gaze full upon him for a moment with a look of tender mockery.

His heart expanded, then twitched with a pang of doubt. This mention of the Mohawks was grateful to his vanity, but it was disturbing too. Here he had been talking to a girl and catching a trout, when his mind should have been intent on plans against the enemy. He felt ashamed of himself. What would be the end of his good fighting and great dreams if he spent any more time in such foolishness?

"I am not a poet," he said. "A man who pushes his shield between the lodges of the Mohawks has no time for the making of songs."

Already his air was preoccupied. Hawk-in-the-Tree noticed this.

“Or for the making of names, chief,” she said. “I do not wonder that your mind is uneasy and that fear tingles in your heart, for the Mohawks are mighty enemies.”

Walking Moose stared at her, then smiled.

“Yes, they are mighty against those who run away,” he said. “The hare that jumps from the fern strikes as much terror in my heart as all the Mohawks who stand in moccasins.” He laughed softly, gazing down at the amber water of the pool. “But I have a name for you,” he added. “Shining Star is your name in my country.”

Then he put the line into her hand, took up his bow and shield, and crossed the stream. He climbed the short, steep ascent and forced his way through the tangled branches. So he advanced for about ten yards, making a good deal of stir. Then he halted, turned, and crawled noiselessly back to the edge of the bank. He lay motionless for several minutes, peering out between the drooping spruces. He had no suspicion of the girl, but it was a part of his creed to look twice and carefully at everything that was new to him. He watched her bait the hook and cast it on the pool. She skipped it here and there across the calm surface; and presently a fish rose and took it, and was deftly landed upon the rock for his trouble. Walking Moose was satisfied that the girl had no intentions against anything but the trout. He crawled noiselessly back through the brush, then got to his feet, and returned to the bank without any effort at concealment. She looked up as he appeared above the stream.

“I have come back,” he said, “to accompany you to your lodge. I must see your grandfather, Never Sleep. It is my duty as chief to know all my people and the whereabouts of every lodge.”

The girl coiled the wet line and took up the two trout. Her head was bowed, so the young man did not see the smile on her red lips. It was in

her thoughts that something more than a poor fish had risen to her hook; but Walking Moose really thought that he was but doing his duty as chief of the clan of the White Salmon. As this couple had come to his country from the lower river, it was clearly his place to know something of their position so that he might protect them in time of need.

Walking Moose climbed the steep bank first and then reached down a helping hand to the girl whom he had named Shining Star. This was an unusual attention from a brave to a squaw. On reaching the top the girl took the lead. She walked swiftly and gracefully, and the twigs and branches that sprang into place behind her switched the warrior; but so intent was he in following this Shining Star that he paid no attention to the switchings. She led straight to the south, over hummocks, and across open places and tangled valleys. So for about a mile; and then she halted and turned a glowing face to her follower.

“I must let Never Sleep know that I am bringing a stranger,” she said, “or he will be in a terrible rage. He is not agreeable when he is angry. If I whistle twice, he will know that I am not alone.”

“He must be an unpleasant old man to live with,” said Walking Moose; and because of the foolishness that was brewing in his heart he felt no suspicion. He stood inert, gazing down at Shining Star’s glossy head, while she gave vent to two long, shrill whistles.

“That will let him know that a visitor is coming,” she said. “It will give him time to get a pleasant smile on his face.”

This appeared to Walking Moose as the most excellent wit. Again they advanced, and soon they came to a little lodge of birchbark set in a grove of young firs. A faint haze of smoke crawled up from the hole in the roof. The door-flap of hide was fastened open, showing a shadowy interior and the glow of a fallen fire. The girl laid her fish on the moss beside the door, and peered into the lodge.

“Walking Moose, the mighty chief, has come to see you,” she said.

“Walking Moose is welcome to my poor lodge,” returned a feeble voice. “Let him enter and speak face to face with old Never Sleep.”

The girl drew back and nodded brightly to the chief.

“You go first,” said he, his native caution flickering up for a moment. “The lodge is so dark, that I am afraid that I might step upon the old man.”

She read the reason for his hesitation, and the blood tingled in her cheeks, but she entered without a word. He paused at the door for long enough to accustom his eyes to the dark within. He could see no one but Shining Star, and a robed, stooped figure seated on the ground. He stepped inside.

“The thong of my moccasin became unfastened,” he said, by way of explaining his hesitation at the door.

A dry chuckle came from the robed figure.

“He is a wise man who halts and sets his feet and eyes to rights at the threshold of a strange lodge,” said the feeble voice of Never Sleep.

Walking Moose felt absurdly young and transparent. He stood beside the fire and stared over it at the old man. He could see little but the living gleam of the face and a hint of two watchful eyes.

“What do you want of me, great chief?” asked Never Sleep.

“I met your granddaughter at the river, where she was fishing,” replied the warrior. “She told me her story, and so I came home with her to mark the position of your lodge. All who dwell in my country are in my care. It is well for me to know where to find every one of my people, in case of need.”

“You will find me of small use to you in time of need,” returned the other, “for I am old and weak, and my fighting days are over. Only in one way can I serve you, chief. I brew potent liquors for the cure of all bodily ills.”

“It is well,” said Walking Moose, with a full recovery of his usual manner. “But you twist the truth of my words. I do not ask for your help, old man; but you and your granddaughter may need mine, some time. Brew your liquor in peace—and in danger send word to Walking Moose.”

With that he turned on his heel and left the lodge.

Next morning found the chief of the people of the White Salmon again reclined on the flat rock above the amber pool; and again his dreams of ambition and plans of warfare were disturbed by the girl whom he had named Shining Star. Again she slid down to the rock, with the coiled fish-line in her hand. Again he took the line from her and caught a trout for her dinner. So it happened for six days, and by that time the dreams of Walking Moose were all of Shining Star instead of ambition. He even made a song, and it seemed to please Shining Star. But of these strangers he said nothing in the village. It would be time to speak of them when he had won the prize.

On the seventh morning the chief waited on the rock above the amber pool for an hour. After that he spent another hour in walking up and down the bed of the stream for a distance of several hundred yards each way. He flushed hot and cold with anxiety.

“Has something happened to her?” he asked of the lonely stream. “Or have they both gone away as quietly as they came?”

Unable to stand the torment of anxiety any longer, he ascended the bank above the pool, and set off swiftly towards Never Sleep’s lodge. He found the old man crouched before the door.

“The girl has a fever,” said the old man. “But I have given her a potent liquor that will drive it out of her blood.”

Such fear gripped the young chief’s heart at these words as he had never felt before. His staring face showed it to the sharp eyes of Never Sleep.

“She rests quietly now,” said the old man. “She must not be disturbed. In the morning she will be well, I think. But, in the meantime, the pot is empty.”

So Walking Moose went into the forest to hunt for flesh for Never Sleep’s cooking-pot. He walked slowly, for his feet felt as heavy as stones when turned away from the lodge where Shining Star lay sick. His eyes were dim, and the sunlight on the trees and the azure sky above looked desolate and terrible to him. He stumbled as he walked. He wandered aimlessly for more than an hour before the thought returned to him that Never Sleep’s pot was empty, and that his mission was to fill it. But the thought flashed away again as swiftly as it had returned, and so he continued his aimless wanderings.

“I love that girl—that Shining Star!” he murmured. “I must tell her of it soon, in plain words—to-morrow, when the fever is gone from her.”

It was close upon sunset when Walking Moose at last got back to the lodge of Never Sleep. He carried two young ducks at his belt. The old man came to the door of the lodge.

“Has the fever gone?” whispered the chief.

“She still sleeps,” replied the other. “The fever is passing. But you are weary, my son. Drink this draught to refresh your sinews and lighten your spirit. Then sleep, and when you awake you will find that the fever has passed away from the girl.”

Walking Moose took the stone cup in a trembling hand and swallowed the bitter-sweet liquid it contained. Then he lay down on the warm moss

beside the lodge. How light his body felt! What beautiful, faint music breathed in his ears! His lids slid down, but he raised them with an effort.

“I must sleep—for—a—little——” His voice trailed away to silence. Again his lids fluttered down.

Never Sleep stooped above him, but the face was no longer that of a feeble old man, but of the Mohawk chief—the father of Hawk-in-the-Tree.

“The liquor has done its work,” he said.

Then the girl to whom Walking Moose had given the name of Shining Star came out of the lodge.

III

Walking Moose slept a deep and dreamless sleep. The Mohawk bound him at ankles and wrists, and then lifted him to his massive shoulders.

“Lead the way!” he commanded.

The girl took up her father’s weapons and a long, tough rope of twisted leather, and entered the forest behind the lodge. The big warrior, with his limp burden, followed close upon her heels. They moved silently, through deep coverts and shadowed valleys, by an unmarked, twisting way. The sun slid down behind the western spruces and twilight deepened over the wilderness.

“For such a mighty chief he was wonderfully simple,” remarked the Mohawk.

Hawk-in-the-Tree did not reply.

At last they came to the river above the fall that was called the Veil of Flying Water. The twilight had thickened to darkness by now; but these two required only a little light, for they had studied this part of the river and the bellowing fall night after night. The man laid Walking Moose on the ground and drew a small canoe from under a blanket of moss and bushes. He made one end of the raw-hide rope fast to the bars and gunnels of the canoe. He tied the other end strongly to a tree at the edge of the bank. He felt no uncertainty as to the strength and exact length of the rope. Everything had been tested; the whole amazing deed had been done before, as far as that had been possible without the presence of Walking Moose.

Now the Mohawk placed the canoe at the very edge of the water and lifted the drugged chief into it. He fastened one end of a shorter line

around his victim’s body just below the shoulders and under the arms. Then he cut the thongs that bound wrists and ankles.

“He will die of hunger within bowshot of his own village,” he muttered.

With the slack of the long rope in his hand he edged the canoe into the racing current, stepped aboard, and let it ease slowly down towards the top of the sheer, out-leaping fury of white water. At the very brow of the screaming slope the canoe hung for more than a minute. Then it came slowly back to where the girl waited on the shore. The big Mohawk stepped out of it, grinning broadly. Walking Moose had vanished.

The Mohawk unfastened the rope and coiled it over his arm. With the girl’s help he returned the canoe to the little hollow and covered it with moss. Hawk-in-the-Tree stood behind him, trembling. This was her father; but the young man who now lay with death above and below and on every side—what of him? She had hated him at one time. But now——

[Illustration: “At 1.5 Andy announced that there was one infallible way to start a refractory car” (page 64).]

She held the shorter of the two ropes of leather in her hands. She made a noose of it. Her father stooped before, spreading the moss over the canoe. She crouched suddenly, gripped his ankles, and jerked his feet backwards, from under him. He pitched headfirst into the hollow with stunning force.

IV

Cold spray flying over his face aroused Walking Moose at last from his drugged sleep. For a little while he lay still, too shocked and bewildered by the quaking of the wet rock on which he lay and the roar and thunder in his ears, to think or move. He saw something pale, wide, and alive close in front and curving above him. He put out his right hand and felt cold, dripping rock behind him. He put out his left hand. Here was more wet rock—and there the sharp edge of it—and space—within a few inches of his side. He sat upright, and as he gazed he remembered the liquor he had taken from the hands of Never Sleep.

“This is the work of that old man!” he exclaimed. He stood up on the narrow ledge and raised his hand to the dim-lit, flying arc. It was struck down, and his face was dashed with bubbling water. Then horror seized him, and he leaned weakly against the dripping rock—for he realised that he was behind the Veil of Flying Water, hemmed in—in a deathtrap.

Walking Moose soon regained his usual composure. He stood with his back to the dripping rock, his feet firmly set on the quaking ledge, and gazed calmly at the roof and wall of thin, hissing water. He thought of the girl to whom he had given the name of Shining Star; but in a second he put that hateful vision from him. The spray came up from the boiling cauldron under the ledge and drenched him. He stared with dull interest at the arching water, and at last decided that the pale radiance that lit it was that of the moon. So the time must be early night. Suddenly he was aware of something foreign on the luminous front of his prison. It was a slender line of blackness, sharply curved, that struck the veil, vanished, and struck again on a level with his eyes. Spray flew when it touched. He leaned forward and put out his right hand. The thing was of twisted leather.

He shot out his hand and gripped the line firmly. He pulled it towards him. It came half-way, seeming to be slack only at one end; then it began to straighten and draw strongly outward and upward. He advanced to the very edge of the rocky shelf, still gripping the rope with his right hand. He stood on tiptoe. Then he grasped the rope with both hands and sprang through the roof of falling water.

When Walking Moose felt the solid rocks under his feet he loosed the grip of his fingers and fell forward, exhausted. Then the girl whom he had named Shining Star knelt beside him and raised his head against her shoulder.

The Mohawk chief, recovered from his fall, looked out upon them from the bushes. Then he turned and went back to his own country, cursing a magic that had not been foretold by the medicine-men.

“Bill Bailey”

By Ian Hay

Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

I

THE COMING OF “BILL BAILEY”

FOR SALE.—A superb 3-seated Diablement-Odorant Touring Car, 12-15 h.-p., 1907 model, with Cape-cart hood, speedometer, spare wheel, fanfare horn, and lamps complete. Body French-grey picked out with red. Cost £350. Will take——

The sum which the vendor was prepared to take was so startling, that to mention it would entirely spoil the symmetry of the foregoing paragraph. It is therefore deleted. The advertisement concluded by remarking that the car was as good as new, and added darkly that the owner was going abroad.

Such was the official title and description of the car. After making its acquaintance we devised for ourselves other and shorter terms of designation. I used to refer to it as My Bargain. Mr. Gootch, our local cycle-agent and petrol-merchant, dismissed it gloomily as “one of them owe-seven Oderongs.” My daughter (hereinafter termed The Gruffin) christened it “Bill Bailey,” because it usually declined to come home; and the title was adopted with singular enthusiasm and unanimity by subsequent passengers.

I may preface this narrative by stating that until I purchased Bill Bailey my experience of motor mechanics had been limited to a motor-bicycle of antique design, which had been sold me by a distant relative of my wife’s. This stately but inanimate vehicle I rode assiduously for something like two months, buoyed up by the not unreasonable hope that one day, provided I pedalled long enough and hard enough, the engine would start. I was doomed to disappointment; and after removing the driving-belt and riding the thing for another month or so as an ordinary bicycle, mortifying my flesh and enlarging my heart in the process, I bartered my unresponsive steed—it turned the scale at about two hundredweight—to Mr. Gootch, in exchange for a set of new wheels for the perambulator. Teresa—we called it Teresa after our first cook, who on receiving notice invariably declined to go—was immediately put into working order by Mr. Gootch, who, I believe, still wins prizes with her at reliability trials.

To return to Bill Bailey. I had been coquetting with the idea of purchasing a car for something like three months, and my wife had definitely made up her mind upon the subject for something like three years, when the advertisement already quoted caught my eye on the back of an evening paper. The car was duly inspected by the family *en bloc*, in its temporary abiding-place at a garage in distant Surbiton. What chiefly attracted me was the price. My wife’s fancy was taken by the French-grey body picked out with red, and the favourable consideration

of The Gruffin was secured by the idea of a speedometer reeling off its mile per minute. The baby's interest was chiefly centred in the fanfare horn.

My young friend, Andy Finch—one of those fortunate people who feel competent to give advice upon any subject under the sun—obligingly offered to overhaul the engine and bearings and report upon their condition. His report was entirely favourable, and the bargain was concluded.

Next day, on returning home from the City, I found the new purchase awaiting me in the coach-house. It was a two-seated affair, with a precarious-looking arrangement like an iron camp-stool—known, I believe, as a spider-seat—clamped on behind. A general survey of the car assured me that the lamps, speedometer, spare wheel, and other extra fittings had not been abstracted for the benefit of the gentleman who had gone abroad; and I decided there and then to take a holiday next day and indulge the family with an excursion.

II

THE PROVING OF "BILL BAILEY"

Where I made my initial error was in permitting Andy Finch to come round next morning. Weakly deciding that I might possibly be able to extract a grain or two of helpful information from the avalanche of advice which would descend upon me, I agreed to his proposal that he should come and assist me to "start her up."

Andy arrived in due course, and proceeded to run over the car's points in a manner which at first rather impressed me. Hitherto I had contented myself with opening a sort of oven door in the dish-cover arrangement which concealed the creature's works from view, and peering in with an air of intense wisdom, much as a diffident amateur inspects a horse's mouth. After that I usually felt the tyres, in search of spavins and curbs.

Andy began by removing the dish-cover bodily—I learned for the first time that it was called the bonnet,—and then proceeded to tear up the boards on the floor of the car. This done, a number of curious and mysterious objects were exposed to view for the first time, with the functions and shortcomings of each of which I was fated to become severally and monotonously familiar.

Having completed his observations, Andy suggested a run along the road. I did not know then, as I know now, that his knowledge of automobilism was about on a par with my own; otherwise I would not have listened with such respect or permitted him to take any further liberties with the mechanism. However, I knew no better, and this is what happened.

I had better describe the results in tabular form:—

12.15. Andy performs a feat which he describes as “tickling the carburetter.”

12.16-12.20. Andy turns the handle in front.

12.20-12.25. I turn the handle in front.

12.25-12.30. Andy turns the handle in front.

12.30-12.45. Adjournment to the dining-room sideboard.

12.45-12.50. Andy turns the handle in front.

12.50-12.55. I turn the handle in front.

12.55-1. Andy turns the handle in front and I tickle the carburetter.

1-1.5. I turn the handle in front and Andy tickles the carburetter.

At 1.5 Andy announced that there was one infallible way to start a refractory car, and that was to let it run down hill under its own momentum, and then suddenly let the clutch in. I need hardly say that my residence lies in a hollow. However, with the assistance of The Gruffin,

we manfully trundled our superb 1907 Diablement-Odorant out of the coach-house, and pushed it up the hill without mishap, if I except two large dents in the back of the body, caused by the ignorance of my daughter that what looks like solid timber may after all be only hollow aluminium.

We then turned the car, climbed on board, and proceeded to descend the hill by the force of gravity. Bill Bailey I must say travelled beautifully, despite my self-appointed chauffeur's efforts to interfere with his movements by stamping on pedals and manipulating levers. Absorbed with these exercises, Andy failed to observe the imminence of our destination, and we reached the foot of the hill at a good twenty-five miles an hour, the back wheels locked fast by a belated but whole-hearted application of the hand-brake. However, the collision with the confines of my estate was comparatively gentle, and we soon disentangled the head-light from the garden hedge.

The engine still failed to exhibit any signs of life.

At this point my wife, who had been patiently sitting in the hall wearing a new motor-bonnet for the best part of two hours, came out and suggested that we should proclaim a temporary truce and have lunch.

At 2.30 we returned to the scene of operations. Having once more tickled the now thoroughly depressed carburetter to the requisite pitch of hilarity, Andy was on the point of resuming operations with the starting-handle, when I drew his attention to a small stud-like affair sliding across a groove in the dash-board.

"I think," I remarked, "that that is the only thing on the car which you haven't fiddled with as yet. Supposing I push it across?"

Andy, I was pleased to observe, betrayed distinct signs of confusion. Recovering quickly, he protested that the condemned thing was of no particular use, but I could push it across if I liked.

I did so. Next moment, after three deafening but encouraging backfires, Bill Bailey's engine came to life with a roar, and the car proceeded rapidly backwards down the road, Andy, threaded through the spare wheel like a camel in a needle's eye, slapping down pedals with one hand and clutching at the steering-gear with the other.

"Who left the reverse in?" he panted, when the car had at length been brought to a standstill and the engine stopped.

No explanation was forthcoming, but I observed the scared and flushed countenance of my daughter peering apprehensively round the coach-house door, and drew my own conclusions.

Since Bill Bailey was obviously prepared to atone for past inertia by frenzied activity, our trial trip now came within the sphere of possibility. My wife had by this time removed her bonnet, and flatly declined to accompany us, alleging somewhat unkindly that she was expecting friends to tennis at the end of the week. The Gruffin, however, would not be parted from us, and presently Bill Bailey, with an enthusiastic but incompetent chauffeur at the wheel, an apprehensive proprietor holding on beside him, and a touzled long-legged hoyden of twelve clinging grimly to the spider-seat behind, clanked majestically out of the garden gate and breasted the slope leading to the main road.

Victory at last! This was life! This was joy! I leaned back and took a full breath. The Gruffin, protruding her unkempt head between mine and Andy's, shrieked out a hope that we might encounter a load of hay *en route*. It was so lucky, she said. She was not disappointed.

From the outset it was obvious that the money expended upon the fanfare horn had been thrown away. No fanfare could have advertised Bill Bailey's approach more efficaciously than Bill himself. He was his own trumpeter. Whenever we passed a roadside cottage we found frantic

mothers garnering stray children into doorways, what time the fauna of the district hastily took refuge in ditches or behind hedges.

Still, all went well, as they say in reporting railway disasters, until we had travelled about four miles, when the near-side front wheel settled down with a gentle sigh upon its rim, and the tyre assumed a plane instead of a cylindrical surface. Ten minutes' strenuous work with a pump restored it to its former rotundity, and off we went again at what can only be described as a rattling pace.

After another mile or so I decided to take the helm myself, not because I thought I could drive the car well, but because I could not conceive how any one could drive it worse than Andy.

I was wrong.

Still, loads of hay are proverbially soft; and since the driver of this one continued to slumber stertorously upon its summit even after the shock of impact, we decided not to summon a fellow-creature from dreamland for the express purpose of distressing him with unpleasant tidings on the subject of the paint on his tail-board. So, cutting loose from the wreck, we silently stole away, if the reader will pardon the expression.

It must have been about twenty minutes later, I fancy, that the gear-box fell off. Personally I should never have noticed our bereavement, for the din indigenous to Bill Bailey's ordinary progress was quite sufficient to allow a margin for such extra items of disturbance as the sudden exposure of the gear-wheels. A few jets of a black and glutinous compound, which I afterwards learned to recognise as gear-oil, began to spout up through cracks in the flooring, but that was all. It was The Gruffin who, from her retrospective coign of vantage in the spider-seat, raised the alarm of a heavy metallic body overboard. We stopped the car, and the gear-box was discovered in a disintegrated condition a few hundred yards back; but as none of us was capable of restoring it to its

original position, and as Bill Bailey appeared perfectly prepared to do without it altogether, we decided to go on *in statu quo*.

The journey, I rejoice to say, was destined not to conclude without witnessing the final humiliation and exposure of Andy Finch. We had pumped up the leaky tyre three times in about seven miles, when Andy, struck by a brilliant idea, exclaimed:

“What mugs we are! What is the good of a Stepney wheel if you don’t use it?”

A trifle ashamed of our want of resource, we laboriously detached the Stepney from its moorings and trundled it round to the proper side of the car. I leaned it up against its future partner and then stepped back and waited. So did Andy. The Gruffin, anxious to learn, edged up and did the same.

There was a long pause.

“Go ahead,” I said encouragingly, as my young friend merely continued to regard the wheel with a mixture of embarrassment and malevolence. “I want to see how these things are put on.”

“It’s quite easy,” said Andy desperately. “You just hold it up against the wheel and clamp it on.”

“Then do it,” said I.

“Yes, do it!” said my loyal daughter ferociously. With me she was determined not to spare the malefactor.

A quarter of an hour later we brought out the pump, and I once more inflated the leaky tyre, while Andy endeavoured to replace the Stepney wheel in its original resting-place beside the driver’s seat. Even now the tale of his incompetence was not complete.

“This blamed Stepney won’t go back into its place,” he said plaintively. “I fancy one of the clip things must have dropped off. It’s rather an old-fashioned pattern, this of yours. I think we had better carry it back loose. After all,” he added almost tearfully, evading my daughter’s stony eye, “it doesn’t matter *how* you carry the thing, so long——”

He withered and collapsed. Ultimately we drove home with The Gruffin wearing the Stepney wheel round her waist, lifebuoy fashion. On reaching home I sent for Mr. Gootch to come and take Bill Bailey away and put him into a state of efficiency. Then I explained to Andy, during a most consoling ten minutes, exactly what I thought of him as a mechanic, a chauffeur, and a fellow-creature.

III

THE PASSING OF “BILL BAILEY”

It is a favourite maxim of my wife’s that *any* woman can manage *any* man, provided she takes the trouble to thoroughly *understand* him. (The italics and split infinitive are hers.) This formula, I soon found, is capable of extension to the relations existing between a motor-car and its owners. Bill Bailey and I soon got to understand one another thoroughly. He was possessed of what can only be described as an impish temperament. He seemed to know by instinct what particular idiosyncrasy of his would prove most exasperating at a given moment, and he varied his *répertoire* accordingly. On the other hand, he never wasted his energies upon an unprofitable occasion. For instance, he soon discovered that I had not the slightest objection to his back-firing in a quiet country road. Consequently he reserved that stunning performance for a crowded street full of nervous horses. He nearly always broke down when I took critical or expert friends for an outing; and the only occasions which ever roused him to high speed were those upon which I was driving alone, having dispatched the rest of the family by train to ensure their safe arrival.

Gradually I acquired a familiarity with most of the complaints from which Bill Bailey suffered—and their name was legion, for they were many—together with the symptoms which heralded their respective recurrences. In this connection I should like to set down, for the benefit of those who may at any time find themselves in a similar position, a few of the commonest causes of cessation of activity in a motor-car, gradual or instantaneous, temporary or permanent:—

A. Breakdowns on the part of the engine. These may be due to—

(1) Absence of petrol. (Usually discovered after the entire car has been dismantled.)

(2) Presence of a foreign body. *E.g.*, a Teddy Bear in the water-pump. (How it got there I cannot imagine. The animal was a present from the superstitious Gruffin, and in the *rôle* of Mascot adorned the summit of the radiator. It must have felt dusty or thirsty, and dropped in one day when the cap was off.)

(3) Things in their wrong places. *E.g.*, water in the petrol-tank and petrol in the water-tank. This occurred on the solitary occasion upon which I entrusted The Gruffin with the preparation of the car for an afternoon's run.

(4) Loss of some essential portion of the mechanism. (*E.g.*, the carburetter.) A minute examination of the road for a few hundred yards back will usually restore it.

B. Intermediate troubles.

By this I mean troubles connected with the complicated apparatus which harnesses the engine to the car—the clutch, the gears, the driving-shaft, etc. Of these it is sufficient to speak briefly.

(1) The Clutch. This may either refuse to go in or refuse to come out. In the first case the car cannot be started, and in the second it cannot be stopped. The former contingency is humiliating, the latter expensive.

(2) The Gears. These have a habit of becoming entangled with one another. Persons in search of a novel sensation are recommended to try getting the live axle connected simultaneously with the top speed forward and the reverse.

(3) The Driving-Shaft. The front end of this is comparatively intelligible, but the tail is shrouded in mystery. It merges into a thing called the Differential. I have no idea what this is. It is kept securely concealed in a sort of Bluebeard's chamber attached to the back-axle. Inquiries of mine as to its nature and purpose were always greeted by Mr. Gootch with amused contempt or genuine alarm, according as I merely displayed curiosity on the subject, or expressed a desire to have the axle laid bare.

C. Trouble with the car. (With which is incorporated trouble with the brakes and steering apparatus.)

It must not be imagined that the car will necessarily go because the engine is running. One of the wheels may refuse to go round, possibly because—

(1) You have omitted to take the brake off.

(2) Something has gone wrong with the differential. (I have no further comment to offer on this head.)

(3) It has just dropped off. (*N.B.* This only happened once.)

After a time, then, I was able not merely to foretell the coming of one of Bill Bailey's periods of rest from labour, but to diagnose the cause and make up a prescription.

If the car came to a standstill for no outwardly perceptible reason, I removed the bonnet and took a rapid inventory of Bill's most vital organs, sending The Gruffin back along the road at the same time, with instructions to retrieve anything of a metallic nature which she might discover there.

When Bill Bailey without previous warning suddenly charged a hedge or passing pedestrian, or otherwise exhibited a preference for the footpath as opposed to the roadway, I gathered that the steering-gear had gone wrong again. The Gruffin, who had developed an aptness for applied mechanics most unusual in her sex, immediately produced from beneath the seat a suit of blue overalls of her own construction, of which she was inordinately proud—I hope I shall be able to dress her as cheaply in ten years' time—and proceeded to squirm beneath the car. Here, happy as a queen, she lay upon her back on the dusty road, with oil and petrol dripping in about equal proportions into her wide grey eyes and open mouth, adjusting a bit of chronically refractory worm-and-wheel gear which I, from reasons of *embonpoint* and advancing years, found myself unable to reach.

Finally, if my nose was assailed by a mingled odour of blistering paint, melted indiarubber, and frizzling metal, I deduced that the cooling apparatus had gone wrong, and that the cylinders were red-hot. The petrol tap was hurriedly turned off, and The Gruffin and I retired gracefully, but without undue waste of time, to a distance of about fifty yards, where we sat down behind the highest and thickest wall available, and waited for a fall of temperature, a conflagration, or an explosion, as the case might be.

* * * * *

Bill Bailey remained in my possession for nearly two years. During that time he covered three thousand miles, consumed more petrol and oil than I should have thought possible, ran through two sets of tyres, and cost a sum of money in repairs which would have purchased a small steam yacht.

There were moments when I loved him like a brother; others, more frequent, when he was an offence to my vision. The Gruffin, on the other hand, having fallen in love with him on sight, worshipped him with increasing ardour and true feminine perversity the dingier and more repulsive he grew.

Not that we had not our great days. Once we overtook and inadvertently ran over a hen—an achievement which, while it revolted my humanitarian instincts and filled the radiator with feathers, struck me as dirt cheap at half a crown. Again, there was the occasion upon which we were caught in a police-trap. Never had I felt so proud of Bill Bailey as when I stood in the dock listening to a policeman's Homeric description of our flight, over a measured quarter of a mile. At the end of the recital, despite my certain knowledge that Bill's limit was about twenty-three miles an hour, I felt that I must in common fairness enter him at Brooklands next season. The Gruffin, who came to see me through, afterwards assured her mother that I thanked the Magistrate who fined me and handed my accusing angel five shillings.

But there was another side to the canvas. Many were the excursions upon which we embarked, only to tramp home in the rain at the end of the day, leaving word at Mr. Gootch's to send out and tow Bill Bailey home. Many a time, too, have Bill and I formed the nucleus of an interested crowd in a village street, Bill inert and unresponsive, while I, perspiring

vigorously and studiously ignoring inquiries as to whether I could play "The Merry Widow Waltz," desolately turned the starting-handle, to evoke nothing more than an inferior hurdy-gurdy melody syncopated by explosions at irregular intervals. Once, too, when in a fit of overweening presumption I essayed to drive across London, we broke down finally and completely exactly opposite "The Angel" at Islington, where Bill Bailey, with his back wheels locked fast in some new and incomprehensible manner,—another vagary of the differential, I suppose,—despite the urgent appeals of seven policemen, innumerable errand-boys, and the drivers, conductors, and passengers of an increasing line of London County Council electric tramcars, stood his ground in the fairway for nearly a quarter of an hour. Finally, he was lifted up and carried bodily, by a self-appointed Committee of Public Safety, to the side of the road, to be conveyed home in a trolley.

But all flesh is as grass. Bill Bailey's days drew to an end. The French-grey in his complexion was becoming indistinguishable from the red; his joints rattled like dry bones; his fanfare horn was growing asthmatic. Old age was upon him, and I, with the ingratitude of man to the faithful servant who has outlived his period of usefulness, sold him to Mr. Gootch for fifteen sovereigns and a small lady's bicycle.

Only The Gruffin mourned his passing. She said little, but accepted the bicycle (which I had purchased for her consolation) with becoming meekness.

At ten o'clock on the night before Bill Bailey's departure—he was to be sent for early in the morning—the nurse announced with some concern that Miss Alethea (The Gruffin) was not in her bed. She was ultimately discovered in the coach-house, attired in a pink dressing-gown and bath slippers. She was kneeling with her arms round as much of Bill Bailey as they could encompass; her long hair flowed and rippled over his

scratched and dinted bonnet; and she was crying as if her very heart would break.

IV

"BILL BAILEY" COMES AGAIN

A year later I bought a new car. It possessed four cylinders and an innumerable quantity of claims to perfection. The engine would start at the pressure of a button; the foot-brake and accelerator never became involved in an unholy alliance; it could climb any hill; and outlying portions of its anatomy adhered faithfully to the parent body. Pedestrians and domestic animals no longer took refuge in ditches at our approach. On the contrary, we charmed them like Orpheus with his lute; for the sound of our engine never rose above a sleek and comfortable purr, while the note of the horn suggested the first three bars of "Onward, Christian Soldiers!"

My wife christened the new arrival The Greyhound, but The Gruffin, faithful to the memory of the late lamented Bill Bailey, never referred to it as anything but The Egg-Boiler. This scornful denotation found some justification in the car's ornate nickel-plated radiator, whose curving sides and domed top made up a far-away resemblance to the heavily patented and highly explosive contrivance which daily terrorised our breakfast-table.

Of Bill Bailey's fate we knew little, but since Mr. Gootch once informed us with some bitterness that he had had to sell him to a Scotchman, we gathered that, for once in his life, our esteemed friend had "bitten off more than he could chew."

The Greyhound, though a sheer delight as a vehicle, was endowed with somewhat complicated internal mechanism, and I was compelled in consequence to retain the services of a skilled chauffeur, a Mr. Richards, who very properly limited my dealings with the car to ordering it round

when I thought I should be likely to get it. Consequently my connection with practical mechanics came to an end, and henceforth I travelled with my friends in the back seat, The Gruffin keeping Mr. Richards company in front, and goading that exclusive and haughty menial to visible annoyance by her supercilious attitude towards the new car.

Finally we decided on a motor trip to Scotland. There was a luggage-carrier on the back of the car which was quite competent to contain my wife's trunk and my own suit-case. The Gruffin, who was not yet of an age to trouble about her appearance, carried her *batterie de toilette* in a receptacle of her own, which shared the front seat with its owner, and served the additional purpose of keeping The Gruffin's slim person more securely wedged therein.

We joined the car at Carlisle, and drove the first day to Stirling. On the second the weather broke down, and we ploughed our way through Perth and the Pass of Killiecrankie to Inverness in a blinding Scotch mist. The Greyhound behaved magnificently, and negotiated the Spittal of Glenshee and other notorious nightmares of the bad hill-climber in a manner which caused me to refer slightingly to what might have happened had we entrusted our fortunes to Bill Bailey. The Gruffin tossed back to me over her shoulder a recommendation to touch wood.

Next day broke fine and clear, and we rose early, for we intended to run right across Scotland. I ate a hearty breakfast, inwardly congratulating myself upon not having to accelerate its assimilation by performing calisthenic exercises upon a starting-handle directly afterwards. At ten o'clock The Greyhound slid round to the hotel door, and we embarked upon our journey. Infatuated by long immunity from disaster, I dispatched a telegram to an hotel fifty miles away, ordering luncheon at a meticulously definite hour, and another to our destination—a hospitable shooting-box on the west coast—mentioning the exact moment at which we might be expected.

Certainly we were “asking for it,” as my Cassandra-like offspring did not fail to remark. But for a while Fate answered us according to our folly. We arrived at our luncheon hotel ten minutes before my advertised time, an achievement which pleased me so much that I wasted some time in exhibiting the engine to the courtly and venerable brigand who owned the hotel, with the result that we got away half an hour late. But what was half an hour to The Greyhound?

Blithely we sped across the endless moor beneath the September sun. The road, straight and undulating, ran ahead of us like a white tape laid upon the heather. The engine purred contentedly, and Mr. Richards, lolling back in his seat, took a patronising survey of the surrounding landscape. Evidently he rejoiced, in his benign and lofty fashion, to think how this glittering vision was brightening the dull lives of the grouse and sheep. Certainly the appearance of The Greyhound did him credit. Not a speck of mud defiled its body; soot and oil were nowhere obtrusive. Bill Bailey had been wont, during periods of rest outside friends’ front doors, to deposit a small puddle of some black and greasy liquid upon the gravel. The Greyhound was guilty of no such untidiness. Mr. Richards, to quote his own respectfully satirical words, preferred using his oil to oil the car instead of gentlemen’s front drives. Under his administration my expenditure on lubricants alone had shrunk to half of what it had been in Bill Bailey’s time.

But economy can be pushed to excess. Even as I dozed in the back seat, sleepily observing The Gruffin’s flying mane and wondering whether we ought not shortly to get out the Thermos containing our tea, there came a grating, crackling sound. The Greyhound gave a swerve which nearly deposited its occupants in a peat-hag; and after one or two zigzag and epileptic gambols came to a full stop.

“Steering-gear gone wrong, Richards?” I inquired.

“I don’t think so, sir,” replied Mr. Richards easily. “Seems to me it was a kind of a side sl—— Get out, sir! Get out, mum! The dam thing’s afire!”

We cooled the fervid glowing of the back-axle with a patent fire-extinguisher, and sat down gloomily to survey the wreck. Economy is the foundation of riches, but you must discriminate in your choice of economies. Axle-grease should not be included in the list. Mr. Richards, whether owing to a saving disposition or an æsthetic desire to avoid untidy drippings, had omitted—so we afterwards discovered—to lubricate the back-axle or differential for several weeks, with the result that the bearings of the off-side back wheel had “seized,” and most of the appurtenances thereof had fused into a solid immovable mass.

We sat in the declining rays of the sun and regarded The Greyhound. The brass-work still shone, and the engine was in beautiful running order; but the incontrovertible and humiliating fact remained that we were ten miles from the nearest dwelling and The Greyhound’s career as a medium of transport was temporarily closed. Even the biting reminder of The Gruffin that we could still employ it to boil eggs in failed to cheer us.

Restraining an impulse to give Mr. Richards a month’s warning on the spot, I conferred with my wife and daughter. We might possibly be picked up by a passing car, but the road was a lonely one and the contingency unlikely. We must walk. Accordingly we sat down to a hasty tea, prepared directly afterwards to tramp on towards our destination.

The wind had dropped completely, and the silence that lay upon the sleepy, sunny moor was almost uncanny. Imbued with a gentle melancholy, my wife and I partook of refreshment in chastened silence. Suddenly, as The Gruffin (considerably more cheerful than I had seen her for some days) was passing up her cup for the third time, a faint and irregular sound came pulsing and vibrating across the moor. It might have been the roar of a battle far away. One could almost hear the popping of rifles, the clash of steel, and the shrieks of the wounded.

Presently the noise increased in intensity and volume. It appeared to come from beyond a steep rise in the long straight road behind us. We pricked up our ears. I became conscious of a vague sense of familiarity with the phenomenon. The air seemed charged with some sympathetic influence.

“What is that noise, Richards?” I said.

“I rather *think*, sir,” replied Mr. Richards, peering down the road, “that it might be some kind of a——”

Suddenly I was aware of a distinct rise of temperature in the neighbourhood of my left foot. My daughter, with face flushed and lips parted, was gazing feverishly down the road. An unheeded Thermos flask, held limply in her hand, was directing a stream of scalding tea down my leg. Before I could expostulate she wheeled round upon me, and I swear there were tears in her eyes.

“It’s *Bill*!” she shrieked. “Bill Bailey! *My* Bill!”

She was right. As she spoke a black object appeared upon the crown of the hill, and, incredible to relate, Bill Bailey, puffing, snorting, reeking, jingling, back-firing, came lumbering down the slope, in his old hopeless but irresistible fashion, right upon our present encampment.

His lamps and Stepney wheel were gone, his back tyres were solid, and his erstwhile body of French-grey was now decked out in a rather blistered coat of that serviceable red pigment which adorns most of the farmers’ carts in the Highlands. But his voice was still unmistakably the voice of Bill Bailey.

He was driven by a dirty-faced youth in a blue overall, who presented the appearance of one who acts as general factotum in a country establishment which supports two or three motors and generates its own electric light. By his side sat a patriarchal old gentleman with a white

beard, in tweeds, hobnail boots, and a deerstalker cap—obviously a head ghillie of high and ancient lineage.

The spider-seat at the back was occupied, in the fullest sense of the word, by a dead stag about the size of a horse, lashed to this, its temporary catafalque, with innumerable ropes.

The old gentleman was politeness itself, and on hearing of our plight placed himself and Bill Bailey unreservedly at our disposal. His master, The M'Shin of Inversneishan, would be proud to house us for the night, and the game-car should convey us to the hospitable walls of Inversneishan forthwith. Tactfully worded doubts upon our part as to Bill's carrying capacity—we did not complicate matters by explaining upon what good authority we spoke—were waved aside with a Highlander's indifference to mere detail. The car was a grand car, and the Castle was no distance at all. Mr. Richards alone need be jettisoned. He could remain with The Greyhound all night, and on the morrow succour should be sent him.

Mr. Richards, utterly demoralised by his recent fall from the summit of autocracy, meekly assented, and presently Bill Bailey, packed like the last 'bus on a Saturday night, staggered off upon his homeward way. My wife and I shared the front seat with the oleaginous youth in the overall, while the patriarchal ghillie hung on precariously behind, locked in the embrace of the dead stag. How or where The Gruffin travelled I do not know. She may have perched herself upon some outlying portion of the stag, or she may have attached herself to Bill Bailey's back-axle by her hair and sash, and been towed home. Anyhow, when, two hours later, Bill Bailey, swaying beneath his burden and roaring like a Bull of Bashan, drew up with all standing at the portals of Inversneishan Castle, it was The Gruffin who, unkempt, scarlet, but triumphant, rang the bell and bearded the butler while my wife and I uncoiled ourselves from intimate association with the chauffeur, the ghillie, and the stag.

Next morning, in returning thanks for the princely manner in which our involuntary host had entertained us, I retailed to him the full story of our previous acquaintance with Bill Bailey. I further added, with my daughter's hot hand squeezing mine in passionate approval, an intimation that if ever Bill should again come into the market I thought I could find a purchaser for him.

He duly came back to us, at a cost of five pounds and his sea-passage, a few months later, and we have had him ever since.

Such is the tale of Bill Bailey. To-day he stands in a corner of my coach-house, an occupier of valuable space, a stumbling-block to all and sundry, and a lasting memorial to the omnipotence of human—especially feminine—sentiment.

Life-Like

By Martin Swayne

Royal Army Medical Corps

Colonel Wedge was a quiet, genial bachelor. If there was anything that seemed to distinguish him from the familiar type of retired officer, it was his great breadth of shoulder. He was well over fifty, but still vigorous and active. On the day after his arrival in Paris, whither he had come on a week's visit, he breakfasted at nine and spent the morning in visiting some public places of interest. He lunched at a restaurant near the Porte St. Martin, where he found himself in a typically Parisian atmosphere, and after smoking a cigar began to stroll idly along the streets. Chance directed his steps in a northerly direction, and about three in the afternoon he found himself in the Montmartre district.

He walked along in a casual manner, his hands clasped behind his back, watching everything with infinite relish. While passing up a side street his eye fell on a flamboyant advertisement outside a cinematograph show. The Colonel was not averse to cinematograph shows, and it struck him that here, perhaps, he might see something out of the ordinary. The poster was certainly lurid. It represented a man being attacked by snakes, and Wedge understood enough French to read the statement underneath that the representation was absolutely life-like, and that the death-agony was a masterpiece of acting.

"Rattlesnakes," reflected the Colonel, eyeing the poster. "It's wonderful what they do in the way of films nowadays. Of course, they've taken out the poison glands."

He stood for a short time studying the poster, which was extremely realistic, and then decided to enter. He went up to the ticket-office, which stood on the pavement, and paid the entrance fee. It was obvious that the establishment was not of the first order. A couple of rickety wine-shops

flanked it one on either side, and the ticket-office was apparently an old sentry-box with a hole cut in the back.

Wedge took his ticket and glanced up the street. It was a day of brilliant sunshine. At the far end of the narrow road there was a glimpse of the white domes of the Sacré Cœur, standing on its rising ground and looking like an Oriental palace. Only a few people were about, and the wine-shops were empty.

A shaft of sunlight fell on the poster of the man fighting with rattlesnakes, and the Colonel looked at it again. It attracted him in some mysterious way, probably because physical problems interested him.

“Seems to be in a kind of pit,” he thought. “Otherwise he could run for it. It is certainly life-like.”

He turned away, ticket in hand. A man standing before a faded plush curtain beckoned to him, and Wedge passed from the bright light of day into the darkness behind the curtain.

He could see nothing. Someone took his arm and led him forward. The Colonel blinked, but the darkness was complete. Somewhere on his left he could hear the familiar clicking of a cinematograph.

The hand on his arm piloted him gently along, and he had the impression of walking in a curve. But it seemed an intolerably long curve. Since he could not speak French, he was unable to ask how much farther he had to go. He felt vaguely that people were round him, close to him, and naturally concluded he was passing down the room where the performance was being held.

But where was the screen?

He could not see a ray of light. Heavy, impenetrable darkness was before him, and seemed to press on his eyelids like a cloth. Suddenly the hand on his arm was lifted. Wedge stopped, blinking.

“Look here,” he said, with a feeling of irritation, “where am I?”

There was no answer. He waited, listening. He could hear nothing. The clicking of the cinematograph was no longer audible.

Deeply perplexed, he held out his arms before him and took a step forward. His outstretched foot descended on—nothing.

Wedge fell forward and downwards with a sharp cry. His fall was brief, but it seemed endless to him. He landed, sprawling, on something soft. Before he could move he was caught and held down with his face pressed against the soft mass that felt like a heap of pillows. A suffocating, pungent odour assailed his nostrils, and gradually consciousness slipped away.

When Colonel Wedge came to his senses he found himself in a small room lit by an oil-lamp hung against the wall. He was lying on a heap of mattresses, bound hand and foot. At first he stared vaguely upwards. Directly overhead was a circular mark in the ceiling. The sound of voices struck on his ears, and, looking round, he saw a group of men talking at a table near by.

With startling suddenness memory came back. He glanced up at the ceiling. There was no doubt that the circular mark was the outline of the trap-door through which he had fallen. He did not attempt to struggle, but lay passively searching in his mind for some explanation of his position.

The men at the table were talking in loud voices, but they spoke in French. He could not understand what they said.

He looked round at them. Five of them—there were half a dozen—were roughly dressed, with blue or red handkerchiefs knotted round their throats; but one of them was of a different type, and looked like a prosperous business man. He was the spokesman and leader of the group, and Wedge noticed that he had a peculiarly evil, energetic type of face.

He spoke rapidly, occasionally nodding towards the heap of mattresses and employing violent gestures. From time to time he thumped the table before him. Finally he rose and crossed the room.

“My name is Dance,” he said. He stuck the cigar he was smoking into the corner of his mouth and went on speaking between his teeth. “I’m an Englishman by birth, and wonderfully fond of my fellow-countrymen. That’s why you are here. You’re just the man I was wanting, and when I saw you looking at that poster I could have hugged myself. What did you think of it? Good, eh? Sorry you didn’t see the film.”

He chuckled to himself.

Wedge looked at him steadily and made no reply. The other shrugged his shoulders and turned away. Some further discussion followed, and then all six left the room.

Wedge waited until the sound of their footsteps had died away in the passage without, and then raised himself. Owing to the way in which he was bound he could not stand up. He looked around keenly. There was only one door and no window. The walls were of rough brick, and it was clear the place was a kind of cellar. Save for the table and chairs there was no furniture. The stone floor was damp, and from one dark corner Wedge could hear the trickling of water. After the first scrutiny of his prison he lay back again on the mattresses and tried to think. He could hear no sound of the traffic or footsteps from the road, and guessed that it would be useless to shout. Save for the trickle of water and the occasional hissing and spurting of the lamp, the place was absolutely silent.

The atmosphere was thick and close. The flame of the lamp grew smaller and smaller, and finally expired. Wedge lay in the darkness, open-eyed, listening to the beating of his heart. He was thirsty. His throat was dry and his head ached, and the cords round his wrists and feet bit into the flesh. He made several powerful attempts to burst them, but in vain.

For what purpose did they want him? If it was simply a question of robbery, why was he kept prisoner? An eternity seemed to pass. In despair, he tried to sleep. But the question as to why he was in this prison repeated itself and made sleep impossible.

Wedge was a man of tried courage, but there was something sinister in his position that caused disagreeable thrills to pass down his back. The trap-door, the chloroform, the cords, the group of evil-looking men were not reassuring incidents. Moreover, the isolation in complete darkness with the monotonous trickling of water unnerved him.

An hour went by, and he made another violent attempt to release himself. His breath came in gasps. Before his shut eyes he saw sheets of red flame. But his efforts were useless. Thoroughly exhausted he lay still again, staring upwards.

Owing to some trick of vision, possibly because the strong sunlight had intensified the colouring of the poster while he was studying it, he saw a shadowy picture of the man fighting for his life in the pit full of rattlesnakes hovering before him in the darkness. He thought grimly that it would be some time before he would have the pleasure of seeing the representation of that film—perhaps never. The latter event was more likely. It was not probable that they would let him go free, because his freedom would mean their arrest.

[Illustration: “Wedge, turning as it moved, always faced it” (page 81).]

“They want me for some purpose,” he muttered. “But what it is, Heaven knows. It can’t be simple robbery. There’s no point in murdering me. I’m not a person of any importance, so I don’t see where the object of kidnapping comes in. Their game beats me, unless they’ve mistaken me for someone else.”

A step outside interrupted his reflections. He heard the door open. Something that sounded like a plate was put on the floor, and the steps

retreated down the passage. After a few minutes they became audible again, and a light showed in the doorway. A man appeared holding a candle. Colonel Wedge realised that it was the intention of his captors that he should take some nourishment, and decided that to do so would be the wisest course. There was no reason why he should weaken himself by abstinence.

He submitted to being fed by his jailer, and eagerly drank the harsh red wine that was offered to him. When the meal was finished he was left alone again, but the candle was put on the table. By watching its rate of decrease in length Wedge gained some idea of the passage of time. By a calculation based on the number of his heart-beats, which were normally sixty to the minute, he deduced that the candle would last for about four hours. As a matter of fact, Wedge's deduction was wrong. The candle burned for three hours. Wedge was unaware that his heart was beating eighty to the minute.

Months seemed to elapse before the candle shot up in a last flare. The Colonel stared at the walls, at the rough, unfaced bricks, at the trap-door in the ceiling. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep. He sat up at intervals and looked round him. He rolled from one side to another. But nothing helped to make the time pass more quickly, and when he was left again in darkness he felt for the first time in his life how easy it would be to go mad.

The tramp of feet roused him from a drowsy, half-conscious condition. The door was flung open and a lantern shone in Wedge's eyes. The men who had sat at the table had returned. Two of them cut the cords round his ankles and pulled him on to his feet. He stood with difficulty, for his legs were numb.

The man Dance, who had previously spoken to him, whose evil face had made an impression on the Colonel's mind, sat down at the table, and Wedge was placed before him.

“Speak no French?” he inquired.

“No.”

The man nodded, and played with a thick gold ring on one of his fingers. His eyes were fixed on the Colonel’s face.

“What am I here for?” asked Wedge, quietly.

“You’ll see soon.”

“Do you want my money?”

“We’ve taken that already.”

They looked at each other steadily. The others in the cellar shuffled uneasily. They did not seem to be so certain of themselves as the man at the table.

“You’re an English officer, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“And you’ve seen some fighting?”

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. He refused to submit to a cross-examination at the hands of this scoundrel.

“All right,” said the other. “Don’t get angry. I promise you that you’ll see some more fighting before you die.”

Something in the man’s expression made Wedge take a quick step towards the table.

“What do you mean? Are you going to kill me?”

There was no answer, but the silence was enough. Wedge relaxed his attitude slowly.

“Is it money you need?” he asked, after a pause.

“What’s the good of offering us money? Once you got out of this place, you would give us away to the police. Yes, we need money, but not from you.”

One thought dominated Wedge’s mind. It was clear that the situation did not demand any unnecessary heroism. If anything could effect his escape he was perfectly justified in making use of it.

“I will give you a thousand pounds, and will promise not to put the affair in the hands of the police,” he said.

“He offers money, and gives his word of honour to say nothing to the police!” exclaimed the other, looking at the men behind Wedge.

There was an outburst of violent opposition. They were wildly excited. They were all round Wedge, shouting and gesticulating and brandishing their fists in his face. He stood impassively in the centre of them with his hands bound. What was this riot? Why did the eyes of these men shine so strangely?

“Two thousand,” he said steadily.

“Impossible!” The man at the table jumped up. “This is only a waste of time.”

He caught up the lantern and went out. The others, pushing Wedge before them, followed. They passed through a long stone corridor, down some narrow steps, and stopped before an iron door. Wedge heard the fumbling of keys, the creak of a rusty lock, and the door swung open. The interior was dark.

Dance stood by the door, holding the lantern aloft. In obedience to a brief command Wedge’s hands were released.

“Hand him the club.”

A stout cudgel of twisted wood, with a heavy nobbed end, was thrust into his hands. But Wedge was a man of action, and he saw in a flash that if he was to escape from his unknown fate the opportunity had come. They were trying to push him through the door into the dark interior.

"*Vite! Il est dangereux!*" exclaimed the man with the lantern.

But Wedge was too quick. He swung the club swiftly round, and the lantern fell, smashed to atoms. In a moment he was seized by half a dozen hands. He fought powerfully, but they hung on to him grimly, and little by little he was thrust forward. He had not enough space to use the club. He dropped it and used his fists, and more than once struck the stone walls in the confusion of the struggle in the dark. Then someone got hold of his throat, while the others fastened on his arms, and he was thrown backwards. He heard the clang of the iron door and lay gasping on the floor.

A blinding white light suddenly shone down on him. He staggered to his feet and looked round, shading his eyes with his hands from the dazzling glare. He was in a circular space bounded by smooth white walls. The floor was sanded. Above him burned half a dozen arc-lamps, whose brilliant rays were reflected directly downwards by polished metal discs. The upper part of the place was in shadow, but he could make out an iron balcony running partly round the wall, about fifteen feet above the sanded floor.

Colonel Wedge went to the wall and began to examine its surface. It was smooth, and seemed made of painted iron. The outline of the door through which he had been flung was visible on one side, but directly opposite there was the outline of another door. He went towards it. It was also made of iron like the surrounding structure, and apparently opened outwards. He pushed at it, but it was shut.

A sound of something falling on the floor made him turn. The wooden cudgel had been thrown down from the iron platform above. Looking up, he could dimly see a number of faces staring down at him, and also a couple of box-like instruments, one at either end of the platform. It was difficult to see clearly, for the light of the arc-lamps was intense. He stared up, shielding his eyes, and then suddenly he saw what they were. A couple of cinematograph machines were trained on the floor below!

It was not until then that Wedge fully realised his position. The picture of the man fighting the rattlesnakes was suddenly explained. He remembered the pit. He walked to the centre and stood with clenched fists. Here was the pit. *Extremely life-like!*

He stooped and picked up the cudgel. At any rate, whatever he had to face, he would make a fight for it.

Mechanically he found himself watching the second door. It was through that door that the menace of death would come.

Up on the platform they were whispering together.

His brain was clear, and he felt calm. He knew that whatever came out from behind that door would have the intention to kill. And he knew, also, that it was not the wish of the onlookers that he should triumph. It would not be a fair fight. In the moments of suspense he wondered in a kind of deliberate, leisurely way what was coming. They would not repeat the rattlesnake picture. That had already had its victim. In this arena one man had acted the part of fear with marvellous realism—perhaps others as well.

Cudgel in hand, ready and braced, with his free hand at his moustache, Colonel Wedge waited, his eyes fixed on the door.

“Ah, I think you understand now,” said a voice out of the shadows above. “We hope that this will make a fine film, the finest of this series that we have done yet.”

Wedge did not move a muscle.

“We rely on you to do your best for us.”

Somewhere at the bottom of his heart the Colonel registered a vow that if he ever got out of that place alive he would kill Dance.

A chuckle followed and then silence, except for the sizzling of the arc-lamps.

Then he heard a sound of clicking. The cinematograph machines had begun.

“Ready?”

Wedge took his breath slowly. The door was opening.

He saw a gap of blackness widening in the white circular wall. The hand that was at his moustache fell to his side. The cudgel rose a trifle, and the muscles of his right arm stiffened. Inch by inch, without a creak, the door swung outwards until it stood widely open.

For a few seconds nothing appeared. The suspense was becoming unendurable, and Wedge had just made up his mind to approach when he saw an indistinct form moving in the background of the shadowy interior, and next moment a big yellow beast slipped out and stood blinking in the strong light. He recognised the flat diamond head and tufted ears in a moment. The door clanged behind it.

“Puma,” he muttered, with his eyes on the brute, and a spark of hope glowed in his heart. There were worse brutes to face single-handed than pumas, and he knew something of the capriciousness of the animal. It was just possible——

His thoughts ceased abruptly. The beast was moving. It slunk on its belly to the wall, and began to walk slowly round and round. Wedge, turning as it moved, always faced it. It quickened its pace into a trot, and as it ran it looked only occasionally at the man in the centre. It seemed more interested in the wall. At times it stretched its head and peered upwards.

In its lean white jaw and yellow eyes there was no message of hatred for the moment. Suddenly it stopped and listened. The clicking of the cinematograph had attracted it. It stood up against the wall, clawing at the paint. Then it squatted on its haunches, with its back to Wedge, and blinked up at the platform overhead.

The heavy fetid odour of the beast filled the air. Wedge relaxed himself a little, but the puma heard the movement, for it looked round swiftly. It behaved as if it had seen him for the first time, and began to pace round and round again, eyeing him. It came to a halt near the door from which it had emerged, and lay down flat, with its paws outstretched, watching Wedge. He caught the sheen of its eyes. He remained still, for at the slightest movement the brute quivered.

As yet he could read nothing vindictive in its look, but he knew that at any moment it might change into a raging, snarling demon and spring. Being a believer in the idea that animals are in some way conscious of the emotional state in others and act accordingly, he tried to banish all sense of fear and all sense of ill-will from his mind, and look at it calmly and indifferently.

The puma, with its fore-paws extended on the sand and its head raised, blinked lazily at him. It seemed half asleep by its attitude. Sometimes the brilliant eyes were almost shut.

“Mordieu!” said a voice above. “He wants rousing.”

In a flash the animal was on its feet, rigid and glaring up. Apparently the platform overhead roused its anger. Its tail began to whip from side to

side, and its lip lifted at one corner in a vicious snarl, uncovering the white fang.

A clamour of voices broke out. The whole aspect of the beast changed. Its eyes blazed. It stooped on its belly, glaring upwards. Was it possible it recognised an old enemy amongst the spectators?

Wedge waited anxiously, and the sweat began to break out on his brow.

With bared claws, the animal crouched, still looking upwards. It seemed to have forgotten Wedge. The men were shouting at it and stamping with their feet on the iron floor of the platform. The beast put one paw out and crept forward. The muscles rippled and bulged under the skin.

“It’s going to spring,” thought Wedge. “But it’s not looking at me.”

Slowly step by step the beast advanced. It passed scarcely two feet away from Wedge, and went on without looking at him. When it was almost directly under the platform it stopped and snarled upwards.

Then someone threw a lighted match on its back, and straightway it became transformed into the devil-cat of tradition.

Wedge was never quite clear as to its movements after that, for it flashed round the arena like a streak of yellow lightning He raised his club, but the brute was not after him. It went twice, and then a third time, round the white walls, and stopped for an instant, taut and low on the sandy floor. And then it shot up in a magnificent leap towards the shadows above the arc-lamps.

The shouts from the platform ceased suddenly, and then a wild hubbub broke out.

Wedge heard the rattling and scraping of the beast’s claws against the railings above and a shriek of terror. There was a stampede of feet. A loud series of snarls followed and the sound of a body falling heavily.

Wedge stood for a moment dazed. Then he dashed across to the door through which the beast had entered, and flung all his weight against it. He tried again and again with all the weight of his powerful shoulders. It yielded with a crash, and he fell flat into the cage on the other side, amongst the foul straw.

He was up in an instant. By the light of the arc-lamps in the arena he could make out that the cage had an iron grating on one side closed by a bolt. He thrust his hand through the bars and worked back the bolt. Next moment he was out of the cage and running down a dark stone corridor, cudgel in hand, and determined to brain anyone who stood in his path. At the top of a flight of steps he came to a door barred from the inside. He flung aside the fastenings and staggered out into the sweet night air.

When the police raided the cellars under the cinematograph show a few hours later, led by Wedge, they found the puma asleep in its open cage, and above, on the iron platform, all that was left of Mr. Dance, inventor and producer of life-like films.

It was not until daylight came that Wedge discovered they had blackened his eyebrows and drawn disfiguring lines across his face.

Lame Dogs

By Cosmo Hamilton

Royal Naval Air Service

The sun fell straightly upon a great golden cornfield. Already the sickle had been at work upon its edges, and tall bundles, among whose feet the vermilion poppy peeped, stood head-to-head at regular distances. Among the ripe heads of the uncut corn the intermittent puffs of a soft August breeze whispered, offering congratulations and perhaps condolences—congratulations mostly, because what is there more beautiful and right in all the year's usefulness than the glorious fulfilment of the spring's green promise?

All the hours of a busy morning had been marked off melodiously by the old clock of an older church which stood with maternal dignity among gravestones several fields away. It wanted only a few moments to the hour of one. A brawny son of the soil, tanned of face, neck, and arms, who had been working in the angle of the field nearest the road, had just laid down his sickle and his crooked stick.

He was hot, but satisfied. He was also sharp-set, and very ready for the dinner that awaited him, with beer, at his cottage on the outskirts of the village. He sang, quietly and monotonously, in a typical burring way, a song which was written in praise of boiled beef and carrots. And while he sang he dabbed his face and neck with a startling handkerchief of red and yellow.

Swallows, flying high, skimmed the air playfully. Flocks of sparrows moved quickly among the standing corn, no longer frightened by the tin with stones in it, that was rattled by a slow-footed boy in the distance. They were eager to get their fill of stolen fruits before their natural enemies removed it from their beaks. The air was alive with the glimmering heat, and the shadows of the trees were almost straight.

One sounded, and before the bell's reverberations had blown away, a note of discord in the delicious harmony was struck by the sudden appearance of a man, who leaned on the white gate which divided the field from the road.

He was a short, slight, odd-looking creature, dressed in clothes that were rather too smart, and a green dump hat a little the worse for wear. His clean-shaven face, mobile and curiously lined, was pale and a little pinched, and the whole limp appearance of the man showed that he was only just recovering from an illness. Across one shoulder a knapsack was slung, and behind his left ear there rested a cigarette. A pearl was stuck in a rather loud tie, and there was a large ring on one of his little fingers.

There was something both comic and pathetic In the figure, and everything that was peculiarly the very antithesis of the exquisite rural surroundings. The initials "R. D." were stencilled on the knapsack, and they stood for Richard Danby, a name that was well known in towns, but wholly unknown among cornfields and under the blue, unsmoked sky.

Danby, who had gladly leaned on the gate to rest, watched the big, muscular man for a moment, with eyes in which there was admiration, and listened to the unmusical rendering of a song which had trickled, note by note, into the country from London, with amusement. He then adopted an air of forced cheerfulness and clapped his hands.

"Bravo!" he said. "Bravo!"

Peter Pippard turned slowly, antagonistically.

"Eh?" he said.

The little man waved his ringed hand.

"I said 'Bravo'—well rendered. What is it? An aria from *Faust*, or a little thing of your own?"

The big man was puzzled and surprised.

“Eh?” he said again.

Danby was not to be beaten. There was something in his manner which showed that he was in the habit of addressing himself to audiences and talking for effect.

“How delightful,” he continued, with fluent insincerity, “to find a peasant in song! A merry heart wags all the day. Who wouldn’t be happy among the golden corn, in touch with Nature, with the field-bugs gambolling over one’s back!”

“Eh?”

Danby laughed.

“You find me a little flowery; I am flying too high for you. I am indulging in aeroplanics. I’ll come down to the good red earth. Marnin’, matey. How’s t’crops?”

The imitation of the country accent was ridiculously exaggerated. The farm-hand examined the town man searchingly and suspiciously.

“Eh?” he said again.

“Beat again!” said Danby, with a shriek of laughter.

Pippard went closer, but slowly.

“Want onythin’, mister?” he asked.

“No. Oh Lord, no! I only want to get some other word out of you than ‘eh.’”

“Oh,” said Pippard.

“Thanks. Thanks most awfully. Now we’re moving.... Well, how’s the corn? It looks fine and fat.”

“Ah,” said Pippard, grinning broadly and affectionately.

The little man bowed. He seemed to be saying things which would arouse laughter among an invisible audience.

“Again I thank you. Yes, very fine and fat. You’ve been punching out and giving them thick ears. What?”

The examination was continued.

“You doan’t seem ter be talkin’ sense, mister.”

Another shriek of laughter disturbed the characteristic peacefulness.

“Congratulations! You’ve discovered me. How can I talk sense when I’m trying to be sociable? You don’t object to a little bright conversation, do you?”

“Noa.”

“Well, we’ll cut generalities and come to facts. How’s the twins?”

“Ain’t got no twins.”

“Nonsense! I don’t believe it. A great, big, brawny fellow like you. I take it you’ve got some nippers?”

Pippard chuckled. “Three girls and two boys.”

“Ah, that’s something like! Again congratulations! It’s very kind of you to ask me to come over. Since you’re so pressing, I think I will.” He climbed over the gate a little painfully and walked jauntily into the field.

The farm-hand broke into a laugh. “Ah reckon as ’ow you’re a funny man, ain’t you?”

The little man became suddenly serious, so suddenly and so eagerly serious, that if Pippard had been endowed with the first glimmerings of psychology, he would have been startled and a little nervous. “Are you

joking, or do you mean it? Is it possible that I make you laugh? Is it possible?"

"The very sight o' you gives me a ticklin' inside," was the reply.

Danby seized the brawny and surprised hand and wrung it warmly. "God bless you, dear old Hodge!" he said hoarsely. "God bless you!" Then he laughed merrily. "You make me feel like an attack of bronchitis."

The feeble joke went home. Pippard roared. "There you goes agin," he said. "What *are* yer, mister? A hartist?"

"An artist? Oh, dear no. Oh, God bless me, no! I'm an artiste."

"What's the difference, any'ow?"

If the little man had asked for his cue, he could not have got it more readily. "An artist earns his bread-and-butter by putting paint on canvas, and an artiste gets an occasional dish of tripe and onions by putting paint on his face."

"Ah reckon as 'ow you're an artiste, mister, although Ah can't see no paint on yer face."

"I washed over twelve months ago," said Danby sadly. "Oh, by the way, am I trespassing?"

"Well, it all depends on wot ye're a-goin' ter do."

"Eat, old boy. If you've no objection I'm going to spread out my *hors d'œuvres* and *pâté de foie gras*, and lunch al-fresco."

"Don't onderstand a blame wurd," said Pippard, grinning.

"Putting it in plain English, I'm going to wrestle with half a loaf of bread and two slices of cold ham. Will you join me? Do." The invitation was made eagerly. "Stay here and let me hear you laugh. It does me more good than a whole side of streaky bacon."

Pippard scratched his head doubtfully. “Well, Ah told th’ old ’ooman as ’ow Ah’d be wome for dinner,” he said.

“The old woman must not be disappointed. Do you pass a pub on your way home?”

“Can’t go anywhere from ’ere without passin’ a poob.”

Danby squeezed a shilling into the great sun-tanned fist.

“Well, call in and get a drink.”

“Thankee, Ah doan’t mind if Ah do.”

“Drink to my health. I don’t suppose you want a drink more than I want health.” He walked round the farm-labourer admiringly. He looked like a smooth-haired terrier who had suddenly met a St. Bernard. “My word, I’d give something to be a man like you. What muscle, what bones, what a back! What a hand! It’s as big as a leg of mutton. Do you ever get tired of being healthy? Do you ever wake up in the morning and say: ‘O Lord, I’m still as strong as an ox—why can’t I get a nice thumping headache to keep me in bed?’”

It was altogether too much for the man who rose with the sun and went to bed with the sun and worked out in the fields all day long; the big, simple, healthy, natural man, whose life was a series of seasons, to whom there was no tragedy except bad weather, and a lack of work and wages. This odd little creature, who said unexpected things as though he meant them, and asked funny questions seriously, was “a comic”—such a man as the clown who came with the circus twice a year, and played the fool in the big tent which was pitched on the green and lighted with flares of gas. Pippard laughed so loudly that he scared the eager sparrows.

“There you go,” he said. “Ah reckon as ’ow you was born funny.”

Danby eyed him keenly and wistfully. “Are you laughing at me?” he asked. “*Me?*”

“Laffin’? Why, you’d make an old sow laff.”

“You amaze me,” said Danby. He gave the man another shilling. “Get further drinks on your way back. You’re—you’re a pink pill for pale people, old boy.”

“Ah *must* go,” said Pippard reluctantly.

“Yes, you trudge off to the old woman and get your dinner. I’ll drink your health in a glass of water and a tabloid.”

Pippard got into his coat and re-lit a short black clay.

“Well, good day, and thankee.”

“Good day, and thank *you*.” Danby held out his hand. It was thin and pale. It was grasped and shaken monstrously. “That’s right—hurt it. Go on; hurt it. You make me feel almost manly.... Good day and good luck! My love to the old woman and the kids, and the rabbit, and the old dog, and granny.”

Laughing again, the big man marched off, made small work of the gate, and trudged away. Danby followed him up to the gate, and stood watching him curiously and admiringly, and as he watched he spoke his thoughts aloud.

“Good day, giant,” he said. “Good day, simple son of the soil, who eats hearty, drinks like a fish, and digests everything. Good-bye, man who knows nothing, and doesn’t want to know anything. I’d give ten years of my life for five of yours any day. Well, well.”

He turned with a sigh, took off his hat and hung it on a twig of the hedge, and then divested himself of his knapsack. This he unstrapped, and, taking out a napkin, spread it with a certain neatness on the grass, and set

upon it a loaf, a piece of Cheddar cheese, a lettuce, and several slices of ham wrapped in paper, a knife and fork. To this not unappetising meal he added a large green bottle of water.

“Ah!” he said. A sudden thought struck him. He put his finger and thumb into a waistcoat pocket, and brought out a small bottle of tabloids. He swallowed one with many grimaces and much effort. He sighed again and sat down. He looked with feigned interest at the eatables in front of him for several minutes. He then shook his head and gave an expressive gesture. “No,” he said aloud, in order that he might not feel quite so lonely. “No, not hungry. Beautiful food, clean napkin, lettuce washed in the brook, no appetite—not one faint semblance of a twist!”

It appeared from the startled flight of a thrush from the hedge that R. D. was not to be lonely after all. Another person bent over the gate, and looked into the cornfield, seemed perfectly satisfied, and climbed over. “This is all right,” she said. “Carlton, S.W. Oh!”

The exclamation was involuntary. The girl caught sight of the man and pulled up short.

Danby sprang to his feet. The girl was pretty; and although her once smart clothes were shabby, and her shoes very much the worse for wear, she looked a nice, honest, frank creature, aglow with health and youth and optimism. Danby caught up his hat, put it on, and took it off again in his best society manner.

“No intrusion,” he said. “Just a little al-fresco lunch, nothing more.”

The girl smiled. Her teeth were very small and white and regular. “That was my idea,” she said. “Not in the way, I hope?”

“Oh, please,” replied Danby. “The sight of some one eating may inspire me and give me the much-desired appetite.”

A ringing laugh was caught up by the gentle breeze.

“I should like to be able to eat enough to starve mine. Good morning!”

“Good morning!” said Danby. He bowed again, and hung his hat back on the twig. He was not a little disappointed. He had hoped for conversation and companionship. He sat down, but with interested eyes watched the girl unpack her luncheon quickly and deftly. She had no napkin. She spread her bread and meat on a sheet of newspaper, and cleaned her knife by thrusting it into the earth and wiping it on the grass. He noticed that her shoes were very dusty, and came to the conclusion that she had walked some distance. He was right. He caught her eye and looked away quickly.

“I beg pardon!” he said.

“Granted, I’m sure.” Danby’s manners were excellent.

“You haven’t got such a thing as a pinch of salt, I suppose?”

“I can oblige you with all the condiments, including a little A1 sauce.”

The girl laughed again. It was a charming laugh. “Oh, I can do without that,” she said.

Danby, only too glad of an excuse to be of use, scrambled to his feet and made his way across the golden stubble to the girl’s side. In his hand he held a small tobacco-tin. He opened it and held it out.

“Navy-cut?” she said, with wide-eyed surprise.

“An old ‘Dreadnought’ turned into a merchant ship. It’s quite clean.”

“Oh, thanks most awfully!” She helped herself to salt.

“Not at all,” said Danby. “Any little thing like that.... Good day!”

“Good day!” she said.

But Danby did not move. The girl's kind heart was reflected in her blue eyes. Never in his life had he needed sympathy and companionship so desperately. He felt that even his long-lost appetite would return if she were to invite him to eat with her.

She too was lonely, although her indomitable courage did not permit her to own it, even to herself. There was, too, something about the little man that was very attractive, something which made her feel sorry for him. She wished that he would ask her if he might join her and bring his own food. What was it about him which reminded her of some one she had seen before?

"Rather nice here, isn't it?" she said.

He replied quickly, eagerly.

"Charming!" he said. "So sylvan."

"So whater?"

"Sylvan. French for rustic."

"Oh, French!"

"Yes; I beg your pardon."

"Good day!" she said.

"Good day!" he replied.

He returned reluctantly to his pitch. He felt that he deserved his dismissal. It was a very foolish thing to have shown that he was something of a scholar. Evidently she considered that he was putting on side.

He sat down and made a sandwich. He felt that he could eat it with some enjoyment if he were seated on the other side of her square of newspaper. As it was....

The girl gave a short laugh.

“I’m afraid I’m a great nuisance,” she began apologetically.

“Not at all. Far from it.” There was another chance, then.

“You haven’t got such a thing as a touch of mustard, I suppose?”

“Oh yes, I have. Almost quite fresh.”

He got up again, and carried a little cold-cream pot with him.

“Oh, thank you!” She took the pot and gazed at its label, with raised eyebrows.

“It’s a has-been,” he said hastily. “I’m a bit of an engineer. Everything comes in useful.”

“Oh—thanks frightfully.” She helped herself.

“Honoured and delighted.” He remained standing over her.

She looked up.

“Anything I can do for you, now?”

“Yes, if you would. When you came here you said something about Carlton Hotel.”

“Oh, that was a poor attempt at wit.”

Danby’s hand went up to his tie. It was extraordinary how nervous he felt these days.

“Don’t think me intrusive, but suppose we imagine that this is the Carlton Hotel, and that all the tables are full except one.”

“Well?”

“Well, in that case, as you and I both wish to lunch, it would be very natural for us to be put at the same table, wouldn’t it? Do you take me?”

The girl laughed heartily.

“Come on, then. Two’s company.”

“How kind you are!” said Danby. “It will give me an appetite for the first time for months.” He hurried to his belongings and brought them back. “I know this is very irregular, our not having been introduced, but I don’t think under the circumstances it will cause a scandal in high life.”

“No, nor a paragraph in the weeklies.”

Danby respread his napkin and arranged his things on it. A sudden unexpected sensation of high spirits infected him.

He adopted what he considered to be the manner of a man of the world.

“Waitah, waitah!” he called, shooting his cuffs. “Great heaven, where’s that waitah! I shall really have to lodge a complaint with the manager. Hi! you in last week’s shirt, her ladyship and I have been waiting here for five minutes and no one’s been near us. It’s a disgrace. Don’t stand gaping there, sir, with a Swiss grin. Alley-vous ang. Gettey-vous gone toute suite, and bringey moi le menu. Verfluchtes, geschweinhund!” He waved the imaginary waiter away. “Pray pardon my heat, Lady Susan.”

The girl was intensely amused.

“Oh, certainly, Lord Edmund,” she replied, assuming an elaborately refined accent.

Danby kept it up.

“Do you find the glare of the electric light too much for you? Shall I complain about the orchestra?”

“One must endure these things in these places, your lordship. Were you riding in the Row this morning?”

“Yaas.” Danby twirled an imaginary moustache. “I had a canter. My mare cast a shoe—sixteen buttons. I rode her so hard that she strained her hemlock. She’s a good little mare. Has fourteen hands, and plenty of action. She’s a bit of a roarer, but then her mother was ridden by a Cabinet Minister.”

“You haven’t taken to a car, then?”

“Oh, yes. I’ve got one Fit and two Damlers. The annoying thing is, I’ve just lost my chauffeur.”

“Oh, really? How?”

“He dropped an oath into the petrol-tank and was seen no more.”

“What an absurdly careless person!”

Danby dropped acting, and eyed the girl keenly.

“I say,” he exclaimed, “that was good!”

“So’s that ham,” said the girl involuntarily.

Instantly Danby’s fork prodded the best piece.

“Have some. Do!”

“Sure you can spare it?”

“It would be a pity to waste it. I can’t tackle more than one slice.”

The girl held out a slice of bread.

“Haven’t seen ham for ten days,” she said simply. “It’s an awfully odd thing.”

“What? The ham?”

“No; your face.”

Danby laughed.

“You’re not the first who’s thought so.”

“And your voice is familiar, too,” said the girl.

Danby pretended to misunderstand. She had provided him with a chance he simply could not resist.

“Familiar? Oh, don’t say that. I thought I was behaving like an undoubted gentleman—one of the old régime.”

The girl examined the little man with a sudden touch of excitement.

“Look here,” she said. “Tell me the truth. Haven’t you been a picture-postcard?”

“Yes,” said Danby bitterly, “oh dear, yes! A year ago I was to be found in all the shops, between Hackenschmidt and the German Emperor.”

“I’ve got it!” she cried. “I know you.”

“No, you don’t,” said Danby.

“I do. I recognise you.”

“I think not. No one could recognise *me* now.”

“But I do. You’re Dick Danby—*the* Dick Danby. The famous Dick Danby. The Dick Danby who used to set all London laughing, who played Widow Twankey at Drury Lane, and topped the bill at the Tivoli and the Pav.”

The little man’s thin pale hands went up to his face.

“Oh, don’t!” he said, bursting into tears. “I can’t bear it.”

For a moment the girl was not sure whether this unexpected emotion was not part of the celebrated funny man's comic method. She was about to laugh, when she found that Danby's shoulders were shaking with very real and very terrible sobs. She was intensely surprised and upset and touched. She had never seen a man cry before. She put a soft hand on his arm.

"Oh, Mr. Danby," she said, "what is it—what's the matter?"

"Haven't you heard? Dick Danby's done for—gone under—gone *phut*. Dick Danby that was; Dick Danby that is no more. Dick Danby, that used to make 'em laugh, is a broken man. Oh, my God!"

[Illustration: "He came forward with a life-like walk and smile. 'Oh, how do you do, my dear Mrs. Richmansworth?' he said" (page 95).]

"Oh, don't go on like that!" said the girl brokenly. "You'll make me cry if you do. What's happened, Mr. Danby?"

The little man shook himself angrily. He was ashamed of himself. He didn't know that he had become so weak, so unstrung, so little master of himself.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've never cried before. It was your recognising me. I didn't think any one could recognise me as I am now. It was overwork, overstrain, three halls a night—I couldn't stand it. I tried to struggle on, but it was no use. I earned my living as a funny man. Can you imagine what it means to a funny man to find that his jokes don't go? Can you imagine what it meant for me to stand waiting in the wings for my number to go up, trembling all over with fear and fright, and then to face the public that used to roar with delight, and get a few scattered hands? Oh, those awful nights! The crowd, no longer my friends, who struck matches and talked. The look of pity on the face of the conductor, and the few words from the stage door when I crept away: 'Never mind, Mr. Danby; can't always expect to knock 'em, y'know.' Do you wonder

that I fretted myself into an illness? Do you wonder that I've been creeping about the country, afraid to face the managers? I'm done. I'm a funny man gone unfunny. I'm the Dick Danby that can't get his laughs."

The girl listened to this painful confession with intense sympathy. She too had earned a hard living on the music-hall stage. She too knew what it was to fail in her anxious endeavour to win applause. She too was at that moment tramping to London in search of work, with only a few shillings between the lodging-house and the Salvation Army shelter. There was something very different between her case and Richard Danby's. She was an insignificant member of a large army of music-hall artistes whose place was always at the very beginning or the very end of the programme. When she had the good fortune to be in work, her salary was a bare living wage, and it was only by stinting herself of the few luxuries of life that she could put by a few pounds for a rainy day. Dick Danby's case was utterly—almost ludicrously—different. His salary for years had been large enough to take her breath away. He had earned more in a week than she had earned in a year. His health had broken down, and his nerves and confidence had left him, but, at any rate, he was not faced, or likely to be faced, with starvation and the Embankment, and other terrors that were unmentionable.

"Don't take it to heart, Mr. Danby," she said cheerily. "You'll get better, never fear, and knock 'em again. And, until then, you can be a country gentleman, and enjoy yourself. Think of all the money you've made!"

Danby gave a curious little laugh.

"And spent," he said. "Money? Oh, yes, I made money—money to burn—and I burnt it—in the usual way. I thought my day would go on for ever, but, like other thoughtless fools, I made a mistake. It came to a sudden end."

“But—but you don’t mean to tell me that you haven’t saved, Mr. Danby?”

“Saved?” Danby laughed again. “Have you ever heard that the word ‘save’ isn’t in the dictionary of the men who earn their living behind the footlights? I’ve got just enough left to keep me on the road till the end of the summer.”

“And then?”

“And then—the workhouse or the prison.”

“Never, never!” cried the girl. “Never!”

A great thrill ran through the little man’s veins. The emphatic cry was the best thing he had heard for many long, depressing months. The fact that it came from a shabby girl who might be in a worse plight than himself did not seem to matter.

“But what am I to do?” he asked.

The girl did not hesitate.

“Go back to the halls with new and better turns,” she said strongly.

Danby shuddered, and went back, snail-like, into his shell.

“I couldn’t. I couldn’t face ’em. Who’d have me now?”

“The Coliseum; the Hippodrome.”

“They’d never look at me. *Me?* They only want good stuff—first-rate stuff—all stars.”

“But you are a star!”

“A fallen star. No; it’s the workhouse for me. I’m a ‘has-been,’ a waster.”

“Who will be again,” said the girl. “Mr. Danby, I know *you*, and what you’re capable of. *I’ve* been in the same bill with you, and you haven’t *begun* to show ’em what you can do yet.”

Danby looked at this girl, whose young voice quivered with confidence, with a new interest.

“*You* in the same bill with *me*!”

“Yes. You’ve never heard of the Sisters Ives?”

Danby wrinkled up his forehead.

“The Sisters Ives? Fanny and Emily Ives?”

“I’m Fanny. Emily’s dead. We did pretty well together, but somehow—I dunno, I don’t seem to catch on alone. I’m tramping back to London.” She was unable to keep her resolutely cheerful voice quite steady, or prevent her smiling mouth from trembling.

Danby bent forward and caught Fanny’s hand, and held it warmly.

“Oh, my dear,” he said. “My dear.”

There was no longer any need for society manners between these two, nor introductions nor small-talk. They had become brother and sister—two human beings on the same hard road.

“So we’re both of us lame dogs, eh?” he said.

“Yes,” said Fanny, “but not too lame to give each other a hand over the stile. *I’m* not going to give up barking, and you’re not, either.”

“I’ve got no bark left in me,” said Danby sadly. “Not even a growl.”

The girl sprang to her feet. Her young body seemed to be alight with energy.

“Don’t talk nonsense, Mr. Danby!” she said. “Cock up your tail, go springy on your feet, and come back to London, and give ’em a bit of the old. D’you mean to tell me that you can’t remember the knack you had of doing the blear-eyed major?”

Danby was beginning to feel horribly excited. His depression seemed to be lifting like a mist.

“I can remember nothing,” he said irritably. “I tell you I’m no good. I’ve lost my pluck!” He said these things merely in the hope that they might be denied.

“Go on. Pluck! You only want a shove. I’m not going to have any of that sort of thing, believe me. You’ve got to wake up, you have. You’ve got to be brought in from grass and stuck into harness again. Now, no nonsense. I’m the great B. P., I am, for the time being. Now, then, on you come. The blear-eyed major, quick. We’ll take the song for sung. Come to the patter!”

Danby’s fingers twitched, and already he had flung out his chest and squared his shoulders.

“I—I can’t,” he said.

“You shall!” said Fanny.

“But—but what about make-up?”

Fanny nearly gave a shout of triumph. It had got as far as make-up. She was winning!

“Make-up!” she scoffed. “A great artiste wants no make-up!”

“But I must have a moustache. I never did the major without something to twirl.”

Fanny’s quick hands were up to her hair.

“Here you are,” she said, holding out a curl. “Bit of my extra. Go on now. Get it up.”

Danby caught it, and laughed. He was shaking with excitement.

“You—you inspire me,” he said. “You—fill me with new life. How can I stick it on? I know. Mustard!”

He rushed to the cold-cream pot, put his fingers into it, rubbed the thick yellow stuff on his upper lip, and stuck on the curl. Then he seized his hat, cocked it on at an angle of forty-five, buttoned up his coat, and strutted about like an irascible bantam cock.

“Armay? Armay? My dear lady, we have no Armay! It was taken over by a lawyer as a hobby. It’s a joke, a bad joke, at which nobody laughs. When you ask about the Armay you go back to the days of my youth, when I was in the 45th—a deuce of a feller too, I give you my word. We officers of Her Majesty’s British Armay were fine fellows, handsome dorgs, my dear lady; and I think I may say I am the last of the fruitay old barkers who could make love as well as they could fight. Oh, l’amour, l’amour! Do you kiss?”

There was in this rapidly touched-in sketch something of portraiture which was not spoilt by the banality of the patter. It was, perhaps, the portrait of the stage-major, but it was the portrait of a man who might conceivably have lived even for the strong note of caricature.

Fanny danced with delight, and clapped her hands until they smarted.

“Hot stuff, Mr. Danby; very hot stuff!”

“No; it’s rotten. Hopeless. You’d better give me up!” Danby, still afraid to believe in himself, took off the impromptu moustache and unbuttoned his coat.

“Give you up! I’ll see you further. Now, then. The woman turn. Quick. You were a scream as a woman, Mr. Danby dear.”

“The woman! How can I?” He looked round for his properties—wig, bonnet, dress, umbrella, little dog. His hands fluttered impotently.

Fanny was ready for him—ready for anything. She was playing the angel, the Florence Nightingale. She was bringing back a human being to life, to a sense of responsibility, to a realisation of power, putting him on his feet again. She intended to win.

“Here you are,” she said. “Get into this.”

With quick, deft fingers she undid her belt and some hooks, slipped her skirt down, stepped out of it, and threw it at him. In her short, striped petticoat she looked younger and prettier and more honest than ever.

Danby gave a gurgle of excitement.

“Oh!” he said. “Oh, Miss Ives, you—you beat me, you——” He got into the skirt.

“That’s the notion,” she said. “Now get into this.” She had whipped off her hat and held it out.

Danby took it. If Pippard had caught sight of him as he stood among the stubble in a skirt beneath his coat he would have fallen into what might turn out to be a dangerous fit of laughter.

“But how about hair?” asked Danby. “Oh, I know.”

It was an inspiration. He darted to the nearest rick, plucked out a handful of golden corn, twisted it into a sort of halo, put it on turbanwise, and placed the hat on top. The effect was excellent; but it was the expression of the little actor’s face which did more to put before his audience of one the garrulous, spiteful, prying woman than the skirt and hat put together.

He came forward with a life-like walk and smile.

“Oh, how do you do, my dear Mrs. Richmansworth?” he said. “I’m afraid I’m a little late, but I only just remembered that it’s the third Thursday. I see you’ve got a new knocker. It represents a gargoyle, or a Chinese god, does it not? Or is it a fancy portrait of your husband? How is dear Mr. Richmansworth? Better! Ah, I wish I could say the same for mine. *My* husband.... But there; the least said the soonest mended. I see that you’ve been having some coal in to-day. Isn’t it dreadful how coal has risen? I don’t call it coal now—I call it yeast. My husband.... But let us talk of pleasant things. I see that you’ve lost your next-door neighbour. She was a good woman, and a great personal friend of mine; but I must say, in all fairness and in very truth, that she won’t be missed, for her tongue was bitter and her words poison. No, thank you! I will not take tea. I was foolish enough to drink a cup at Mrs. Snodgrass’s; and although I don’t wish to go into details, I might just as well have swallowed a cannon-ball. I’m that swollen, I could hardly put my gloves on. I think it’s called gastritis.”

Fanny roared with delight. The absurd patter was said with an unmistakable touch of humour which would have appealed irresistibly to any music-hall audience.

“Good old Dick Danby!” she cried. “It’s a case of six weeks at the Coliseum and fifteen on the road, with a star line on the bills. Give me my skirt.”

“I beg your pardon!” He got out of it quickly. “Oh, if only I dared! If only I had the pluck to face my friends in front again! ‘Return of Mr. Richard Danby,’ eh?”

“That’s it! It’s a cert.! It’s fine! You’re up to your best form. You only want a couple of good songs, and your face will gleam again in all the shop windows.”

Danby put his trembling hands on the girl's shoulders.

"Oh, Miss Ives! Oh, Fanny, you're better than all the medicine. You're a lady doctor—a hospital of lady doctors. You've bucked me up. You've given me back my pluck. Come on—to London—to London!"

"Yes," cried Fanny, "to London!"

Danby ran to his knapsack and began to pack it feverishly. The colour had returned to his face. His eyes were alight. He laughed as he packed. They both laughed; and when, a few minutes later, they faced each other again, ready for the road, they both looked as if a fairy had touched them with her wand.

"Your sister's dead," said Danby, "and you're down on your luck. Join forces with me, and we'll do a turn together—*this* turn, *this* story, just as we've done it here, and we'll call it 'Lame Dogs.'"

Fanny's tears started to her eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Danby, do you mean that?"

Danby almost shouted with excitement.

"Mean it? I never meant anything so seriously in my life. Dick Danby and Fanny Ives at ten o'clock nightly. That's what I mean, my dear. You've done it. You've helped a lame dog over a stile. In future, I won't work only for myself. I'll work for you too. Little Dick Danby's on his feet again. Little Dick Danby's believed in. He's come face to face with Miss Fanny Hope Faith Charity Ives, and he won't let her go. Is it a contract?"

Fanny tried to take the outstretched hand. She tried to speak, and failed. Danby bent down and put his lips on her sleeve. Then he led her to the stile, helped her over, and together they took the road which led to London.

The Silver Thaw

By R. E. Vernede

Rifle Brigade

A silver thaw had set in. The icy rain fell so suddenly and so quickly that Masson felt his car skid on what had been a dry—almost a dusty—high-road before he was well aware of the cause. Two minutes later the imperative necessity of pulling up became apparent, and he came to a stop at the end of a hundred yards' slide.

"If it had been downhill," he thought to himself, "the depreciation on this particular four and a half horse-power de Dion would have been considerable. I suppose I'm in luck."

The luck, on second thoughts, was of a very dubious kind. A mist, following on the break of the frost, had already obscured the beauty of the night; the roadway seemed absolutely deserted, and the nearest approach to a village was, as Masson guessed, some five miles off. His lamps, shining upon what might have been a frozen canal between two high hedges, showed that he could as well have been twenty miles from a village for all chance he had of getting there either on foot or on wheels. Pulling out his watch, he found the time to be ten o'clock. He had been about half an hour on the road. Calculating that he had done some twelve miles, and that there were fifty separating the place he had dined at from the place he had intended to reach, he was still thirty-eight miles from the latter.

"No London for me to-night," he said, turning up his coat-collar. "This thaw may turn to rain and it may not. The point is, what am I to do if it doesn't?" He stood up in the car to prospect.

An answer came in lights that glowed yellow through the mist, from some house evidently that stood a little off the road to the left. They had

been hidden until that moment by the hedge, and seemed all the nearer now for their suddenness. They meant shelter from that icy drip, possibly a bed for the night. There was no resisting the prospect. Masson climbed gingerly down, commended the car to Providence, and made for a white gate in the hedge that seemed to indicate the entrance to the drive. His fingers were so numbed that he could scarcely unlatch it.

Any one who has tried the business of walking in what is called—romantically enough—a silver thaw will know that romance is the last thing that occupies the mind of a person so engaged. The constant striving to remain perpendicular, the grovelling with unseizable earth forced upon a man who has sat down upon it with an unexpectedness that is outside all experience, the doubts as to whether any material progress can be made except on all fours, combine to keep the attention fixed upon practical things. Add the darkness of a clouded winter sky, a gathering mist, and a path—if it could be called a path—at once barely visible and totally unknown, and it will be clear that a man encountering these difficulties will be justified in wishing romance to the deuce. Masson wished it further before he had done with it that night.

The only warning that he had before he was plunged into it, willy-nilly, was the sound of a whistle, as of some one expressing surprise, from the high-road he had left. He imagined that it proceeded from some yokel who had come upon the deserted de Dion, and he sincerely hoped that the yokel would not have the time or inclination to overhaul its machinery. For a moment, indeed, with some of the yearning instinct of the motorist for his car, he thought of returning to it and warning the yokel off. The very act of trying to come to a decision, however, made his heels go from under him, and when he had got them under control again the decision was formed. It was to reach the house—or congeal.

Another five minutes' skidding and he reached it. The back of it apparently, for there was no door. The result of a polite hail was that a window was opened from overhead, and a voice—a girl's voice—said:

"Is it you?" She said it in a whisper, only just audible.

"Who?" returned Masson, a little surprised.

It was not, perhaps, an intelligent question, but it did not seem to justify what followed. The window was shut with a little shriek, and a pair—or two pairs—of sturdy arms closed about Masson's body. It did not require so much force as was used to bring him to the ground, his antagonist or antagonists on top of him. He explained as much with some warmth as he lay there, but only had the satisfaction of hearing one of the men say to the other—there were two, it seemed: "You tak' un by the lags, Mr. Board, and ef 'e tries kicken', Ah'll gi'e un a jog in the belly."

"Right y'are, Jenkins.... Now, sir, gently, if you please."

The last words were addressed to Masson, and he guessed, from the tone of reluctant respect, that the speaker was some house-servant. Probably the butler.

"All right," he said. "Only, if you're going to carry me, for Heaven's sake be careful. If you drop me, it's murder, mind. You'll be hanged for it."

"No fear, sir," said Mr. Board genially. "We won't hurt you, never fear. What the squire'll do is another matter, sir, as I dessay you guess. Ready, Jenkins?"

"Ah," said Jenkins, and moved forward with Masson's head. Mr. Board followed with his legs. In this manner, and with an unpleasant feeling that one or other of them would certainly slip, Masson made his untriumphal procession into the house.

He was dumped, brutally by Jenkins, respectfully by Mr. Board, on the Turkey-carpet of what—so far as he could see for the sudden glare of lights—was the large and armoured hall of a manor-house.

He lay for a moment on the Turkey-carpet with closed eyes. When he looked up there was a tall and irascible old gentleman standing over him with a heavy riding-whip.

“Stand him on his feet, Jenkins, and you stand by the door, Board, and see that he don’t make a rush. Now, sir”—the old gentleman addressed himself to Masson with a most threatening countenance—“you’re going to elope with my daughter—eh, what?”

Masson stared. “Going to elope with your daughter? Might I ask—can you explain to me what the meaning of this assault on me by your servants—I presume they’re your servants—means?”

“You might,” said the old gentleman caustically. “They had their orders, sir, from me, to bring you in neck and crop, sir—neck and crop, by gad! You didn’t expect *that* when you came sneaking round here after my daughter—eh, what?” He thrashed the air significantly. “Any excuse to offer before——”

Masson backed away a little towards a light but solid chair that stood near. It might serve as a weapon if this old madman attacked.

Mr. Board—a middle-aged man, unmistakably the butler—put his back against the hall door and stood rubbing his hands. Jenkins, a gaitered person, choked a guffaw. It seemed to Masson that, with three able-bodied persons opposed to him, he had better try the discreet before the valorous part.

“It seems to me,” he said, raising his voice a little, “that the excuse should be offered to me. I can only imagine you’re labouring under some delusion——”

“Ha!” said the old gentleman.

“Which I am quite willing to help to clear, so far as I am concerned. I haven’t the least idea what you mean by accusing me of sneaking round after your daughter. I have never set eyes on your daughter. I don’t know who she is or who you are. I came here off the high-road—perhaps I ought to say I’m motoring to London—because the roads are so slippery I couldn’t get on. Seeing your lights, I thought I could get some assistance here.”

“That’s why you went round to the back of the house, eh?”

“My dear sir,” said Masson impatiently, “are you aware that it’s a pitch-dark night, that the back and the front of your house are equally strange to me, that the mistake I made in going to the back instead of the front is the kind of mistake any stranger trying to get here would make?”

He spoke with a good deal of indignation, by no means soothed to hear Jenkins snigger: “He, he! that’s a good un. Et was all along of a mistake. He, he!” and the squire’s reply, snorted insultingly:

“Look here, my young man, I knew you were a rogue. I didn’t know you were a cur too. Likely story, ain’t it? Motoring, eh? Never seen my daughter. What? Never seen John Clifton o’ the King’s Arms neither, I dare say? Well, I have. John Clifton knows me, and he knows I’ve got him in my pocket. So when you went and ordered a horse and trap for ten o’clock to-night, mentioning—hang your impudence—that you might be wanting it for a young lady you were going to elope with, John Clifton, he came round to me. ‘He’ll be waiting about ten-thirty to-night, under missy’s window. That’s the arrangement, squire.’ John Clifton told me that. ‘Ten-thirty,’ said he, and, by gad, ten-thirty it is.”

“I’ve never heard of John Clifton in my life,” said Masson soothingly.

“Stick to your lie,” snorted the squire.

“Stick to your mulish idiocy,” returned Masson, equally enraged; “only, if you want to avoid making a drivelling fool of yourself, send for your daughter. I imagine she’ll be able to inform you that you’ve made a mistake, so far as I’m concerned.”

Whether the squire, thus braved, would have proceeded at once to carry out the intention his hands, twitching at the whip, suggested, Masson hardly knew. At that moment an elderly lady opened a door at the far end of the hall and entered.

“Oh, Reginald!” she cried.

“What is it?” asked the squire, turning at her.

“Is this the young man?”

“Is this the——” the squire choked. “No, it isn’t. This is the young man who swears he isn’t the young man. That’s who this young man is. Wants me to call Judith down to verify him. I’ll be——”

“Merely in justice to the young lady,” said Masson scornfully, as the squire stopped for breath.

“Perhaps——” said the elderly lady, in a deprecating voice. “Possibly, Reginald, it would be fairer. You have never seen the young man before, have you? Judith——”

“Judith’s a minx!” said the squire furiously.

“But she has never told a lie,” said the elderly lady.

“Call her!” The squire rumbled the order, and the elderly lady fled. “Judith, my dear, Judith!” Masson could hear her twittering to her charge as he leaned on the back of the chair which was to have served him for a weapon in case the squire had proceeded to extremities. He supposed the matter was now as good as ended, and could afford a smile at the disappointed expression of Jenkins, who was evidently the squire’s

principal backer in the scheme of *force majeure*. Mr. Board, indeed, had allowed a sigh, as of relief, to escape him at the new turn of affairs, and was for leaving his post at the door.

“Didn’t I tell you to stay there?” said the squire sharply; and, observing Masson’s smile, “Don’t you imagine, my fine fellow, that you’ve escaped your thrashing yet. Ha!”

The last word was an acknowledgment of his daughter’s arrival under the wing of the elderly lady. Masson looked at the girl with interest. She was tall and slender—a pretty girl. There was, Masson judged, some grounds for the squire’s suspicions, for she was dressed for out of doors, in hat and furs, and seemed pale and upset. She avoided Masson’s eyes.

[Illustration: “Masson looked about him wildly.... ‘My name is Henry,’ he explained—‘Henry Masson’” (page 101).]

“You wanted me, father,” she said.

“No, I didn’t; confound it!” said the squire rudely. “It was your aunt wanted you. This rogue”—he indicated Masson with his riding-whip—“wants to save his skin; says he isn’t your man. Ha! What do you say?”

Masson waited in all serenity for her reply. She seemed to hesitate and gulp for words. It was excusable, Masson thought. The old curmudgeon had frightened the wits half out of her.

“What do you say?” roared the squire, again.

She twisted her hands together, took a step forward, and, in a trembling voice, addressing Masson:

“Oh, Dick!” she said fondly.

Masson became aware that the dropping of a pin might have been audible but for Mr. Board's respectful sigh of dismay at the door. For a second he doubted his full possession of his senses.

"What did you say?" he stammered.

"Oh, Dick! Why, why did you come? I wish——" she burst into gentle sobs.

Masson looked about him wildly. He felt a mere fool.

"My name is Henry," he explained—"Henry Masson."

"Just so," said the squire grimly. "Martha, take Judith upstairs! Send her to bed. Quickly now; no talking. Now, sir" (to Masson as the door closed upon the two ladies), "are you going to take your thrashing standing up or lying down?" He had recovered his self-possession, and it was Masson who felt his leaving him. Only for a moment, however. Then, "Standing up," he said, and gave Jenkins, as that individual advanced to collar him, a kick that brought him to the ground. He seized the momentary advantage to dodge the squire's whip and to give a swing of the chair into Mr. Board's bread-basket. Mr. Board fell back—unfortunately, against the hall door, which was against Masson's chance of escaping. It is probable that the next five minutes offered as good an exhibition of rough-and-tumble fighting as the hall of the manor-house had ever been privileged to witness. Only superior agility enabled Masson to keep his end up, for, though Mr. Board's attack was reluctant, it was not devoid of cunning, and both the squire and Jenkins were bulls for fierceness. Indeed, Masson, panting hard, was having his chair wrenched from him by the latter, while he dodged the squire's attempts to clinch, when he felt the other door, through which the ladies had vanished, scrape his back. It gave him an idea, and he acted on it. Letting Jenkins have the chair at full grip, which sent him staggering backwards, Masson butted the squire, turned the handle, and was through. He hung on to the handle

desperately, feeling for a key. There was none. The opposition forces had got their hold, and were forcing the door open.

It was at this crisis that the elderly lady again made her appearance. She came bustling into Masson's back, crying aloud, "She's gone! She's gone with the other young man! Oh, dear" (as she perceived Masson), "what is happening? Where is my brother?"

"In there," said Masson, and let go.

"Reginald!" she cried, as the squire came bouncing through. "Stop! It's not this young man. It's another young man; and Judith's gone. She got out of her bedroom window, and they're driving off now!"

"What?" cried the squire.

"Perhaps," said Masson politely, "you will now believe what I said."

He might as well have addressed the walls for all the attention he received. The squire had no sooner grasped the new situation than he was foaming for the front door, giving directions at the top of his voice.

"Put in the mare, Jenkins. Saddle Black Beauty. Tell the boy to ride for the police. Drat and confound this——"

Masson gathered that the squire's broken sentences signified that he had stepped out into the ice-paved night, with the inevitable results. However, he must have picked himself up, for his halloaing grew fainter.

"But how it will all end, Heaven only knows," said the elderly lady to Masson, in a despairing way.

"I'm afraid you're right," said Masson. "Good evening, madam."

The hall door was open, his late antagonists had disappeared, but since there was no knowing when they would return, or in what frame of mind, it was not wise to lose an opportunity. Stepping out into the darkness,

Masson found that the silver thaw had turned to rain, and that the path, though slippery in parts, was safety itself to what it had been. He followed the winding drive until he came to the white gate and the road beyond. There, unnoticed, it seemed, and untouched, stood his car by the side of the road. He started it and moved on at a moderate pace. A couple of minutes later he neared two figures going at a plodding canter in the light of his lamps. The one that led was tall and large. “The squire,” thought Masson, and hooted vigorously.

“A hundred pounds if you’ll give me a lift,” cried the squire. “I want to catch up a horse and trap—just ahead. Won’t take you three minutes. A hundred pounds! Come!”

“For mercy’s sake, sir, do!” said the other—Mr. Board, it was clear. Neither of the two seemed to know whom they were addressing; or else they had forgotten the events of the evening, which hardly seemed possible.

“I’m afraid—very sorry—but I can’t stop,” said Masson politely. He bore them no grudge, on the whole; but, having witnessed the squire in the fulness of his raging, he felt no desire to cumber himself with him any more. It would be conniving at manslaughter. “Quite impossible,” he repeated, as he whizzed by them.

He put on speed, turned a bend of the highway a minute and a half later, and pulled up just in time to avoid not mere connivance, but actual committal of manslaughter. For there, in the very centre of the road, was the horse and trap which the others were so anxious to come up with. Only it was no longer a horse and trap united, but a horse and a trap quite separate entities—of which, moreover, the trap lay on one side, minus a wheel and with broken shafts.

So much Masson's lights showed him as he came to a stop just in time. A little shriek that arose at the same moment from the bank at the side of the road revealed more.

"Oh, Dick, is it—father?"

"No," said Mr. Masson. With every wish to be neutral in this family affair, he could not resist giving so much consolation. A young man, who had, it seemed, been divided between soothing the author of the little shriek and holding on to the frightened horse—not altogether a simple division of labour—came forward at this. "Excuse me, sir," he said to Masson: "I don't know who you are, but——"

"Oh, Dick, it's the other young man—Mr.—Mr. Henry." The squire's daughter spoke from the bank.

"Henry Masson," said that gentleman; "not Dick! I should have been obliged," he continued, with a good deal of urbanity, "if you could have mentioned that fact half an hour ago." He bore the squire's daughter no grudge, on the whole, but he felt that he was entitled to that small piece of irony at least. It was not altogether amusing to be "the other young man."

The young man—the real Dick—had apparently received only a partial account of the evening's proceedings.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," he said frankly. "I know something went wrong up at the house—Judy was telling me just as our horse came down—confound that ice thaw! The squire mistook you for me, didn't he?"

"Well," said Masson, "the squire couldn't very well help making the mistake when——" A fierce bellowing not far in the rear interrupted him. "That is the squire, I suppose," he went on. "I passed him a couple of minutes ago. He seemed anxious to come up with you."

“Good heavens!” said the young man. “Look here, sir. I don’t know if you know the state of affairs. This lady and I wish to get married. You see what’s happened? Cart smashed. If you could give us a lift——”

He spoke very pleasantly and yet earnestly. Masson bore no grudge against him. As he hesitated, the squire’s daughter came from the hedge bank, where she had been sitting, into the light of his lamps.

“You will forgive me, won’t you?” she said winningly. “It was my only chance of getting away. I was frantic.” She looked very piteous and pretty in the light of the lamps. “You will, won’t you?” she repeated.

“Certainly,” said Masson; “there’s nothing to forgive. Pray get in. I ought to think myself lucky to have been the young man, if it was only for ten minutes.”

“Come, Dick—quick!” cried the squire’s daughter.

The young man let the horse go and climbed into the car.

“Just in time, I think,” he said, as Masson backed a little and slipped the car past the fallen trap to a loud chorus of “Stop, you rogue!”

“Good night, squire!” they all cried, as they went ahead through the thin, falling rain.

Later on, when Masson accepted an invitation to be best man at the wedding of Mr. Richard Castle with Miss Judith Trelawney, he realised that he had not come so badly out of that silver thaw. He felt magnanimous, in fact.

Carnage

By Compton Mackenzie

Royal Navy

I am not a man naturally fond of adventure, but on the contrary have preserved from earliest youth an ambition to stay at home and watch from a sunny window-seat the orderly course of humanity along an orderly street.

Fortune, however, by depriving my parents of everything except myself, and myself of everything except a flute, made me a raggle-taggle wanderer, dependent for my livelihood on the charms of music.

Ignorant of luxury through the exigencies of a nomadic existence, I owned nevertheless a very fastidious taste which often led me to despise the miseries of my situation—so much so that I believe I would rather a thousand times depend on the hard ground than sacrifice my sensibility in the endurance of an uncongenial bedfellow.

So much by way of explaining the following adventure, which was actually produced by my inability to suffer a common hardship of the wanderer’s lot.

On a December dusk of the year 1753, I found myself, with apparently no prospect of a lodging, on a bleak high-road in the middle of Cornwall. What horrid impulse took me to that barbarous peninsula, I cannot now recall exactly; but probably my journey was connected with some roadside rumour of prosperity to be found in the West of England at the holiday season.

My first experience of Cornish hospitality was not happy; for, having begun to flute merrily in the yard of an outlying farmhouse, the savage owner loosed a pair of lean hounds, who followed me with a very odious barking nearly half a mile along the road. I was determined to avoid such places in future, and to keep my breath for a town, where the amenity of a closer social intercourse might have evolved a more generous spirit among the inhabitants.

With gloomy thoughts I trudged on, without a glimpse of any village or hamlet, or even of an isolated dwelling such as I had lately tried.

The night was coming up fast behind me, and I was already pondering the imminent extinction of my life's flame in the wind-swept bogs on either side of the path, when I came suddenly on a small inn, not visible before on account of the road's curve and a clump of firs shorn and blistered by the prevailing wind.

Here I asked for a bed; but on being informed that I must share it with a degraded idiot whom I perceived slobbering in a corner of the taproom, I scorned the accommodation and inquired the distance and direction of the nearest village.

"There's no village for another five mile or more," said the landlord. "What's your trade, master?"

I did not wish to gratify the bumpkin's curiosity; but reflecting that I might hear of a junketing in the neighbourhood, told him I was a musician.

"Then why don't 'ee make for Cannebrake?" he asked.

"Cannebrake?" I exclaimed. "How on earth shall I make for a place of whose existence I am only this moment aware?"

"Never heard of Cannebrake o' the Starlings?" he exclaimed. "Why, 'tis a famous place here around, and the old lord he might be proud to listen to a parcel o' music. Come, I'll show 'ee the road."

A burst of gibberish from the idiot made up my mind, and I hurried after the landlord, who with much circumlocution described my route. I left him by the inn door, and when I turned once or twice to wave a farewell, saw him still standing there, a white patch in the fading light.

I passed, according to his directions, a dry tree, a slab of granite shaped like an elephant's back, and a stretch of waste water stuck here and there with withered reeds like an old brush, until I reached a tall Celtic cross that leaned very forbiddingly towards the path. Here a side track dipped down from the main road to a valley whose ample vegetation contrasted strangely with the barren moors above. My path was soon overarched with trees. A smell of damp woodland pervaded its gloom, and my footsteps were muffled by the drift of wet leaves. Had it not been for the deep ruts into which from time to time I slipped, I should have concluded I had missed the path and was penetrating towards the heart of a forest.

I emerged from the avenue at last; though by now it was so dark that only the fresher air and the rasping of my feet on stones told me I was again in open country. But it was impossible to advance, and I was beginning to regret the inn and rail at myself for objecting to the idiot's company, when I saw above a black hill-top the yellow rim of the full moon, whose light, increasing every moment, was presently strong enough to show me I was not fifty yards from the great gates of Cannebrake.

Yet I was half afraid to set them creaking in the silence, so menacing were they between their tall stone pillars, so complete was the absence of any welcome.

I have often had occasion to visit the seats of the nobility and gentry in more civilised corners of England, and the air of abandonment that surrounded the entrance of Cannebrake did not seem to consort with the traditions of any famous or honoured name.

The very moonlight in that hollow was tainted with a miasma, setting no clear contrasts of shadow and silver, robbing the pillars of all solidity and giving the landscape the tremulous outlines of a half-remembered dream.

I had never before experienced the sensation of absolute decay. I had been affected by the fall of autumn leaves from dripping branches, by the

melting of ice on warm winter mornings; but here dissolution was silent, without a curlew's cry or lisp of withered grass to mark its accomplishment.

At last, by an effort of common sense, I pushed the gates ajar, and the creaking of them, as they swung back upon their hinges, followed me up the moss-grown drive with a wailful indignation.

The shrubbery planted round the gates did not extend far, and the drive soon unfolded its direction, running straight and bare over a wide, undulating grassland populated with the shadowy forms of cattle, to the doors of Cannebrake—a long, low building of the undistinguished architecture which I had already learned to associate with Cornish houses.

I stood awhile contemplating the mansion that seemed impalpable in the webs of the moon.

There was neither barking of dogs nor any sign of human life until I observed the shadow of a man carrying from room to room of the second story a circle of candlelight increasing and diminishing with each entrance and exit. I supposed it to be a servant's nightly round of inspection, and, assured of the existence of life within, moved across to the heavily nailed door.

I would have pulled at once the great iron bell-chain, had it not been for a strange disinclination to destroy the quiet with so wild a sound. As it was, I stood there holding my breath, I believe, while I deciphered the coat-of-arms above the door—a medley of Turks' heads and birds.

Then, with the slight knowledge of French gleaned on my wanderings, I fell to translating the motto of the family, "Aux amis l'amour, aux ennemis la mort."

Notwithstanding the pledge of this sentiment in stone, I could not spur myself into arousing the inmates; but as there was a rank growth of grass between the drive and the house itself, I availed myself of its quiet to crawl round and peer unheard into the windows on the ground floor.

On a closer view of the window to the right of the door, I saw glinting on the darkness of heavy curtains a thin line of light. Without more ado I pulled out my flute and started “Come, Lasses and Lads.”

This harmless old air seemed to produce a most distressing effect upon the inmates, for the curtains were immediately flung back and an elderly gentleman, with wig all awry and hands tugging at his stock, stared out into the night as if afraid of hell.

I tapped gently with my flute upon the lattice, and in response to my knocking, but with evident dismay, my listener was persuaded to throw it open.

Whether the sight of him pale and horror-struck had led me to expect a timid inquiry as to my business, I do not know, but I doubt if I ever heard so deep a voice from any human creature before. It rumbled like a bull’s and, I vow, alarmed me more than the music of my instrument had alarmed its owner.

A horrid stream of blasphemies heralded his demand to know my business.

“My name, my lord, is Tripconey—Peter Tripconey, a flute-player, and your lordship’s very humble, obedient servant to command.”

This frank avowal had the effect of slightly mitigating his wrath, and he was pleased to ask me what I did in his park at such an ungodly hour.

“Indeed, my lord, I was sent here.”

“Sent here, you vagabond? By whom?”

“By an inn-keeper who plies a poor trade on the desolate moors adjacent to your lordship’s estate.”

He seemed relieved by my information, and was gracious enough to ask if I could play any sea-songs. I answered I could play and sing the “Ballad of the Golden Vanity” and many more besides, as well as any man alive.

“Hark ’ee, Cynthia,” he said, turning to address another inmate. “There’s a musician outside. Shall we have him in, girl? Shall we have a merry-making? The poor wretch looks as if a good supper would do him no harm. Hi, sirrah, can you eat?” he asked, turning round again to me.

I assured him I had a very tolerable appetite, and he bade me ring the bell forthwith, vowing he would give me bed and board for a night’s music. I made haste to obey his orders, and when I stepped into the great hall, lighted by a score of candles and the blaze of a gigantic fire roaring on the hearth, was glad I had done so.

His lordship with much condescension presented me to his daughter, the Honourable Miss Cynthia Starling, who received me with the courtesy it delights a woman of rank to exercise. In the presence of this lovely creature I threw off every evil foreboding, and made haste to entertain the noble company with as much wit as I could command. I may say I was very successful.

His lordship laughed very heartily at all my sallies, and once or twice I plainly detected a faint smile pass over the classic features of the honourable and handsome young woman.

His lordship excused himself from joining me at supper, pointing out with much intelligence that, having already dined, a second meal so soon after the other would be likely to injure his night’s rest. I cordially agreed with him, and drank his health in a pint bumper of a very level and solid old Burgundy. His lordship was pleased to acknowledge my toast, and

indeed went so far as to drink prosperity to the humble flute-player sheltered by his hospitable roof.

When I had eaten as much as I wanted, my host called out in his great voice for the butler, whom I disliked at first sight. He was a tall, thin man, with pouched eyes and an unnaturally sleek face the colour of tallow. His hands were hairy, blue with gunpowder, and criss-crossed with livid scars.

However, I soon forgot him in racking my memory for the old sea-tunes which his lordship wished to hear. The latter sat upright in the ingle, beating time to the choruses with his ebony cane, or rather crutched-stick, which he leaned upon very heavily in his walk, being, as I supposed, a sufferer from the gout. The crutch itself was very massive and bound with gold bands.

I also played some polite melodies for the pleasure of her ladyship, which she commended very earnestly; but when she had wished us a good night and retired to her chamber, my Lord Cannebrake set out to curse all love-songs and country dances, and bade me get back immediately to the sea-tunes which he loved so well.

Presently he called for the butler, Springle, and to my surprise, and I may add profound vexation, invited him to take a chair by the fire and join in the choruses. I was shocked to see the familiar way in which this fellow treated his master, and, for my own part, was quick to put the insolent rogue in his place as often as I could, thus showing him very plainly how I esteemed his presumption.

One or two of my hits went very well with his lordship; and though Mr. Springle snarled at me from his chair, I was not at all afraid to bait him whenever the circumstances of the conversation gave me an opportunity.

“Springle,” said his lordship after a round of tunes, “Mr. Tripconey must whet his whistle. Bring in another bottle of Burgundy and warm me a noggin of rum.”

I was amazed to hear a nobleman favour the plebeian beverage of rum, and still more deeply amazed to hear his butler answer him very saucily, “Aye, aye,” without offering to move himself.

“Get up, you impudent swab!” bellowed Lord Cannebrake. “What! Disobey orders, would you, you dog! You whimpering, sneering, dirty ship’s steward.”

Mr. Springle, perceiving he had made too free with his master’s affableness, rose at once and slunk from the hall.

My Lord Cannebrake growled to himself awhile, and then sat moodily silent, staring into the fire.

I seized the occasion of the butler’s absence to ask him point blank why the first sounds of my flute had alarmed him so violently. “For,” said I, “there is nothing surprising at this jolly season of the year, when waits and mummers are abroad, in hearing the sound of music by night.”

“Did I look frightened, eh?” asked his lordship. “Hah, and I was frightened, woundily frightened. I come, sir, of a plaguy old family, and I live in a plaguy old house, and I’ve inherited very little else but a plaguy crew of ghosts.”

“And you mistook me for one of ’em?” I laughed.

“We Starlings,” he went on, “like most old families, have our omens and death cries and what not, and it has always been accounted very ill work for a Starling to hear a starling’s whistle.”

I was somewhat put about to learn that my playing had been mistaken for a vulgar bird's whistle, but, concealing my annoyance very genteely, laughed the matter off.

[Illustration: "'Springle,' his lordship gasped. 'Springle, I've killed him, ha'n't I?'" (page 113).]

"Indeed, my lord, I believe that is the first time that ever my flute was taken for a bird."

"Yes," he murmured, more to himself than to me, "yes, I heard that whistle forty days out from Sierra Leone, and the next day we was flinging half-cooked niggers into the sea and——"

He stopped suddenly and looked me full in the face, but I thought his mind was wandering and paid small attention to his wild words.

"And I heard it again when we were careening in the Pearl Islands off Panama just before I was took with Yellow Jack, but I've never heard it since till to-night. Ecod, I don't like being my Lord Cannebrake, with ghosts thick as seagulls round about. I was happier before; I was happier in the pleasant Isle of Thanet with the sea-wind singing day and night round my cottage. I used to do nothing mostly, except sight the craft beating round the Foreland, and think of 'em so white and handsome in the Downs, a-stroking all the while my little daughter's light-brown hair. And now look at me, stuck in a low, dirty swamp ten miles from the sound of breakers, wi' nothing to think of but ghosts. That's bad for a man who, mark you, was a-seafaring once. But there came an ague and took one; and another broke his neck out hunting; and the third, he fell into the pool fishing for carp; and so I became Lord Cannebrake."

I was at a loss to know why this elderly nobleman honoured me with his confidence, but ascribed it to the influence of the old sea-songs and my own insignificance, for I doubt he never thought me a person of much

importance, and he went on with his monologue without seeming to expect any comment from me.

“Then there’s Cynthia. Cannebrake’s no place for a high-spirited young woman. London’s the place for her, where she can meet women of quality and learn the ways of fashion. She’s a sweet maid. I never knew a sweeter. But what’s to become of her, buried alive, in a manner of speaking, and like to grow into a mumbling, fumbling old maid with nothing to watch all her life but the sun’s rise and set, and winter coming in cold, and the spring-time rain, and a few flowers of summer?”

Here I made bold to offer a suggestion that he should go back to the Isle of Thanet.

“Ah, why don’t I, Mr. Flute-player? I’ll tell you why,” and he leaned over, whispering in my ear:

“Because I dare not. Because I lived a vile, bad life when I was young, and I’m afraid. That’s a terrible thing for you to ponder, Mr. Tripconey—an old man living alone in a dip of these wild moors—afraid. Listening to the clock tick-ticking, and all the time fast afraid. You’ve seen me, white and shaking, when you tapped on the window: me—Captain Starling—afraid.”

Springle’s entrance with rum enough for half a dozen put an end to further reminiscence.

“Why, Conrad,” said his lordship, “why, Conrad, boy, I see you’ve set a glass for yourself. That was thoughtful of you, Conrad.”

Then suddenly the old man’s fury broke out—very terrible.

“And so you’d make a nincompoop of me before my guests, would you? Below deck, you swab!” he roared, and, picking up one of the heavy cut-glass goblets, flung it between the butler’s legs as he hurried from the

hall. Lord Cannebrake laughed and made me fill up my glass, while he poured out for himself an extra strong allowance of rum.

“Master Springle thinks he can do as he likes because I give him a moderate amount of freedom, seeing that we were shipmates once.”

“It is indeed a condescension on your side, my lord, for which the fellow shows himself monstrous ungrateful. I drink your lordship’s very good health.”

He acknowledged the compliment by draining his glass to me, and I could not forbear my admiration to see how he poured the fiery liquor down his throat at a single gulp. I myself, a timid drinker, could never have survived the quarter of it sipped slowly. When he had put down his glass I saw that he was sniffing the air as a stag sniffs for water.

“Tell me,” he demanded, “can you smell sea-water?”

So unusual a question put me in some confusion, for if I laughed it aside I would have seemed to suspect him of drunkenness. I determined therefore to humour his fancy, and told him very gravely that I could not smell sea-water.

“I doubt it’s my fancy,” he muttered. “Or rum. Rum more likely.” With which he gulped down a second glass even stronger than the former. All at once a horrid cry rang through the house. The long-drawn echo of it froze my blood and set my glass clinking against the decanter in a tumult of apprehension.

“What’s that?” gasped his lordship. And here let me assure you, he looked as much alarmed as myself. I threw a glance up to the gallery, expecting to see her ladyship in bed-gown peering over the balustrade. But there was nothing.

Then Springle, his face as livid as the criss-cross scars on his hand, burst into the hall.

“Cap’n Starling! Cap’n Starling!” he cried.

“Aye, aye,” muttered my lord in the dead voice of profoundest agitation.

“Cap’n Starling!” moaned the butler.

“Eh, what!” exclaimed his master. “Who the plague are you calling ’cap’n’? Ha’n’t you learned ’tis ‘my lord’ nowadays?”

“To blazes wi’ lords,” chattered Springle. “Sea-lords and land-lords. Here’s Cap’n Swall walking up the path to this house.”

“Cap’n Swall?” repeated his lordship. “Cap’n Swall? Here, give me the rum, my handsome.”

He drained the glass a third time, which seemed to calm his excitement.

“This ain’t a fancy of yours, Conrad?”

“No fancy, my lord. I seed him quite plain and the stars a-shining through his wicked bow legs as he come down the slope. But let him come!” Springle almost screamed. “Let the swab come! We’re too many for him, with pleasant talk of old ships and a knife that goes in easy and quick like.”

I confess I was amazed by the coolness with which the rascal proposed to murder a fellow-creature, and was relieved to hear his lordship discourage the notion.

“None of that,” he commanded. “None of that. If ’tis Matthew Swall, ’tis him; and maybe there’s a reckoning, and maybe there isn’t, but none of that. If ’tis man to man, him and me, ’tis out in the moonlight with ship’s cutlasses and you and Mr. Tripconey here to see fair play. So drink the rum, you cowardly dog, and stand by.”

Springle swallowed the spirit, and the three of us waited in silence till there came a ringing peal from the great bell, a peal that echoed jangling and clanging through Cannebrake of the Starlings.

“Must I let him in, cap’n?” whispered Springle.

There was a tap-tap on the lattice, but when we turned towards the sound the curtains were close drawn and we knew the man outside could not see us.

“Let him in,” said his lordship, standing up very stern.

Conrad moved sideways to the door, and what with the way he kept twitching his hairy hands, and what with his chestnut-brown suit and his manner of walking, I could not help comparing him to a large crab.

Captain Swall followed the servant into his master’s presence. He was a short, thickset, squab-nosed man, much weather-beaten, and wearing a soiled blue coat trimmed with gold lace frayed and tarnished. In his right hand he carried a cocked beaver hat, in the other a pistol. Flinging down the hat, he went with outstretched palm right up to Lord Cannebrake, saying:

“Well, if this don’t beat pay-day. Messmate, how are ye? Lord Cannebrake now, ain’t it? And here’s Conrad Springle and a bottle of rum and Matthew Swall of the *Happy Return*, and—why, bless me,” he added, catching sight of me, “here’s a strange face after all.”

His lordship never offered to present me, but, coming sharp to the point, said:

“I thought you were dead, Matthew.”

“I know ye did, Dicky. Nor more isn’t that very astonishing seeing as I thought I were dead myself. It was a cunning move of yourn, Dicky, that ’ere sheering off in Jamestown. It was a clever trick, when you thought

you'd quit being a gentleman of fortune, to leave me laying low with Yellow Jack, and not a single golden George to so much as spit on, not a single golden George to get me clear of Virginia and the tobacco planters. And I was took, Dicky. I was took all right and sold five hundred miles up country, to a Frenchman whose throat I slit so as he died quicker nor ever you'd think a man could die."

"Mr. Tripconey," said his lordship to me, "I think you'll find your bedroom prepared. Springle, show Mr. Tripconey to his chamber."

The butler, with many a backward glance to where the two sea-captains sat facing one another in the firelight, led me up the wide stairs and parted from me by the door of my room without so much as a good night.

Now whether the wicked flavour of Captain Swall's conversation had fascinated my imagination, or whether the Burgundy had fired my blood with an inquisitiveness foreign to my nature, I do not know, but for the life of me I could not help wondering how it fared with the party downstairs. I resented being shut up out of sight and sound in this gaunt bedchamber; and at last, no longer able to bear my ignorance, I snuffed the candle and crept barefooted along the black corridor as far as the opening to the hall. Here, by kneeling close to the wall and peering through the balustrade, I could see and hear all that was happening below. I ran but small risk of discovery; for, as I reasoned, it would be easy to gain my room noiselessly while any one from below was ascending the stairs.

Lord Cannebrake and his visitor were still seated facing one another, while Springle was standing, well out of the way of both, at the farther end of the hall.

"But I don't want to fight, Dicky," Captain Swall was saying. "I done with fighting long ago. This here pop I holds in my hand so pretty, that's not for fighting; that's for protection, Dicky, in case you was to leave me

once again on a lee-shore. No, I don't want no revenge nor nothing, Dicky. But seeing as how I'm tired of roaming, and finds it dull at the *Prospect of Whitby* down by Wapping Stairs, I've a mind to sling my hammock in Cannebrake."

"So you think you're going to live at my expense, do you?" asked his lordship grimly. "But you're not. I don't feed ruffians like you, Matthew Swall."

"Turned pious, have ye?" sneered the other. "Took to religion, maybe? Changed the name of your ship? That's a main unlucky thing to do, and by——" He swore an abominable oath. "By—— it won't go down with me, not with old Matthew. Springle, my lad, it looks as if you was ship's cook aboard here. Let's see the quality of your beef."

I could not help feeling greatly delighted by Mr. Springle's discomfiture as he stood there in a fine quandary.

"What! Mutiny, Conrad?" the captain went on, as the butler made no offer to move. "You was quicker at obeying orders in the old days, Conrad. You was a long way more spry arter I sarved you with your six dozen lashes. You become quite a handy lad arter that. Quick and handy with that 'ere clasp-knife of yourn, Conrad, when you done for the crew of the *True Love* what was lying on their backs off Calabar a-waiting for you to obey orders. Come, look alive, my lad, or you'll find yourself in Bodmin Gaol, and 'tis Cap'n Swall who says so."

Springle, cowed by the fierce intruder, gave up defiance and went to fetch the victuals.

"That's a nice little place Conrad's got himself," continued Swall, with one eye cocked very wickedly at Lord Cannebrake.

"Do you want to be my butler?" demanded the latter.

“No, I wouldn’t rob Conrad. There’s room for both of us. Maybe you’ve got a snug little cabin somewhere between decks, a snug little berth where you and me and Conrad ’ll be able to talk over old times and old ships. Better you and I should talk over ’em quiet and comfortable and snug like, with the rum going round as it ought to in a genelman’s country house. Better nor talking over ’em at the Old Bailey. Why, you’ve a darter, haven’t you, Dicky? What ’ud she say if she went for a cruise down the river one lovely morning in the summer-time, and seed her father, black as a crow, swinging in the wind at Execution Dock?”

“You won’t blackmail me,” said my lord.

“Blackmail, is it? By the Lord,” shouted Captain Swall, “Black Flag’s more the lay.”

“Be careful, Matthew. You know I’m a hot-blooded man. You know I won’t stand too much.”

“Aye, by the plague, and you know mine, Dick Starling, and it ain’t lost nothing these twenty years of waiting. Look ’ee here, it comes to this. You’ve got a darter. Well.” Again he swore that fearful oath. “If you don’t give me your darter—for I won’t be put off with no fine words after Jamestown, Dicky; I’ll have something of yours as you vally—I’ll have your young maid, or you swing for piracy.”

But even while he threatened, shaking the pistol, Lord Cannebrake struck hard with his stick and Captain Swall fell forward among the glasses on the table.

“Springle,” his lordship gasped. “Springle, I’ve killed him, ha’n’t I?”

Then I saw that the butler was standing in the corner, a plate of beef in his hand. He came forward and, setting down the plate, shook the sprawling figure.

“Aye, aye, he’s dead as his beef,” said Springle.

“We’ll bury the body quick, Conrad. Wait. I’ll see he has no friends outside.”

I could not help wondering at the old nobleman’s pluck as I saw him move towards the door, and thought of him marching round that desolate house with Heaven knows how many bloodthirsty enemies ambushed in the shadows.

When his master had left the hall, Springle shook the body more roughly, and to my horror, for I thought him stone dead, Captain Swall muttered thickly:

“Curse you, Dicky, you nearly done for me a second time, but you’ll pay—you’ll pay.”

“Look ’ee here, Cap’n Swall,” said Springle, turning the wounded man over and staring into his eyes. “Two’s company at Cannebrake, but three ain’t. You sent me off for beef. You had me flogged once. You’ve run aground, Cap’n Swall.”

Here the fiend caught his enemy by the throat, and, as he squeezed the life out of the thickset man, spoke through clenched teeth:

“You’re making port at last, Cap’n Swall. I’ll lay Davy Jones is about signalling your sperrit now.”

I suppose I should have interrupted the man’s villainy, but by this time, between cramp and terror, I could do nothing but lie quaking on the cold floor of the gallery.

Lord Cannebrake came back in a minute or two.

“He’s dead?”

“Dead,” said the murderer.

“And nobody will know,” said his lordship, with a sigh of relief.

“Not if I don’t peach.”

“What d’ye mean?”

“Why, just this here, my lord. I’m tired of being butler. I wants promotion. I reckon you’ll sign some sort of a parlez-vous as’ll ensure my promotion.”

Lord Cannebrake seemed stricken by his servant’s treachery.

“Are you going to turn against me, Conrad?”

“You’ve been a fool,” said the latter—“a fool for twenty years. Afraid o’ what I might say about the *Jolly Roger*. What could I ha’ done, a pore ignorant seaman? What was my word against Lord Cannebrake’s? You might ha’ cut me adrift long ago. But now you can’t. Now things is different. Here’s murder stepped in on my side.”

“Aye, it has!” I shouted, springing up. “Black-hearted, cold murder; but it’s you, Mr. Springle, that’s the murderer. My lord, my lord, he strangled Captain Swall when you were outside. That villain there—that ruffian——”

In my bare feet, and waving my flute, I came dancing down the stairs—a ludicrous figure, I dare swear, but jubilant at having outwitted the butler.

He had his knife out in a flash, and I owed my life to his lordship, who, without a thought of the scandal, picked up the dead man’s pistol and shot his servant through the back, so that he fell huddled at the foot of the staircase.

Then Lord Cannebrake and I looked at each other with two bodies between us.

“Her ladyship?” I said.

“We’ll have to tell her.”

I felt sorry for the old man who had kept his secret so many years. But the hall was now running with Conrad's blood, and I thought we should do well enough to escape the law.

Her ladyship came along the gallery, very pale and beautiful.

"What is it, father? I heard a shot."

"A bad night's work, my lady-love," said the father gently. "But Mr. Tripconey here has saved Cannebrake."

"And his lordship has saved me," I cried.

"Then we should all be grateful," said my lady, very calm.

I slept prodigious little that night, and blistered my hands so that I couldn't play my flute for a week; but I was always sure for many a year of a hearty welcome at Cannebrake of the Starlings.

The Bronze Parrot

By R. Austin Freeman

Royal Army Medical Corps

The Reverend Deodatus Jawley had just sat down to the gate-legged table on which lunch was spread and had knocked his knee, according to his invariable custom, against the sharp corner of the seventh leg.

"I wish you would endeavour to be more careful, Mr. Jawley," said the rector's wife. "You nearly upset the mustard-pot, and these jars are exceedingly bad for the leg."

"Oh, that's of no consequence, Mrs. Bodley," the curate replied cheerfully.

"I don't agree with you at all," was the stiff rejoinder.

“It doesn’t matter, you know, so long as the skin isn’t broken,” Mr. Jawley persisted with an ingratiating smile.

“I was referring to the leg of the table,” Mrs. Bodley corrected frostily.

“Oh, I beg your pardon!” said the curate, and, blushing like a Dublin Bay prawn, he abandoned himself in silence to the consideration of the numerical ratios suggested by five mutton chops and three prospective consumers. The problem thus presented was one of deep interest to Mr. Jawley, who had a remarkably fine appetite for such an exceedingly small man, and he awaited its solution with misgivings born of previous disappointments.

“I hope you are not very hungry, Mr. Jawley,” said the rector’s wife.

“Er—no—er—not unusually so,” was the curate’s suave and casuistical reply. The fact is that he was always hungry, excepting after the monthly tea-meetings.

“Because,” pursued Mrs. Bodley, “I see that Walker has only cooked five chops; and yours looks rather a small one.”

“Oh, it will be quite sufficient, thank you,” Mr. Jawley hastened to declare; adding, a little unfortunately, perhaps: “Amply sufficient for any moderate and temperate person.”

The Reverend Augustus Bodley emerged from behind the *Church Times* and directed a suspicious glance at his curate; who, becoming suddenly conscious of the ambiguity of his last remark, blushed crimson and cut himself a colossal slice of bread. There was an uncomfortable silence which lasted some minutes, and was eventually broken by Mrs. Bodley.

“I want you to go into Dilbury this afternoon, Mr. Jawley, and execute a few little commissions.”

“Certainly, Mrs. Bodley. With pleasure,” said the curate.

“I want you to call and see if Miss Gosse has finished my hat. If she has, you had better bring it with you. She is so unreliable, and I want to wear it at the Hawley-Jones’s garden party to-morrow. If it isn’t finished, you must wait until it is. Don’t come away without it.”

“No, Mrs. Bodley, I will not. I will be extremely firm.”

“Mind you are. Then I want you to go to Minikin’s and get two reels of whitey-brown thread, four balls of crochet cotton, and eight yards of lace insertion—the same kind as I had last week. And Walker tells me that she has run out of black-lead. You had better bring two packets; and mind you don’t put them in the same pocket with the lace insertion. Oh, and as you are going to the oil-shop, you may as well bring a jar of mixed pickles. And then you are to go to Dumsole’s and order a fresh haddock—perhaps you could bring that with you, too—and then to Barber’s and tell them to send four pounds of dessert pears, and be sure they are good ones and not over-ripe. You had better select them and see them weighed yourself.”

“I will. I will select them most carefully,” said the curate, inwardly resolving not to trust to mere external appearances, which are often deceptive.

“Oh, and by the way, Jawley,” said the rector, “as you are going into the town, you might as well take my shooting-boots with you, and tell Crummell to put a small patch on the soles and set up the heels. It won’t take him long. Perhaps he can get them done in time for you to bring them back with you. Ask him to try.”

“I will, Mr. Bodley,” said the curate. “I will urge him to make an effort.”

“And as you are going to Crummell’s,” said Mrs. Bodley, “I will give you my walking shoes to take to him. They want soling and heeling, and tell him he is to use better leather than he did last time.”

Half an hour later Mr. Jawley passed through the playground appertaining to the select boarding-academy maintained by the Reverend Augustus Bodley. He carried a large and unshapely newspaper parcel, despite which he walked with the springy gait of a released schoolboy. As he danced across the desert expanse, his attention was arrested by a small crowd of the pupils gathered significantly around two larger boys whose attitudes suggested warlike intentions; indeed, even as he stopped to observe them, one warrior delivered a tremendous blow which expended itself on the air within a foot of the other combatant's nose.

"Oh! fie!" exclaimed the scandalised curate. "Joblett! Joblett! Do you realise that you nearly struck Byles? That you might actually have hurt him?"

"I meant to hurt him," said Joblett.

"You meant to! Oh, but how wrong! How unkind! Let me beg you—let me entreat you to desist from these discreditable acts of violence."

He stood awhile gazing with an expression of pained disapproval at the combatants, who regarded him with sulky grins. Then, as the hostilities seemed to be—temporarily—suspended, he walked slowly to the gate. He was just pocketing the key when an extremely somnolent pear impinged on the gate-post and sprinkled him with disintegrated fragments. He turned, wiping his coat-skirt with his handkerchief, and addressed the multitude, who all, oddly enough, happened to be looking in the opposite direction.

"That was very naughty of you. *Very* naughty. Someone must have thrown that pear. I won't tempt you to prevarication by asking who? But pears don't fly of themselves—especially sleepy ones."

With this he went out of the gate, followed by an audible snigger which swelled, as he walked away, into a yell of triumph.

The curate tripped blithely down the village street, clasping his parcel and scattering smiles of concentrated amiability broadcast among the villagers. As he approached the stile that guarded the footpath to Dilbury, his smile intensified from mere amiability to positive affection. A small lady—a very small lady, in fact—was standing by the stile, resting a disproportionate basket on the lower step; and we may as well admit, at once and without circumlocution, that this lady was none other than Miss Dorcas Shipton and the prospective Mrs. Jawley.

The curate changed over his parcel to hold out a welcoming hand.

“Dorcas, my dear!” he exclaimed. “What a lucky chance that you should happen to come this way!”

“It isn’t chance,” the little lady replied. “I heard Mrs. Bodley say that she would ask you to go into Dilbury; so I determined to come and speed you on your journey” (the distance to Dilbury was about three and a half miles) “and see that you were properly equipped. Why did not you bring your umbrella?”

Mr. Jawley explained that the hat, the boots, the fresh haddock, and the mixed pickles would fully occupy his available organs of prehension.

“That is true,” said Dorcas. “But I hope you are wearing your chest-protector and those cork soles that I gave you.”

Mr. Jawley assured her that he had taken these necessary precautions.

“And have you rubbed your heels well with soap?”

“Yes,” replied the curate. “Thoroughly—most thoroughly. They are a little sticky at present, but I shall feel the benefit as I go on. I have obeyed your instructions to the letter.”

“That is right, Deodatus,” said Miss Dorcas; “and as you have been so good, you shall have a little reward.”

She lifted the lid of the basket and took out a small paper bag, which she handed to him with a fond smile. The curate opened the bag and peered in expectantly.

“Ha!” he exclaimed. “Bull’s-eyes! How nice! How good of you, Dorcas! And how discriminating!” (Bull’s-eyes were his one dissipation.) “Won’t you take one?”

“No, thank you,” replied Dorcas. “I mustn’t go into the cottages smelling of peppermint.”

“Why not?” asked Deodatus. “I often do. I think the poor creatures rather enjoy the aroma—especially the children.”

But Dorcas was adamant; and after some further chirping and twittering, the two little people exchanged primly affectionate farewells, and the curate, having popped a bull’s-eye into his mouth, padded away along the footpath, sucking joyously.

It is needless to say that Mrs. Bodley’s hat was not finished. The curate had unwisely executed all his other commissions before calling on the milliner: had ordered the pears, and even tested the quality of one or two samples; had directed the cobbler to send the rector’s boots to the hat-shop; and had then collected the lace, black-lead, cotton, pickles, and the fresh haddock, and borne them in triumph to the abode of Miss Gosse. It appeared that the hat would not be ready until seven o’clock in the evening. But it also appeared that tea would be ready in a few minutes. Accordingly the curate remained to partake of that meal in the workroom, in company with Miss Gosse and her “hands”; and having been fed to bursting-point with French rolls and cake, left his various belongings and went forth to while away the time and paint the town of Dilbury—not exactly red, but a delicate and attenuated pink.

After an hour or so of rambling about the town, the curate’s errant footsteps carried him down to the docks, where he was delighted with the

spectacle of a military transport, just home from West Africa, discharging her passengers. The khaki-clad warriors trooped down the gang-planks and saluted him with cheerful greetings as he sat on a bollard and watched them. One even inquired if his—Mr. Jawley's—mother knew he was out; which the curate thought very kind and attentive of him. But what thrilled him most was the appearance of the chaplain; a fine, portly churchman with an imposing, coppery nose, who was so overjoyed at the sight of his native land that he sang aloud. Mr. Jawley was deeply affected.

When the soldiers had gone, he slowly retraced his steps towards the gates; but he had hardly gone twenty yards when his eye was attracted by a small object lying in the thick grass that grew between the irregular paving-stones of the quay. He stooped to pick it up and uttered an exclamation of delight. It was a tiny effigy of a parrot, quaintly wrought in bronze and not more than two and a half inches high including the pedestal on which it stood. A perforation through the eyes had furnished the means of suspension, and a strand of silken thread yet remained, to show, by its frayed ends, how the treasure had been lost.

Mr. Jawley was charmed. It was such a dear little parrot, so quaint, so naïve. He was a simple man, and small things gave him pleasure; and this small thing pleased him especially. The better to examine his find, he seated himself on a nice, clean white post and proceeded to polish the little effigy with his handkerchief, having previously moistened the latter with his tongue. The polishing improved its appearance wonderfully, and he was inspecting it complacently when his eye lighted on a chalked inscription on the pavement. The writing was upside-down as he sat, but he had no difficulty in deciphering the words "Wet paint."

He rose hastily and examined the flat top of the post. There is no need to go into details. Suffice it to say that anyone looking at that post could have seen that some person had sat on it. Mr. Jawley moved away with

an angry exclamation. It was very annoying. But that did not justify the expressions that he used; which were not only out of character with his usual mild demeanour but unsuitable to his cloth, even if that cloth happened to be—but again we say there is no need to go into details. Still frowning irritably, he strode out through the dock gates and up the High Street on his way to Miss Gosse's establishment. As he was passing the fruiterer's shop, Mr. Barber, the proprietor, ran out.

"Good evening, Mr. Jawley. About those pears that you ordered of my young man. You'd better not have those, sir. Let me send you another kind."

"Why?" asked the curate.

"Well, sir, those pears, to be quite candid, are not very good——"

"I don't care whether they are good or bad," interrupted Mr. Jawley. "I am not going to eat them," and he stamped away up the High Street, leaving the fruiterer in a state of stupefaction. But he did not proceed directly to the milliner's. Some errant fancy impelled him to turn up a side-street and make his way towards the waterside portion of the town; and it was, in fact, nearly eight o'clock when he approached Miss Gosse's premises (now closed for the night) and rang the bell. The interval, however, had not been entirely uneventful. A blue mark under the left eye and a somewhat battered and dusty condition of hat and clothing seemed reminiscent of recent and thrilling experiences; and the satisfied grin that he bestowed on the astonished caretaker suggested that those experiences, if strenuous, had not been wholly unpleasurable.

The shades of night had fallen on the village of Bobham when Mr. Jawley appeared in the one and only street. He carried, balanced somewhat unsteadily on his head, a large cardboard box, but was otherwise unencumbered. The box had originally been of a cubical form, but now presented a slightly irregular outline and from one corner a thin

liquid dripped on Mr. Jawley's shoulder, diffusing an aroma of vinegar and onions with an added savour that was delicate and fish-like. Up the empty street the curate strode with a martial air, and having picked up the box—for the thirteenth time—just outside the gate, entered the rectory, deposited his burden on the drawing-room sofa, and went up to his room. He required no supper. For once in a way he was not hungry. He had, in fact, taken a little refreshment in town; and whelks are a very satisfying food, if you only take enough of them.

In his narrow and bumpy bed the curate lay wakeful and wrapped in pleasing meditation. Now his thoughts strayed to the little bronze parrot, which he had placed, after a final polish, on the mantelpiece; and now, in delightful retrospection, he recalled the incidents of his little jaunt. There was, for instance, the slightly intoxicated marine with whom he had enjoyed a playful interview in Mermaid Street. Gleefully he reconstituted the image of that warrior as he had last seen him sitting in the gutter attending to his features with a reddened handkerchief. And there was the overturned whelk-stall and the two bluejackets outside the "Pope's Head." He grinned at the recollection. And yet there were grumblers who actually complained of the dulness of the clerical life!

Again he recalled the pleasant walk home across the darkening fields, the delightful rest by the wayside (on the cardboard box), and the pleasantries that he had exchanged with a pair of rustic lovers—who had told him that "he ought to be ashamed of himself; a gentleman and a minister of religion, too!" He chuckled aloud as he thought of their bucolic irritation and his own brilliant repartee.

But at this moment his meditations were broken into by a very singular interruption. From the neighbourhood of the mantelpiece there issued a voice—a very strange voice, deep, buzzing, resonant, chanting a short sentence, framed of yet more strange and unfamiliar words:

"*Donköh e didi mä tūm. On esse?*"

This astounding phrase rang out in the little room with a deep, booming emphasis on the “tūm,” and an interrogative note on the two final words. There followed an interval of intense silence, and then, from some distance, as it seemed, came the tapping of drums, imitating, most curiously, the sound and accent of the words; “tūm,” for instance, being rendered by a large drum of deep, cavernous tone.

Mr. Jawley listened with a pleased and interested smile. After a short interval, the chant was repeated, and again, like a far-away echo, the drums performed their curious mimicry of speech. Mr. Jawley was deeply interested. After a dozen or so of repetitions, he found himself able to repeat, with a fair accent, the mysterious sentence, and even to imitate the tapping and booming of the drums.

But after all you can have too much of a good thing; and when the chant had continued to recur, at intervals of about ten seconds, for a quarter of an hour, Mr. Jawley began to feel bored.

“There!” said he, “that’ll do,” and he composed himself for slumber. But the invisible chanter, ignoring his remark, continued the performance *da capo* and *ad lib.*—in fact, *ad nauseam*. Then Mr. Jawley became annoyed. First he sat up in bed and made what he considered appropriate comments on the performance, with a few personal references to the performer; and then, as the chant still continued with the relentless persistence of a chapel bell, he sprang out and strode furiously over to the mantelpiece.

“Shut up!” he roared, shaking his fist at the invisible parrot; and, strange to say, both the chant and the drumming ceased forthwith. There are some forms of speech, it would seem, that require no interpreter.

When Mr. Jawley entered the breakfast-room on the following morning, the rector’s wife was in the act of helping her husband to a devilled kidney, but she paused in the occupation to greet the curate with a stony

stare. Mr. Jawley sat down and knocked his knee as usual, but commented on the circumstance in terms which were not at all usual. The rector stared aghast and Mrs. Bodley exclaimed in shrill accents: “Mr. Jawley, how dare——”

At this point she paused, having caught the curate’s eye. A deathly silence ensued, during which Mr. Jawley glared at a solitary boiled egg. Suddenly he snatched up a knife, and with uncanny dexterity, decapitated the egg with a single stroke. Then he peered curiously into the disclosed cavity. Now if there was one thing that Mr. Jawley hated more than another, it was an underdone egg; and as his eye encountered a yellow spheroid floating in a clear liquid, he frowned ominously.

“Raw, by Gosh!” he exclaimed hoarsely; and plucking the egg from its calyx, he sent it hurtling across the room. For several seconds the rector stared, silent and open-mouthed, at his curate; then, following his wife’s gaze, he stared at the wall, on the chrysanthemum paper of which appeared a new motive uncontemplated by the designer. And meanwhile, Mr. Jawley reached across the table and stuck a fork into the devilled kidney.

When the rector looked round and discovered his loss, he essayed some spluttered demands for an explanation. But since the organs of speech are associated with the act of mastication, the curate was not in a position to answer him. His eyes, however, were disengaged at the moment, and some compelling quality in them caused the rector and his wife to rise from their chairs and back cautiously towards the door. Mr. Jawley nodded them out blandly; and being left in possession, proceeded to fill himself a cup of tea, and another of coffee, cleared the dish, emptied the toast-rack, and having disposed of these trifles, concluded a Gargantuan repast by crunching up the contents of the sugar-basin. Never had he enjoyed such a breakfast, and never had he felt so satisfied and joyous.

Having wiped his smiling lips on the table-cloth, he strolled out into the playground, where the boys were waiting to be driven in to lessons. At the moment of his appearance, Messrs. Joblett and Byles were in the act of resuming adjourned hostilities. The curate strode through the ring of spectators and beamed on the combatants with ferocious benevolence. His arrival had produced a brief armistice, but as he uttered no protests, the battle was resumed with a tentative prod on the part of Joblett.

The curate grinned savagely. “That isn’t the way, Joblett,” he exclaimed. “Kick him, man. Kick him in the stomach.”

“Beg pardon, sir,” said Joblett, regarding his preceptor with saucer-eyes. “Did you say kick him?”

“Yes,” roared the curate. “In the stomach. Like this!”

He backed a few paces, and fixing a glittering eye on Byles’s abdomen, rushed forward, and, flinging his right foot back until it was almost visible over his shoulder, let out a tremendous kick. But Byles’s stomach was not there. Neither was Byles, which, of course, follows. The result was that Mr. Jawley’s foot, meeting with no resistance, flew into space, carrying Mr. Jawley’s centre of gravity with it.

When the curate scrambled to his feet and glared balefully around, the playground was empty. A frantic crowd surged in through the open house door, while stragglers hurriedly climbed over the walls.

Mr. Jawley laughed hoarsely. It was time to open school, but at the moment he was not studiously inclined. Letting himself out by the gate, he strolled forth into the village and sauntered up the street. And here it was, just opposite the little butcher’s shop, that he encountered the village atheist. Now this philosopher—who, it is needless to say, was a cobbler by profession—had a standing and perennial joke, which was to greet the curate with the words: “How do, Jawley?” and thereby elicit a gracious “Good morning, Mr. Pegg” and a polite touch of the hat. He

proceeded this morning to utter the invariable formula, cocking his eye at the expectant butcher. But the anticipated response came not. Instead, the curate turned on him suddenly and growled:

“Say ‘sir,’ you vermin, when you speak to your betters.”

The astounded cobbler was speechless for a moment. But only for a moment.

“What!” he exclaimed, “me say ‘sir’ to a sneakin’ little sky-pilot, what——”

Here Mr. Jawley turned and stepped lightly over to the shop. Reaching in through the open front, he lifted a cleaver from its nail, and swinging it high above his head, rushed with a loud yell at the offending cobbler. But Mr. Pegg was not without presence of mind—which, in this case, connoted absence of body. Before you could say “wax,” he had darted into his house, bolted the door, and was looking down with bulging eyes from the first-floor window on the crown of the curate’s hat.

Meanwhile the butcher had emerged angrily from his shop and approached the curate from behind.

“Here,” he exclaimed gruffly, “what are you doing with that chop——” Here he paused suddenly as Mr. Jawley turned his head, and he continued with infinite suavity:

“Could you, sir, manage to spare that cleaver? If you would be so kind——”

Mr. Jawley uttered a sulky growl and thrust the great chopper into its owner’s hands; then, as the butcher turned away, he gave a loud laugh, on which the tradesman cleared his threshold at a single bound and slammed the half-door behind him. But a terrified backward glance showed him the curate’s face wreathed in smiles, and another glance made him aware

of the diminutive figure of Miss Dorcas Shipton approaching up the street.

The curate ran forward to meet her, beaming with affection. But he didn't merely beam. Not at all. The sound of his greeting was audible even to Mr. Pegg, who leaned out of window, with eyes that bulged more than ever.

"Really, Deodatus!" exclaimed the scandalised Miss Dorcas. "What can you be thinking about, in such a pub——" Her remonstrances were cut short at this point by fresh demonstrations, which caused the butcher to wipe his mouth with the back of his hand and Mr. Pegg to gasp with fresh amazement.

"Pray, pray remember yourself, Deodatus!" exclaimed the blushing Dorcas, wriggling, at length, out of his too-affectionate grasp. "Besides," she added with a sudden strategic inspiration, "you surely ought to be in school at this time."

"That is of no consequence, darling," said Jawley, advancing on her with open arms; "old Bod can look after the whelps."

"Oh, but you mustn't neglect your duties, Deodatus," said Miss Dorcas, still backing away. "Won't you go in, just to please me?"

"Certainly, my love, if you wish it," replied Jawley, with an amorous leer. "I'll go at once—but I *must* have just one more," and again the village street rang with a sound as of the popping of a ginger-beer cork.

As he approached the school, Mr. Jawley became aware of the familiar and distasteful roar of many voices. Standing in the doorway, he heard Mr. Bodley declare with angry emphasis that he "would not have this disgraceful noise," and saw him slap the desk with his open hand; whereupon nothing in particular happened excepting an apparently preconcerted chorus as of many goats. Then Mr. Jawley entered and

looked round; and in a moment the place was wrapped in a silence like that of an Egyptian tomb.

Space does not allow of our recording in detail the history of the next few days. We may, however, say in general terms that there grew up in the village of Bobham a feeling of universal respect for the diminutive curate, not entirely unmixed with superstitious awe. Rustics, hitherto lax in their manners, pulled off their hats like clockwork at his approach; Mr. Pegg, abandoning the village street, cultivated a taste for footpaths, preferably remote and unobstructed by trees; the butcher fell into the habit of sending gratuitous sweetbreads to the Rectory, addressed to Mr. Jawley; and even the blacksmith, when he had recovered from his black eye, adopted a suave and conciliatory demeanour.

The rector's wife alone cherished a secret resentment (though outwardly attentive in the matter of devilled kidneys and streaky bacon), and urged the rector to get rid of his fire-eating subordinate; but her plans failed miserably. It is true that the rector did venture tentatively to open the subject to the curate, who listened with a lowering brow and sharpened a lead pencil with a colossal pocket-knife that he had bought at a ship-chandler's in Dilbury. But the conclusion was never reached. Distracted, perhaps, by Mr. Jawley's inscrutable manner, the rector became confused, and, to his own surprise, found himself urging the curate to accept an additional twenty pounds a year—an offer which Mr. Jawley immediately insisted on having in writing.

The only person who did not share the universal awe was Miss Dorcas; for she, like the sundial, "numbered only the sunny hours." But she respected him more than any, and, though dimly surprised at the rumours of his doings, gloried in secret over his prowess.

Thus the days rolled on, and Mr. Jawley put on flesh visibly. Then came the eventful morning when, on scanning the rector's *Times*, his eye lighted on an advertisement in the Personal Column:

“Ten Pounds Reward.—Lost: a small bronze effigy of a parrot on a square pedestal; the whole two and a half inches high. The above Reward will be paid on behalf of the owner by the Curator of the Ethnographical Department of the British Museum, who has a photograph and description of the object.”

Now Mr. Jawley had become deeply attached to the parrot. But after all, it was only a pretty trifle, and ten pounds was ten pounds. That very afternoon, the Curator found himself confronted by a diminutive clergyman of ferocious aspect, and hurriedly disgorged ten sovereigns after verifying the description; and to this day he is wont to recount, as an instance of the power of money, the remarkable change for the better in the clergyman’s manners when the transaction was completed.

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. Jawley reappeared in the village of Bobham. He carried a gigantic paper parcel under one arm, and his pockets bulged so that he appeared to suffer from some unclassified deformity. At the stile, he suddenly encountered Mr. Pegg, who prepared for instant flight and was literally stupefied when the curate lifted his hat and graciously wished him “good evening.” But Mr. Pegg was even more stupefied when, a few minutes later, he saw the curate seated on a doorstep, with the open parcel on his knees, and a mob of children gathered around him. For Mr. Jawley, with the sunniest of smiles, was engaged in distributing dolls, peg-tops, skipping-ropes, and little wooden horses to a running accompaniment of bull’s-eyes, brandy-balls, and other delicacies, which he produced from inexhaustible pockets. He even offered Mr. Pegg himself a sugar-stick, which the philosophic cordwainer accepted with a polite bow and presently threw over a wall. But he pondered deeply on this wonder, and is probably pondering still, in common with the other inhabitants of Bobham.

But though, from that moment, Mr. Jawley became once more the gentlest and most amiable of men, the prestige of his former deeds

remained; reverential awe attended his footsteps abroad, devilled kidneys and streaky bacon were his portion at home; until such time as Miss Dorcas Shipton underwent a quieter metamorphosis and became Mrs. Deodatus Jawley. And thereafter he walked, not only amidst reverence and awe, but also amidst flowers and sunshine.

* * * * *

Postscript.—The curious who would know more about the parrot may find him on his appropriate shelf in the West African Section, and read the large descriptive label which sets forth his history.

“Bronze-gold weight in the form of a parrot. This object was formerly the property of the great Ashanti war Chief, Amankwa Tia, whose clan totem was a parrot. It was worn by him, attached to his wrist, as an amulet or charm, and when on a campaign a larger copy of it, of gilded wood, was carried by the chief herald, who preceded him and chanted his official motto. It may be explained here that each of the Ashanti generals had a distinguishing motto, consisting of a short sentence, which was called out before him by his heralds when on the march, and repeated, with remarkably close mimicry, by the message drums. Thus, when several bodies of troops were marching through the dense forest, their respective identities were made clear to one another by the sound of the chant on the drums. Amankwa Tia’s motto was: ‘Donköh e didi mä tūm. On esse?’ Which may be translated: ‘(Foreign) Slaves revile me. Why?’ A somewhat meaningless sentence, but having, perhaps, a sinister significance.”

The Forbidden Woman

By Warwick Deeping

Royal Army Medical Corps

Hilary Blake went down through the tangled shrubs of the garden that was half a wilderness, and a strange, white awe was on his face.

Twice he paused, turned, and looked back. She was still there on the terrace, set high against the sunset—a strange, wet sunset, in which streaks of opalescent blue showed dimly through a vaporous glow of scarlet and gold. Queer, slate-coloured clouds sailed low down across the sky. The far woods were the colour of amethyst. But Judith of the terrace was outlined against a clear breadth of gold. She was watching him, and he could imagine the provoking set of her head, and that enigmatic smile of hers that made men wonder.

She had been strangely kind to him that evening, and the fire of her beauty was in his blood.

How was it that she had been a young widow these five years, and that no man had won her a second time? She was proud, with a vague, elusive pride, a pride that baffled and kept men at a distance. And yet it had seemed to him that there was a great sadness behind those eyes, a dread of something, a loneliness that waxed impatient. Sudden silences would fall on her. He had found her looking at him in a queer and tragic way, as though she saw some shadow of fate falling between them.

A spray of syringa brushed across his face as he walked on down the tangled path. It was wet and fragrant, and, with sudden exultation, he crushed it against his mouth. The smell of it was of June and of her.

He went on, head in air, marvelling at all the tangle of chances that had brought this great thing to him. A year ago he had been Captain Blake, of the 7th Foot, leading redcoats by the Canadian lakes. He remembered that letter coming to him, that letter that told him how two deaths had

made him Blake of Brackenhurst Manor. There had been that wild dinner in that block-house by the lakes, when all the fine fellows had drunk to Blake of Brackenhurst, and Red Eagle and his “braves” had gone mad with fire-water and set the store-house alight by shooting into the thatch. He had not seen Brackenhurst since he was a boy. He had come to it a little elated, and he had discovered her.

“Good evening, Captain Blake.”

Hilary had just let the wicket-gate clash behind him. He turned sharply.

An old yew threw a deep shade here, shutting off the sunset, and, leaning against the fence under it, Hilary saw a big man in a long green coat, buff riding-breeches and top boots. He wore a black, unpowdered wig under his three-cornered hat, and this dark wig set off the sallow and impassive breadth of a face that showed to the world a laconic arrogance. He had a little book of fishing flies in his hands, and as he played with it casually his eyes looked at Hilary Blake with an ironical insolence that was but half veiled.

Blake hardly knew the man, save by sight and reputation. He was Sir Royce Severn, of Moor Hall, a man with a mystery round him and more duels to his credit than his neighbours cared to mention. In fact, there was a sort of dread of him dominating the neighbourhood. He lived practically alone at Moor Hall, up yonder against the northern sky, a grim, secretive sort of creature who rode, and shot, and fished alone.

“Good evening to you,” and Blake’s eyes added, “What may you be doing outside Judith Strange’s garden fence?”

The man seemed to have been waiting for that challenging look in the other’s eyes. He gave a queer and almost noiseless laugh, and put his fly-book away in his pocket. A heavy hunting-crop hung on the fence. Sir Royce Severn tucked it with a certain cynical ostentation under his arm.

“I think we are strangers, Captain Blake.”

“I think we are, sir.”

“My way is your way for a mile or so. Do you take the path through the park?”

“I do.”

He moved on, and the man in green set himself beside him. The sunset was on their faces, and up yonder Judith of the Terrace still stood outlined against a glow of gold.

Blake saw his companion look steadily towards her, and there was something in that look that made his blood simmer.

“Mrs. Judith stays out late on so damp an evening.”

“And what is it to you if she does, my friend,” said Blake’s eyes.

The man in green laughed, that quiet, threatening laugh of his.

“You come here very often, Captain Blake.”

“I beg your pardon, sir.”

“I said, you come here very often. You are new to these parts; I know them better than you do.”

A cold anger began to stir in Hilary Blake.

“My business is my own, Sir Royce Severn. Pray leave it at that.”

The other answered him sharply.

“I deny that, Captain Blake; I deny that flatly. It is my business to tell you that Judith Strange is a dangerous woman.”

The path had reached a spot where great oaks were gathered together, casting a half gloom over the grass. Under their canopies the stormy sky showed yellow and red.

Blake stopped dead and faced the man in green.

“I think, sir, you are a little mad—or very insolent.”

“I am neither the one nor the other.”

“You will leave a certain name untouched in my presence.”

He saw two like points of light shine out in the other’s eyes.

“That is the language that all of them have used, Captain Blake. Your good cousin talked like that, sir, though what right he had to mouth such heroics only his own silly conceit could tell. I have heard a great deal of such talk”—he shrugged and laughed—“it never moved me one iota.”

Blake stared at him.

“Moved you, sir! What cause was there for you to be moved—one way or the other? Save that if you spoke lightly of a lady it was right that some man should smite you on the mouth.”

“That no man has ever done.”

“Indeed!”

“I speak of Judith Strange as I please.”

“I think not, sir.”

“Captain Blake, you have never seen me handle a sword or mark my man with a pistol.”

He drew himself up, squaring his shoulders; and his arrogant face was a threat, a face that loomed big and white and fanatical under the gloom of the trees.

Blake’s eyes grew dangerous.

“Come out into the open, sir. What is at the bottom of all this boasting?”

Sir Royce Severn bowed to him.

“Captain Blake, let me suggest to you that you go no more to Judith Strange’s house.”

“Let me suggest, sir, that you mind your own business.”

“Judith Strange is my business.”

The younger man took a step forward, and his left arm went up. Severn’s hunting-crop whirled suddenly, and struck Blake’s fist so that one of the knucklebones cracked. The pain of it made Blake stride to and fro, biting his lips.

“You fiend!”

Severn laughed.

“You cannot hurt me, my friend. I never met a cock yet who could face me in the pit. Judith Strange, Captain Blake, is to be my wife, and I have a sort of jealousy in me that is dangerous to calves. I say what I please about the woman I mean to marry.”

Blake’s face had gone dead white, but not with physical pain.

“I don’t take you, sir.”

“Oh, come, sir, come. You appear to know very little about women. Judith Strange would flirt on her wedding morning. But I, Captain Blake, want no youngsters playing round the woman I mean to marry. If moths come to my candle, *pff*, I snuff them out. Only twice, sir, have men dared to fight with me. They did not need a second dose.”

He tucked his hunting-crop under his arm, took off his hat ironically, and left Blake standing.

For the moment Hilary Blake's anger had died out of him. He saw Sir Royce Severn disappear among the trees, and felt himself a fool for having ridden the high horse. The man had had the laugh of him. It was all natural, and logical enough.

Sir Royce Severn could be accused of neither madness nor insolence if he resented another man paying court to the woman who was to be his wife.

But Judith! And that wet sunset, and the walk upon the terrace, that leave-taking, the brushing of the syringa across his mouth! A flare of pain rushed through him. He thought of the exultation of an hour ago, of the wonder of joy that had been in his heart.

Had she been playing with him, fooling him? What was he to believe?

He was lost in the chaos of his own emotions, of love, anger, scorn, hate, shame, and savage regret. He would go back and hear the truth from her own lips. But no, the laughter of a coquette would be too bitter for him to bear. Great God! was she that heartless thing? Why should he believe this man's word against her, throw over all that was sacred because of Severn's confident sneers?

Hilary turned, and began to walk back along the path, staring at the ground in front of him, forgetting his bruised hand. The splendour was dying in the west, and a blue twilight flowing into the valleys; the hills looked black and cold.

"Hilary!"

She had come on him suddenly out of the twilight, and the red brocade dress that she was wearing seemed to catch the last rays of the sunset,

and to glow amid the gloom. She was breathing fast as though she had been running, and he could see the rising and falling of her breast.

Hilary had stopped dead, his head held high.

“Mrs. Judith!”

But that haughty poise of his was no more than hoar frost on a sunny morning.

She came close to him till he saw the shine in her eyes, the proud rage of her white throat, and the way that glowing red brocade swayed up and down below a smother of white lace. Even the lover in him had guessed her capable of great passion, but now that he saw the full flare thereof he stood silent and astonished.

“That brute was waiting for you. I had looked for it. That is why I stayed upon the terrace. I knew that it must happen some day soon.”

“Sir Royce Severn?”

Her passion did not give him time to speak.

“So, Hilary Blake, he has frozen or frightened you—after his fashion! You hold your head high and look at me with haughty eyes! Must I defend myself, I, who have never justified myself to any man? By Heaven, why should I stoop to defend myself before any man? Why? Even before you!”

[Illustration: “‘Judith, I will break this fate of yours.’ He drew closer, but she put him back with her hands” (page 130).]

Her whole figure seemed to glow in the twilight like metal at red heat, but her face was a stark white, her eyes challenged him.

He drew his breath in deeply, for this tempest of passion played upon the half-smothered fire in him like the wind.

“Judith, what have I said yet?”

“Ah, say it; let us have it spoken. Then I, too, will speak.”

He looked at her, and a sudden generous shame smote him.

“No, by Heaven!”

She beat her hands together.

“Yes, by Heaven! But I can guess what Severn said: that I am to be his wife, that I have played with men——”

His silence answered her.

“He lied. Do you hear, he lied. My God, how I hate that man!”

She stood very still a moment, but it was the stillness of a wrath that found nothing strong enough to carry it to self-expression.

“Listen. For five years—ever since my husband died—this man has persecuted me. ‘Judith, marry me,’ he has asked, month by month, but I know that I hated him from the first, and I did not hide my hate. But he is a devil, that man; he seemed to thrive on the ‘Nays’ I gave him, and he came and quarrelled month by month, by way of making love. I forbade him the house. He laughed, and said: ‘Be sure that I shall not let you marry another man. I shall scare them away, or kill them if they refuse to be scared.’ And he was as good as his word. Men sought me; I did not seek them, nor did I love any of those who came to me to make love. What did it matter? Each man dropped away in turn, and came no more. Three were cowards; two fought Royce Severn and were wounded; he swore that he would kill them the next time, and they took him at his word. Love was not worth the risk! Then he would waylay me somewhere, and be smooth, and courteous, and sneering. ‘Judith,’ he would say, ‘no man will put me out of his path. You will marry me—or remain a widow.’ And when I threatened to go away—marry, to spite

him—he threatened in return. ‘My dear, I shall follow you. And if you trick me, by marrying, you will be a widow again within a month.’”

Strange as the tale sounded, Blake knew that it was the truth, and a fierce exultation woke in him. If she had not cared, would she have told him this?

“The man is mad!”

“Mad, yes, but most accursedly logical in his madness. The Severns have been like that. Sometimes I feel that I shall take his life, or that he will take mine.”

Blake took a step towards her.

“Judith, am I no more than the other men, the cowards, and the two who would not dare the uttermost?”

“I shall not answer you.”

“By Heaven, you must! Why, even if you have no love for me, shall I slink away and not fight for the right to be near you! There is a devil in me that can match the devil in Royce Severn.”

She gave a queer, inarticulate cry, and the fire died out of her eyes.

“No, no; that is why I followed you to-night. Hilary, I knew that you were not like those others.”

“You knew that! Then——”

“No, no; listen. I have a feeling in me sometimes that I am a woman who is fatal to men—fatal to those who love me. A month ago I might not have cared, but now I care too much. Hilary, promise never to see me again.”

He gave a grim yet exultant laugh.

“That is impossible. Judith, I will break this fate of yours.”

He drew closer, but she put him back with her hands.

“No, no; have I not told you that this man is a devil? No one in these parts would dare to cross him. He can shoot as no mortal man should shoot, and they say that the best French swordsmen could not touch him. It is death.”

He drew himself up, and his eyes smiled suddenly.

“If it be death, well, what of that! My love is greater than Severn’s love. I, too, can use foil or pistol, and a cavalry sabre is like neither of these. I shall fight this man.”

She stood white and mute a moment, her hands hanging limply. Then suddenly her hands were upon his shoulders, her passionate face looking into his.

“Hilary, oh, my dear! No, no; I cannot bear it. Go away, leave me. I shall have your blood upon my hands, and then I think I shall go mad.”

He caught her and held her.

“Judith, I cannot leave you. So I must kill Severn.”

“But he——”

“Dear, the man is mortal. I say, I shall kill him.”

“Yet, if you kill him——”

He lifted her face to his.

“Well, I might have to go over the water for a while. But I should come back.”

“Hilary!”

He felt all the woman in her stirring in his arms.

“Hilary, I should be with you then, not here. Oh, if it were possible!”

“Dear, is this the truth?”

“The uttermost truth, the very heart of my heart.”

He looked at her, very dearly, and then kissed her upon the mouth.

“So be it. Go back, my beloved. I have work to do.”

He had to free himself, almost by force, for her dread returned.

“No, no; I shall never see you again.”

“I swear that you shall. Dear heart, let me go.”

He put her hands aside very gently.

“Judith, go home and wait. By morning I may have news for you.”

In half an hour Blake was on the edge of the moor, walking as though for a wager. A mere cart track led over the moor to Moor Hall, and on either side of it were stretched masses of whin and heather. A moon was just rising, and all the countryside was spread below, the distant cliffs drawing a black outline about the glimmer of the sea. But Blake was watching the cart track in front of him.

He had cut an oak sapling with his clasp-knife in one of the park plantations so that he should have something to match against Royce Severn’s hunting-crop.

Blake had guessed that he might catch his man on the homeward road, and catch him he did, just where the track turned eastwards over the ridge of the moor. Fifty paces ahead of him Blake saw a black figure rise against the sky-line, almost between him and the rising moon.

“Sir Royce Severn.”

The black figure paused, and waited there against the steel-grey sky.

“Who’s there?”

The moonlight showed him Hilary Blake.

“Ah, Captain Blake, come to apologise so soon!”

“No, sir, only to tell you that you are a liar.”

He could not see Severn’s face, for he had his back turned towards the moon.

“So you do not believe me, Captain Blake?”

“No, I do not, sir; or I should not have turned so far out of my way to call you a liar and a coward.”

Both men felt that it had come, that they were like dogs doomed to be at each other’s throats, but Severn strolled forward with a casual air, flicking his hunting-crop to and fro as though he were beating time to a piece of music. And that arrogant self-confidence of his fooled him. He had to do with an athlete that night, a man who had matched himself to run and leap against Indians, and not with some heavy squireling or town gallant out of condition with drink and cards. For Blake took a standing leap at Severn, covered ten foot of ground at the spring, and got such a blow home as sent the big man sprawling.

Blake was on him, and had wrenched the hunting-crop away. He broke it across his knee, and threw the pieces into a furze bush.

“If you want a broken fist, sir, I have an oak sapling that will wipe out that blow you gave me two hours ago.”

But Severn was up, in far too wild a rage for sticks or fisticuffs.

“Fool, I should have warned you with a sword-prick through the arm, but now, by the woman I mean to marry, I will kill you.”

“Leave it at that!”

“Choose your weapons. I’ll meet you with whatever you please.”

Blake smiled over set teeth.

“I claim cavalry sabres. I have two. You shall have your choice.”

Severn snarled at him.

“You prefer being slashed to pricked, eh? Very good. One second each will serve. At six to-morrow morning.”

“When you please.”

Severn became suddenly and splendidly polite.

“Captain Blake, it will be a pleasure. What do you say to that little field at the back of the fir plantation on the main road down yonder? You know it?”

“Yes.”

“At six, then. I have a friend at my house who will act for me. I shall be happy to choose one of your sabres. I wish you a very good night.”

His politeness had thinned to an ironical and sneering playfulness, but Blake had been born with a stiff back. Yet he saw how Royce Severn had trodden on the courage of those other men, and half cowed them before they had crossed swords.

“It is a pretty thing, a cavalry sabre, sir. May you, too, pass a good night. I shall go home and get some sleep.”

And so they parted.

Hilary Blake turned back for Brackenhurst, and in half an hour found himself standing in the brick porch of Colonel Maundrell’s house at the

end of Brackenhurst village. The colonel's old soldier-servant answered his knock.

"Is your master in, Thomas?"

"Sure, sir; he is in."

"And alone?"

"And alone, sir."

Colonel Maundrell was sitting at the open window of his library that looked towards the sea.

Two candles in silver candlesticks stood on the oak table, and their pale light seemed to mingle with the moonlight that streamed in at the window. The old soldier with the hawk's beak of a nose and the iron-grey head had been sitting there thinking.

Directly the door had closed and the sound of Thomas's footsteps could be heard departing, Blake told his business.

"Colonel, I want you to second me. I fight Royce Severn at six to-morrow morning."

The old soldier sat forward in his chair. Then, after a moment's silence, "Curse Royce Severn."

He rose, and drawing himself to his full height, looked searchingly at Blake from under his straight grey eyebrows.

"What has made you quarrel with Royce Severn?"

"A love affair, sir."

Maundrell pulled out his tortoise-shell snuff-box and took snuff vigorously.

“So you want to marry Judith Strange. I know how Severn has persecuted her. It is a pity someone has not shot the beast; I have thought of doing it myself. But do you know what you are doing, Blake?”

“I am going to marry Judith Strange.”

“Yes, yes; all very well that. But this man Severn can shoot and fence like the devil himself. He is the coolest and most deadly beast when there is fighting afoot. Who has the choice of weapons?”

“I have, sir; I have chosen cavalry sabres.”

The colonel threw up his right hand with a stiff gesture of delight.

“Sabres? excellent! Severn’s love is the foil. There are some men, Blake, who can never take kindly to sabre play, just as some men would rather be slashed than pinked through the liver. Sabres: excellent!”

He walked up and down, limping slightly, from an old wound that he had got at Fontenoy.

“Where do we meet, lad?”

“In the little meadow behind the fir plantation above Gaymer’s farm.”

“At six?”

“At six. I take the sabres. Severn has his choice. A friend is to second him.”

“I know that friend of his. A little brown beast of a French fencing-master. Sabres: excellent! Look you, lad, speed is the great thing against a man like Severn. Go at it, like a cavalry charge. I have known good swordsmen knocked over by mere slashing boys in a cavalry charge. It is no use playing the cunning game with Royce Severn.”

“Thank you, sir. I am out to kill him in the first thirty seconds. I know something about sabres.”

The colonel came and tapped him on the shoulder.

“Blake, you had better sleep here. Go up and get those sabres now it is dark.”

“That is an idea, sir. I want to pack a valise, and get all the money I have in the house. I will ride my black horse down here and stable him for the night.”

“Lad, you don’t contemplate dying! That’s the spirit.”

“If I have to go, sir, I’ll not leave Severn alive behind me. Judith shall be free.”

It was a cloudless June morning when Hilary Blake and Colonel Maundrell got on their horses and took the lane that led round the back of the village past the mill.

Blake’s Canadian campaigning had hardened him, and he had slept for three hours. He carried a leather valise strapped to his saddle. The colonel had the sabres wrapped in a black cloth under his arm. Mists still hung about the valleys, and they could not see the sea.

They passed Gaymer’s farm and came to the fir plantation. It was black, and still, and secret, and gloom hung within the crowded trunks like a curtain. A rough gate opened through a ragged hedge. They dismounted, and leading their horses, disappeared into the wood.

Judith Strange had not slept, for a man had come riding late up the drive between the old oaks, and had left a letter with the major domo, and galloped away again as though fearful of being called back. The letter had been sealed with red wax, and Judith had broken the seal and read the letter by candle-light in the long parlour.

“JUDITH,—I love you. I fight Severn to-morrow morning, and you shall be free. Do not try to come between us, for you will fail.

“HILARY BLAKE.”

She had turned the letter over in her hands, and her gaze had rested on the red wax of the seal she had broken. The colour of blood! She had been seized by a foreboding of evil, by the thought that this thing was prophetic, that to-morrow the man who loved her might be dead.

She fought against this dread in her own heart, but she did not sleep. Her servants were a-bed; the candles had burnt out in the long parlour, and the full moon shone over the sea.

Judith had stepped through the open window on to the terrace, and she walked to and fro there in the moonlight, feeling that she was helpless to hinder the workings of her own fate.

Then she rebelled, thrust her forebodings aside, and refused to believe in her own fears.

She returned to the house, found a little hand-lamp burning in the panelled hall, and taking it went up the broad stairs to her room at the end of the long gallery. There was a valise under the bed. She pulled it out, and began to fill it with clothes, and to collect her jewellery and store it away in a rosewood case bound with brass. Nor did she forget the guineas she kept in the secret drawer of her bureau.

Then she dressed herself as for a journey, with a kind of tenderness towards herself and towards her love, putting on one of her red brocades and a black beaver hat with black feather. She looked long at herself in her glass, touching her black hair with her fingers, on which she had thrust the most precious of her rings. Emeralds and rubies glittered in the lamplight, and her eyes were almost as feverish as the precious stones.

She sat down in a chair by one of the windows and waited. Hours passed; the dawn showed in the east; the lamp had burnt all its oil, and had flickered out. The silence was utter. An anguish of restlessness returned.

A clock struck five. She rose, passed out of the room, down the dim stairs, and through the long parlour on to the terrace. The freshness of the dawn was there, and the birds were awake in the thickets. She began to walk up and down, up and down over the stone flags, with the heavy mists lying in the valleys below, and the sea hidden by a great grey pall.

The boom of a gun came from the sea. It was some fog-bound ship firing a signal.

The clock in the turret struck six. A gardener appeared upon the terrace, saw Judith walking there, stared, and slunk away. She was conscious of a strange oppression at the heart, a sudden spasmodic quickening of her suspense. She could walk no longer, but sat down on the dew-wet parapet and waited.

Suddenly the mist lifted. The great trees in the park seemed to shake themselves free of their white shrouds. The vapour drifted away like smoke; the grass slopes and hollows showed a glittering greyish green.

Judith stood up, her eyes dark and big in a pale face, for far away, over yonder, something moved amid the trees. She pressed her hands over her bosom and waited. And then she saw a galloping horse, and a man bending forward in the saddle, a little figure, distant in the morning light.

Which was it? She strained her eyes, but could not satisfy her suspense. Twice had Royce Severn ridden to her in just such a fashion, to make mocking love to her and to tell her that he had left a rival cowed and beaten.

Suddenly her heart leapt in her. The man had galloped near; he had seen the figure on the terrace; he waved his hat.

She gave a strange cry, ran to the terrace steps and down them to the path that led through the wilderness.

They met where a climbing rose trailed in the branches of a half-dead almond tree. Blake had left his horse at the wicket-gate.

She saw the grim radiance of his face.

“Hilary!”

“I have killed Royce Severn.”

She swayed forward, and he had her in his arms.

“Oh, my beloved, you are as white as death.”

“Dear, I have suffered.”

He kissed her.

“Judith, you are free. But this man’s blood——”

She clung to him.

“Let us go away, let us go away together. Yes, I have money, and my jewels, and my valise packed. I will order the coach. They cannot harm you, Hilary, for killing him, and yet——”

He looked in her eyes and understood.

“Dear, we will leave the thought of it behind us. Come, there is no time to lose. We can make Rye town before noon.”

They went up the terrace steps hand in hand.

Eliza *and the* Special

By Barry Pain

Royal Naval Air Service

“Eliza!” I said, after we had retired to the drawing-room, as we almost always do after our late dinner nowadays, unless of course the lighting of an extra fire is involved, “Eliza, I have this afternoon come to rather an important decision. I must ask you to remember the meaning of the word decision. It means that a thing is decided. It may be perfectly natural to you to beg me not to risk the exposure to the weather, and the possible attacks by criminals or German spies, but where my conscience has spoken I am, so to speak, adamant, (if you would kindly cease playing with the cat, you would be able to pay more attention to what I am saying). What I want you to realise is that no entreaties or arguments can possibly move me. This nation is at present plunged——”

“By the way,” said Eliza, “you don’t mind my interrupting, but I’ve just thought of it. Miss Lakers says she can’t think why you don’t offer yourself as a special, and I don’t see why you shouldn’t, either.”

“This, Eliza,” I said, “is one of the most extraordinary coincidences that have befallen me in the whole course of my life. If an author were to put such a thing in a book, every reader would remark on its improbability. But the fact remains—at the very moment when you spoke I was on the point of telling you that I had decided to become a special constable.”

“That’s all right, then,” said Eliza. “I’ll tell Miss Lakers. Wonder you didn’t think of it before. Anything in the evening paper to-night?”

“You are hardly taking my decision in the way that might have been expected,” I said. “However, we will let that pass. We must now take the necessary steps.”

“What do you mean?” said Eliza. “You just go to the station and——”

“I was not thinking of that. There is this question of exposure to the weather. A warm waistcoat—sufficiently low at the back to give protection to the kidneys—is, I understand, essential. We must also procure a flask.”

“Well, I shouldn’t if I were you. If you take whiskey when you’re on duty, and then anything happens, you only put yourself in the wrong.”

[Illustration: “I had forgotten my cocoa flask” (page 139).]

“My dear Eliza,” I said, “I was not dreaming of taking stimulants while on duty. Afterwards, perhaps, in moderation, but not during. I was referring to one of those flasks which keep soup or cocoa hot for a considerable period. This question of exposure to the weather is rather more serious than you seem to——”

“Oh, that kind of flask! Well, that’s different. And do be more careful when you’re uncrossing your legs. You as near as possible kicked the cat that time.”

As I told her, she had quite failed to grasp the situation or to take a proper interest in it. Her reply, that I was too funny, simply had no bearing on the subject.

* * * * *

I am not a snob. Far from it. But I do think that in the special constabulary a little more regard might be paid to social status. I was required for certain hours of the night to guard a small square building connected with the waterworks. It was in a desperately lonely spot, fully a hundred yards from the main road and approached by a footpath across a desolate field. I make no complaint as to that. Unless a man has pretty good nerves he had better not become a special constable. But I do complain, and with good reason, that in this task I was associated with Hopley.

Hopley is a plumber, in quite a small way. Some ten or twelve years ago, when I was merely an employee of the firm in which I am now a partner, I gave Hopley some work. At the time of taking the order he called me "sir," and was most respectful. Later, he used very coarse language, and said he should not leave my kitchen until the account had been settled. I remember this because it was the last time that I had to pawn my watch.

Fortunately, Hopley seemed to have forgotten the incident and to have forgotten me. On the other hand he seemed quite oblivious of the fact that there was any social barrier between us. He always addressed me as an equal, and even as an intimate friend. Making allowances for the unusual circumstances, the nation being at war, I did not put him back in his place. But after all, I ask myself, was it necessary? With a little more organisation it would not have happened.

I will admit that I found him useful at drill and generally tried to be next him. He seemed to know about drill, and gave me the required pull or push which makes so much difference.

But when we two were guarding that building I found him most depressing. He took a pessimistic view of the situation. He said that any

special who was put to guard a waterworks was practically sentenced to death, because the Germans had got the position of every waterworks in the kingdom charted, and the Zeppelins had their instructions. Then he talked over the invasion of England, and the murder of a special constable, and told ghost stories. By day I could see, almost before Eliza pointed it out, that an incendiary bomb would do more active work in a gasometer than in a reservoir. But in the darkness of the small hours I am—well, distinctly less critical.

And I may add that the only mistake we have made yet was entirely due to Hopley. It was a nasty, foggy night and I saw a shadowy form approaching. I immediately went round to the other side of the building to report to Hopley, and he said that this was just the sort of night the Germans would choose for some of their dirty work. It was he who instructed me about taking cover and springing out at the last minute. We sprang simultaneously, Hopley on one side and myself on the other, and if it had been anybody but Eliza we should have made a smart job of it. I had forgotten my cocoa flask and Eliza was bringing it to the place where I was posted. This was unfortunate for Hopley, as she hit him in the face with the flask. I think that I personally must have slipped on a banana-skin, or it may have been due to the sudden surprise at hearing Eliza's voice. Eliza said she was sorry about Hopley's nose, but that we really ought not to play silly jokes like that when on duty, because we might possibly frighten somebody.

The other night I was discussing with Hopley the possibility of my being made a sergeant.

"Not a chance," he said. "No absolute earthly, old sport." And then he passed his hand in a reflective way over his nose. "But if only your missus could have joined," he said, "she'd have been an inspector by now."

The Probation *of* Jimmy Baker

By Albert Kinross

Army Service Corps

I

The bank was in the High Street, a broad, leafy place of stone houses and regularly planted trees. The most of Seacombe, however, is neither broad nor leafy nor regular. Old Town—so they call it—a picturesque welter of thatched and cream-washed cottages, climbs the hills and clusters round the harbour; New Town, with its bank and High Street and electric light and things, was added when the railway came. Into this bank, one bright September morning, stepped Miss Mamie Stuart Berridge, of Lansing, in the State of Michigan. From Lansing, in the State of Michigan, to Seacombe, in the county of Somerset, is a far and distant cry, and the transition requires money for its satisfactory accomplishment. Miss Mamie had money, a diminishing wad that folded up in a neat black leather case. She stepped into the bank, unfolded her wad, and handed an American Express Company's cheque across the counter. The young man who did duty there reminded her that she must sign it. "That's the second time I've forgotten," said Mamie, and wrote her name in the appointed space.

"All gold, or would you like a note?" inquired the young man.

Miss Mamie thought that she would like a note; and then she altered her mind and exchanged the note for gold; and then she altered her mind once more and took the note. The young man smiled amiably and blushed a little; for the transaction was fast becoming confidential, and he was told that the note would "do for Mrs. Bilson." He knew Mrs. Bilson as a party who let lodgings.

"Are you comfortable there?" he ventured.

"As comfortable as one can be in this old England of yours."

A laugh, a snapping of her handbag, a swish of skirt, and she was gone. Other and duller customers engaged the young man till four o'clock. Once or twice that day he thought of Mamie, and wondered whether she was ever coming back again.

The next afternoon he caught a glimpse of her, seated high on a char-à-banc, and just returned from an excursion. "She's been to Porlock Weir," he said, and then went off to play tennis, a game that invariably occupied his leisure hours of daylight. After the bank had closed there was little else to do in Seacombe. The next day he met her face to face, and he blushed a deep pink, for she had recognised him. She gave him a bright little bow; he stopped; she inquired whether he had anything to do; and "Nothing at all," was his answer. The tennis club could go hang was an inward ejaculation that escaped Miss Mamie Stuart Berridge.

They bought things for her supper and her breakfast, and she also wanted a new pair of gloves, and asked the young man where she could get them. He did his best for her and carried the parcels, and explained that a florin was not the same as half a crown. She had given up Mrs. Bilson, who had overcharged her, and was now doing her own catering. "Just like you English," she added gaily, and led the way to a shop where they sold Devonshire cream. This latter delicacy, it appeared, was "just lovely," and not to be had at all in the United States.

"Won't you come in?" she asked, when at last they reached her door.

The young man hesitated.

"Isn't it proper?" inquired Miss Mamie.

The young man smiled.

"Well, I guess we'll just be improper."

The young man followed her into a sitting-room that overlooked the street.

Indoors, Mamie tucked up her sleeves and made a salad, and the young man sat on the sofa and watched her. “What’s your name?” she asked.

“Baker—James Baker.”

“Always been at that old bank?”

“Since I left school.”

“Like it?”

“Not very much.”

“Why do you stay there?”

“I don’t know.”

“Got put there, and here in England people stay where they’re put?”

“I suppose so.”

“Any prospects?”

“I may be a manager some day—get a branch office like this.”

“When you’re pie-faced and bald?”

Her frankness was alarming, but Jimmy Baker rather liked it. “When I’m forty or so,” he admitted.

“How old are you now?” She asked the question without looking up from her salad.

“Twenty-three.”

“I’m twenty-two,” said she. “Uncle Walter died and left me a thousand, and so I thought I’d come to England and have a good time. I’m going to be a school teacher when it’s over. I’ve been to college. When you’ve been to college you can do without a chaperon, and I’d nobody to go with

me and nobody to ask. Father's married again, and I don't remember mother. I was a baby when she died. You got any folks?"

Baker had everything and everybody. His father farmed near Bideford; his mother and sisters looked after the dairy; his brothers were at school or in positions similar to his own.

"What do they give you at the bank?" she asked.

He named the figure of his meagre salary.

"My! you're not going on working for that!"

"I have to," he answered.

"Well, it's no business of mine;" and now she rang for the landlady and introduced Mr. Baker as a guest who was staying to supper.

II

Miss Mamie Stuart Berridge had explored Exmoor and Dunster and Porlock, and the other wonderful and romantic places that are within walking or driving distance of the little town. She had, perhaps, just scratched the surface; yet, for all that, it was ecstatic to take tea in the shadow of age-old castles, or wander through villages that looked as though they had come straight out of a picture-book. Till she met Jimmy Baker, however, one thing had been lacking in this romance—the final touch. She saw it at last, and clearly too; it had not been so very prominent before. Jimmy's ingenuous face brought it home to her. She wanted a companion. Doing England and having "a good time" was all very well; but without a companion it was only half the good time it might have been. And there was Jimmy, free to go a-roaming every evening after five, or even earlier. So she annexed him, and such of Seacombe as knew Jimmy whispered that this annexation was not entirely one-sided.

He was twenty-three and she was twenty-two, and it was the month of the harvest moon and all the year's stored tenderness. They climbed the winding paths that led to the church; close together on a bench they rested and found the sea; through narrow lanes they strolled, and thence upward to purple heather and the misty hills. And there Mamie discovered that she had not been mistaken. The final touch was a hand laid on hers, and an inward wound like that which comes when music is too sweet, too magical. The night she gave her lips to him obliterated America, and especially Lansing, in the State of Michigan. She wanted to stay here for ever, in his arms, and the moon poised above Dunkery Beacon. This place was no longer England; it had become the Land of Heart's Desire.

“Let me look and look,” she cried; “I shall never see anything like this again!” And with his arm on her neck, and cheek against cheek, they sat there, awed by a world bathed in moonlight, themselves transfigured, smitten and silenced by the great mystery of first-awakened love. It seemed to Mamie that she had been born anew, been here admitted into some strange, all-satisfying faith.

Baker’s holiday, an annual fortnight wherein he might refresh himself as best he could, was due next Monday. He had been saving up for it. During fifty weeks of the year he was a bank clerk, the other two he was permitted to be a man. By a predestinate coincidence—or so they deemed it—Mamie’s trip expired on the same date. A fortnight from the Monday she must go to Liverpool, and thence return to Lansing, in the State of Michigan. She had her berth on the steamboat; all was paid for and arranged. Thus two weeks and some odd days remained to them before she sailed.... It was on the Saturday that they made up their minds to get married.

Which of the two first jumped to that decision is hard to say, and does not matter specially. That they jumped to it is enough. The Saturday found them at Grabbist, above Dunster, and the inspiration came during a pause. It seemed as simple as the line of Dunkery Beacon, that great hill whose monstrous bulk is so precise. Next day, in the smoke-room of the Pier Hotel, they consulted reference books. They could go to London to-morrow, and be married on the Tuesday, it said, provided they paid the fees. They clubbed their money together and went.

From then onward unseen hands seemed to guide them; first to their lodgings, thence to the office of the Vicar-General, where they bought a licence—Mamie had stayed in London, and had a residential qualification, it appeared—and next day to the church where they were married. They came out into the street again, and no one knew their secret. They shared the memory of a sacrament taken in the wilderness,

where the droning curate and paid witnesses were of small account beside the flame that had fused them into man and wife.... The golden sunlight of that exquisite hour when, hand-in-hand, they faced London was as though made for them; the old heart of the giant city could still rejoice, it seemed, and was ready to crown true lovers, and fold them in mantles of shimmering tissue and cloth of gold. They wandered through leafy squares, and a man stopped them and asked them the way to Bell Yard. Neither of them knew. Had he inquired the road to Paradise they could have told.... They grew hungry at last. Their wedding breakfast was eaten in a restaurant off Hatton Garden. The regular customers of the place, Jews for the most part, and dealers in the staple article of that quarter, smiled the racial smile of genial incredulity as these two entered and found room. But neither Jim nor Mamie had a doubt; for in their eyes that met across the narrow table shone a light more precious and more enduring than that emitted by all the diamonds, rubies, and emeralds of Hatton Garden.... The night found them in Rye, a southern place that Mamie had chosen—she had so often longed to see it.

III

The boy and girl shared everything in those two weeks—pain and bliss, the joy of early morning, the wistfulness of twilight and the first white star. Their money was in one purse; they spent it together, choosing things to eat and drink, or little gifts that would remind them when their hour was come. Over their young heads hung the shadow; they had the courage to outface it; to-morrow was yet distant, and when it dawned they would praise God for what had been, and could never be removed.... They knew all there was to know; and a strange pride thrilled them, a tenderness that neither had foreseen. Love was even greater than their dreams of it and their foreknowledge. The sea's strength and the land's strength had tested soul and body, had blessed these two with infinite renewals, an unassailable virginity.

From Rye and Winchelsea they had wandered to Hythe along that coastline, avoiding Dungeness, and pausing at Lydd, New Romney, and Dymchurch with its sands. Each morning they had bathed, and often at sunset; these old places fascinated them, and especially Mamie, who came from Lansing, in the State of Michigan.

"What a lot you know!" he said one day, amazed at her book learning.

"I'm going to be a school teacher," she laughed back, "and besides, I like it. No, it's not the history—the dates and things—that fascinates me; but I seem to have been here before," she explained, adding: "Lots of us Americans feel that way about it—as though—as though——"

"You'd come from here?" he helped her.

"That's right—as though we'd come from here. And perhaps we have," she added gaily, finishing with "Our name's Berridge, so we must have done."

“I never look upon you as a foreigner,” said he; “at least, I haven’t since——” and he hesitated.

“Since?” she inquired.

“Since I first wanted to kiss you.”

“Do it again!”

Jimmy was quite prepared to take up the challenge, but she had fled. He caught her behind the plump Martello Tower where she was hiding, and did it again. After that they returned to firmer ground, sitting on the beach and looking out over the Channel.

“You must leave that old bank,” began Mamie; “it’s served its purpose.”

“It brought us together.”

“Yes, that’s just it. And now it’s brought us together——”

“We can drop it?” He had seen her point.

“I don’t want you to go on working for them,” she pursued; “I want you to work for us—for me.”

Jimmy nodded. “I’ve thought of that as well,” he answered.

“They give you a wretched salary, and when you’re an old Gazook and nobody wants you, they say, ‘Perhaps it’s time he got married,’ and put you in charge of a little office like that at Seacombe.”

“That’s it,” said Jimmy.

“Banking’s no good in this old country unless you’re somebody’s son, or rich on your own account. But I know what,” she added, brightening.

Jimmy sat up.

“You must get into some regular article like woollens or cottons or manufactured things—a good salesman’s always got a chance.”

“D’you know, I’ve thought of that as well?” cried young Baker. “My brother Tom travels with wholesale groceries, and he’s doing well.”

“If you haven’t got money, you’ve got to make business, and then the firm’s *bound* to pay you—it can’t help itself. My old uncle was always saying that.”

And so it was resolved that, when Mamie went back to America, Jim should quit the bank and get hold of a “regular article.” Only that way could they two come together again, unless they wished to wait till he had become the “old Gazook” of Mamie’s prophecy.

[Illustration: “Through narrow lanes they strolled, and thence upward to purple heather and the misty hills” (page 142).]

IV

The day of parting came. He stood on the quay at Liverpool and watched the great boat out of sight. A mist filled his eyes; but when, at last, he turned on his heel and faced reality once more, a courage rose within him, and he resolved to conquer or to perish. He would conquer—conquer—conquer. All the way to London the train seemed to be repeating that burden, seemed to be branding it, stamping it in deep-bitten letters on his heart of hearts. And with that repetition mingled an ineffaceable memory of her and her fine courage. They had kissed good-bye that morning in the room of their hotel, and again in the tiny cabin where there was scarce room to swing a cat. “Believe in me,” he had whispered, her slim body close pressed to his own; and once more “Believe in me, believe in me!”... “If I didn’t believe in you,” she had answered, “I would just drop overboard, and no more said.”... “And if there’s anything else, when you get over there, you’ll tell me?” She had understood him.... “I’ll tell, of course I’ll tell;” and then: “It’s no fun being a woman, is it, Jim?” she had added, with a little laugh.... Now in the train he fed on those last moments, and he would conquer or perish. “Conquer—conquer—conquer,” echoed the on-rushing train.

He was in Seacombe that night, and had given notice next morning. “Got another job?” asked the manager; and “Yes, in London,” answered young Baker. The other seemed to envy him his chance of escape. A month from then, armed with a first-class character and seven pounds in gold, Jimmy set out for the metropolis. He had told his father as much as he dared tell that unromantic old man. He hadn’t been home for his holiday this year, he said, because he wanted to get away somewhere quiet and think about his future. Now he had come to a decision. Unless one had capital or influence, banking was no good; for a poor man it was best to learn about some staple article like woollens or cotton or coal, and stick

to that. His father said: “We’ll see,” and the rest of that week-end passed much as usual.... “D’you know, I think you’re right?” said the old man on the Monday morning; “I never thought much of that banking, but your mother says it’s a genteel trade, almost like parsoning or being a lawyer.”

Jim Baker went up to London, and these West-Country folk being a sturdy stock, no one at home, or even at Seacombe, had any doubt but that he would find a living. Mamie, meanwhile, had removed to Buffalo, New York, and had there begun her school teaching. Letters came and went; at first by every post, then not quite so often, and at last it was agreed that, when there was nothing of any consequence to say, a post-card would be enough. “I don’t want you to be *worried* by all this,” wrote Mamie; “you’ve got your work to do, and I guess I’ve got mine.” Sometimes to the romantic youth she seemed the least bit hard-hearted. He mustn’t let the thought of her hinder him, she insisted; yet often she wrote two letters to his one.

Baker’s business hours were spent in looking for the staple article. He tried several before he dropped on to his feet; cocoa to begin with, then clocks and watches, and, finally, leather. He resolved to stick to leather—firstly, because everybody used it; and, secondly, because he felt instinctively that the man who had engaged him was of the sort who would give a fellow a chance. This gentleman, a middle-aged Scotsman, Campbell by name, had a warehouse in Bermondsey, and to him young Baker went as invoice clerk. Now he wrote leather to Mamie, who answered for a while on cards. A suspicion flashed across him during this fancied period of neglect; but she had said no word about *that*—and she had promised. The suspicion died down with her first long letter. She had removed to Cleveland, where she had taken a new position. That explained it all, and Mamie was forgiven.

The next year he spoke French and German after a fashion of his own, and could attend to foreign customers. In the autumn he was promoted to

the warehouse and allowed to sell. One day he went out and came back with a contract running into four figures; and then, instead of an increase of salary, he stipulated for a small commission. His employer made no opposition; indeed, Mr. Campbell rather preferred this new arrangement. Baker was beginning to put by money. And from across the ocean came an answering whoop, shouts and ecstasies of triumph, as, step by step, these two drew nearer to the Promised Land. Her letters had now become a spur, a call—never a goad, never a lash; but there they were, egging him on, a challenge and yet a support, a martial music playing him into battle. In the night he blessed her; often he lay awake, groping for the memory of that sweet slim body.... So passed the years till he had made a home for her.

The long-awaited day had dawned at last. His commissions had reached the sum they had agreed; with his savings he had taken a modest house and furnished it. She had only to walk inside. He told his chief, now become his friend; he took him into his confidence and unfolded their whole story.

“So that’s what put the devil inside you!” cried Campbell, and slapped him on the back. “Go you off to Liverpool,” he added, “and don’t come back till you’re wanted. Make it a week, Baker; for you’re not indispensable, though you think you are. And tell the dear girl I sent you, and that I want to shake hands with her—she’s given me the best salesman in all Bermondsey, d’ye hear that?”

Jimmy heard it and laughed; and there was a pride in his laughter as well as a deep joy. Few men had a wife like his, he knew—scarce one in all he had run across these six hot years. Arrived home that night, he found the last letter she had posted from the other side.

“Husband and lover,” she wrote, “hold on to something tight. I have a dear surprise for you. I am bringing your boy to his father. I never told you before, because I wanted you to be free, because I wanted you to go

ahead and not bother about me and about us. He was born in the spring, when I only sent post-cards. That was why I only sent post-cards, and that was why I removed to Cleveland afterwards. I had my marriage paper to show, so it didn't matter much, and I let out and worked for the two of us; and now he's close on six years old. He's just like you, Jim: the same sturdy limbs, the same clear forehead, and good blue eyes. With him I have been able to bear all this separation. He knows you and loves you, and to-day he is mad with joy, because, at last, we are going to live with father. Forgive me for hiding this from you; but I didn't want to be a drag upon you. I wanted you to have a clear road and go the shortest way. When you meet us at Liverpool, you'll tell me whether I did right."

"My God," cried Jimmy Baker, "my God, I've got a son as well! And it was like her, too—like her to say nothing and stand aside for me!"

V

In Liverpool Baker met them, and the boy was just as she had described him, with his father's eyes and forehead, and strength of chest and limb. That subtle something which makes blood know its own blood, flesh its own flesh, united these two on the landing-stage. Mamie stood aside holding in her tears, as father and son hugged one another for the first time. He had kissed her before the child, and she was glad of that. His quick embrace, his look of pride, had been a reassurance, a reward, that wiped out in one stroke the pain of those long years, their doubts, their fears, suspenses, and privations. From a slip of a girl she had grown into splendid womanhood; and he, the lad that she remembered, was standing there—a man.

They left the boy with grandparents and aunts, a whole cloud of new relations; and then alone they stole off to Seacombe and Dunster, and the shadow of Dunkery Beacon.

It was May. Earth, sea, and sky were tender with their own tenderness; in the youth of all things green, new fledged, or bursting into flower, they found echo and symbol of their own renewal. Lovers they had been here, when he had served in "that old bank"; and lovers they were once more, now that steadfastness and self-mastery had brought them a far deeper passion.

"Would you go through it all over again?" he asked her, knowing her answer ere he spoke.

"Over and over again, if it had to be—but God is merciful to lovers," she replied. "I have learnt that thinking—thinking how it all happened."

"I too," he said. Few things there were that these two had not thought together, though time and ocean rolled between.

London claimed them, and work and their new home. Mr. Campbell invited himself to supper on the evening of their arrival.

“The living image of you, Baker,” he said, when Jimmy, junior, was introduced, “the living image!” And then, “I want you to stay on with us in Bermondsey; you can have a share—call it ‘Campbell & Baker,’ shall we, Mamie?” For the old ruffian had insisted on addressing Mamie by her Christian name.

The offer was accepted, and in parting, “Only one man in a thousand could have done what you have done,” said Mr. Campbell; “and only one woman in a hundred thousand, Mamie. You’ve done the impossible; you’re geniuses,” he ended, laughing at them; and, as an afterthought, “If my boy ever gets married on the quiet and plays the fool, I’ll break his blethering neck for him!”

The Ghost *that* Failed

By Desmond Coke

Loyal North Lancashire Regiment

The Blue Lady wailed disconsolately in the panelled room.

In her mortal life, four hundred years before, she had always been somewhat behind the times; and now she was in arrears by the space of a whole Silly Season. She was grappling with the stale problem, “Do we Believe?”

The Blue Lady concluded, emphatically, that we did not believe; and hence her wailing. She had seen the age of scepticism coming. For more than three hundred glad years men had crossed themselves and shuddered when she went moaning through the sombre rooms of Yewcroft Hall. Secure in her reputation, she had been content once only in the evening to interrupt the revelry, and then, conscious that all eyes had been upon her stately progress, to seek contentedly her spectral couch. But with the

growth of science had risen also disbelief. Once stage-coaches were discarded, and people came to Yewcroft by a steam-drawn train, she felt that any other marvel must lose caste. She did not fail to observe that, as she passed along the rooms, there were those who, though they trembled, would not turn, and made pretence of not observing her. Then came the hideous day on which the Hall harboured a deputation from a Society of Research, who loaded themselves with cameras, dull books, and revolvers, before spending a night in the Panelled Room. The Blue Lady, as became a self-respecting ghost, slept elsewhere, and would not show herself to these ill-mannered creatures; so that next day the Press declared the famous Yewcroft ghost to be a myth. This was terrible; but far worse was to come.

The family who had held Yewcroft since feudal times, the Blue Lady's own family, showed with old age a preference for sleep, and inasmuch as an ungrateful populace refused to pay them for this function, reduced means led to the abandonment of Yewcroft. It was taken by Lord Silthirsk, who had made tinned meat and a million by methods equally ambiguous. He turned the moss-hung chapel into a garage, and fitted electric light throughout the Hall.

The Blue Lady, struck in every vulnerable part, resolved to drive the Silthirsks out. For the first three days of their residence she missed no chance of floating in on Lady Silthirsk at moments likely to embarrass her. Her Ladyship showed no symptoms of annoyance or of fear, though sometimes, if not alone, she would look up and say, "Oh, here's that blue one again," in tones which the blue one took to be of terror cleverly concealed. On the fourth day the Silthirsks had a niece to stay, and the Blue Lady embraced this as a chance to learn what real impression she had made. Waiting till dessert was on the table, so that her Ladyship might not think it necessary to hide her fear before the servants, she swept into the dining-room and passed close beside the niece.

Elfrida shuddered. “What was that?” she cried.

“What’s what?” asked her aunt; while her uncle said “Banana,” and fell to his dessert again.

“No—something cold: it made me shudder, just as if something had gone by.”

The Blue Lady, ambushed behind a vast tooled-leather screen, gloated over her success.

“Oh, *that*!” said Lady Silthirsk: “that’s one of the fixtures—a spook. We rather like her—it’s so picturesque and old-world, ain’t it? Some people can see her—*I* always can. She’s blue—quite an inoffensive mauvy blue. Oh, I distinctly like her. She’s a novelty, ye know: and she’ll be *so* cooling in the summer!”

But even she started at the ghastly groan which issued from behind the leather screen.

For some weeks the Blue Lady did not deign to show herself, until Lady Silthirsk began to find fault. The landlord, she implied, had swindled her. It became clear to the spectre that all hopes of driving out these upstarts by terror had been idle dreams.

And now, on Christmas Eve, the night dedicate of old to her compatriots, she had given herself up to despair. She did not even care to walk. She wailed disconsolately in the Panelled Room.

It was thus that the Gaunt Baron found her. The Gaunt Baron did not belong to Yewcroft, but was attached to a neighbouring house, now empty. With nobody to terrify at home, he found visits to the Blue Lady a not unpleasing variant of the monotony. Except that she was several centuries his junior, he felt for her an emotion which went to a dangerous degree beyond respect. He was pained to find her wailing.

“What, wailing!” he cried, coming on her through the oaken panels, “and nobody to hear you?”

The Blue Lady raised a tortured face towards him. “Who would not wail? And who should hear me? Fools! They *can* not hear me. Many of them do not even see me. Bah! They have no sense, except the sense of taste: with truffles before them, they see nothing else.”

“To-night is Christmas Eve.”

The Gaunt Baron made the suggestion in a mild, kindly way, but the Blue Lady turned upon him almost angrily, as though he had been the culprit.

“Yes! To-night is Christmas Eve. And what are they doing? Where is the Yule-log? Where is the wassail? Where the dim light of glowing embers? They’ll sit in the glare of this new light—a big party—and play what they call Bridge; and if they feel a mystic chill, will draw the curtains or turn the hot-air pipes full on.... What do these fools know about Romance? The word is dead. I saw some of their novels while the house was shut. Love? Gallantry? Nowhere in the volume. A knock-kneed weakling making love to his friend’s wife, or two infants puling of passion like mere vulgar serfs.... Love, for these people, ends with Marriage, to begin again after Divorce.”

[Illustration: “‘Do a cake-walk, now!’ ‘Encore!’” (page 153).]

“You are bitter.” The Gaunt Baron held his head beneath his arm—a fact which gave to all his utterances something of the tone of a ventriloquist.

“Bitter! So would you be bitter! It’s all very well for you, with the Manor empty;—but me, with these vulgarians!... Baron, these mortals are beating us: we’re pretty well played out. ‘Played out!’ Look at our very speech: they’ve ruined that. Do I speak like a woman of the day of Good Queen Bess? Do you speak like a baron of—of King—like an ancient baron?”

“You do not,—and it was Stephen,” said the Baron quietly.

“Mark me, Baron, we are near the end. Either Lady Silthirsk or myself leaves Yewcroft. There is no room here for a self-respecting spectre. They use the headsman’s block for mounting on their horses. If I cannot drive them out, I go,—and where? Well, if I cannot leave the earth—oh, why was I ever murdered?—then I must sleep beneath the hedges, till I find an empty house. Baron, that time is near. I have tried everything, and nothing seems to frighten them. Lady Silthirsk serves liqueurs in the old Banquet Hall at midnight, and as I don’t appear,—as though I should!—she says the theatre, is closed for alterations and repairs. Oh, it is unbearable, unbearable!”

“Dear lady,” answered the Gaunt Baron, “do not despair. I managed to say, some minutes ago, that it was Christmas Eve. Let me explain. It is now close upon the hour of midnight—the time and day on which we ghosts are thought by men to have our greatest power. Even those who don’t believe in us are a little influenced by the tradition. As twelve strikes every one is half expectant. That is your moment. Burst upon them, wailing and raving. They are sure to see. Some of the guests will insist on leaving Yewcroft, and the Silthirsks will not like a house where parties are impossible. Quick! There is the gurgle that preludes the hall-clock’s striking. In three minutes midnight will be here. Hasten, sweet dame, hasten! I will be at hand to watch you.”

* * * * *

Downstairs, during this dialogue, Lady Silthirsk had been talking to her niece. “Elfrida, dear, in a few minutes they’ll all be here for the midnight *séance*; and I have something that I want to tell you first.”

“Why, what is it, auntie?” asked Elfrida: “you look terribly serious.”

“I am serious, darling girl. Let me be frank. I think it is time that you were married—not only, understand, because of your poor parents, but

also for your own happiness. And when I see a man who can make you both rich and happy, well——”

“But who?” interrupted Elfrida.

“*Who?* My dear girl, are you blind! Why, Bobby!”

“Lord Bancourt?”

“Yes, ‘Lord Bancourt’! Don’t look as though I had shot you! Why, you silly dear thing, you must know Bobby is madly in love with you. All this week he has followed you about like an obedient dog, and all the week you’ve ignored him as though he were a naughty mongrel!”

“Why, I’m sure I’ve treated him just like anybody else. I never——”

“My dear Elfrida, you will be the death of me! Do you think he wants no more of you? Are you living in the Middle Ages, or is this the Twentieth century? Do you expect him to come and steal you away by night and force? Nowadays the girl must do her part. Bobby is a splendid fellow, an old friend of mine, rich, young, passably good-looking——”

“I think he’s handsome, decidedly,” Elfrida said, without a thought, and then blushed scarlet.

Her aunt laughed. “And *I* think you’re in love with him,” she said. “I know he only wants a little encouragement—not quite so much ice to the square inch, my dear! Won’t you try, for my sake?”

“I’ll try, auntie, yes: I could be very, very happy with him—if he asked me: but I don’t think I could—it’s so hard——”

Lady Silthirsk kissed her. “I don’t ask anything, you little goose, except that you should be just humanly kind to poor Bobby—I think he’ll do the rest!”

“I’ll *try*,” said Elfrida dubiously.

Her aunt, she reflected, was not of a nature to see how terrible it would be if people should believe her to be “angling” for Lord Bancourt. Better that he should choose some one else than that he should marry her on such a rumour!

“Oh, here they are!” cried Lady Silthirsk, as her husband brought his flock into the room, shouting:

“I’ve collected every one, gamblers and all, for the *séance*—except Bobby. Can’t find him.”

“Oh, I wish he were here—the Lady will surely walk on Christmas Eve,” said the hostess. “If she doesn’t, I mean to demand my money back! Oh, there’s the hour! Sit quiet, every one.... Blue Lady forward, please! There, look!—there!”

She pointed excitedly at the old gallery, once for minstrels, now arrogated by a pianola organ. Behind its oaken pillars passed a vague female figure, dressed in blue, moaning horribly, and waving distraught arms above her flowing hair.

Immediately cries of every sort rose from the watchers.

“I can’t see her.” “It’s a cinematograph!” “What ho, Lord Bobby!” “Gad, she’s gone slick through the music-stool.” “I still can’t see her.” “No, there’s nothing there.” “Do a cakewalk, now!” “Encore!”

As she vanished some one clapped his hands, and with a laugh the whole party joined in the applause.

The scene had not been very impressive. From a theatrical point of view the ghost’s entrance had been ruined by the number and the temper of its audience. Those who had not seen it scoffed; those who had, till reminded of the music-stool seen dimly through the figure, half-believed the Blue Lady to be an *alias* of Lord Bancourt. Then, as one by one they

realised that what had passed was in very truth a ghost, the guests hushed their laughter, until the babel sank almost into silence.

It was in such a lull that Bobby entered. “Why, what a stony *séance*!” he exclaimed. “Missing me? or seen a ghost?”

“Yes—so delightful! The Blue Lady actually came,” said Lady Silthirsk, who alone seemed totally unruffled.

Bobby laughed—the unforced laugh of healthy youth. “Oh-ho! I see why you were silent. But you can’t green me, thanks: I’m not quite so verdant—oh no, not at all!”

“We have seen it—really,” one or two guests hastened to assure him.

Lord Bancourt laughed more heartily than ever. “Why, I believe you’ve honestly deceived yourselves! This is glorious! You really think you saw the ghost!”

“Who could doubt?” asked a plump dowager, who intended henceforth to adopt a pose intensely spiritual. “What doubt exists, when the great After lifts its veil? Have *you* ever seen a ghost, Lord Bancourt?”

Bobby tried to hide his smiles. “I’m afraid—and glad—I haven’t. If I did, I should go off my nut, I think. But I don’t think I ever shall!”

With these words he moved towards the circle of ghost-seers, and chose, with unerring aim, of all the vacant chairs, that next Elfrida.

Lady Silthirsk beamed contentedly.

“I seem to have missed a lot,” said the irrepressible Bobby, as he sat down, and added impudently, “but I hope that I’ve been missed a lot?”

Elfrida remembered her aunt’s warning, but she also fancied (as the self-conscious will) that all the gathering, still somewhat silent, had heard

the question, and would hear the answer. She could fancy their scorn at her “scheming tactics.”

Bobby looked expectantly towards her.

“It was certainly a unique experience,” she said stiffly.

Bobby’s face fell.

Lady Silthirsk shrugged her shoulders.

* * * * *

“There!” exclaimed the Blue Lady, safe within the Panelled Room, “I knew how your mad scheme would work. You heard: they catcalled, they encored me, asked for some new dance. They gave me a round of applause when I went off. I can stay here no longer, to be insulted.”

“Always impetuous!” said the Gaunt Baron quietly. “You rushed off after the applause: I waited, and heard what alters the whole question.”

“Namely——?” asked the Lady, in ill temper.

“Lord Bancourt did not see you—has never seen a ghost—doesn’t believe in them. He said distinctly, ‘If I saw one, I should go off my nut,’—this being schoolboy and smart for going mad.”

“I begin to see.” The Blue Lady brightened visibly.

“Exactly. You must catch him alone—no more of these convivial audiences—and then drive him mad. He is an old friend of Lady Silthirsk, rich and titled; she would not stay here after that. You must wreak your worst on him.”

“I can only wail,” she answered gloomily; “I have no chains, or blood, or severed head——”

The words inspired the headless Baron.

“Ah,” he cried, “I will come and help—to-night. I ought not to show myself out of my own house, but——”

“Oh, what is etiquette in such a crisis? Baron, dear Baron, you have saved me. I am an old-fashioned woman, and at such a time I need a man....”

* * * * *

It was night. It had, to be precise, been night for several hours, and the whole household was at length tucked up in bed. Sleep had come none too easily to at least three members,—to Elfrida worrying about the real sentiments of Bobby, to Bobby worrying about the real sentiments of Elfrida, and to Lady Silthirsk worrying about the real sentiments of both. The last named, in particular, tossed long upon her sleepless bed. She was puzzled. She could half understand Elfrida's foolish diffidence: she could not understand Bobby's idiotic silence. Why did he not speak? He was not of a sort to be lightly daunted by the fear of a rebuff. Or had she made a false diagnosis? Was he not in love at all?

And at length even she turned over on her side with a contented groan. Sleep reigned over Yewcroft Hall.

But in Bobby's room, far off along the west wing, dark deeds were decidedly afoot. For more than half an hour a headless Knight, clanking horribly in every joint of his dim-gleaming armour, had chased to and fro a blue-clad Lady, who wailed in awful wise and tossed arms of agony to the wall-papered ceiling.

Through all this Lord Bancourt slept smilingly upon his noble bed.

Then the Gaunt Baron consulted with the Blue Lady, and a change of tactics was the result. The armoured figure now rattled round the room, rousing more noise than any antiquated motor, the while a frantic dame pursued him with blood-curdling wails.

Bobby stirred a little, murmured sleepily, turned over, and showed every symptom of having relapsed into even deeper slumber.

The ghosts were in despair.

“Dawn draws on,” said the Gaunt Baron suddenly. “I always knew when I was beaten. Come, sweet dame. A man who can sleep like that will make his mark some day in the House of Lords.”

He vanished, and, after one despairing glance, the Blue Lady flung herself angrily through the oaken door.

It was at this moment, by a subtle irony of fate, that Lord Bancourt awoke. The sense of some presence lingered with him, and he sat upright in bed. His sleepy eyes were caught by a blue skirt which vanished from the doorway; his sleepy mind failed to perceive that the door had not been open.

“Whew!” he said, and lay thinking, thinking deeply—for Lord Bancourt.

He was very young, and, like most young nobles, not inclined to underestimate his own importance. After the first moment of surprise, he felt no doubt as to the wearer of the blue skirt. It was Elfrida. He was rather unobservant as to women’s dresses “and all that, you know”: but he felt fairly certain that she had worn a blue costume at dinner. Yes, it could be no one else. It was almost certainly Elfrida.

Elfrida’s iciness was but a cloak. When she had snubbed him by day, she would creep in by night and gaze upon his sleeping, moonlit face! How beautiful!

His heart thrilled at the revelation. He had hesitated, so far, to speak. It would never do for him—Lord Bancourt—to risk refusal by a nobody. His mother, in her long course of tuition, had taught him proper pride. But now....

Now, at the first chance, he would throw himself, his rank, his wealth, his everything before the nobody, and feel no fear as to the verdict. To-morrow—to-morrow!

And when to-morrow came, as it does sometimes come despite the proverb, he rose early and went out in the garden. As he had shaved each morning, he had seen Elfrida walking in the grounds below. He had never dared to join her. Everything, to-day, was different, though the weather was certainly absurdly cold for early rising.

She was there before him, in among the white, hoar-laden, yew walks. She turned at his coming. “You are early this morning, Lord Bancourt.”

“Ah,” he responded meaningly, “the early bird catches the first worm.” It struck him, for the moment, as a compliment, and rather neat. But he pined for something less indefinite. “Elfrida,” he said, going close to her, “I may call you Elfrida?—I could not wait. You encouraged me last night, you gave me hope, and now—I want more. You won’t take even that away? I want far more. I want you—I want you to be my wife. Will you, Elfrida? Don’t be cruel. I want you to say ‘yes’!”

Elfrida’s head was in a whirl. She did not know how she had encouraged him. She could remember nothing of last night, except that she had lost a chance—that he had seemed offended. She could not guess at what had changed his attitude. She only knew that what her aunt wanted—above all, what she herself longed for—had somehow come to pass; only knew that her loved one’s arms were round her. She said “Yes.”

* * * * *

“Sweet dame,” said the Gaunt Baron, later, in the Panelled Room, “I have been scouting, and, alas! bring evil news. Lord Bancourt took you last night for Elfrida, was encouraged to propose, and is accepted. Lady Silthirsk is delighted, says the wedding shall be here, and she must turn this dear chamber into a dressing-room. She says she will clear out the musty panelling. It is all unfortunate.”

“Unfortunate!” wailed the Blue Lady. “It all comes of listening to a man. See what your mad scheme has done!... Baron, forgive my bitterness,—I am defeated. I told you these mortals had vanquished us. I set out to do a little evil, in the good old way, and see what I have done! I have made everybody happy! Farewell. Yewcroft must know me no more. Farewell, farewell for ever!”

With an abysmal groan she vanished through the panelling. Unless she has found an ancient, empty house, she is perhaps sleeping underneath the hedges.

The Miracle

A Tale of the Canadian Prairie

By Ralph Stock

Artists’ Rifles

The old man slowly shook his head and looked out through the ranch-house window to where the sea of yellow grass merged into the purple haze of the horizon.

“I’m sorry, Dode,” he said in his gruff drawl, “blamed sorry.”

The young man stood before him choking back words he longed to utter and twisting his hat out of recognition in the effort. Words! Of what use had they ever been with Joe Gilchrist? All his life he had used as few as possible himself and shown little patience with those who did otherwise—why should it be different now?

“Blamed sorry,” the colourless voice repeated. “I had no notion things were going this way or I’d have put ’em straight right away. It’ll hurt all the more now, I guess, but I can’t help it, Dode—you’re not the man, that’s all.”

“Why?” The other’s voice carried resentment. “What’s the matter with me, anyway?”

The grizzled head turned slowly, the keen, deep-set eyes, surrounded by a tracery of minute wrinkles from looking into long distances, rested on the young man’s troubled face in a level, emotionless scrutiny.

“Nothing,” said Joe Gilchrist. “As a man—nothing, or you wouldn’t have been my foreman the last ten years; but as a husband for Joyce——” He smiled faintly and shook his head.

At that moment Dode Sinclair could have killed this man whose life he had saved more than once. He knew the iron resolve behind that smile and shake of the head.

“I’m the man she chose,” he jerked out.

“At seventeen,” was the quiet rejoinder.

“She’s a woman.”

Joe Gilchrist tilted his head to one side and scratched his cheek. It was a habit of his when anything puzzled him.

“She chose you, did she? Who’s she had to choose from?”

Dode Sinclair opened his mouth to speak, closed it again, and fell to twisting his hat with renewed vigour.

“Well,” he began awkwardly, “there was Dave Willet and that dude schoolmaster on Battle Creek and——”

“And you want to tell me Dave Willet and a dude schoolmaster on Battle Creek’s a fair show for a girl?” The old man paused. “You can’t, Dode—not me.”

Dode looked down at a pair of work-worn riding-boots, then up into the other’s face.

“What’s the matter with Dave Willet?” he demanded hotly, “or a dozen others who’d give their ears for her? I know we’re not fit to lick her boots; what man would be? but we’re as good as most round these parts.”

“Ah, these parts,” muttered the old man, “these parts. But they ain’t the world, Dode. You’ve got to get that into your head, though maybe it’ll be a job.”

“They’re good enough for me.”

“And me, and the rest of us; but they’re not good enough for my daughter.”

“She doesn’t say that.”

“No, because she’s never seen anything else——” Joe Gilchrist broke off with a gesture of uneasiness. “Shut that door; I want to ask you something.”

The young man obeyed mechanically, and when he turned, the other was leaning forward in the pine pole-rocker, whittling flakes from a plug of tobacco.

“I want to ask you what you think I’ve been doing the last fifteen years,” he drawled. “You ought to know, but if you don’t, I’ll put you wise. I’ve been tryin’ to make money out of breeding horses. It ain’t daisy-pickin’, but after hopin’ a bit, despairin’ a bit, and workin’ a bit, I’ve made it—there it is on four legs in a pretty middlin’ bunch of horses, and what’s it for? Me? You know my wants, Dode Sinclair. No, it’s for Joyce. *Joyce’s got to have her chance.*”

He stopped abruptly, with an indrawing of his thin lips that the other knew well, and commenced to rub the tobacco between his horny palms.

Dode Sinclair still stared at his boots.

“You’re going to take her East,” he muttered. “You’re going back on the prairie.”

Joe Gilchrist rose slowly from his chair and pointed through the window with the stem of his pipe.

“You see Tin Kettle buttie,” he said evenly, “there to the east of Hungerford Lake: when they read my will they’ll find they’ve got to pack me up there someway—in the democrat, I guess—but that’s where I’m goin’ to be, and I’m tellin’ you now so’s you’ll remember when you feel like sayin’ I’ve gone back on the prairie. But—Joyce’s got to have her chance.”

He stood looking out of the window for a space, then turned with the air of one disposing of an unpleasant topic.

“You can round up. The boy’ll be here any day after a week. I’m sellin’ half the bunch. You’re to run the place when—we go.”

Dode Sinclair turned on his heel. At the door he hesitated, then looked back at the thin bent figure by the window.

“Maybe the prairie won’t let you,” he said.

When he had gone Joe Gilchrist stood motionless, staring at the door.

“What the dickens does he mean by that?” he growled, and frowned as he lit his pipe.

Joyce Gilchrist was perched on the corral-poles when Dode came out to her.

“He won’t listen to me,” he said, tracing dejected patterns in the dust with his spur. “Says you’ve got to have your chance.”

“Chance?—what chance?” Joyce looked down at him wonderingly.

“Chance of getting a better man than me.”

The girl was at his side in a flash, looking into his face with anxious interrogation.

“Dode, Dode, what do you mean?—what does he mean?”

“He means he’s going to take you away, Joyce—East, where the guys come from. He’s been working for that the last fifteen years—and, God help me!—so have I, without knowin’ it. The horses is a pretty considerable bunch now, and——”

“But I won’t go,” flashed the girl; “I won’t go, Dode.” Her hand was on his arm. “I’ll talk him over.”

“You’ll never do that,” said Dode. “Never. I know Joe better’n you, though he *is* your dad. He’s got that queer set look;—besides, he’s right.”

“Right?”

“Yes, he always is. You’ve made good—you ought to go East and live swell. This is no country for a woman.”

“*You* say that?”

“*He* says it, and he’s always right.”

“But you don’t say it—*you* don’t say it, Dode!”

Her hands were on his shoulders now, he could feel her warm breath on his face.

“My God!” he burst out, “you know I love every inch and atom of you.” His hands were trembling at his sides. “You know that I’d do anything—anything—but we can’t go against him. Someway I couldn’t do it—I’d feel I’d stolen you—that I wasn’t giving you what was your due. He’s right; he’s always right.”

The girl stamped a small work-worn riding-boot in the dust. “I wish—I wish all the horses were dead! I wish we had to start all over again. I won’t go, so there! I’ll talk to him; he’ll say yes; you see——”

She left him and hurried towards the house, a slim figure of health and lightness in a short, dun-coloured riding-skirt and dilapidated soft felt hat.

Dode Sinclair watched her go.

“Nothing short of a miracle will make him say that,” he mused.

And he was right.

For the next week the grass flats below the Gilchrist ranch echoed with the thunder of galloping hoofs and the shrill whinnying of mare and foal. From every point of the compass horses flowed into the valley, with distended nostrils and untrimmed manes and tails streaming in the wind. Some had never yet seen a house, and at sight of the low line of pine-log stables and corrals turned tail and fled in terror, until overtaken and headed back by tireless riders on steaming mounts.

On the final day Joyce Gilchrist helped her father to mount the old piebald cayune that he loved, and rode down with him to inspect the herd. Dode Sinclair saw them coming and turned swiftly on his

companion, a lean wire of a man in the unpretentious, workmanlike uniform of the North-West Mounted Police.

“Here they come,” he said in a voice harsh with apprehension. “If you don’t want to see an old man drop dead—an old man that’s done more for you fellers than any one on the range—take your men and horses into that stable.”

The policeman followed his glance and saw two black dots moving slowly down the trail.

“He’s got to know,” he said sternly.

“Yes, he’s got to know—ain’t that enough? Curse it, man, can’t you see there’s ways of doin’ these things? Sudden like that—it’d break him up.”

“Joe Gilchrist knows how to take his medicine.”

“No man better; but I know him, I tell you—the horses are his life. There’s time enough for him to know.”

“Three days,” replied the policeman shortly. “The regulations allow three days for glanders. He’s bound to know then—why not now?”

Dode Sinclair laid his hands on the other’s shoulders and looked into his stern-set face.

“Because I’m asking you, Jim,” he said. “Maybe your memory’s short; maybe you forget the early days now you’re a corporal. Try back a bit—try back to the spring of 1900, when the chinook came and thawed out the Warlodge mushy a bit previous, and you thought it’d bear and it didn’t; and the elegant fix I found you in——”

“You don’t need to tell me, Dode,” said the other, looking away up the trail. “But you know what Fenton’s like, and——” Suddenly he threw back his head. “Well!—open the door, then!”

Joe Gilchrist rode slowly through the herd. Some of the brood mares he knew by name—had known them for fifteen years.

“See that pot-bellied grey with the roan foal?” he said to Dode. “Got her for fifteen dollars off the Indians at Red Deer. We’ve had her fifteen years, and she’s had twelve foals. Seems to me she’s about done now, though. Got that peaked look.”

“Hasn’t lost her winter coat yet,” Dode answered shortly, and moved on towards the edge of the herd. “Ragged, that’s all.”

“Pretty middlin’ bunch,” mused the old man. He had never been known to say more about his horses. “Pretty middlin’.”

“Sure,” said Dode, and watched the pinto ambling up the trail. Then he dismounted and opened the stable door.

“I’m leaving two men,” said the policeman. “You can corral them to-night, and the vet’ll be along to-morrow.”

Dode leant against the stable and watched him mount.

“How many d’you think——” he began.

“The vet’ll be along to-morrow,” the other repeated shortly, and set spurs to his horse.

The next day and the next the grass-flat corrals creaked and strained and rattled while an endless procession of horses fought and worked its way along the narrow chutes, halted a brief moment while one of its number was subjected to the “squeeze” and a minute examination by a sweating police vet. and passed on, some to another corral and some—pitiably few—to the open prairie and freedom.

Dode Sinclair watched the work like a man in a trance.

[Illustration: “It was eight o’clock before Joe Gilchrist returned” (page 161).]

When it was done the corral gate was flung open and the horses it had held were headed up the valley and still up to where it ended in a deep gully of gumbo and yellow gravel. On three sides the animals were hemmed in by almost sheer cliff a hundred feet high; on the fourth by ten N.W. Mounted Policemen with levelled rifles and set faces.

There is only one cure for glanders.

* * * * *

“Queer that buyer don’t come,” said Joe Gilchrist.

Three days before Dode Sinclair had ridden out to meet a florid little man in a livery buggy on the town trail, and after five minutes’ conversation the latter had turned his horses and driven off in a cloud of dust.

“Blamed queer. They’ll be losing flesh if they’re herded much longer.”

Towards evening the old man became restless—both Joyce and Dode noticed it, but neither was quite prepared when returning from the west field to find the homestead empty, except for the Chinese cook, and the pinto cayune gone from the stables.

“He’s gone to have a look at the herd,” Dode said.

“But alone, and on pinto!” exclaimed the girl. “You know how she stumbles. I must go and find him.”

“She stumbles, but she don’t fall,” said Dode. “Let him be—this once. Alone—that’s the best way for him to find out.”

He told her all, while Joyce sat like one turned to stone. When he had done, she looked up into his face.

“Then—then we *have* got to start all over again,” she whispered.

“Pretty near.”

Dode looked out through the window. The setting sun was dyeing the sea of yellow grass a rich auburn, and Joyce was at his side, but his thoughts were with the lone rider down on the grass flats. He would find the corrals empty, the gates open. He would follow the tracks up the coolie, and still up, until he came to the deep gully of gumbo and yellow gravel. Dode remembered that the “ewe-necked” grey with the roan foal lay at the outside of the ghastly circle, her mild eyes staring glassily down the valley. Beyond that his thoughts refused to travel.

It was eight o’clock before Joe Gilchrist returned. He stabled the pinto himself and came into the sitting-room, where Joyce and Dode sat pretending to read, with his usual slow, heavy step. The pine-pole rocker creaked, and they could hear him whittling at his plug of tobacco, but they could not bring themselves to look up.

“Bit dull to-night, ain’t you?” he queried suddenly. His voice was so natural that for a fleeting moment Dode thought it impossible that he could know. But when he looked up, there was no longer any doubt in his mind. The strong old face was drawn and haggard, in spite of the smile he had summoned to his lips. His keen eyes were levelled on the younger man in a penetrating but not unkindly look.

“I guess you were right, Dode,” he drawled. “The prairie knows how to cure swelled head.”

And the other two knew that the miracle had come to pass.

The Fight *for the* Garden

By Sir Arthur T. Quiller-Couch

Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry

I

“It is strange, though,” said the gardener’s wife in Flemish, standing in the doorway of the chapel and studying, while she shook her duster, the tall pigeon-house in the centre of the courtyard. “The birds have not come back yet. Not a sign of them.”

“They never like it when their house is cleaned out,” responded Philomène, the middle-aged maid-of-all-work, just within the doorway. She, too, had a duster and, perched on a step-ladder insecurely—she weighed, by our English reckoning, a good fifteen stone—was flapping the dust from a tall crucifix nailed above the lintel. “The good man told me he had collected close on two pecks.”

“He is down in the garden digging it in around the roses. He says that it will certainly rain to-night.”

“It has been raining to the southward all the afternoon,” said Philomène, heavily descending her step-ladder and shielding her eyes to stare up at the western window, through the clear quarrels of which the declining sun sent a ray from under heavy clouds. “That will be by reason of the guns.”

“Thunder,” suggested the gardener’s wife.

“The guns bring the thunder; it is well known.” In her girlhood Philomène had been affianced to a young artilleryman; she had lost him at Landrecy twenty-one years ago, and had never since owned another lover or wished for one.

“Ah, well—provided they leave us alone, this time!” sighed the gardener’s wife. She gazed across to the stable-buildings where, by a flight of cup steps leading to the hay-loft, her two children, Jean and

Pauline, were busy at play with Antoine, son of a small farmer, whose homestead, scarcely a mile away, aligned the high-road running south from the capital.

The school in the neighbouring village had been closed for two days; and to-morrow, being Sunday, would make a third holiday anyhow. Yesterday Jean and Pauline had been Antoine's guests at a picnic breakfast in the sand-pit opposite his father's farm (there were domestic reasons why they could not be entertained in the house), and had spent four blissful hours watching the army—their army, horse, foot, and artillery, all within toss of a biscuit—march past and southward along the chaussée. To-day it was their turn to be hosts; and all the long afternoon, with intervals for light refreshment, the three children had been conducting a series of military operations from the orchard-hedge through the orchard, across a sunken ditch, through the terraced garden (with circumspection here, for the gardener was swift to detect and stern to avenge paternally any footmark on his beds), through the small fruit-garden (where it was forbidden to eat the under-ripe currants), the barnyard, among the haystacks, the outbuildings, to the courtyard and a grand finale on the stable steps. Here Napoleon (Antoine, in a cocked hat of glazed paper) was making a last desperate stand on the stair-head, with his back to the door of the loft and using the broken half of a flail en moulinet to ward off a combined "kill" by the Prince of Orange (Jean) and the British Army (Pauline). Jean wielded a hoe and carried a wooden sword in an orange-coloured scarf strapped as waistband around his blouse. But Pauline made the most picturesque figure by far. She had kilted her petticoat high, and gartered her stocking low, exposing her knees. On her head through the heat of action she carried an old muff strapped under her chin with twine. Her right hand menaced the Corsican with a broomstick; her left arm she held crooked, working the elbow against her hip while her mouth uttered discordant sounds as a bagpipe.

“Pauline—Pauline!” called her mother. “Mais, tais-toi donc—c’est à tue-tête! Et d’ailleurs nu-genoux! C’n’est pas sage, ça....”

“C’est le pibrock, maman,” called back the child, desisting for a moment. “J’suis Ecossaise, voilà!”

She had seen the Highland regiments yesterday, and the sight had given her a new self-respect, a new interest in warfare; since (as she maintained against Antoine and Jean) these kilted warriors must be women; giantesses out of the North, but none the less women. “Why, it stands to reason. Look at their clothes!”

The gardener’s wife left discipline to her husband. She took a step or two out into the yard, for a glance at the sun slanting between the poplar top of the avenue. “It’s time Antoine’s father fetched him,” she announced, returning to the chapel. “And what has happened to the birds I cannot think. One would say they had forgotten their roosting house.”

“The birds will return when the corn is spread,” answered Philomène comfortably. “As for little Antoine, if he be not fetched, he shall have supper, and I myself will see him home across the fields. The child has courage enough to go alone, if we pack him off now, before nightfall; but I doubt the evil characters about. There are always many such in the track of an army.”

“If that be so,” the gardener’s wife objected, “it will not be pleasant for you, when you have left him, to be returning alone in the dark. Why not take him back now before supper?”

Philomène shrugged her broad shoulders. “Never fear for me, wife; I understand soldiery. And moreover, am I to leave the chapel unredded on a Saturday evening, of all times?”

“But since no one visits it——”

“The good God visits it, service or no service. What did Father Cosmas preach to us two Sundays ago? ‘Work,’ said he, ‘for you cannot tell at what hour the Bridegroom cometh’—nor the baby, either, he might have said. Most likely the good man, Antoine’s father, has work on his hands, and doctors so scarce with all this military overrunning us. I dreamt last night it would be twins. There now! I’ve said it, and a Friday night’s dream told on a Saturday——”

“Wh’st, woman!” interrupted the gardener’s wife, in a listening attitude; for the shouts of the children had ceased of a sudden.

II

Napoleon, at bay with his back to the hay-loft door, ceased to brandish his weapon, dropped his sword-arm and flung out the other, pointing:

“Look!” he cried. “Behind you!”

“Oh, we know that trick!” answered the escalading party, and closed upon him for the coup de grâce. But he ducked under Jean’s clutch, still pointing, and cried again, this time so earnestly that they paused indeed and turned for a look.

About half-way between the foot of the steps and the arched entrance, with one of its double doors open behind him, stood a spare shortish gentleman, in blue frock-coat, white breeches, and Hessian boots. On his head was a small cocked hat, the peak of it only a little shorter than the nose which it overshadowed; and to this nose the spare shortish gentleman was carrying a pinch of snuff as he halted and regarded the children with what, had his mouth been less grim, might have passed for a smile of amusement.

“Mademoiselle and messieurs both,” said he in very bad French, “I am sorry to interrupt, but I wish to see the propriétaire.”

“The pro—— but that will be monseigneur,” answered Pauline, who was the readiest (and the visitor’s eyes were upon her, as if he had instantly guessed this). “But you cannot see him, sir, for he lives at Nivelles, and, moreover, is ever so old.” She spread her hands apart as one elongates a concertina. “Between eighty and ninety, mamma says. He is too old to travel nowadays, even from Nivelles, and my brother Jean here is the only one of us who remembers to have seen him.”

“I remember him,” put in Jean, “because he wore blue spectacles and carried a white umbrella. He was not half so tall as anyone would think. Oh, what a beautiful horse!” he exclaimed, catching through the gateway a glimpse of a bright chestnut charger which an orderly was walking to and fro in the avenue. “Does he really belong to you, sir?” Jean asked this because the visitor’s dress did not bespeak affluence. A button was missing from his frock-coat, his boots were mired to their tops, and a black smear on one side of his long nose made his appearance rather disreputable than not. It was, in fact, a smear of gunpowder.

“He really does,” said the visitor, and turned again to Pauline, his blue eyes twinkling a little, his mouth grim as before. “Who, then, is in charge of this place?”

“My father, sir. He has been the gardener here since long before we were born, and mamma is his wife. He is in the garden at this moment if you wish to see him.”

“I do,” said the visitor, after a sharp glance around the courtyard, and another at its high protecting wall. “Take me to him, please!”

Pauline led him by a little gateway past the angle of the château and out upon the upper terrace of the garden—planted in the formal style—which ran along the main (south) front of the building and sloped to a stout brick wall some nine feet in height. Beyond the wall a grove of beech trees stretched southward upon the plain into open country.

“Excellent!” said the visitor. “First rate!” Yet he seemed to take small note of the orange trees, now in full bloom, or of the box-edged borders filled with periwinkle and blue forget-me-not, or with mignonette smelling very sweetly in the cool of the day; nor as yet had he cast more than a cursory glance along the whitewashed façade of the château or up at its high red-tiled roof with the pointed Flemish turrets that strangers invariably admired. He appeared quite incurious, too, when she halted a

moment to give him a chance of wondering at the famous sun-dial—a circular flower-bed with a tall wooden gnomon in the centre and the hours cut in box around the edge.

“But where is your father?” he asked impatiently, drawing out a fine gold watch from his fob.

“He is not in the rose-garden, it seems,” said Pauline, gazing along the terrace eastward. “Then he will be in the orchard beyond.” She turned to bid Jean run and fetch him; but the two boys had thought it better fun to run back for a look at the handsome chestnut charger.

So she hurried on as guide. From the terrace they descended by some stone steps to a covered walk, at the end of which, close by the southern wall, stood another wonder—a tall picture, very vilely painted and in vile perspective, but meant to trick the eye by representing the walk as continued, with a summer-house at the end. The children held this for one of the cleverest things in the world. The visitor said “p’sh!” and in the rudest manner.

Stepping from this covered way they followed a path which ran at right angles to it, close under the south wall, which was of brick on a low foundation of stone and stout brick buttresses. In these the visitor’s interest seemed to revive.

“Couldn’t be better,” he said, nodding grimly.

Pauline knew that her father must be in the orchard, for the small door at the end of the path stood open; and just beyond it, and beyond a sunken ditch, sure enough they found him, with a pail of wash and a brush, anointing some trees on which the caterpillars had fastened. As the visitor strode forward Pauline came to a halt, having been taught that to listen to the talk of grown-up people was unbecoming.

But some words she could not help overhearing. “Good evening, my friend,” said the visitor, stepping forward. “This is a fine orchard you have here. At what size do you put it?”

“He is going to buy the château,” thought Pauline with a sinking of her small heart; for she knew that monseigneur, being so old, had more than once threatened to sell it. “He is going to buy the château, and we shall be turned out.”

“We reckon it at three arpents, more or less. Yes, assuredly—a noble orchard, and in the best order, though I say it.”

After a word or two which she could not catch, they walked off a little way under the trees. Their conversation grew more earnest. By and by Pauline saw her father step back a pace and salute with great reverence.

(“Yes, of course,” she decided. “He is a very rich man, or he could not be buying such a place. But it will break mamma’s heart—and mine. And what is the place to this man, who appreciates nothing—not even the sun-dial?”)

The two came back slowly, her father walking now at a distance respectfully wide of the visitor. They passed Pauline as if unaware of her presence. The visitor was saying——

“If we do not hold this point to-night, the French will hold it to-morrow. You understand?”

They went through the small doorway into the garden. Pauline followed. Again the visitor seemed to regard the long brick wall—in front of which grew a neglected line of shrubs, making the best of its northern aspect—as its most interesting feature.

“Might have been built for the very purpose with these buttresses.” He stopped towards one and held the edge of his palm against it, almost half-way down. “But you must cut it down, so.” He spoke as if the

brickwork were a shrub to be lopped. “Have you a nice lot of planks handy?”

“A few, milord. We keep some for scaffolding, when repairs are needed.”

“Not enough, hey? Then we must rip up a floor or two. My fellows will see to it.”

The gardener rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. “To be sure there are the benches in the chapel,” he suggested.

“That’s a notion. Let’s have a look at ’em.”

They mounted to the terrace and passed back into the courtyard, Pauline still following. Antoine’s father had arrived to fetch him; had arrived too with a cart. The cart held a quantity of household furniture. The farmer held the reins, and the gardener’s wife and Philomène were hoisting the child up beside him. They were agitated, as anyone could see, and while her father led the visitor into the chapel Pauline walked over to Jean, who stood watching, to ask him what it all meant.

“He says the war is coming back this way: it may even be to-night.”

“Yes,” said the farmer, addressing the women and unwittingly corroborating Jean’s report. “This is the third load. With the first I took along my good woman, and by God’s mercy found a lodging for her at the Curé’s. A small bedroom—that is all; but it will be handy for the midwife.”

“And your crops, my poor friend?”

“It was a fine swathe of rye, to be sure,” agreed the farmer, sighing. “And the barley full of promise—one gets compensation, they tell me; but that will be small comfort if while the grass grows the cow starves. So I brought you the first word, did I? Vraiment? And yet by this time I

should not wonder if the troops were in sight." He waved a hand to the southward.

Jean plucked Pauline by the sleeve. The two stole away together to the ladder that stood against the pigeon-house.

"We hear no news of the world at all," said the gardener's wife. "My man at this season is so wrapped up in his roses——"

"Holà, neighbour!" called the gardener at this moment, coming forth from the chapel, the visitor behind him. "You are stealing a march on us, it seems? Now as a friend the best you can do is to drive ahead and bespeak some room at the village for my wife and little ones, while they pack and I get out the carts."

"Is it true, then?" His wife turned on him in a twitter.

"My good woman," interposed the visitor, coming forward—at sight of whom the farmer gave a gasp and then lifted his whip-head in a flurried (and quite unheeded) salute—"it is true, I regret to say, that to-night and to-morrow this house will be no place for you or for your children. Your husband may return if he chooses, when he has seen you safely bestowed. Indeed, he will be useful and probably in no danger until to-morrow."

"The children—where are the children?" quavered the gardener's wife, and began calling, "Jean! Pauline!"

Jean and Pauline by this time were perched high on the ladder, under the platform of the pigeon-cote. From this perch they could spy over the irregular ridge of the outbuildings down across the garden to the grove, and yet beyond the grove, between the beech-tops to the southward ridge of the plain which on most days presented an undulating horizon; but now all was blurred in that direction by heavy rain-clouds, and no sign of the returning army could be seen, save a small group of horsemen

coming at a trot along the great high-road and scarcely half a mile away. Crosswise from their right a shaft of the setting sun shot, as through the slit of a closing shutter, between the crest of another wood and rain-clouds scarcely less dark. It dazzled their eyes. It lit a rainbow in the eastern sky, where also the clouds had started to discharge their rain.

The château seemed to be a vortex around which the thunderstorm was closing fast—on three sides at any rate. But for the moment, poured through this one long rift in the west, sunlight bathed the buildings; a sunlight uncanny and red, that streamed into the courtyard across the low ridge of the outbuildings. The visitor had stepped back to the eastern angle of the house, and stood there as if measuring with his eye the distance between him and the gate. He began to pace it, and as he advanced, to Jean's eye his shadow shortened itself down the wall like a streak of red blood fading from the top.

"There's room in the cart here for the little ones," the farmer suggested.

"But no," answered the gardener; "Jean and Pauline will be needed to drive off the cattle. I shall take one cart; you, Philomène, the other; and I will have both ready by the time you women have packed what is necessary."

"A bientôt, then!" The farmer started his mare, the gardener following him to the gateway. The gardener's wife turned towards the house, sobbing. "But I shall come back," called Philomène stoutly. "Mon Dieu, does anyone suppose I will leave our best rooms to be tramped through by a lot of nasty foreign soldiers!"

No one listened to her. After a moment she, too, went off towards the house. Jean and Pauline slid down the ladder.

The farmer's cart had rumbled through the archway and out into the avenue. The visitor had beckoned his orderly, and was preparing to mount. With one foot in stirrup he turned to the gardener. "By the way,"

said he, “when you return from the village bring lanterns—all you can collect”; then to the orderly, “Give me my cloak!” for already the rain was beginning to fall in large drops.

A squall of rain burst over the poplars as he rode away.

III

Jean and Pauline awoke next morning to some very queer sensations. They had slept in their clothes upon beds of hay. Their bedroom, in fact, was part of a cottage loft partitioned into two by rough boards; on this side, hay—on the other a hen-roost. The poultry were cackling and crowing and seemed to be in a flurry. Jean raised himself on his elbow and called:

“Pauline!”

“Jean! I was just going to wake you. I have scarcely slept all night, while you have been snoring. Listen! The battle has begun.”

Sure enough a deal of fusillading was going on, and not very far away; and this no doubt had scared the fowls on the other side of the partition. The loft had but a narrow slit, unglazed, close under the eaves, to admit air and daylight. Jean crept to it, over the trusses of hay, and peered out on the world. He could see nothing but clouds and a few near trees wrapped in a foggy drizzle. Still the loose fusillade went on.

“I don’t think it can be the battle,” he reported. “Philomène says that battles always begin nowadays with the big guns, and this moreover sounds half-hearted.”

He was right, too. The two or three trees visible in the mist were the outposts of a plantation which straggled up to the entrance of the village. Beyond this plantation lay two regiments that, like the rest of the army, had marched and bivouacked in mud and rain. At dawn they had been ordered to clean their small arms, and since the readiest way to make sure of a musket is to fire off the charge, they had been directed to do so, by companies.

In an interval of this fusillade the children caught the sound of someone moving in the kitchen below, lighting the fire. Jean crept from his window-slit to the hatchway of the loft and called down softly, “Maman!”

The good woman of the cottage answered, bidding him go back to bed again. His mother was not in the house, but had been called during the night to visit a cottage some way up the road.

“That will be Antoine’s mother,” whispered Pauline, who had crept over the hay to Jean’s side. “Is it a boy or a girl?” she asked aloud.

“It is twins,” said the good woman. “Now lie down and be sensible, you two.”

“But where is papa?”

“Down at the château, doubtless. But God knows. He was here a little before midnight, and left again meaning to spend the night there. Now I have told you what I know.”

The two crept back to their lairs, and lay very obediently until the good woman called up that coffee was ready. They hurried down the ladder, washed their hands and faces at the pump outside, and returned to the meal. There was coffee and a very savoury pottage in which they dipped great slices of bread. The woman was kind to them, having no children of her own. Her husband (she said) was somewhere in the plantation, felling trees with the troops. He had gone out long before dawn with a lantern, because he knew the best trees and could lead the pioneers to them in the dark.

Jean, having breakfasted until his small belly was tight as a drum, felt a new courage in his veins, and a great curiosity. He proposed to Pauline in a whisper that they should run down together to the château and see how papa was getting on, and Philomène.

“She will scold, though,” objected Pauline.

“Oh!” said Jean. “Philomène’s scolding!”

They ran out into the back garden. “That is right,” the woman called after them. “You can play there more safely than in the road. But be sensible now; if they should begin firing——”

It was not difficult to slip through the tumble-down fence. On the far side of it the children struck a footpath which ran down across a rye-field to the plantation. The rain had ceased, and above the rye many larks were singing, though the clouds hung grey and heavy. The loose firing, too, had ceased. Trees and the backs of a few cottages on their left, denser woodland ahead of them, circumscribed the view here. Not a soldier was in sight. There was nothing to be heard save the larks’ chorus.

“But, of course,” exclaimed Pauline, recollecting, “it is Sunday. People do not fight on Sunday.”

“Are you sure?” asked Jean, with a touch of disappointment. “If it were an ordinary Sunday the church bell would be ringing before now.”

“That is M. le Curé’s cunning. With so many soldiers about, his church would be suffocated if he called attention——”

“But where are the soldiers?” demanded Jean.

They went down the path, which was narrow and slippery with mire, between walls of rye that, when brushed against, shook down the golden rain in showers. Jean led, with Pauline at his heels. They reached the plantation and entered it by a low gap. The wood being of beech, there was no undergrowth to wet their legs; but the boughs dripped. The plantation ended at a bank overhanging a paved road, and down this bank they scrambled without difficulty.

The pavement ran down the middle of the road, and they followed this, avoiding the slush which lined it on either side. The ruts here were prodigious. In fact, the children, who had driven the cattle up this road a few hours ago, found it almost unrecognisable.

They now heard sounds of wood-cutters' axes, creaking timber, men's voices—foreign voices, and at an angle of the road came on a sudden glimpse of scarlet. The avenue to the château turned off from the high-road just here; and just beyond the turning a company of British red-coats were completing an abattis, breast-high, of lopped trees criss-crossed and interlaced with beech-boughs.

An officer caught sight of the children as they stood hesitating, and warned them sharply to go back.

"But we have a message for our father, who is the gardener yonder," spoke up Jean, with a jerk of his thumb towards the château.

"Well, you can give it to the sentry at the gate, if he'll take it. But be quick!"

The children darted up the avenue between the poplars. At the entrance gate, which stood open, sure enough they found a red-coat posted.

"We bring a message for our father, who is the gardener here," said Jean, hardily.

The sentinel made him repeat it, and answered in execrable French. "Well, I suppose there is no harm in letting you carry it, if the message is urgent. Your father's somewhere in the garden; I saw him pass that way a minute ago. But you must promise to be back within five minutes."

"Lord, now," added the sentry, smiling down at them, "I left just such a pair as you at home, not two months ago. I'd be sorry, much as I love them, to see them anyways here."

“I like that man,” said Pauline, as she and Jean passed into the yard. The place was empty, save for two soldiers—Lunsbrugers—in green uniform, who were carrying a bench from the chapel towards the small gate of the garden.

“But we have no message for papa,” said Pauline, “unless we tell him that Antoine’s mother has twins.”

“And he won’t be in a hurry to hear that.” Just then a dull noise sounded afar to the southward, and the ground seemed to shake a little. “We will first seek Philomène.”

He had hardly spoken the words when something screamed in the air above and struck the edge of the stable-steps with a terrific crash. The children, frightened out of their lives, dashed for the ladder of the pigeon-house—the nearest solid object to which they could cling. Across the smoke, as they clung and turned, they saw the sentry very coolly shutting the gate. Four or five green-coats ran out of the chapel to help him, but paused a moment as a second and a third shot whistled wide overhead. Then they rushed forward, heads down, to the gate, which was quickly shut and barred. They had not seen the children, who now, climbing up the ladder, stayed not until they had squeezed through the square hole of the platform and crawled into the pigeon-house, where they lay panting.

[Illustration: “They had not seen the children, who now, climbing up the ladder, stayed not until they had squeezed through the square hole of the platform” (page 170).]

It was, of course, quite foolish to seek shelter here. For the moment they would have been far safer in the courtyard below, under the lee of the outbuildings. A ball, striking the pigeon-house, would knock it to shivers at one blow. But they had climbed in pure panic, and even now, without any excuse of reason, they felt more secure here.

As a matter of fact the danger was lessening, for with these first shots the artillery to the southward, beyond the trees, had been finding its range and now began to drop its fire shorter, upon the garden below the château. Through their pigeon-holes Jean and Pauline overlooked almost the whole stretch of the garden, the foot of which along the brick wall was closely lined with soldiers—tall red-coats for the most part, with squads of green-jackets here and there and a sprinkling of men who carried yellow knapsacks. They had broken down the cups of the buttresses during the night and laid planks from buttress to buttress, forming a platform that ran the entire length of the wall. Along this platform a part of the defenders stood ready with bayonets fixed in their muskets, which they rested for the moment on the brick coping; others knelt on the flower border close beneath the platform watching at apertures where a few bricks had been knocked out. There were green jackets and yellow, too, in the grove beyond, posted here and there behind the breech-holes—a line of them pushed forward to a hedge on the left—with a line of retreat left open by a small doorway.

This was all that Jean and Pauline could see of the defence; and even this they took in hurriedly, for the round shot by now was sweeping the garden terraces and ploughing through the flower-beds. It still passed harmlessly over the wall and the soldiery lining it; and the children could see the men turn to watch the damage and grin at one another jocosely. Pauline wondered at their levity; for the hail under which they stood and the whistling noise of it, the constant throbbing of earth and air and the repeated heavy thuds upon the terrace were enough to strike terror into anyone.

She cried “O—oh!” as a tall orange-tree fell, shorn through as easily as a cabbage stump.

But Jean dragged at her arm. Between the tree tops in a gap of the smoke that hung and drifted beyond the wood—which dipped southward with

the lie of the slope and fined away there to an acute angle—the enemy batteries, or two of them, were visible, shooting out fresh wings of smoke on the sullen air, and on a rising ground beyond, dense masses of infantry, with squadrons of horsemen moving and taking up position. Flags and pennons flickered, and from moment to moment, as a troop shifted ground, quick rivulets of light played across lines of cuirasses and helmets. Tens—hundreds—of thousands were gathered there and stretched away to the left (the trees were lower to the left and gave a better view); and the object of this tremendous concourse, as it presented itself to Jean—all to descend upon the château and swallow up this thin line of men by the garden wall. To him, as to Pauline, this home of theirs meant more than the capital, being the centre of their world; and of other preparations to resist the multitude opposite they could see nothing.

Jean wondered why, seeing it was so easy, the great masses hung on the slope and refrained from descending to deliver the blow.

By and by that part of the main body which stood facing the angle where the wood ended threw out, as it were by a puff, a cloud of little figures to left and right, much like two swarms of bees; and these two dark swarms, each as it came on in irregular order, expanding until their inner sides melted together and made one, descended under cover of their artillery to the dip, where for a few minutes Jean lost sight of them.

In less than a minute the booming of the heavy guns ceased, and their music was taken up by a quick crackle of small arms on both sides of the wood. The line of defenders by the hedge shook, wavered, broke and came running back, mingling with their supporters posted behind the beech-boles; under whose cover they found time to reload and fire again, dodging from tree to tree. But still as it dodged the whole body of men in the wood was being driven backward and inward from both sides upon the small door admitting to the garden. At this point the crush was hidden by the intervening wall. The children could only see the thin trickle of

men, as after jostling without they escaped back through the doorway. But across the wall could now be seen the first of the assailants closing in among the beech-trunks. A line of red jackets, hitherto hidden, sprang forward—as it were from the base of the wall on the far side—to cover the route. But they were few and seemed doomed to perish when——

Whirr-rh! Over the children's heads, from somewhere behind the château, a shell hissed, plunged into the trees right amongst the assailants, and exploded. It was followed by another, another, and yet another. The whole air screamed with shells as the earth shook again with their explosions. But the marvel was the accuracy with which they dropped, plump among trees through which the assailants crowded—white-breasted regiments of the line, blue-coated, black-gaitered, sharpshooters closing in on their flanks. The edge of this ring within thirty seconds was a semicircle of smoke and flame along which, as globe after globe fell and crashed, arms tossed, bodies leapt and pitched back convulsively; while even two hundred yards nearer at most, the knot of defenders stood unscathed.

Within five minutes—so deadly was the play of these unseen howitzers—not a blue-coat stood anywhere in sight. A few wounded could be seen crawling away to shelter. The rest of the front and second lines lay in an irregular ring, and behind it the assault, which had swept so close up to the wall, melted clean away. Amid hurrahs the streams of green and yellow jackets, which had been pouring in at the entry, steadied itself and began to pour forth again to reoccupy the wood, gaily encouraged by the tall red-coats on the platform. The hail of shells ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

In the lull Jean found tune to look below him, then through another pigeon-hole which faced the gateway he saw his father crossing the yard with a red-coated officer who was persuading him to leave it.

"Philomène!" shouted the gardener.

The serving-woman came forth from the doorway of the house, bearing a large basin. She emptied it into a sink beside the steps, and what she poured was to appearance a bowlful of blood.

“We are to go, it seems,” called the gardener. “They will try again, and the likes of us will be shot as having no business here.”

“No business?” called back Philomène. “I don’t remember when I had so much.” She disappeared into the house.

“Papa!” shrilled Jean, and pushed Pauline out towards the platform. “For your life, quick!”

“But the ladder has gone!” gasped Pauline.

It was true. Jean shouted to his father again, but the scream of a belated shell overhead drowned his young voice. Someone had removed the ladder. Before he could call again his father had passed out and the sentry, under the officer’s instructions, was barring the gate.

IV

The ladder which alone could help them to descend rested against the curtain of the gate, some two dozen yards away. Why it had been carried off to be planted there, or by whom, there was no guessing. Someone, maybe, had done it in a panic. For a moment it rested there idly: yet, as events proved, it had a purpose to serve.

A lull of twenty minutes ensued on the baffled first assault. But the French tirailleurs, beaten back from their direct attack on the wood, collected themselves on the edges of it, and began to play a new and more deadly game, creeping singly along the hedges and by the sunken ways, halting, gathering, pushing on again, gradually enclosing three sides of the walled enceinte. Against the abattis on the high-road they made a small demonstration as a feint. But the main rush came again through the wood and across an orchard to the left of it.

This time, for some reason, the deadly howitzers were silent. This time, after another roar of artillery fire, the defenders in the grove came pouring back with the black-gaitered men close upon them, intercepting and shooting them down by scores.

Then followed half an hour’s horrible work all along the garden wall; work of which (and they should have thanked Heaven for it) the children missed the worst, seeing only the red-coats jabbing across the wall and downwards with their bayonets; the riflemen at the loopholes firing, drawing back, pausing to re-load. The small door had been shut fast, and a dozen men held their weight against it.

Yells and firing sounded all the while from the orchard to the loft. But what was happening there the children could not see. An angle of the house cut off their view in that direction—cut off in fact, their view of the main field of battle, where charge after charge of cavalry was being

launched against the few regiments holding a ridge to the left, close under which the château stood.

But for Jean and Pauline the whole fight was for the château—their home, and especially just now for the garden. It seemed incredible that a thin line of red-coats could hold the wall against such numbers as kept pouring up between the beech-boles. Yet minute after minute passed, and the wall was not carried.

Someone shouted close at hand from the gate. They turned that way, each choosing a peephole. A score of blue-coats had actually burst the gate open, and were carrying the courtyard with a rush. But, half-way, as many red-coats met them and swept them out at point of bayonet, forcing the double gate on their backs. Half a dozen others ran with beams to barricade it. Close beside it to the left a man topped the wall and straddled it with a shout of triumph; a red-coat fired slantwise from the pigeon-house ladder and he pitched writhing upon the cobbles. Shakos and heads bobbed up behind the coping whence he had dropped; but the yard now was full of soldiers (Heaven knew whence they had sprung) and so this assault too was driven back.

Shouts arose from the left of the house. Gradually, the assault here being baffled, the men drained off in that direction. The attack upon the wall, too, seemed to have eased. Then came another lull. Then the enemy’s artillery opened fire again, this time with shell. A tall officer stood against the wall, shouting an order, when the first shell dropped. When the smoke of the explosion cleared he was there no longer. There remained only what seemed to be his shadow. It was actually the streak of him beaten in blood upon the stucco.

This new cannonade was designed to set fire to the obstinate buildings, and very soon the roof broke into a blaze in two places. That of the chapel was the first to catch, at the western end. Many of the wounded had been carried there.

The pigeon-house stood intact. Not even a stray bullet had struck it. But now a new danger threatened the children and a surer one even than the fast dropping shells. Smoke from the blazing roof of the main building poured into every aperture of their hiding-place. They fought with it, striving to push it from them with hands that still grew feebler. Of a sudden it blotted out, not the battle only, but life itself for them.

V

“Pauline!”

It seemed to Jean that he was awaking again in the hay-loft. Again he heard the distant crackle of musketry.

“Pauline!”

Pauline stirred. At that moment a bird alighted on a sill before one of the holes and disappeared with a whirr of wings. It was a pigeon returning to roost, frightened to discover his house occupied.

The noise awakened Pauline upright. She sat up on the floor of the loft and asked suddenly:

“But did they break in after all?”

“They? Who?” asked Jean, still confused. But he crept to the opening, as he had crept to the other opening in the dawn.

It was close upon sunset now; but he did not mark this. What he marked—and what brought him back to his senses—was the sight of Philomène crossing the empty courtyard with a bucket. It was the same courtyard, though its outbuildings here and there lacked a roof. It was the same Philomène anyhow, with her waddling walk.

“Philomène!”

“Eh? But, the good God deliver us, how?”

“Fetch the ladder here.”

She fetched and planted it. The two children climbed down to her.

VI

A man came through the broken gateway and stood for a moment gazing around him in the falling twilight at the ruins—a tall sergeant of the Horse Artillery. He caught sight of Philomène and the children and stared at them, harder still.

“Well, I’ve seen things to-day,” he said. “But if you ain’t the unlikeliest. Who belongs here?”

“I could have told you, yesterday,” answered Philomène, in an old voice, following his look around.

“And you’ve seen these things? You?” he asked. His face was dirty—a mask of gunpowder; but his eyes shone kindly, and Pauline, without recognising his uniform, knew him for a friend. “Well, I’m——! But who lives here just now?”

“There’s nobody at home just now but me and the children, as you see,” said Philomène. “Were you looking for somebody?” with another look around. “He will be hard to find.”

The tall sergeant leaned an elbow against the gate. He was tottering with fatigue. “It’s a victory, that’s what it is,” he said; “an almighty victory.”

“It ought to be, God knows,” Philomène assented.

“And—and——But you’ll be busy, no doubt?”

“Moderately.”

“I have to push on with my battery. But there’s no real hurry—the Prussians are after them. Now I thought—on the off-chance, if I could find a friend here——”

“What is it you ask of me, good man?”

“If one of you wouldn’t mind stepping yonder with me. It’s much to ask, I know. But there’s a gentleman—an officer of ours——”

“Wounded?”

“No such trouble for you, good woman. Dead he is, and I helped bury him. But I want to find someone who will mark the place and keep it marked ’gainst I come back—if ever I do.”

“Was he a friend of yours, then?” asked Philomène, while the children stared.

“I wouldn’t altogether say that. He’d have said ‘yes’ fast enough, if you’d asked him. But he was a gentleman; Ramsey by name—Major Norman Ramsey; one of many fallen to-day, but I rode with him in his battery when he charged in slap through the whole French cavalry at Fuentes d’Oñoro. Will you come? ’Tis but a little way.”

His voice pleaded so—it was so strange and womanly, coming from a man of his strength and inches—that they followed him almost without demur, out by the gateway and around the sunken lane at the back of the buildings, where (for it was dark) they had to pick their steps for fear of stumbling over the dead.

Mercifully the way was not far. The tall sergeant halted and pointed to a patch of broken turf, where was a loose mound among broad wheel-ruts.

“You see, I have marked it with a stone,” said he. “But in a few days’ time there may be many around here. I want you to mark this one—it doesn’t matter how, so that you know it and can point it out when his friends ask. He wears his jacket, of course—the same as mine.” The tall man spanned his chest and turned towards the dying daylight, so that the bars of yellow braid showed between his fingers. “Only the facings will be of gold. You see those three trees standing alone? They will be

half-way between it and the wall of the château—in a straight line almost; and the lane close here on our left. You cannot miss it." He felt in his pockets.

"We want no money, soldier," said Philomène. "We will do our best. Give me your name, that meanwhile we may pray for you and him, out of these many."

"My name is Livesay, Sergeant, of Bull's troop. That will mean nothing to you, however."

"I dare say," answered Philomène simply, "it will convey more to our Lord God. I had a man once—who was killed—in the Artillery."

Jean and Pauline stared at the man. Tears, as he stood by the grave, had carved channels of white down his powder-stained cheeks.

"I do not believe," he said, "in praying for the dead. But I am glad, somehow, there are folks who do. Will you? His name was Ramsey; and the Duke, who has won this battle, broke his heart, curse him!"

"How did he die, sir?" asked Philomène simply.

"He was killed some while ago and far from here," answered the sergeant. "Of a broken heart, Mademoiselle."

"It is a sad thing," sighed Philomène, "to live for the Artillery."

The sergeant seemed to wish to say more, but turned to shake hands with her. He patted the children lightly on the head, then strode down the slope. A last shaft of sunset cast his long shadow over the heaps of slain.

With a sob Philomène pulled herself together.

"Mark my words, children. The pigeons will be home at their roosts to-morrow and all this will be as if it never had been."

She turned back to retrace the path, and over the fields of slain the two children followed her, heavy with sleep.

The Face *in the* Hop Vines

By Charles G. D. Roberts

King’s (Liverpool) Regiment

From the low window, framed in hop-vines, came light enough to light to bed so sleepy a traveller as I, so I troubled not at all to find the candle. Sitting idly on the edge of the couch, I pondered on the effort it would require to pull off my boots. A soldier, and hardened to all shifts, I might, indeed, have slept as I was; but the bed was the best in the inn, and I cared not to vex my hostess’s tidy soul by any such roughness of the camp. Even as I thought of it, however, my tired brain was flowing away into dreams.

But on the sudden I sat up straight, very wide awake. My hand went to the butt of my pistol. I had caught a stealthy rustling in the hop vines about the window. Could these Acadians be planning any mischief against me? It was not probable, for they were an open-dealing and courageous folk, and had shown themselves civil during the few hours since my coming to Cheticamp village. Nevertheless, I knew that in a certain sense I might count myself to be in an enemy’s country, and vigilance my best comrade. I sat in the gloom motionless, watching the pale square of the window.

Presently a head appeared close to the glass, and my fingers released the pistol. The head was a woman’s—a young girl’s, it seemed—in the wimpled white cap wherein these girls of Acadia are wont to enshadow their bright faces. Then light fingers tapped on the pane, and with great willingness I threw open the sash. But on the instant, guessing at a mystery of some sort, I held my tongue and kept my face aloof from the outdoor glimmer. For my part, however, I could make out—less, perhaps, by these material eyes than by the insight of the heart—that the face which looked up peeringly into mine was young and alluring.

“Jacques,” she murmured in a voice which my ears at once approved, “is it really you?”

“There’s a mistake here—an interesting mistake,” said my heart to me. But I let no such utterance rise to my lips. No, indeed. But my name is Jack—and no one could be supposed to think of spelling at such a moment. My conscience made no protest as I answered:

“Surely, dear one, it’s Jack. Who else could it be?”

I spoke in a discreet whisper, for all voices in a whisper sound alike; and I blessed my stars that I had perfected my French since my arrival in Halifax. I put out my hand, but failed to find a small one to occupy it.

“Of course, I knew it was you, Jacques,” the bewitching voice responded, “or you don’t suppose I should have come knocking at your window this way, do you?”

“No, I should think not, *chérie*,” I assented heartily, solicitous to cherish the maid’s mistake and prolong the interview to the utmost patience of Fate. “But it was kind of you to come so soon.”

This seemed safe and non-committal, but I trembled after I said it, lest some unknown revelation should be lurking in the words.

“I had to, Jacques, because I was afraid you might come to see me to-night——”

“I was coming,” I interrupted, boldly mendacious, “but I was on the road all night, and thought I had better lie down for a soldier’s forty winks before I called.”

She laughed under her breath provocatively.

“How your French has improved in these two years,” she remarked with approbation. “I used to think you would never learn.”

This was the first time I had seen Cheticamp village, but I felt safe in my reply.

“I was stupid, of course, *mon ange*; but after I was gone I remembered your sweet instructions.”

This was dangerous ground. I hastened to shift it.

“But tell me,” I went on, “what can you mean by saying I am not to come and see you? Surely you are not going to be so cruel, when I’ve been away so long.”

“No, Jacques,” she said, with a decisive shake of her pretty head, “you cannot come. Father is very bitter against you, and there would be a scene.”

I began to feel that I had rights which were being trampled upon.

“But what do you suppose I came to Cheticamp for?” I pleaded.

“Not merely to see me—that I know, Jacques,” came the decided answer. “You could never get leave of absence just for that. You cold-blooded English could never make a woman’s wishes so important.”

“Couldn’t we, indeed?” I protested. In my eagerness I leaned forward into the glimmer, seeking closer proximity to the fair enshadowed face that seemed to waver off alluringly just beyond my reach. Then, in a panic lest I had revealed myself and displayed to her the error which I was finding so agreeable, I drew myself back hastily into the gloom. To cover my alarm I reproached her plaintively.

“Why do you keep so far away, sweet one? Surely you are glad to see me again!”

She laughed softly, deliciously, under her hood.

“I haven’t seen you yet, really, you know, Jacques. Perhaps you have changed, and I might not like you so well. Men do change, especially Englishmen and soldiers, they say. But tell me, why have you come to Cheticamp; what reason beside to see me?”

This was a poser. I feared the game was up. But experience has taught me that when one has no good lie ready to hand it is safest to throw oneself on the mercy of Truth and trust to her good nature. She has so many sides that one of them can generally be found to serve any occasion. I told the truth, yet with an air that would permit her to doubt, should the game require it.

“The business which gained me the privilege of coming where I might be once more blessed by the light of your sweet eyes, provoking one, was the need conceived in the heart of our good Governor of putting a stop to certain transactions with the French at Louisbourg, which, as you doubtless know very well, have laid all this Cheticamp coast under grave suspicion. Your people, I dare wager, are too wise to be mixed up in such perilous enterprises.”

No sooner had I spoken than I realised that, for once, Truth had tricked me. I had better have trusted to invention.

“Thank you, Jacques. That is just what I wanted to know. You are so kind. Good night.”

There was a mocking note in the sweet voice, a little ring of triumph and hostility. For one instant the face was raised, and I saw it plainly, as if by the radiance of the scornful eyes. Then, before I could in any way gather my wits, it vanished.

I thrust my head forward, heedless of concealment, and gained one glimpse of a shadow disappearing through the shrubbery. I sprang out to follow. But no, I forget myself. The window was somewhat small for one of my inches. I climbed out laboriously. The witch was nowhere to be

seen. Then, still more laboriously, I climbed back again, cursing Fortune and my own stupidity which had bungled so sweet a game. I sat down on the edge of my bed to consider.

The errand which had brought me from Halifax to Cheticamp, with six soldiers to support me, was one of some moment, and here was I already in danger of distraction, thinking of a girl's voice, of half-seen, mocking eyes, rather than of my undertaking. I got up, shook myself angrily, then sat down again to lay my plans for the morrow.

The old Seigneur of Cheticamp, Monsieur Raoul St. Michel le Fevre, had heartily accepted the English rule, and dwelt in high favour with the powers at Halifax. But he had died a year back, leaving his estates to his nephew, young St. Michel. It had come to the ears of the Government that this youth, a headstrong partisan of France, was taking advantage of his position as seigneur to prosecute very successfully the forbidden traffic with Louisbourg. Great and merited was the official indignation. It was resolved that the estates should be confiscated at once, and young Monsieur St. Michel le Fevre captured, if possible. Thereupon the estates were conferred upon myself, to whom the Governor was somewhat deeply indebted. It was passing comfortable to him to pay a debt out of a pocket other than his own. I was dispatched to Cheticamp to gather in Monsieur le Fevre for the Governor and the le Fevre estates for myself. They were fair estates, I had heard, and I vowed that I would presently teach them to serve well the cause of England's king.

My first thought in the morning, when the level sun streaming through the hop vines brought me on the sudden wide awake—as a soldier should wake, slipping cleanly and completely out of his sleep-heaviness—my first thought, I say, was of a shadowed face vanishing into the night-glimmer, and something enchantingly mysterious to be sought for in this remote Acadian village. Then, remembering my business and

hoping that my indiscretion had not muddled it, I resolutely put the folly from me and sprang up.

It is curious, when one looks back, to note what petty details stand forth in a clear light, as it were, upon the background of great and essential experience. I am no gourmand, but apt to eat whatever is set before me, with little concern save that it be cleanly and sufficient. Yet never do I hear or think of Cheticamp village without a remembered savour of barley cakes and brown honey, crossed delicately with the smell of bean blossoms blown in through a sunny window. At the time, I am sure, I took little heed of these things. My care was chiefly to see that two of my men set forth promptly to watch the two wharves on each side of the creek, which served the fleet of the fishermen. Then I dispatched two others to spy on the roadway entering and leaving the village, and a fifth to sentinel a hill at the back overlooking all the open country. With the remaining fellow, my orderly, at my heels, I set out for the dwelling of young Monsieur St. Michel le Fevre de Cheticamp, rehearsing his full name with care as I went, in order that there should be no lack of courteous ceremony to disguise the rudeness of my errand.

I needed none to point me out the house of the le Fevres. On the crest of a dark-wooded knoll at the south-east end of the one long village street, it spread its cluster of grey gables, low and of a comfortable air. Fir groves sheltered it to north and east. On the west gathered the cool, green ranks of its apple orchard. Down the slope in front unrolled a careless garden—thyme plots and hollyhock rows, gooseberry bushes and marigold beds, and a wide waste of blossoming roses—all as unlike the formal pleasances of France and England as garden-close could be, yet bewitching, like a fair and wilful woman.

“It shall not be changed by so much as one gooseberry bush,” said I to myself, highly pleased with the prospect. Then, rounding a lilac thicket, I arrived at the open gate. And then, face to face, I met a girl.

The meeting was so sudden, and so closely did I confront her, that I felt my coming a most uncivil intrusion. Moreover, she was most disconcerting to look upon. Stammering apologies and snatching my hat from my head, I flushed and dropped my eyes before her—which was not in accordance with my custom. I dropped my eyes, as I say, but even then I saw her as clearly within my brain as if my eyes were boldly resting upon her face.

The lady of the manor, evidently. I had heard there was a sister to the recalcitrant young seigneur, one Mademoiselle Irene, over whose beauty and caprices had more than one duel been fought among the gallants of Quebec.

The picture which, during those few heart-beats while I stood stuttering, burned itself into my memory was one that not absence, years, or habitude has any power to dull. The face was a face for which some men would die a hundred deaths and dream all beauty in dying, while other men, blind fools, and many women, of the envious sort, would protest it to be not even passable; a face small, thin, clear, and very dark; the chin obstinate; the mouth full, somewhat large, sorrowful, mocking, maddening, unforgettably scarlet; the nose whimsical, dainty; the eyes of a strange green radiance, very large and trustfully wide open, frank as a child’s, yet unfathomable; a face to trust, to adore, yet not to understand. The hair black, thick, half curling, with a dull burnish, falling over each side of the brow almost to cover the little delicate ears. The figure, clad in some soft, whitish stuff descending only to the ankles, was under middle height, slight to thinness, straight, lithe, fine, indescribably alive—in some strange way reminding me of a flame. In narrow little shoes of red leather the light feet stood poised like birds’. From one small nut-brown hand swung a broad-brimmed hat of black beaver, with an ample black feather at the side. Beside this entrancing picture I was vaguely conscious of a wide, yellow pathway sloping upward through roses, roses, roses drenched in sun.

Presently I heard the sound of my stammering cease, and a soft voice, troubling me with a familiar note, said courteously: “You are very welcome to Cheticamp, monsieur. My brother is away from home, unhappily, but in his absence you must allow me the honour of taking his place as your host in my poor way.”

I looked up and met her eyes fairly, my confusion lost in surprise, and on the instant my heart signalled to me: “It is none other than the maid of the window! Take care!”

Yes, I saw it plain. Yet I should never have known it but for a perception somehow more subtle than that of ear and eye—for she had disguised her voice the night before, and her dress had been that of a peasant maid, and the bright riddle of her face had been in shadow. I perceived, too, that she felt herself safe from discovery, and that it was for me to save her blushes by leaving her security unassailed. In all this sudden turmoil of my wits, however, I fear that I was near forgetting my manners.

“But, mademoiselle,” I demanded bluntly, “how do you know who I am?”

“It is the part of the conquered to know their conquerors, monsieur,” she answered, in a manner that eluded the bitterness of the words. “But, indeed, the place of an English officer, on duty that is doubtless official, is here at the Seigneury and not at the village inn. We cannot let you put a slight upon our hospitality.”

I was in sore embarrassment; and the parchment deed conveying to me the Seigneury of Cheticamp began to burn my pocket. I felt a vehement desire to accept the sweetly proffered hospitality of this enchanting witch. The temptation dragged at my heartstrings. There was nothing to do but take it by the throat rudely if I would save any shreds of honour. “Alas! mademoiselle,” I said, avoiding her eyes, “I am here on a rough

errand, and your courtesy pierces me. I am here to arrest your brother and carry him a prisoner to Halifax."

"Monsieur, monsieur, what do you mean?" she cried, with a faintness in her voice. But looking up suddenly, I saw that her surprise was a pretty piece of feigning, though her agitation was real enough.

"I mean that your brother, though succeeding to these estates under protection of English law, and owing allegiance to the English Crown, is giving aid to England's enemies. He is supplying Louisbourg with grain and flax and cattle from these lands of Acadia, which are now English. The Governor has proofs beyond cavil. He has sent me to arrest your brother, mademoiselle, not to be happy in the hospitality of your brother's sister."

And now, to my amaze, the merriest and most persuasive smile spread a dazzle over my lady witch's face.

"Those proofs of your good Governor's, monsieur," she cried, with pretty scorn, "I will show you what folly they are. You have all been deceived. You must come with me now, and give me fullest opportunity to clear my brother's honour. And in any case it is my right, as well as my pleasure, to entertain the Governor's representative when he visits the place of my father's people."

But I was stubborn. That deed in my pocket weighed tons. Yet my inclination must have shown in my eyes, plainly enough for one less keen than Mademoiselle Irene le Fevre to decipher it. A little air of confidence flitted over her face. Nevertheless, I shook my head.

"Most gracious lady," I protested, "you honour me too much. It will delight me to learn that your brother has been maligned"—and in this, faith, I spoke true, forgetting the contingent peril to my pocket—"but were he never so innocent it would be my duty to take him to Halifax, for

the Governor himself to weigh the evidence. The irony of life has sent me as your foe, not as your guest."

"Then, monsieur, come as a foe who but observes the courtesies. Come with your hands free to arrest my brother at any moment on his own hearthstone (he is far away from it now, praise Mary!), or to arrest your hostess either, if your duty should demand that unkindness. Come as one who graciously accepts what he could, if he would, take as his right. Let us play that you come here as our friend, monsieur—and give me the hope of winning an advocate for my brother against the evil day that may bring him before the cold English judges at Halifax."

Her strong, little eloquent hands were clasped in appeal—and who was I to deny her? But I looked into her eyes; and I saw in their childlike deeps, underneath the mocking and the feigning, a clear spirit, which I could not bear to delude. I understood now very plainly her mad game of the night before. She was unmasking a danger for her brother. I justified her in my heart; for my own part in the folly I felt a creeping shame. How lightly she must hold me. This thought, and a sense that I was about to hurt her, brought the hot flush to my face; and I looked away as I spoke.

"But, mademoiselle—forgive me that I bear such tidings—the estates of Monsieur Raoul le Fevre, Seigneur of Cheticamp, are confiscated to the Crown."

Lifting my eyes at the last words, I saw that the girl had grown very white and was staring at me in a sort of terror. There was plainly no feigning here. This blow was unexpected, unprepared for, something beyond her bright young wit to deal with. I seemed to see in her heart a sudden, hopeless desolation, as if all her world had fallen to ruin about her and left her life naked to the storm of time. Not a word had she ready in such a crisis.

“Mademoiselle,” I cried, more passionately, perhaps, than was fitting, “do not misunderstand. The confiscation does not apply at once, of course, and you are still absolute mistress here. If your brother be proved innocent, the decree of confiscation may be revoked. So it will now be held in suspension. You will, I am sure, permit me to go through the form of visiting your house, to convince me, as the Governor’s emissary, that Monsieur le Fevre is not there. Then I will return to the village and see to it that my men shall cause you no annoyance or embarrassment. I dare not ask you to pity me for the duty that has been put upon me.”

As I spoke I had been watching her face, without seeming to think of anything but my own words. First the colour returned to cheek and lips; then a wild anger was lighted in the great green eyes—anger with a fear and appeal behind it. Then a resolved look—and I knew that she would force herself to play out the game, setting her brother’s interest before all else. And then, last of all, a most fleeting, elusive look of triumph at the back of her eyes and at the bow of her lips, for the indeterminable fraction of a second. I took note of this with some anxiety. Could it be possible that she felt sure of her power over me? Could it be possible that she had, at all, any hold upon me? No, she was too confident. She interested me amazingly. She seemed to me the most beautiful thing that could have ever existed. But I was not in love, and would not be swerved from my duty even if I were. Yet all this was flashed instantaneously through my brain—she was speaking—and I was yielding.

“You are a generous enemy, a chivalrous enemy, monsieur,” she murmured, in a low, earnest, slightly strained voice. Then she recovered her lightness. “I am almost your prisoner, in a sense, am I not? A suspect, certainly. If I accept your leniency, and profit by your permission to stay here under my confiscated roof, do not make me die under this weight of favour. Be my guest and let me feel that I am not the only one in debt.”

Was this the same woman, this half-mocking, all-irresistible creature, she whom I had seen grey-faced with hopeless trouble not three minutes before? Said I to myself, “If I put my wits or my heart against hers it is all up with me. Blank truth is my only hope.” Aloud I said, “I will be your guest, mademoiselle, though the debt in which I so overwhelm myself is one from which I can never again get free.”

For this acquiescence my reward was just a look of brilliancy that made me catch my breath with pleasure. With a gesture that bade me to her side she turned and moved slowly up the path, between the shining copiousness of roses.

[Illustration: “‘It is I who must ask forgiveness,’ she said softly, holding out her hand” (page 192).]

“I will send a servant with your orderly to the inn, monsieur,” she said, “to fetch your things. Our old walls will be glad to shelter again a soldier’s uniform, even if the colour of it be something strange to them.”

“Almost you tempt me to wish that I had been born to the white uniform,” I answered, in a daze with the nearness of her, the witchery of her, the nameless charm of her movement, the subtle intoxication of her voice.

“Almost you tempt me to regret,” she retorted, with gracious raillery, “that the men of your cold and stubborn north cannot be moved to change by a woman’s arguments.”

“It is to unchangeableness we are moved by a woman, mademoiselle.”

I spoke with an exaggerated lightness, to avoid a too significant seriousness.

“Is there ever, I wonder, a risk of such steadfastness growing tiresome?” mused mademoiselle, turning contemplative.

The swift change discomfited me. I turned my words to platitudes on the beauty of the house, the garden, the landscape. And presently I found myself established, an honoured yet confessedly hostile guest, in the Seigneury of Cheticamp.

A little old housekeeper, wizened and taciturn and omnipresent, kept me under an inscrutable surveillance, but treated me civilly enough. My chamber, very spacious, but with a low ceiling of broken slopes under the eaves, its windows looking out over the rose-garden, the village, and the sea, was furnished with a strange commingling of the luxury and daintiness of Versailles with the rudeness of a remote, half-barbarous colony. One of my men, my orderly, was entertained, much to his satisfaction, in the servants' quarters, and did me service as regularly as if we were at home at Goreham-on-Thames; while the rest, lodging at the inn, came to me with daily reports, which varied not at all in their trivial sameness. I breakfasted alone. Throughout the morning I walked exploring the country for miles about and talking with the inhabitants; or I investigated the roomy, irregular old house, whose half-open doors and rambling corridors extended trustful invitation to my curiosity; or I read and wrote in the small but well-stocked library, to which stained glass from Rouen, a prayer desk, and a corner shrine lent the savour and sanctity of a chapel. At one hour past noon precisely I dined with Mademoiselle le Fevre, and afterwards either walked with her in the garden and in the fir-woods, or, if the weather was unfavourable, conversed with her, most pleasurably, in the book-room, while she wrought with more or less affectation of diligence at a curious piece of tapestry, gold threads and scarlet on a cloth of a soft dull blue. Before sunset we supped, and in the evening, with doors and windows open and the scented breath of sea and rose and meadow flowing through, she played to me on her spinet, or sang ballads of old France, till candle-light and "good night" brought the day to a close.

Small wonder, being so gently occupied, that I was in no haste to force events, to ask myself what I desired or expected should happen. The man I was sent to seek was obviously not here. It was a plain and pleasant duty for me to stay here and await him. Meanwhile, I was serving the King by my presence, which was security that the Seigneury of Cheticamp should render no assistance to the King's enemies at Louisbourg. To be sure, it was rendering continual assistance to Mademoiselle Irene le Fevre de Cheticamp, but I could not bring myself to consider for a moment that the King could be so unhappy as to count her among his enemies. And so the days slipped by. I was not—as I should have sworn to myself in all honesty had one suggested it to me—in the least in love with mademoiselle. I merely found it unavoidable to think about her or dream about her all the time; impossible to engage my interest in anything whatever that I could not connect with her. For her part, she grew day by day more sweetly serious, more womanly courteous, until our pretty masquerading that night at my window among the hop vines came to be a remote, unbelievable dream.

But the situation, seemingly so quiet and easy that it might aspire to last for ever, was, in fact, a bubble of rainbow tissue blown to its extremes of tension and ready to shatter at a breath. When the breath came it was a light one, truly, yet how the face of the world changed under it. I awoke one morning in the first rosiness of dawn with a kind of foreboding. I went to the window. There in the misty bay, hove-to at a discreet distance from the wharves, was a small schooner, signalling.

The signals were unintelligible to me, which meant it was my duty to be concerned with them. I remembered that there was a flag-pole on the knoll, behind the house. With a sudden leaden sinking at the heart I realised that mademoiselle's brother was at last in evidence, and I could imagine nothing that would more embarrass me than that I should succeed in capturing him. After watching the signals for some time, and wondering if it were mademoiselle herself manipulating the unseen

replies, I decided that there was nothing to be done but parade my guard openly along the coast. Then, if he should persist in stupidly running his neck into the noose, I would have to do my duty and pull it.

“Oh, why has she a brother!” I groaned, cursing him heartily, but straight revoked my curse, remembering that but for his delinquencies I had never come at all to Cheticamp.

Slowly I made my toilet, and before it was finished the little vessel was under way again, beating out of the inlet against a light westerly wind. Both to north and south of Cheticamp Harbour were little sheltered ports with anchorage for such small craft as she; and I concluded that with this wind she would seek the next haven northward. I resolved to send my men to search the southerly coves. Then I stepped out upon the terrace and met mademoiselle herself tripping through the dew, her hair dishevelled, her eyes like stars, her small face one gipsy sparkle with excitement.

At sight of me an apprehension dimmed the sparkle for an instant. Then she came forward to greet me with her usual courtesy. But now there was a challenge deep in her eyes, and presently a return of the old subtle audacity, as if I were a foe to be fenced with, bewildered, eluded. It hurt me keenly, and I took no thought of the utter unreasonableness of my grievance.

“Good morning, monsieur,” she cried gaily. “Have you a bad conscience that you sleep so lightly and arise so early?”

“Mademoiselle,” said I gravely, bending low over her cool brown fingers, and noticing that they trembled, “I have been watching the signals from yonder ship.”

The brown fingers were withdrawn nervously.

“They were quite unintelligible to me,” I continued, “but I readily infer that your brother has returned and is on shipboard.”

A strange look—was it relief?—passed over her face. Then she nodded her dark head as if in frankest acquiescence.

“Allow me to say at once that I must try to capture him, but that I earnestly hope that I shall not be so unfortunate as to succeed.”

At this her eyes softened upon me. Never had I seen anything, in life or in dream, so beautiful as the smile upon her lips. But I went on: “My men will patrol the coast; but they are few, and I cannot, of course, prevent your messengers eluding their vigilance and communicating with Monsieur le Fevre. I am glad I cannot prevent it. I doubt not you will warn him that all this neighbourhood is strictly watched. My men would at once recognise him, if they saw him, from the descriptions they have had.”

Then, as I watched her face, my restraint was shaken. The love which I had not till that day let myself realise laid mighty grasp upon me. The long-chained passion crept into my voice, and it changed, trembling, as I continued:

“Oh, you can prevent him falling into our hands. I beseech you let not that evil come upon me that your brother should be my prisoner.”

“Thank you, monsieur,” she said very simply, putting her hand in mine with a confidence like a child’s. Her eyes searched my very heart for a second. “I think, with such assistance, we can elude your vigilance, monsieur.”

But on the instant her look changed to one of the deepest gravity. As I have so often thought of that look since, it was a surrender in part, in part a sacrament.

“The South Cove at noon,” she said, with a sort of sob, and flushed and ran hastily into the house.

For a moment or two I stood staring after her in utter bewilderment. The dominant feeling, which sent great gushes of light and warmth through heart and brain and nerve, was that she loved me, that she had revealed herself to me on a swift, inexplicable impulse. This set me reeling in a kind of intoxication. But underneath, clamouring harshly to be heeded, was the problem she had thrust upon me. She had forced me to know just what I had striven so desperately not to know. For the moment, however, I did not think. I simply let myself feel; and, turning mechanically, I walked in a daze down the winding road through the rose garden.

“Of course,” said I to myself, and half aloud to the roses, “she means that I am to act upon her word and take my men safely out of the way to South Cove before noon, leaving the North Harbour, where the ship has gone, perfectly secure. She knows that I can act with a clear conscience on so definite a piece of information as that. She knows that there is nothing else for me to do. She sees that I love her. She trusts me. And she trusts my wit to comprehend her subtle devisings. Irene! Irene!”

And I swung gaily down towards the village through an air more light and sweet, through a sunshine more radiant and clear, under a sky more blue, than ever before my travelled senses had encountered.

I breakfasted at the inn. By the time my messengers had got hold of my scattered men and given them my orders to report to me at South Cove, it wanted but an hour of noon. To South Cove was an hour’s brisk walking, and I set out, with my orderly at my heels. He was a trusty, discreet fellow, with whom I was wont to talk not a little; but to-day my dreams were all-sufficient to me, and I would not let the lad so much as stir his tongue. Arriving at the point where the upland dipped down to South Cove, a narrow inlet thickly screened with woods, I noted the hour as exact noon. Then, liking well the look of the leafage below me, with the

glint of water sparkling through, and craving no company but my own and my thoughts, I bade my man wait where he was and watch the roads both ways, and halt the others as they should come up.

The path down through the trees was green-mossed, winding, and steep. I went swiftly but noiselessly. Near the foot, as I was just about to emerge upon the beach, the sound of voices below caught my ear. I essayed to stop myself, slipped, crashed through a brittle screen of dead spruce boughs, and came down, erect upon my feet but somewhat jarred, not ten paces from the spot where a lady and a cavalier, locked in one another's arms, stood beside a small boat drawn up upon the shingle.

It was mademoiselle, and the man was her brother, as I saw on the instant from the likeness between them. They had unlocked their arms and turned towards me, startled at the sound of my fall. Mademoiselle's face went white, then flushed crimson, and, drawing herself up, she confronted me with a look of unutterable scorn, mingled with pain and reproach. Apprehension and amusement struggled together in the face of the young seigneur.

For my own part, I had realised on the instant the whole enormity of my mistake. Mademoiselle had told me the plain truth, staking everything on my love, trusting me utterly. My heart sinks now as I recall the anguish of that moment. I had but one thought—to justify myself in her eyes. I sprang forward, stammering.

"Forgive me, mademoiselle, I did not understand—I quite misunderstood. Believe me, I never dreamed——"

But, shaken and humiliated as she was, she did not lose her presence of mind. She played another card boldly.

"Captain Scott," she said, as if this were the most ceremonious meeting in the world, "this is my fiancé, Monsieur de St. Ange."

By great good fortune I had wit enough to seem to believe her. In fact, perhaps my belief was too well simulated, for the expressions that passed over her face in the next few seconds were inexplicable to me and mightily increased my confusion. But toward this “Monsieur de St. Ange” I felt most cordial.

“Delighted, monsieur, I am sure,” I exclaimed, bowing low, while he bowed with equal ceremony, but in silence.

“I congratulate you,” I went on, terribly at a loss. Then I looked at mademoiselle, who had turned away white and indifferent.

“There has been some mistake,” I continued desperately. “That you should wish to see your betrothed is, of course, to me sufficient explanation of your presence here. But others might think I should inquire more searchingly into an enemy’s purpose in visiting a place like this. My men are in the neighbourhood; I will go at once and withdraw them. But I beg you, monsieur, to withdraw yourself as speedily as possible.”

I backed away, striving in vain to win a look from mademoiselle. As for her brother, he was most civil.

“I thank you for your great courtesy, monsieur,” he answered, the corners of his mouth restraining themselves from mirth. “Much as it would be to my pleasure to know you better, I am aware that I might find it inconvenient. I shall comply as speedily as possible with your most reasonable request.”

At the foot of the path, finding that mademoiselle was quite oblivious to my presence, I turned and made all haste from the calamitous spot. When I found my men, I hurried them off toward Cheticamp with an eagerness that hinted at a fresh and important clue. From the inn I sent them in parties of two, on errands of urgency that would take them as far as possible from South Cove. Then, hurrying back to the Seigneury, I

awaited, in sickening suspense, the return of mademoiselle to a belated meal.

At the suggestion of the wizened old housekeeper, I ate the meal alone—or, rather, I put some dry, chip-like substances into my mouth, which chose to collect themselves in a lump some little way below my throat. The old lady seemed as ignorant as I of the reason of mademoiselle's delay, though once and again, from the shrewd scrutiny which I caught her bestowing upon my countenance, I suspected that she knew more than she would confess. The afternoon went by in that misery of waiting that turns one's blood to gall. I would go out among the roses, but cursing them for their false, disastrous speech, I found them not contenting company. Then I would go back into the library and spend the sluggish minutes in jumping up, sitting down, trying this book, rejecting that, while every sense was on the rack of intensity to catch some hint of her presence in the house. But all in vain. The stillness seemed unnatural. There was a menace in the clear pour of the afternoon sun. When at last, toward sundown, the humpbacked old gardener went by the window with a watering-pot, I was startled to see that the affairs of life were going on as usual. There was somehow a grain of comfort, of reassurance, in the sight of the old humpback. I left the library and went to find the housekeeper, determined to put her through such an inquisition as should in some way relieve my suspense.

I found her in the supper-room, putting flowers on a table that was set for—only one.

"Supper is served, monsieur," she said, as I came in.

"For me alone?" I gasped, feeling that the world had come to an end.

"For monsieur," she answered.

“Tell me”—and the tone made her look at me quickly with a deference not before observable in her manner—“tell me at once where Mademoiselle le Fevre is gone.”

“Certainly, monsieur, certainly. There is no desire to deceive monsieur. Mademoiselle and her maid have removed to the inn at Cheticamp, where mademoiselle intends to reside till she can join monsieur her brother at Louisbourg.”

I heard her through, then rushed from the room, snatched up my hat, and sped down to the inn of Cheticamp. I fear that the civil salutations of the villagers whom I passed went outrageously unregarded.

My demand was urgent, so within a very few minutes of my coming I was ushered into mademoiselle’s parlour, and with a thrill of hope at the omen I noted that it was the same room which I had occupied on the night of my arrival at Cheticamp, the same dear room through whose hop-garlanded window I had made such bold and merry counterfeit with mademoiselle in her disguise. But not nourishing to hope was mademoiselle’s greeting. I had not dreamed so small a dame could ever look so tall. Her slim figure was in the gown of creamy linen which she had worn when I had met her in the rose-garden. Her small, strange, child-like face was very white, her lips set coldly and less scarlet than their wont, and her eyes—they were fearfully bright and large, with a gaze which I could not fathom.

“To what do I owe this honour, monsieur?” she asked. “It is much——”

But I was rude in my trouble.

“Why have you fled from me, mademoiselle?” I interrupted passionately. “Why have you left your own home in this way? I will leave it at once—for you shall not be driven from it.”

“My home, monsieur? It is your house. I will not be a pensioner on your bounty.”

How had she found this out? I was in confusion.

“What—what do you mean, mademoiselle?” I stammered.

“I mean, monsieur,” she said, with ice and fire contending in her voice, “that all these days, when I thought I was playing the hostess, in a home belonging either to my brother or to the English Government, I have been but a beggar living on your charity. I know that you are the owner of Cheticamp House and all in it, it having been taken from us to give to you.”

I was in despair over this further complication; but this was not the time for finding out the betrayer of my secret.

“I had hoped that you would never know, mademoiselle,” I protested. “But it is not of that I would speak. Forgive me, I beg you on my knees, for the stupid mistake, the unpardonable mistake I made this morning. And oh, count it something that I did my best to remedy the error, so that no harm came of it.”

The anger that flamed into her eyes was of a beauty that did not delight me.

“Doubtless you did your duty, monsieur, as a servant of your Government. Doubtless honour required that you should betray the trust so foolishly reposed in you by a silly girl. You would have taken my brother, and through his sister’s folly. I cannot feel any very keen gratitude for the generosity which suffered my fiancé, whom you did not seek, to go free.”

Light began to struggle in upon the darkness of my brain.

“Your fiancé!” I returned quickly. “Could you think for one moment I did not know that he was your brother?”

Her face changed marvellously at this declaration.

“I knew your purpose then,” I went on. “But forgive me, forgive me for not understanding you before. I was not worthy of the simple trust you placed in me. I thought you meant me to understand that I should take my men to South Cove at noon to have them out of the way. I thought it was a piece of your daring strategy, and I was proud because you trusted my stupid wits to follow your plan. I thought it was to save me the embarrassment of openly letting your brother go. I thought—oh, I thought myself so wise, and I was so cheaply careful of my duty. Can you forgive me? You know, you must know, in the light of what I did afterwards, that if I had only understood your words in all their uncalculating faith no power on earth would have prevented me keeping myself and my men as far as possible from South Cove.”

Her tense attitude relaxed. Her figure seemed no longer so portentously tall.

“It is I who must ask forgiveness,” she said softly, holding out her hand. I seized it in both of mine and dared to kiss it fiercely, hungrily, and marvelled to find that it was not at once withdrawn from such an ardour.

“I am not so wise, I am not so subtle, as you think me,” she continued. “It was a clever device, indeed, that you credited me with, and so much more considerate and fine in every way than my poor little thoughtlessness which threw the responsibility upon you. But you are mistaken, monsieur, if you think that I am at all clever or subtle.”

She was looking down, watching, but not seeming to see, how my hands held both of hers. For myself, I knew that the joy of life had come to me; but I could find no word to say, so wildly ran my blood. After a moment’s silence she said musingly:

“I don’t think I ever could deceive any one. I am sure I never did deceive any one in my life—but once; oh, yes, once.” And here she lifted up her face and flashed upon me a challenge of dancing eyes and mocking mouth.

“No, indeed,” said I. “The maid who came to my window did not deceive me for a moment when afterwards I met her in the rose-garden.”

“Oh!” she gasped with a little sob, while her face grew scarlet. “You knew all the time? It was horrid of me—too horrid to think of. Oh——”

At this point it seemed to me that she was looking for a spot to hide her face, and, taking base advantage of her confusion, I drew her into my arms and let her blushes fly to cover against my coat. Never before, in my opinion, had the King’s uniform been so highly honoured.

“To my window you came that night, my lady,” I whispered, “but it was to the door of my heart you came.”