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The Rupa Book of CRIME STORIES

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Rupa & Co
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Introduction

I grew up on a heady mixture of crime, mystery and detective fiction, but their influence was purely of a literary nature; I have yet to commit a major crime, just as the majority of readers are innocent of murder and mayhem. I cannot honestly say that I have never had the urge to commit one. The wish to put someone unpleasant—bully, sadist, cheat or extortionist-out of the way (permanently) is strong in most of us; but commonsense and civilized norms prevail over our baser instincts, and we step back from committing that most terrible and unnatural of crimes—the murder of a fellow human-being.

The stories in this collection have always stood out in my memory as being different from others, either as psychological studies of the criminal (often a very ordinary, harmless sort of individual) or because of the original methods used by the more diabolical type of killer. Most of the writers represented here specialized in crime or detective fiction. Others took to it as a diversion from more 'serious' writing. Jack London was a master story-teller with a deep insight into human motivation; he drew from first-hand experience. But all these writers were excellent craftsmen, outstanding in their own fields.

Several were humourists. Such as Stacy Aumonier, one of my favourite short story writers, who is also represented in The Rupa Book of Great Suspense Stories. Here, in The Perfect Murder,,' his wit and subtle sense of humour again come into play. Barry Pain was another humorous writer of the early twentieth century who dug below the surface of polite middle-class conventions. This was a period rich in the emerging literature of crime, mystery and detection.

Some young readers have insisted that I include a cricket story in this anthology. Cricket and murder hardly go together, but I took up the challenge and dug up the pitch (or rather, my archives) to find Bernard Newman's 'Death at the Wicket', in which a fast bowler sets out to wreak vengeance on an overly-defensive batsman! Newman was best known for his spy stories; but he knew his cricket too, as this story will testify.

Arthur Machen was a very gifted writer, neglected in his own lifetime. He spent
many years living in a shabby London lodging-house, turning out strange tales of
the macabre, the supernatural and the fantastic. His work is better appreciated today
than it was during his lifetime. The Islington Murder' is one of his more realistic
stories. And, for a change the murderer gets away with it!

W.W. Jacobs was a popular writer of humorous sea stories, but he is better
known today for his short stories of crime and the supernatural. Another very
popular writer of the same period was H. de Vere Stacpoole, who set his romantic
adventure stories in exotic locales. He was best known for his novel, The Blue
Lagoon, filmed in 1948 with Jean Simmons in the lead and in 1980 with Brooke
Shields. The Chinese Girl' is an off-beat story, done with considerable skill.

Other successful practitioners of the art were J.S. Fletcher, E. Phillips
Oppenheim, and G.D.H. and M. Cole, all of whom are represented here by fine
examples of their work. The Coles were a husband and wife team who wrote many
successful detective stories; Cole was a leading Economist in the British Labour
Party, his wife a gifted writer.

These were pioneers in the field of the crime story. They were followed by
names that are famous today—Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Ellery Queen,
Raymond Chandler—but the work of the early writers was inferior to none.

We will let a great writer (rather than a critic) have the last word on the subject.
In 1944, Somerset Maugham wrote: "I have a notion that when the historians of
literature come to discourse upon the fiction produced by English-speaking peoples
during the first half of this century, they will pass somewhat lightly over the
productions of serious novelists and turn their attention to the immense and varied
achievement of the mystery writers."

How true! While the names of scores of Nobel and Booker prize winners have
been forgotten, readers turn to story-tellers such as Doyle, Dahl, Saki and Maugham
himself for good writing and stories that tell you something about the human
condition, in particular the human mind and its motivations.

Ruskin Bond
Mussoorie

September 2003
Death at the Wicket

By Bernard Newman

There was certainly plenty of evidence.

Country house cricket is in danger of becoming extinct, so I had gladly accepted Noxon's invitation. Not that I am a star performer. A country house cricket eleven usually consists of three or four good players, a couple of promising youngsters, three or four people who were once cricketers, and a couple who never were and never would be. I came into the third category, but young Faulkner was emphatically in the first. He was a fast bowler of class, and only the accident of birth in a Minor Country had kept him from the public eye. He had played plenty of games for the M.C.C., and had done well; though at Lord's they whispered stories of his queer temper.

Pape Pontivy, once a famous French spy catcher, went down to Malmeston with me. He was not in the least interested in cricket, and within an hour had shocked the company by calling the umpire a referee, and by a comment that Faulkner must be a good bowler, since he hit the bat every time.

This was during a practice game. Over tea, Noxon talked over his strategy for the first match. Faulkner would be his shock bowler: there was a slow left-hander for the other end. After that, he had as changes a selection of has-beens and would-be's.

I am not quite certain how the words 'body line' came into the conversation. The phrase was always more dramatic than accurate, but since the unfortunate controversy in Australia it has been dropped—the phrase only, not the method of attack. Many bowlers, when they talk of 'leg theory' and 'pad play', are really discussing Larwood's method.

Pontivy pricked up his ears when 'body line' was mentioned, and a dozen people tried to explain it to him, quite unsuccessfully.

"You may see a bit of it on Wednesday, M. Pontivy," said young Faulkner—rather grimly, I thought, "we're playing Malmeston—and Torris will be there."
I knew that there was bad blood between him and Torris. I confess that I never liked Torris myself. He assiduously cultivated a local reputation as a cricketer, and actually he knew the rules— and dodges—of the game backwards. As captain of the Malmeston Cricket Club he was successful, but very unpopular with his opponents; not because of his success, but because he was no sportsman—he never took a risk, and would insist always on his pound of flesh. There was a famous occasion years ago when Malmeston were facing a score of 260, and had nine men out for 85—and then Torris claimed bad light, and got it.

He used to make a lot of runs, but was not a pretty bat. I never saw a man use his pads more, not even in professional cricket before the new rule. He never played an innings without at least three l.b.w. appeals. He survived all but the last, and unkind rumour said quite a lot about umpires. A country house party is not unlike a school in its atmosphere, and schoolboys' opinions on visiting umpires are notorious. The Malmeston regular umpire was one of Torris's own servants—half the team depended on him for a livelihood, for that matter. It was noted, so exasperated bowlers declared, that Torris was never l.b.w. unless the opponents' umpire had to give the decision, and Torris was always careful when facing his end.

There had been a scene between Faulkner and Torris this previous season, I remembered: Faulkner could stand punishment, but Torris's pad play made him wild. He promptly packed his leg-field, and served up some real body-line stuff! It wasn't dangerous, for Faulkner was accurate, but it got Torris rattled. And at last, he appealed to the umpire!

Unfortunately for him, the umpire wasn't his own man, but a retired Indian officer, Colonel Coffin.

"What?" barked Coffin. "Appeal disallowed! This is cricket, sir, not a test match!"

Odd Coffin's unconsciously-coined epigram became almost a classic, and unkind people used to whisper "This is cricket, not a test match!" when they wanted to get Torris wild. Strangely enough, Faulkner himself got unexpectedly ratty when the incident was mentioned. Although he had scored, he hated Torris the more.

But although we all agreed with Faulkner, we tried to calm him down.

"I don't care what you say," Faulkner almost shouted, "But if he tries that pad-stuff, then I give him leg-theory."

"Oh, cut it out, old chap," Taunton protested—another Grade I player. "It'll kill cricket."

"Never heard of in my time," old Knight put in—a grand old tryer, still good for five or six on a perfect wicket. "In my day we used to play the game."

"Play the game!" Faulkner howled. "But Torris ...".

"Torris doesn't know how to play the game—never did." This from Bingham, the local doctor. I didn't like him: a good cricketer, but utterly selfish—played for himself first and his side second. When he wasn't batting, he always wanted to bowl.
He fancied himself as a fast bowler, but was very erratic—not in the same class as Faulkner. "Nevertheless, I should go steady on the body-line and bumper business, Faulkner. Torris isn't so young as he was, you know—can't get out of the way."

"He's quick enough to stick his-pads in front," Faulkner retorted. And, he went off into a long defence of body-line—all the old arguments dragged out again, till we were sick of it. I have only mentioned the discussion at length because it was such vital evidence against Faulkner.

Bingham continued to advise caution. I doubted if he were thinking of Torris's welfare! He wasn't Torris's doctor: on the contrary, he disliked him as freely as anybody. Only last winter, so old Knight told me, there had been ugly rumours about Torris and Bingham's wife. Evidently the potential scandal had blown over, for there had been no divorce.

We were to play Malmeston the following Wednesday. Noxon, our host, had fixed up the match in spite of the universal dislike of Torris, for Malmeston were a good side, and had a fine pitch in the middle of a glorious old village green. Noxon had fixed up a full week's cricket for his house party, which was to be assisted by one or two local residents like Bingham. I was quite pleased with my own moderate performances, but Pontivy would have been bored to exasperation but for the lucky accident that the Chief Constable of the county was among the guests. The two men talked shop very contentedly throughout the games.

The house party arrived a few minutes late at Malmeston, but Bingham was already there to represent us: I noticed Torris out in the middle of the green, inspecting the wicket. He won the toss and decided to bat.

I would have witnessed the affair at Malmeston in any case, but chance gave me a front seat for the drama. Early in Malmeston's innings our wicket-keeper knocked up his right thumb rather badly, and had to take off the gloves. Noxon, our skipper, handed them to me.

"Slip the pads on, will you, Newman?" he said.
"But, damn it, Noxon," I protested, "I haven't kept wicket for twenty years!"
"No, but you used to. Stop 'em—that'll do. We don't expect fancy work."

Faulkner was bowling well, getting real pace out of the hard pitch. But I could see that Torris was getting on his nerves. So well positioned behind the stumps, I could now appreciate the irritation of Torris's pad play. Twice Faulkner broke through his guard, and once appealed confidently for l.b.w. But Torris's man was at the other end. I saw Faulkner bite his lip, and guessed what was coming.

I wondered if Noxon would interfere, but Faulkner was his star player, and he himself no more than a keen rabbit. Faulkner set his field deliberately—five men on the leg side. I was a bit anxious—for myself: body-line bowling is no picnic for the wicket-keeper. Torris looked round at the new field in some anxiety—pad-players aren't too fond of being hit.
He certainly got what was coming for him. Faulkner's second ball caught him a nasty blow just below the heart. Play was held up for a minute, and I saw Dr Bingham look meaningfully at Faulkner. But Faulkner was past looks, and had no mercy. Torris stopped the fifth ball of the over on the point of his knee, and almost jumped clear of the ground at its sudden sting—a fast ball on the knee can be very painful. He swung his leg to ease it, and took his stance for the final ball.

It was never played. Just as Faulkner began his long run, I noticed that Torris shuddered; a few seconds later—just as Faulkner delivered the ball—the bat fell from Torris's hands. The ball crashed into the undefended wicket; I saw Torris staggering forward, clutching at his chest; a moment later he sank helplessly to the ground.

I ran to his side, and fumbled with my clumsy gloves as he writhed on the crease, his hands pressed towards his heart. But now, Dr Bingham, from mid-off, was kneeling beside Torris. He called out to Knight to bring his bag from his car, and then forced a few drops of red liquid down Torris's throat. At this stage I noticed that Pontivy was on the field, bending over Torris.

"I fear that he is dead," the old man said quietly to the doctor.

"I am afraid so," Bingham agreed.

The match was, of course, abandoned at once. I was more than concerned. Sergeant Wilkins, the local policeman, was in the Malmeston team, and I saw him talking to the Chief Constable.

I pulled Noxon on one side. The old chap was naturally tremendously upset. We knew that Torris's death was an accident—Faulkner had never meant to kill him. But that is merely the difference between manslaughter and murder. I did wonder, in fact, if a charge of murder might not be preferred. Manslaughter depends upon involuntary and unplanned conditions, accidents through negligence, and the like. But Faulkner, days before, had planned to bowl body-line at Torris; the fact that the bowling overreached his anticipations was no defence. Noxon thought that manslaughter was quite bad enough! He paralleled the case of a boxer who kills an opponent by a blow which might be classed as unfair. We were unhappy enough, in either case; the idea of giving evidence against Faulkner was not very comfortable!

There was a long wait for an ambulance to take away the body. It was indicative of the atmosphere of unrest that even Bingham, accustomed to death, had not taken off Torris's pads— these outsize pads which had been the direct cause of the tragedy. I noticed this: so did Pontivy.

"Get those pads off!" he whispered. It was his tone of voice which gave me the first hint of untoward events.

I got into the ambulance and took off Torris's pads and batting gloves, dropping them in a corner of our dressing-room.

"Let the others go!" said Pontivy, softly.
Already players were drifting away. Sergeant Wilkins had taken the names and addresses of those on the field, and had warned me—as the nearest spectator—that I would be needed at the inquest.

"It is not going to be the inquest which the worthy sergeant expects," said Pontivy.

"Look here, Papa, what are you getting at?" I asked.

"You know as much as I do—you saw the man die."

"But ..."

"How did he die?"

"He got a blow over the heart."

"Yes, but that did not kill him. He died after a blow on the knee."

"Maybe delayed action," I suggested.

"I repeat, you saw the man die, and should know better. The man was poisoned!"

"What?"

"Once I caught a German spy," said Papa Pontivy. "He knew that he could not escape, and that I had no mercy. So, he swallowed a little phial of poison and died. I do not forget it, or what he looked like. This man, I say, died the same way."

"No. But there are other methods of poisoning a man."

"Just a minute, Papa, Bingham saw him die, too, and he's a doctor."

"A country doctor, in a respectable district. I wonder if he has ever seen a man die of poison?"

"Well, he'll find out!"

"Yes. And, in the meantime the murderer will have perfected his alibi."

"But—no one was near Torris!"

"His pads were near him. Always look at the obvious, my dear Newman, and don't bother about the circuitous moves of the detective story. The man died after a blow on the knee—that is a fact. The doctor will presumably examine the knee. We will examine the pads. His left knee, was it not?"

Pontivy examined the pad with minute care, while I ensured that he was undisturbed. Five minutes later he called over to me.

"Look! These pads are stiffened with cane. A splinter of cane has been bent back—my guess is that it has been impregnated with poison. A devilish scheme! And, it worked!"

"So the murderer is someone who knew that Torris was likely to be hit on the pads!"

"Yes—though that appears to be common knowledge—do not touch that splinter!" he cried.

"I wasn't going to! But the bang over the heart ..."

"An accident—quite fortuitous."

"Well what are you going to do? Wait for the result of the autopsy?"

"No. I am quite certain what that will be. But if the murderer is clever, he must
return to remove this splinter. We will wait, too—and watch."

The pavilion was the usual village hut, with two dressing-rooms under a common roof. I noticed that the rafters supported an accumulation of old nets and other impedimenta. We climbed up to a good vantage point.

Two of the home team came in to collect their kit. Then a long silence. Half an hour must have passed. Then I felt a slight tap from Pontivy.

A man had entered the home dressing-room. We could not see him, but heard him turning over the cricket gear. Of course, he would expect to find Torris's pads there. Now he came into our room, and I saw a look of relief as he saw Torris's large-sized pads on the floor.

"I told you that I knew what the result of the autopsy would be," Pontivy whispered, very faintly. "Heart failure—not poison!"

Dr Bingham! I saw him pick up the left pad, and press with a tiny pair of scissors at the inside of the knee-cap. Bingham? Of course, I ought to have suspected him earlier. Swiftly my mind ran the gamut of detection. Motive? The scandal about Torris and his wife. Opportunity? The knowledge that Faulkner would bowl body-line. The early arrival at the ground, while Torris was out on the pitch. The opportunity as a doctor to procure poisons, and the knowledge to use them.

Of course, it must be Bingham. Was the absence of the police surgeon fortuitous? No, the crime had been fitted to the period. Yes, and his character fitted the crime, too—that selfish nature would see another man suffer in his place. Only if another were condemned would his own security be complete.

"Life is a collection of trifles, Dr Bingham," said Pontivy from the rafters. "If only you could have removed the pads yourself, at the mortuary ..."

I saw terror in Bingham's eyes. As I dropped to the ground beside him, I thought that he was preparing to fight. Then he accepted the inevitable, and jabbed his hand sharply against the protruding splinter of Torris's pads.
The Perfect murder

By Stacy Aumonier

One evening in November two brothers were seated in a little café in the Rue de la Roquette discussing murders. The evening papers lay in front of them, and they all contained a lurid account of a shocking affair in the Landes district, where a charcoal-burner had killed his wife and two children with a hatchet. From discussing this murder in particular they went on to discussing murder in general.

"I've never yet read a murder case without being impressed by the extraordinary clumsiness of it," remarked Paul, the younger brother. "Here's this fellow who murders his victims with his own hatchet, leaves his hat behind in the shed, and arrives at a village hard by with blood on his boots."

"They lose their heads," said Henri, the elder. "In cases like that they are mentally unbalanced, hardly responsible for their actions."

"Yes," replied Paul, "but what impresses me is—what a lot of murders must be done by people who take trouble, who leave not a trace behind."

Henri shrugged his shoulders. "I shouldn't think it was so easy, old boy; there's always something that crops up."

"Nonsense! I'll guarantee there are thousands done every year. If you are living with anyone, for instance, it must be the easiest thing in the world to murder them."

"How?"

"Oh, some kind of accident—and then you go screaming into the street, 'Oh, my poor wife! Help! You burst into tears, and everyone consoles you. I read of a woman somewhere who murdered her husband by leaving the window near the bed open at night when he was suffering from pneumonia. Who's going to suspect a case like that? Instead of that, people must always select revolvers, or knives, or go and buy poison at the chemist's across the way."

"It sounds as though you were contemplating a murder yourself," laughed Henri.

"Well, you never know," answered Paul; "circumstances might arise when a murder would be the only way out of a difficulty. If ever my time comes I shall take
a lot of trouble about it. I promise you I shall leave no trace behind."

As Henri glanced at his brother making this remark he was struck by the fact that there was indeed nothing irreconcilable between the idea of a murder and the idea of Paul doing it. He was a big, saturnine-looking gentleman with a sallow, dissolute face, framed in a black square beard and swathes of untidy grey hair. His profession was that of a traveller in cheap jewellery, and his business dealings were not always of the straightest. Henri shuddered. With his own puny physique, bad health, and vacillating will, he was always dominated by his younger brother. He himself was a clerk in a drapery store, and he had a wife and three children. Paul was unmarried.

The brothers saw a good deal of each other, and were very intimate. But the word friendship would be an extravagant term to apply to their relationship. They were both always hard up, and they borrowed money from each other when every other source failed.

They had no other relatives except a very old uncle and aunt who lived at Chantilly. This uncle and aunt, whose name was Taillandier, were fairly well off, but they would have little to do with the two nephews. They were occasionally invited there to dinner, but neither Paul nor Henri ever succeeded in extracting a franc out of Uncle Robert. He was a very religious man, hard-fisted, cantankerous, and intolerant. His wife was a little more pliable. She was in effect an eccentric. She had spasms of generosity, during which periods both the brothers had at times managed to get money out of her. But these were rare occasions. Moreover, the old man kept her so short of cash that she found it difficult to help her nephews even if she desired to.

As stated, the discussion between the two brothers occurred in November. It was presumably forgotten by both of them immediately afterwards. And indeed, there is no reason to believe that it would ever have recurred, except for certain events which followed the sudden death of Uncle Robert in the February of the following year.

In the meantime the affairs of both Paul and Henri had gone disastrously. Paul had been detected in a dishonest transaction over a paste trinket, and had just been released from a period of imprisonment. The knowledge of this had not reached his uncle before his death. Henri’s wife had had another baby, and had been very ill. He was more in debt than ever.

The news of the uncle's death came as a gleam of hope in the darkness of despair. What kind of will had he left? Knowing their uncle, each was convinced that, however it was framed, there was likely to be little or nothing for them. However, the old villain might have left them a thousand or two. And in any case, if the money was all left to the wife, here was a possible field of plunder. It need hardly be said that they repaired with all haste to the funeral, and even with greater alacrity to the lawyer's reading of the will.
The will contained surprises both encouraging and discouraging. In the first place the old man left a considerably larger fortune than anyone could have anticipated. In the second place all the money and securities were carefully tied up, and placed under the control of trustees. There were large bequests to religious charities, whilst the residue was held in trust for his wife. But so far as the brothers were concerned the surprise came at the end. On her death this residue was still to be held in trust, but a portion of the interest was to be divided between Henri and Paul, and on their death to go to the Church. The old man had recognised a certain call of the blood after all!

They both behaved with tact and discretion at the funeral, and were extremely sympathetic and solicitous towards Aunt Rosalie, who was too absorbed with her own trouble to take much notice of them. It was only when it came to the reading of the will that their avidity and interest outraged perhaps the strict canons of good taste. It was Paul who managed to get it clear from the notary what the exact amount would probably be. Making allowances for fluctuations, accidents, and acts of God, on the death of Mme Taillandier the two brothers would inherit something between eight and ten thousand francs a year each. She was eighty-two and very frail.

The brothers celebrated the good news with a carouse up in Montmartre. Naturally their chief topic of conversation was how long the old bird would keen on her perch. In any case, it could not be many years. With any luck it might be only a few weeks. The fortune seemed blinding. It would mean comfort and security to the end of their days. The rejoicings were mixed with recriminations against the old man for his stinginess. Why couldn't he have left them a lump sum down now? Why did he want to waste all this good gold on the Church? Why all this trustee business?

There was little they could do but await developments. Except that in the meantime—after a decent interval—they might try and touch the old lady for a bit. They parted, and the next day set about their business in cheerier spirits.

For a time they were extremely tactful. They made formal calls on Aunt Rosalie, inquiring after her health, and offering their services in any capacity whatsoever. But at the end of a month Henri called hurriedly one morning, and after the usual professions of solicitude asked his aunt if she could possibly lend him one hundred and twenty francs to pay the doctor who had attended his wife and baby. She lent him forty, grumbling at his foolishness at having children he could not afford to keep. A week later came Paul with a story about being robbed by a client. He wanted a hundred. She lent him ten.

When these appeals had been repeated three or four times, and received similar treatment—and sometimes no treatment at all—the old lady began to get annoyed. She was becoming more and more eccentric. She now had a companion, an angular, middle-aged woman named Mme Chavanne, who appeared like a protecting goddess. Sometimes when the brothers called, Mme Chavanne would say that Mme
Taillandier was too unwell to see anyone. If this news had been true it would have been good news indeed, but the brothers suspected that it was all pre-arranged. Two years went by, and they both began to despair.

"She may live to a hundred," said Paul.

"We shall die of old age, first," grumbled Henri.

It was difficult to borrow money on the strength of the will. In the first place their friends were more of the borrowing than the lending class. And, anyone who had a little was suspicious of the story, and wanted all kinds of securities. It was Paul who first thought of going to an insurance company to try to raise money on the reversionary interest. They did succeed in the end in getting an insurance company to advance them two thousand francs each, but the negotiations took five months to complete, and by the time they had insured their lives, paid the lawyer's fees and paid for the various deeds and stamps, and signed some thirty or forty forms, each man only received a little over a thousand francs, which was quickly lost in paying accrued debts and squandering the remainder. Their hopes were raised by the dismissal of Mme Chavanne, only to be lowered again by the arrival of an even more aggressive companion. The companions came and went with startling rapidity. None of them could stand for any time the old lady's eccentricity and ill-temper. The whole of the staff was always being changed. The only one who remained loyal all through was the portly cook, Ernestine. Even this may have been due to the fact that she never came in touch with her mistress. She was an excellent cook, and she never moved from the kitchen. Moreover, the cooking required by Mme Taillandier was of the simplest nature, and she seldom entertained. And, she hardly ever left her apartment. Any complaints that were made were made through the housekeeper, and the complaints and their retaliations became mellowed in the process; for Ernestine also had a temper of her own.

Nearly another year passed before what appeared to Paul to be a mild stroke of good fortune came his way. Things had been going from bad to worse. Neither of the brothers was in a position to lend a sou to the other. Henri's family was becoming a greater drag, and people were not buying Paul's trinkets.

One day, during an interview with his aunt—he had been trying to borrow more money—he fainted in her presence. It is difficult to know what it was about this act which affected the old lady, but she ordered him to be put to bed in one of the rooms of the villa. Possibly she jumped to the conclusion that he had fainted from lack of food—which was not true—Paul never went without food and drink—and she suddenly realised that after all he was her husband's sister's son. He must certainly have looked pathetic, this white-faced man, well past middle age, and broken in life. Whatever it was, she showed a broad streak of compassion for him. She ordered her servants to look after him, and to allow him to remain until she countermanded the order.
Paul, who had certainly felt faint, but quickly seized the occasion to make it as
dramatic as possible, saw in this an opportunity to wheedle his way into his aunt's
favours. His behaviour was exemplary. The next morning, looking very white and
shaky, he visited her, and asked her to allow him to go, as he had no idea of abusing
her hospitality. If he had taken up the opposite attitude she would probably have
turned him out, but because he suggested going she ordered him to stop. During the
daytime he went about his dubious business, but he continued to return there at night
to sleep, and to enjoy a good dinner cooked by the admirable Ernestine. He was in
clover.

Henri was naturally envious when he heard of his brother's good fortune. And,
Paul was fearful that Henri would spoil the whole game by going and throwing a fit
himself in the presence of the aunt. But this, of course, would have been too obvious
and foolish for even Henri to consider seriously. And, he racked his brains for
some means of inveigling the old lady. Every plan he put forth, however, Paul sat
upon. He was quite comfortable himself, and he didn't see the point of his brother
butting in.

"Besides," he said, "she may turn me out any day. Then you can have your shot."

They quarrelled about this, and did not see each other for some time. One would
have thought that Henri's appeal to Mme Taillandier would have been stronger than
Paul's. He was a struggling individual, with a wife and four children. Paul was a
notorious ne'er-do-well, and he had no attachments. Nevertheless, the old lady
continued to support Paul. Perhaps, it was because he was a big man, and she liked
big men. Her husband had been a man of fine physique. Henri was puny, and she
despised him. She had never had children of her own, and she disliked children. She
was always upbraiding Henri and his wife for their fecundity. Any attempt to pander
to her emotions through the sentiment of childhood failed. She would not have the
children in her house. And, any small acts of charity which she bestowed upon them
seemed to be done more with the idea of giving her an opportunity to inflict her
sarcasm and venom upon them than out of kindness of heart.

In Paul, on the other hand, she seemed to find something slightly attractive. She
sometimes sent for him, and he, all agog— expecting to get his notice to quit—
would be agreeably surprised to find that, on the contrary, she had some little
commission she wished him to execute. And, you may rest assured that he never
failed to make a few francs out of all these occasions. The notice to quit did not
come. It may be—poor deluded woman!—that she regarded him as some kind of
protection. He was in any case the only 'man' who slept under her roof.

At first she seldom spoke to him, but as time went on she would sometimes send
for him to relieve her loneliness. Nothing could have been more ingratiating than
Paul's manners in these circumstances. He talked expansively about politics,
knowing beforehand his aunt's views, and just what she would like him to say. Her
eyesight was very bad, and he would read her the news of the day, and tell her what was happening in Paris. He humoured her every whim. He was astute enough to see that it would be foolish and dangerous to attempt to borrow money for the moment. He was biding his time, and trying to think out the most profitable plan of campaign. There was no immediate hurry. His bed was comfortable, and Ernestine's cooking was excellent.

In another year's time he had established himself as quite one of the permanent household. He was consulted about the servants, and the doctors, and the management of the house, everything except the control of money, which was jealously guarded by a firm of lawyers. Many a time he would curse his uncle's foresight. The old man's spirit seemed to be hovering in the dim recesses of the over-crowded rooms, mocking him. For the old lady, eccentric and foolish in many ways, kept a strict check upon her dividends. It was her absorbing interest in life, that and an old grey parrot which she treated like a child. Its name was Anna, and it used to walk up and down her table at meal-times and feed off her own plate. Finding himself so firmly entrenched Paul's assurance gradually increased. He began to treat his aunt as an equal, and sometimes even to contradict her, and she did not seem to resent it.

In the meantime Henri was eating his heart out with jealousy and sullen rage. The whole thing was unfair. He occasionally saw Paul, who boasted openly of his strong position in the Taillandier household, and he would not believe that Paul was not getting money out of the old lady as well as board and lodging. With no additional expenses Paul was better dressed than he used to be, and he looked fatter and better in health. All—or nearly all—of Henri's appeals, although pitched in a most pathetic key, were rebuffed. He felt a bitter hatred against his aunt, his brother, and life in general. If only she would die! What was the good of life to a woman at eighty-five or six? And, there was he—four young children, clamouring for food, and clothes, and the ordinary decent comforts. And, there was Paul, idling his days away at cafés and his nights at cabarets—nothing to do, and no responsibilities.

Meeting Paul one day he said:
"I say, old boy, couldn't you spring me a hundred francs? I haven't the money to pay my rent next week."
"She gives me nothing," replied Paul.

Henri did not believe this, but it would be undiplomatic to quarrel. He said:
"Aren't there—isn't there some little thing lying about the villa you could slip in your pocket? We could sell it, see? Go shares. I'm desperately pushed."

Paul looked down his nose. Name of a pig! Did Henri think he had never thought of that? Many and many a time the temptation had come to him. But no; every few months people came from the lawyer's office, and the inventory of the whole
household was checked. The servants could not be suspected. They were not selected without irreproachable characters. If he were suspected—well, all kinds of unpleasant things might crop up. Oh, no, he was too well off where he was. The game was to lie in wait. The old lady simply must die soon. She had even been complaining of her chest that morning. She was always playing with the perroquet. Somehow this bird got on Paul's nerves. He wanted to wring its neck. He imitated the way she would say: "There's a pretty lady! Oh, my sweet! Another nice grape for my little one. There's a pretty lady!" He told Henri all about this, and the elder brother went on his way with a grunt that only conveyed doubt and suspicion.

In view of this position it seemed strange that in the end it was Paul who was directly responsible for the denouement in the Taillandier household. His success went to his rather weak head like wine. He began to swagger and buster and abuse his aunt's hospitality. And, curiously enough, the more he advanced the further she withdrew. The eccentric old lady seemed to be losing her powers of resistance so far as he was concerned. And, he began to borrow small sums of money from her, and, as she acquiesced so readily, to increase his demands. He let his travelling business go, and sometimes he would get lost for days at a time. He would spend his time at the races, and drinking with doubtful acquaintances in obscure cafes. Sometimes he won, but in the majority of cases he lost. He ran up bills and got into debt. By cajoling small sums out of his aunt he kept his debtors at bay for nearly nine months.

But one evening he came to see Henri in a great state of distress. His face, which had taken on a healthier glow when he first went to live with his aunt, had become puffy and livid. His eyes were bloodshot.

"Old boy," he said, "I'm at my wits' end. I've got to find seven thousand francs by the twenty-first of the month, or they're going to foreclose. How do you stand? I'll pay you back."

To try to borrow money from Henri was like appealing to the desert for a cooling draught. He also had to find money by the twenty-first, and he was overdrawn at the bank. They exchanged confidences, and in their mutual distress they felt sorry for each other and for themselves. It was a November evening, and the rain was driving along the boulevards in fitful gusts. After trudging a long way they turned into a little café in the Rue de la Roquette, and sat down and ordered two cognacs. The café was almost deserted. A few men in mackintoshes were scattered around reading the evening papers. They sat at a marble table in the corner and tried to think of ways and means. But after a time a silence fell between them. There seemed nothing more to suggest. They could hear the rain beating on the skylight. An old man four tables away was poring over La Patrie.

Suddenly, Henri looked furtively around the room and clutched his brother's arm.
"Paul!" he whispered.
"What is it?"

"Do you remember—it has all come back to me—suddenly—one night, a night something like this—it must be five or six years ago—we were seated here in this same café—do you remember?"

"No. I don't remember. What was it?"

"It was the night of that murder in the Landes district. We got talking about—don't you remember?"

Paul scratched his temple and sipped the cognac. Henri leant closer to him.

"You said—you said that if you lived with anyone, it was the easiest thing in the world to murder them. An accident, you know. And, you go screaming into the street—"

Paul started, and stared at his brother, who continued:

"You said that if ever you—you had to do it, you would guarantee that you would take every trouble. You wouldn't leave a trace behind."

Paul was acting. He pretended to half-remember, to half understand. But his eyes narrowed. Imbecile! Hadn't he been through it all in imagination a hundred times? Hadn't he already been planning and scheming an act for which his brother would reap half the benefit? Nevertheless, he was staggered. He never imagined that the suggestion would come from Henri. He was secretly relieved. If Henri was to receive half the benefit, let him also share half the responsibilities. The risk in any case would be wholly his. He grinned enigmatically, and they put their heads together. And so, in that dim corner of the cafe was planned the perfect murder.

Coming up against the actual proposition, Paul had long since realised that the affair was not so easy of accomplishment as he had so airily suggested. For the thing must be done without violence, without clues, without trace. Such ideas as leaving the window open at night were out of the question, as the companion slept in the same room. Moreover, the old lady was quite capable of getting out of bed and shutting it herself if she felt a draught. Some kind of accident? Yes, but what? Suppose she slipped and broke her neck when Paul was in the room. It would be altogether too suspicious. Besides, she would probably only partially break her neck. She would regain sufficient consciousness to tell. To drown her in her bath? The door was always locked or the companion hovering around.

"You've always got to remember," whispered Paul, "if any suspicion falls on me, there's the motive. There's strong motive why I should—it's got to be absolutely untraceable. I don't care if some people do suspect afterwards—when we've got the money."

"What about her food?"

"The food is cooked by Ernestine, and the companion serves it. Besides, suppose
I got a chance to tamper with the food, how am I going to get hold of—you know?"
"Weed-killer?"
"Yes, I should be in a pretty position if they traced the fact that I had bought weed-killer. You might buy some and let me have a little on the quiet.
Henri turned pale. "No, no; the motive applies to me, too. They'd get us both."
When the two pleasant gentlemen parted at midnight their plans were still very immature, but they arranged to meet the following evening. It was the thirteenth of the month. To save the situation the deed must be accomplished within eight days. Of course, they wouldn't get the money at once, but, knowing the circumstances, creditors would be willing to wait. When they met the following evening in the Café des Sentiers, Paul appeared flushed and excited, and Henri was pale and on edge. He hadn't slept. He wanted to wash the whole thing out.
"And, sell up your home, I suppose?" sneered Paul.
"Listen, my little cabbage. I've got it. Don't distress yourself. You proposed this last night. I've been thinking about it and watching for months. Ernestine is a good cook, and very methodical. Oh, very methodical! She does everything every day in the same way exactly to schedule. My apartment is on the same floor, so I am able to appreciate her punctuality and exactness. The old woman eats sparingly and according to routine. One night she has fish. The next night she has a soufflé made with two eggs. Fish, soufflé, fish, soufflé, regular as the beat of a clock. Now, listen. After lunch every day Ernestine washes up the plates and pans. After that she prepares roughly the evening meal. If it is a fish night, she prepares the fish ready to pop into the pan. If it is a soufflé night, she beats up two eggs and puts them ready in a basin. Having done that, she changes her frock, powders her nose, and goes over to the convent to see her sister who is working there. She is away an hour and a half. She returns punctually at four o'clock. You could set your watch by her movements."
"Yes, but—"
"It is difficult to insert what I propose in fish, but I don't see any difficulty in dropping it into two beaten-up eggs, and giving an extra twist to the egg-whisk, or whatever they call it."
Henri's face was quite grey.
"But—but—Paul, how are you going to get hold of the— poison?"
"Who said anything about poison?"
"Well, but what?"
"That's where you come in."
"I!"
"Yes, you're in it, too, aren't you? You get half the spoils, don't you? Why shouldn't you—some time to-morrow when your wife's out—"
"What?"
"Just grind up a piece of glass."
"Glass!"
"Yes, you've heard of glass, haven't you? An ordinary piece of broken wine-glass will do. Grind it up as fine as a powder, the finer the better, the finer the more—effective."

Henri gasped. No, no, he couldn't do this thing. Very well, then; if he was such a coward Paul would have to do it himself. And perhaps, when the time came Henri would also be too frightened to draw his dividends. Perhaps, he would like to make them over to his dear brother Paul? Come, it was only a little thing to do. Eight days to the twenty-first. To-morrow, fishday, but Wednesday would be souffle. So easy, so untraceable, so safe.

"But you," whined Henri, "they will suspect you."

"Even if they do they can prove nothing. But in order to avoid this unpleasantness I propose to leave home soon after breakfast. I shall return at a quarter-past three, letting myself in through the stable yard. The stables, as you know, are not used. There is no one else on that floor. Ernestine is upstairs. She only comes down to answer the front-door bell. I shall be in and out of the house within five minutes, and I shan't return till late at night, when perhaps—I may be too late to render assistance."

Henri was terribly agitated. On one hand was—just murder, a thing he had never connected himself with in his life. On the other hand was comfort for himself and his family, an experience he had given up hoping for. It was in any case not exactly murder on his part. It was Paul's murder. At the same time, knowing all about it, being an accessory before the fact, it would seem contemptible to a degree to put the whole onus on Paul. Grinding up a piece of glass was such a little thing. It couldn't possibly incriminate him. Nobody could ever prove that he'd done it. But it was a terrible step to take.

"Have another cognac, my little cabbage."

It was Paul's voice that jerked him back to actuality. He said: "All right, yes, yes," but whether this referred to the cognac or to the act of grinding up a piece of glass he hardly knew himself.

From that moment to twenty-four hours later, when he handed over a white packet to his brother across the same table at the Cafe des Sentiers, Henri seemed to be in a nightmarish dream. He had no recollection of how he had passed the time. He seemed to pass from that last cognac to this one, and the interval was a blank.

"Fish to-day, soufflé to-morrow," he heard Paul chuckling. "Brother, you have done your work well."

When Paul went he wanted to call after him to come back, but he was frightened of the sound of his own voice. He was terribly frightened. He went to bed very late and could not sleep. The next morning he awoke with a headache, and he got his
wife to telegraph to the office to say that he was too ill to come. He lay in bed all day, visualising over and over again the possible events of the evening.

Paul would be caught. Someone would catch him actually putting the powder into the eggs. He would be arrested. Paul would give him away. Why did Paul say it was so easy to murder anyone if you lived with them? It wasn't easy at all. The whole thing was chock-a-block with dangers and pitfalls. Pitfalls! At half-past three he started up in bed. He had a vision of himself and Paul being guillotined side by side! He must stop it at any cost. He began to get up. Then he realised that it was already too late. The deed had been done. Paul had said that he would be in and out of the house within five minutes at three-fifteen—a quarter of an hour ago! Where was Paul? Would he be coming to see him? He was going to spend the evening out somewhere, "returning late at night."

He dressed feverishly. There was still time. He could call at his aunt's. Rush down to the kitchen, seize the basin of beaten-up eggs, and throw them away. But where? How? By the time he got there Ernestine would have returned. She would want to know all about it. The egg mixture would be examined, analysed. God in Heaven! It was too late! The thing would have to go on, and he suffer and wait.

Having dressed, he went out after saying to his wife:

"It's all right. It's going to be all right," not exactly knowing what he meant. He walked rapidly along the streets with no fixed destination in his mind. He found himself in the cafe in the Rue de la Roquette, where the idea was first conceived, where he had reminded his brother.

He sat there drinking, waiting for the hours to pass.

Soufflé day, and the old lady dined at seven! It was now not quite five. He hoped Paul would turn up. A stranger tried to engage him in conversation. The stranger apparently had some grievance against a railway company. He wanted to tell him all the details about a contract for rivets, over which he had been disappointed. Henri didn't understand a word he was talking about. He didn't listen. He wanted the stranger to drop down dead or vanish into thin air. At last he called the waiter and paid for his reckoning, indicated by a small pile of saucers. From there he walked rapidly to the Café des Sentiers, looking for Paul. He was not there. Six o'clock. One hour more. He could not keep still. He paid and went on again, calling at café after café. A quarter to seven. Pray God that she threw it away. Had he ground it fine enough?

Five minutes to seven. Seven o'clock. Now. He picked up his hat and went again. The brandy had gone to his head. At half-past seven he laughed recklessly. After all, what was the good of life to this old woman of eighty-six? He tried to convince himself that he had done it for the sake of his wife and children. He tried to concentrate on the future, how he could manage on eight or ten thousand francs a year. He would give notice at the office, be rude to people who had been bullying
him for years—that old blackguard Mocquin!
At ten o'clock he was drunk, torpid, and indifferent. The whole thing was over for good or ill. What did it matter? He terribly wanted to see Paul, but he was too tired to care very much. The irrevocable step had been taken. He went home to bed and fell into a heavy drunken sleep.

"Henri! Henri! Wake up! What is the matter with you?"
His wife was shaking him. He blinked his way into a partial condition of consciousness. November sunlight was pouring into the room.
"It's late, isn't it?" he said, involuntarily.
"It's past eight. You'll be late at the office. You didn't go yesterday. If you go on like this you'll get the sack, and then what shall we do?"
Slowly the recollection of last night's events came back to him.
"There's nothing to worry about," he said. "I'm too ill to go to-day. Send them another telegram. It'll be all right."
His wife looked at him searchingly. "You've been drinking," she said. "Oh, you men! God knows what will become of us."
She appeared to be weeping in her apron. It struck him forcibly at that instant how provoking and small women are. Here was Jeannette crying over her petty troubles. Whereas he—
The whole thing was becoming vivid again. Where was Paul? What had happened? Was it at all likely that he could go down to an office on a day like this, a day that was to decide his fate?
He groaned, and elaborated rather pathetically his imaginary ailments, anything to keep this woman quiet. She left him at last, and he lay there waiting for something to happen. The hours passed. What would be the first intimation? Paul or the gendarmes? Thoughts of the latter stirred him to a state of fevered activity. About midday he arose, dressed, and went out. He told his wife he was going to the office, but he had no intention of doing so. He went and drank coffee at a place up in the Marais. He was terrified of his old haunts. He wandered from place to place, uncertain how to act. Late in the afternoon he entered a cafe in the Rue Alibert. At a kiosk outside he bought a late edition of an afternoon newspaper. He sat down, ordered a drink and opened the newspaper. He glanced at the central news page, and as his eye absorbed one paragraph he unconsciously uttered a low scream. The paragraph was as follows:

**Mysterious Affair At Chantilly**
A mysterious affair occurred at Chantilly this morning. A middle-aged man, named Paul Denoyel, complained of pains in the stomach after eating an omelette. He died soon after in great agony. He was staying with his aunt,
Mme Taillandier. No other members of the household were affected. The matter is to be inquired into.

The rest was a dream. He was only vaguely conscious of the events which followed. He wandered through it all, the instinct of self-preservation bidding him hold his tongue in all circumstances. He knew nothing. He had seen nothing. He had a visionary recollection of a plump, weeping Ernestine, at the inquest, enlarging upon the eccentricities of her mistress. A queer woman, who would brook no contradiction. He heard a lot about the fish day and the soufflé day, and how the old lady insisted that this was a fish day, and, and that she had had a souffle the day before. You could not argue with her when she was like that. And, Ernestine had beaten up the eggs all ready for the soufflé—most provoking! But Ernestine was a good cook, of method and economy. She wasted nothing. What should she do with the eggs? Why, of course, Mr Paul, who since he had come to live there was never content with a café complet. He must have a breakfast, like these English and other foreigners do. She made him an omelette, which he ate heartily.

Then the beaten-up eggs with their deadly mixture were intended for Mme Taillandier? But who was responsible for this? Ernestine? But there was no motive here. Ernestine gained nothing by her mistress's death. Indeed she only stood to lose her situation. Motive? Was it possible that the deceased—The inquiry went on a long while. Henri himself was conscious of being in the witness-box. He knew nothing. He couldn't understand it. His brother would not be likely to do that. He himself was prostrate with grief. He loved his brother.

There was nothing to do but return an open verdict. Shadowy figures passed before his mind's eye—shadowy figures and shadowy realisations. He had perfectly murdered his brother. The whole of the dividends of the estate would one day be his, and his wife's and children's. Eighteen thousand francs a year! One day—

One vision more vivid than the rest—the old lady on the day following the inquest, seated bolt upright at her table, like a figure of perpetuity, playing with the old grey perroquet, stroking its mangy neck.

"There's a pretty lady! Oh, my sweet! Another nice grape for my little one. There's a pretty lady!"
Thomas Masterick looked dully at the little square of grey sky behind his cell window. He had come to regard it as something of an entity, something almost possessing life. It had a unique talent. It was the only thing in his cell that ever changed. It was a tiny, slow-moving picture in a world that was fixed and motionless. He talked to it in a low, uncomplaining monotone that was cow-like in its contemplative absence of expression. For fifteen years he had been talking to various objects in his cell, reasoning with them vaguely on his one cankering grievance against life.

Not that it was a grievance in the ordinary sense of the word, for there was not a scrap of resentment in the soul of Thomas Masterick. Only a dim perplexity, a puzzlement that refused to submit to elucidation no matter how earnestly he tried to think it out. All he asked of life was an explanation, a reason for the rather unfair thing life had done to him. And, he could never quite get down to that explanation. It eluded him persistently. A thousand times he had tried to think down to the real reason. And, he had overdone it. Later he came to realise that that was probably why he could no longer think as easily as he used to.

"The trouble is," he admitted to the grey square, "I've been thinking too much. I've had too many thinks. A lot too many thinks. I know I have; because now when I try to have a real good think all I get is a bad dizzy. And, these dizzy's make my head ache. I've too many of them dizzy's lately.

"But They can say what They like," he added moodily. "They can say what They like, but They can't say I killed Fred Smith. They can say and say and say. But that don't make out I killed him."

He sat on the edge of his stool and fretfully fingered the leaves of the Bible on the white-scrubbed table.

"Of course, the other trouble is," he said. "They think I did. And, that's where They've got me. That's what makes it more awkward. It's not much use me saying I
didn't, if all the time They tell me I did. They don't believe me any more than I believe Them. They're the most awful crowd of liars I ever met.

"That long, lanky chap in the black gown—he was the worst of the lot. And, he was the start of it. Never heard such a lying devil in all my life. Stood up in the middle of the court he did—in the middle of the court, mind you—and deliberately argued that I killed Fred Smith. And, there was a hell of a crowd of people there. All listening. They must have heard it. Couldn't have done otherwise.

"And, how could he know?" he asked with placid wonderment. "Eh? How could he know. He wasn't there. He admitted he'd never seen Fred Smith in his life. And, he laughed when I asked him. I didn't like that laugh. So stinkin' cocky it was. He admitted he'd never seen me, not till that day They put me in court. So how could he know. Yet, he stood in the very middle of that court and deliberately made out to the judge how I did it. Stuck at it for four days he did. He was a marvel of a chap. He proved I did do it! Actually proved it. He was a marvel of a chap. Proved it as plain as plain. An absolute marvel of a chap. But the most God-forsaken liar I ever came across in my life.

"And, the questions he asked! Couh! You'd have thought he'd known Smithy all his life. Long, lanky devil, he had me tied up all ways. Couldn't move a hand's turn. A fair knockout. He proved me a liar. And, a perjurer. And, a thief. And then, he went and proved I killed Fred Smith. And that was where I had him. Because I never killed Fred Smith. I never saw Fred Smith that day. And, if ever I get out of this I'll tell him so too. Never such a chap in all my born days. Simply wouldn't listen to reason. And now, it's raining like the very devil.

"I never told him any lies. I never told him any perjury. And, I never nicked anything in my life. Well, not since I left school, anyway. And then, for him to stand up in the middle of that court and say the things he did—well! It beats me. Beats me flat.

"And then, the judge told me he was going to hang me. I wish to God he had now. I wouldn't have been stuck here all this time. Can't make out why he didn't. They was so damn cock-sure I'd done it. If I did, why didn't he hang me? If I'd done it, he ought to have hung me, and none of these half-larks. If I didn't do it, then They got no right to have me hung. And, They haven't hung me. Looks precious much to me as if They ain't sure I did do it, after all.

"I knew it was going to rain. I knew it this morning. And, I said so to Four-eighty-four out in the exercise. 'Ginger,' I said, 'it's going to rain.' 'I don't care a damn,' says Ginger. 'Before dinner,' I said. 'Will it,' says Ginger. 'I will bet you three hundred thousand pounds it don't.'

"Well, I've got that to come, anyway. That ought to set me up a bit when I get outside. But I don't suppose I'll get it. He won't pay up. He never does. I don't believe he's got three hundred thousand pounds. He's a fly devil is Ginger. Different as
anything from Southampton Jack. Southampton Jack betted me a bread ration that I couldn't get him the result of the Derby before supper-time. Of course, I could get him the result of the Derby before supper-time. I know the ropes. After all the years I've been here I ought to know the ropes. People who don't know how to get hold of the ropes never ought to go to prison.

"But Ginger don't even pay up on a bread ration. He betted me a bread ration last Sunday that the chaplain would give out hymn number four-eight-four in the evening. And, he didn't. The biggest number he gave out was three hundred and eight. But that only shows how much Ginger knows about religion. Hymn number four-eight-four is a Christmas hymn. And, this ain't Christmas. Not by a long chalk. But he never paid up.

"Southampton Jack paid up next morning. Chucked it in my cell as he was passin' through to the exercise. That's the best of sailors. They're only fly devils sometimes. Mostly they're all right. He's here because he sold a lot of cargo. He says he'd go dotty if they put him in prison without him selling some cargo first. I'm here because I never killed Fred Smith. If I had of killed Fred Smith They'd have hung me.

"Southampton Jack don't believe I killed Fred Smith. Don't believe a word of it. What? You?' he said. 'You killed Fred Smith? Not you, my cocker,' he said. 'You ain't got the guts to kill Fred Smith.' Which was quite right then. But ain't now. I wouldn't think twice about having a lam at that long, lanky devil who stood up in the middle of that court and spouted about me the way he did. It was him that got me lagged, I reckon.

"Sometimes I used to think I'd go dotty when They put me in there without me first killing Fred Smith. But I don't get that way now. All I get is the dizzies. And, only when I'm having too many thinks.

"It's funny old Ginger letting himself get caught over his own hymn number. You'd reckon they'd all know their own hymn numbers by the time they've been here a lot of years. When all you've got to read is that Bible and hymn-book, it makes you study 'em a bit. I must have read that Bible down a hundred times. And, I'm hanged if I can see what there is in it for people to go raving crazy about. A finer pack of lies I never did see. Nor, a bigger lot of twaddle. Unless it was the lot that long lanky devil said about me in that court.

"Most of us know where we are in the hymn-book. Joe Bennett is a Holy Baptism and Tim Cheyne is a 'Piphany. There's a couple of Trinity Sundays down there past the wash-house and all of 'em up there on the top landing are Lents. Me and the lags either side is Ember Days. I've been here years and years and I've never been sung yet. Dan Rafferty gets sung most. He's a Times of Trouble. But the best one is old Three-fifty-one. He's a Matrimony and he's in for a lot of bigamy. I reckon that's damn funny. Thinking about that has got me out a dizzy many a time. Southampton
Jack is a Harvest Festival and Tom Earle, who used to be a warden here once, is the only Rogation Day in this block. The other Rogation cells are full of scrubbing gear.

"In my honest opinion I don't believe Fred Smith ever was killed. I believe he took ship that day. It's just the sort of thing he would do. It would be just his delight to land me in the soup. He always said he would. And, my God, he did! Not half he didn't. He always went on sailing ships. And, if he suddenly went off on one of those damn long Melbourne cruises of his, he wouldn't be heard of for months and months. More especially if he got bad winds. It would have been all over before he made land. All over and done with. And, I'd have been put away prop'ly.

"Southampton Jack might know. He's been to sea long enough. Running east, too. He would tell me if he's heard anything about Smithy since I've been here. If he has, then all I've got to do is to wait till my time's up and go and find him. If I did find him I wouldn't half be able to take the mike out of that cock-sure crowd in that court. I'd give 'em a shock all right. I'd make 'em think a bit, too, I'll lay.

"And, I don't believe that body they had up on that slab was old Freddy Smith at all. Smithy never wore a wristwatch. He was a sailor. A blue water sailor. And I doubt, if his eyesight was good enough to see the time by a wristwatch. And, I'm dead sure he never wore brown boots in his life. I've told the Governor that. And the Chaplain. And the Visiting Justices. But, you see, they didn't know Fred Smith. So they couldn't say. And they wouldn't believe me much, anyway—not after what that long, lanky devil said about me.

Rubber-shod feet and a jingle of steel went past his door and up the stairs of the main hall.

"That's old Neversweat," he observed. "Going up to start opening all the doors for dinner. Mutton broth and jackety spuds it'll be to-day. And no duff. Because there's bread. That ought to be all right. And after that we'll all have a bath. And after that Six-thirty-one will scrape the hide off our faces with that razor of his. And then we'll all be all right for Sunday. Six-thirty-one tries to make out he was a real barber before he came here. Couh! I pity his customers. Southampton Jack reckons his customers must have got him put away—if he really was a barber outside. Jack only let him shave him once. Then he put in to be allowed to grow a beard. The Governor laughed like hell when old Neversweat told him why."

The wards of the lock clanged solidly back to the thrust of a ponderous key.

"Basins," said the cookhouse orderly in front of an adequate warden.

Thomas Masterick received his dinner, and the warden poked his head into his cell.

"Number Three-five-four," he said, "you won't go through to exercise after dinner. You'll remain in your cell till the chaplain comes. He will see you this afternoon."
"Will he, sir? All right. Thank you."
The warder looked at him oddly. "You feeling unwell?" he snapped.
"No sir. I'm all right. Only I think I've got one of my dizzies coming on. I'll be all right, sir, after this bit of broth."
"Well, take my tip when the chaplain comes, and look better than you do now. Or, he will be having you trotted along to the infirmary. And you don't want that, do you?"
Masterick looked at him with a childlike incredulity. Of all the desirable heavens in the world of the penal prison the infirmary was the sweetest and best.
"I wouldn't mind going to the infirmary, sir," he said bleakly. "It's very nice in the infirmary."
Regardless of the din of impatient basins and spoons lower down the corridor, the warder stepped right into the cell.
"Say, Three-fifty-four, don't you know what he is going to see you for?" he asked.
Masterick looked up with a spot of fear in his eyes.
"You're going out to-morrow, Three-fifty-four. Didn't you know? Oh, you poor devil!"
That last was because Thomas Masterick had trembled a little, grinned a little, and slid down to the floor with the mutton broth spreading all over his chest.
"My Gawd!" said the warder in the mess-room half an hour later. "Now what the devil was that Number Three-fifty-four living for? Eh? What was he looking forward to? He wasn't' even keeping tally of his time. He's the first one I've ever known who couldn't tell you to a second how many hours he still had to do—at any time of the day or night."
"Well, you see," Thomas Masterick was informing his basin at that moment, "when I was a Feast and Thanks giving down there by the doctor's shop, I had it all written up in the whitewash. Got a splinter off the floor boards, I did. And scratched 'em all up in the whitewash. All in bundles of ten. And I scratched one out at each breakfast. Five thousand four hundred and eighty days. That's what they give you for a lifer. And I had 'em all written up.
"The first time I lost count was years and years ago. While we were out in the exercise the maintenance party came round and put fresh whitewash up in the cells. And when I tried to think down to how many I'd done and how many I still had to do, I got a dizzy. And then, just when I had it nearly all put to rights again by licking off a lot of the new whitewash, they went and changed my cell and made me an Ember Day."

◊

When the chaplain came he found Masterick very quiet and subdued.
"How are you, Number Three-fifty-four?" he asked with kindly austerity. "Well, I hope?—and prepared for your big adventure to-morrow?—I really and sincerely trust we shall never see you again?"

Masterick turned his eyes to the window-patch.

"Well, sir, that all depends on how They look at it," he said, a little distantly. "I never quite know what They're going to do with me next. You never ought to have seen me to start with. Not really. Because I never killed Fred Smith. But you know that, don't you? I told you."

"You; but I want to know what you are going to do. I can probably help you with your arrangements and help you to get settled down again. Have you any people living to whom you can definitely go?"

"That I can't say, sir. You see, I've been here a tidy long while. And most likely all the people I used to know have died. Perhaps, even Fred Smith has died, too. A tidy long while I've been here. There's been a war finished and done with since I've been here. And you see that little flag-pole against my bit of window? Well, I always thought that was a flag-pole form the day it first went up, five months back. But that ain't a flag-pole. It's a wireless. So Southampton Jack tells me. I'll have to step very quiet till I pick up that lot of ropes outside again."

"Yes, quite. H'm! A great pity you haven't somewhere definite to go—something definite to do. Perhaps I may be able to exert—"

"Oh, I've got something definite to do all right, sir."

"Oh, you have. Oh, well, of course, that's splendid. Regular employment is it?"

"Pretty regular, maybe. I want to take the mke out of that cocksure crowd in the court. Because, you see, sir, I never killed Fred Smith."

The chaplain who had heard that curiously uncomplaining fact reiterated with such steady persistence that he had almost come to believe it himself, made a mental note that Thomas Masterick was a case which would have to be watched pretty closely when he got clear of the prison.

But he needn't have worried. The authorities admitted two months later that their suspicions about Masterick were groundless, and They called off the System. He had harboured no dark animosity against those connected with his trial—a trial which, except for the fact that Thomas Masterick did not kill Fred Smith, was perfectly honest and fair. In fact, he made what they called 'quite a good recovery.' He picked into the old ruts with deliberate, if painful, endeavour. He got a job down about the docks and set about his task of climbing back into civilisation again with calm stolidity. In his case They did not fear for the recidivist.

And yet, a month after that, they freely admitted that it would have been far better for them and for the pomp and vanity of all the legal world if Thomas Masterick
had gone straight out, bought a gun and kicked up ten different hells according to his own half-burned-out lights. For the problem that Thomas Masterick flung at them with cold and calculated deliberation when the time was ripe shook the law-officers of the Crown to their finger-tips. He knocked the Law clean out. He left it flat and gasping. He sent every legal mind in the country hectically scampering through old and ancient tomes for light and guidance. But there was no light and guidance. Thomas Masterick had floored them utterly and completely, ludicrously and horribly.

For, three months after his release from prison, and quite by accident, he met the long, lanky devil in the black gown. Counsel for the Crown was also wearing a Knighthood and a K.C. Thomas Masterick was not to know that. Not that it would have mattered to that numb, pulseless soul, even if he had know it.

It was by the 'Griffin,' where Fleet Street melts into the Strand, and he walked up to him, and he said:

"Hey, mister—you know all that lot of stuff you said about me?" The K.C. looked down at him shrewdly, and paused for a moment.

"No," he said evenly. "I don't think I do."

"Yes, you remember—that lot of stuff you said about me in the court. To the judge."

The K.C.'s eyes contracted ever so slightly. Somewhere, right away in the back blocks of memory there came a tiny, fleeting picture—a glimpse.

"Oh, yes—I believe I do," he said. "Let me see, now—er—wasn't it—er—"

"Yes, mister; that's what it was. And it was all wrong. All the whole lot of it. I said so at the time, didn't I? And I'm saying so again. I never killed Fred Smith. Not in spite of all what you said. Honest I didn't. And one of these days I'll prove it to you. I'll give you the surprise of your life. And that surprise of everybody else's life who was in that court."

The K.C. drew in a long breath, slowly.

"Ye gods!" he breathed, almost too low to be heard. "So you—you have only just come out, have you?"

"Yes, mister. A couple of months ago."

"Are you working? I mean, have you got anything to do?"

"Yes, mister. Got a regular job. Wapping to Convent Garden. I'm often along here."

"That's a good man." The K.C. slipped a fiver into his hand. "Get yourself a nice new Sunday suit," he said, with a pat on his shoulder.

"Thank you very much, mister." Thomas Masterick pocketed the fiver and hung around. After a moment he said:

"Could you—would you give me a word of advice, too, sir?"

"Certainly, certainly. What's the trouble?"
"Well, supposing I ever found that Fred Smith you said I killed. See, just supposing. How would I have to go about it?"

The K.C. whistled under his breath. "Well!" he said, "that would be a poser. Perhaps the best thing you could do would be to come along and see me—here in my chambers. Any of the bobbies here will show you—just here in the Inner Temple."

"Because down in my lodging-house there's a White Star man says he's seen Fred Smith—that's since you said I killed him. It was in 'Frisco, he said Fred was running grain in the hog-backs. Got tired o' sail, he did."

"Well, look here, old man, if ever you do manage to get hold of him, you come along and see me. I'll do all I can to help you."

"I wouldn't half be able to take the mike out of that cocky lot of devils, wouldn't I?"

"You would what?"

"Prove 'em a lot of unholy liars."

"You certainly would."

"Not 'arf, I wouldn't," said Thomas Masterick tonelessly. "I'd do more than that, too!"

The K.C. nodded genially and went off with a little pity and a lot of amusement in his heart. He was a good soul in his way, was the K.C., but the acid of the Law ran tart in his veins. His perceptions were too subservient to the dictates of logic.

But it happened that he heard from Thomas Masterick again. On a most propitious day, too. The K.C. was lunching a few legal friends in his chambers. There were three other K.C.'s, a former Chancellor, and two judges of the High Court among them.

The K.C.'s secretary entered and slipped behind his chair. "There's a very persistent fellow outside, sir—a man who calls himself Thomas Masterick. He says you wouldn't turn him away for anything. That it's very important. And that he's got Fred Smith with him!"

"Good God!" said the K.C., swinging round. "Here? He's got Smith here."

"There is another man with him, sir, yes—frightened-looking man."

"Goodness gracious me!" The K.C. turned to his lunch-party with wild excitement in his eyes.

"Well, if that isn't the most amazing thing!" he cried. "Listen here, you fellows. I've got the most unique course just coming in you've ever sampled in your lives. This is a lunch you'll remember and talk about for years. A real tit-bit. Do you—do you remember that dock murder fifteen years or so ago? Feller named Masterick killed a chap called Fred Smith. I was conducting for the Crown. You, Rumbold, you were judge at the time. He got the black cap—obvious from the first; but the Home Sec. Commuted. That, too, was obvious. He—"
Rumbold nodded and the others all intimated their precise memory of the case.

"Well, Masterick is here and Smith is here!" cut in the K.C. with a rush. In a few words he outlined the details of the case to them and the history of his last meeting with Thomas Masterick in Fleet-street.

"Show them in, Plender," he said. And the two men came in—Masterick calm and a little bit suspicious; Fred Smith openly scared.

"Who's all this lot?" demanded Masterick, nodding once at the guests.

"Friends of mine, old chap. Friends who are, I am sure, quite as eager to hear you and help you as I am myself. I doubt if any man in the world ever had such an array of legal talent—ha, ha, that's one for you, Rumbold—to help him as you."

"I don't want any help," said Masterick flatly. He dragged Smith farther into the room. "I've had a hell of a hunt to find him," he announced. "And when I did find him he wouldn't come along—not till I told him about you, mister. I ain't got much to say—I'm afraid I've got a dizzy coming on; that's what comes of trying to think too hard. But the way I look at it is this. You were a cocksure crowd of devils in that court, weren't you? Wouldn't listen to reason, no ways. I told you a hundred times I never killed Fred Smith, but you wouldn't have it; you was that damned cocky about it. You lagged me for fifteen years for murdering that swipe there. And I hadn't done it. But I've done the punishment for it, blast you!

"And now"—he suddenly pulled out a gun and shot Fred Smith clean through the heart where he stood—"now I've done the murder for which I've already been punished." He thundered. "And what the hell are you going to do about it?"
The Interruption

By W.W. Jacobs

The last of the funeral guests had gone, and Spencer Goddard, in decent black, sat alone in his small, well-furnished study. There was a queer sense of freedom in the house since the coffin had left it; the coffin which was now hidden in its solitary grave beneath the yellow earth. The air, which for the last three days had seemed stale and contaminated, now smelt fresh and clean. He went to the open window and, looking into the fading light of the autumn day, took a deep breath.

He closed the window and, stooping down, put a match to the fire, and, dropping into his easy chair, sat listening to the cheery crackle of the wood. At the age of thirty-eight he had turned over a fresh page. Life, free and unencumbered, was before him. His dead wife's money was at last his, to spend as he pleased instead of being doled out in reluctant driblets.

He turned at a step at the door, and his face assumed the appearance of gravity and sadness it had worn for the last four days. The cook, with the same air of decorous grief, entered the room quietly and, crossing to the mantelpiece, placed upon it a photograph.

"I thought you'd like to have it, sir." She said, in a low voice, "to remind you."

Goddard thanked her, and, rising, took it in his hand and stood regarding it. He noticed with satisfaction that his hand was absolutely steady.

"It is a very good likeness—till she was taken ill," continued the woman. "I never saw anybody change so sudden."

"The nature of her disease, Hannah," said her master.

The woman nodded, and, dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief, stood regarding him.

"Is there anything you want?" he inquired, after a time.

She shook her head. "I can't believe she's gone," she said, in a low voice. "Every now and then I have a queer feeling that she's still here—"
"It's your nerves," said her master sharply. "— and wanting to tell me something."

By a great effort Goddard refrained from looking at her. "Nerves," he said again. "Perhaps, you ought to have a little holiday. It has been a great strain upon you."

"You, too, sir," said the woman respectfully. "Waiting on her hand and foot as you have done, I can't think how you stood it. If you'd only had a nurse—"

"I preferred to do it myself, Hannah," said her master. "If I had had a nurse it would have alarmed her."

The woman assented. "And, they are always peeking and prying into that doesn't concern them," she added. "Always think they know more than the doctors do."

Goddard turned a slow look upon her. The tall, angular figure was standing in an attitude of respectful attention; the cold, slaty-brown eyes were cast down, the sullen face expressionless.

"She couldn't have had a better doctor," he said, looking at the fire again. "No man could have done more for her."

"And, nobody could have done more for her than you did, sir," was the reply. "There's few husbands that would have done what you did."

Goddard stiffened in his chair. "That will do, Hannah," he said curtly. "Or, done it so well," said the woman, with measured slowness.

With a strange, sinking sensation, her master paused to regain his control. Then he turned and eyed her steadily. "Thank you," he said slowly; "you mean well, but at present I cannot discuss it."

For some time after the door had closed behind her he sat in deep thought. The feeling of well-being of a few minutes before had vanished, leaving in its place an apprehension which he refused to consider, but which would not be allayed. He thought over his actions of the last few weeks, carefully, and could remember no flaw. His wife's illness, the doctor's diagnosis, his own solicitous care, were all in keeping with the ordinary. He tried to remember the woman's exact words—her manner. Something had shown him Fear. What?

He could have laughed at his fears next morning. The dining-room was full of sunshine and the fragrance of coffee and bacon was in the air. Better still, a worried and commonplace Hannah. Worried over two eggs with false birth-certificates, over the vendor of which she became almost lyrical.

"The bacon is excellent," said her smiling master, "so is the coffee; but your coffee always is."

Hannah smiled in return, and, taking fresh eggs from a rosy-cheeked maid, put them before him.

A pipe, followed by a brisk walk, cheered him still further. He came home glowing with exercise and again possessed with that sense of freedom and
freshness. He went into the garden—now his own—planned alterations.

After lunch he went over the house. The windows of his wife's bedroom were open and the room neat and airy. His glance wandered from the made-up bed to the brightly-polished furniture. Then he went to the dressing-table and opened the drawers, searching each in turn. With the exception of a few odds and ends they were empty. He went out on to the landing and called for Hannah.

"Do you know whether your mistress locked up any of her things?" he inquired.

"What things?" said the woman.

"Well, her jewellery mostly,"

"Oh!" Hannah smiled. "She gave it all to me," she said quietly.

Goddard checked an exclamation. His heart was beating nervously, but he spoke sternly.

"When?"

"Just before she died—of gastro-enteritis," said the woman.

There was a long silence. He turned and with great care mechanically closed the drawers of the dressing-table. The tilted glass showed him the pallor of his face, and he spoke without turning round.

"That is all right, then," he said huskily. "I only wanted to know what had become of it. I thought, perhaps, Milly—"

Hannah shook her head. "Milly's all right," she said, with a strange smile. "She's as honest as we are. Is there anything more you want, sir?"

She closed the door behind her with the quietness of the well-trained servant; Goddard, steadying himself with his hand on the rail of the bed, stood looking into the future.

II

The days passed monotonously, as they pass with a man in prison. Gone was the sense of freedom and the idea of a wider life. Instead of a cell, a house with ten rooms—but Hannah, the jailer, guarding each one. Respectful and attentive, the model servant, he saw in every word a threat against his liberty—his life. In the sullen face and cold eyes he saw her knowledge of power; in her solicitude for his comfort and approval, a sardonic jest. It was the master playing at being the servant. The years of unwilling servitude were over, but she felt her way carefully with infinite zest in the game. Warped and bitter, with a cleverness which had never before had scope, she had entered into her kingdom. She took it little by little, savouring every morsel.

"I hope I've done right, sir," she said one morning. "I have given Milly notice."

Goddard looked up from his paper. "Isn't she satisfactory?" he inquired.

"Not to my thinking, sir," said the woman. "And, she says she is coming to see
you about it. I told her that would be no good."
    "I had better see her and hear what she has to say," said her master.
    "Of course, if you wish to," said Hannah; "only, after giving her notice, if she
doesn't go I shall. I should be sorry to go—I've been very comfortable here—but
it's either her or me."
    "I should be sorry to lose you," said Goddard in a hopeless voice.
    "Thank you, sir," said Hannah, "I'm sure I've tried to do my best. I've been with
you some time now—and I know all your little ways. I expect I understand you
better than anybody else would. I do all I can to make you comfortable."
    "Very well, I leave it to you," said Goddard in a voice which strove to be brisk
and commanding. "You have my permission to dismiss her."
    "There's another thing I wanted to see you about," said Hannah; "my wages. I was
going to ask for a raise, seeing that I'm really housekeeper here now."
    "Certainly," said her master, considering, "that only seems fair. Let me see—what
are you getting?"
    "Thirty-six."
    Goddard reflected for a moment, and then turned with a benevolent smile. "Very
well," he said cordially, "I'll make it forty-two. That's ten shillings a month more."
    "I was thinking of a hundred," said Hannah dryly.
    The significance of the demand appalled him. "Rather a big jump," he said at last,"I really don't know that I—"
    "It doesn't matter," said Hannah, "I thought I was worth it— to you—that's all.
You know best. Some people might think I was worth two hundred. That's a bigger
jump, but after all a big jump is better than—"
    She broke off and tittered. Goddard eyed her.
    "—than a big drop," she concluded.
    Her master's face set. The lips almost disappeared and something came into the
pale eyes that was revolting. Still eyeing her, he rose and approached her. She stood
her ground and met him eye to eye.
    "You are jocular," he said at last.
    "Short life and a merry one," said the woman.
    "Mine or yours?"
    "Both, perhaps," was the reply.
    "If—if I give you a hundred," said Goddard, moistening his lips, "that ought to
make your life merrier, at any rate."
    Hannah nodded. "Merry and long, perhaps," she said slowly. "I'm careful, you
know—very careful."
    "I am sure you are," said Goddard, his face relaxing.
    "Careful what I eat and drink, I mean," said the woman eyeing him steadily.
    "That is wise," he said slowly. "I am myself—that is why I am paying a good
cook a large salary. But don't overdo things, Hannah; don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"I am not likely to do that," she said coldly. "Live and let live; that is my motto. Some people have different ones. But I'm careful; nobody won't catch me napping. I've left a letter with my sister, in case."

Goddard turned slowly and in a casual fashion put the flowers straight in a bowl on the table, and, wandering to the window, looked out. His face was white again and his hands trembled.

"To be opened after my death," continued Hannah. "I don't believe in doctors—not after what I've seen of them—I don't think they know enough; so if I die I shall be examined. I've given good reasons."

"And, suppose," said Goddard, coming from the window, "suppose she is curious, and opens it before you die?"

"We must chance that," said Hannah, shrugging her shoulders; "but I don't think she will. I sealed it up with sealing-wax, with a mark on it."

"She might open it and say nothing about it," persisted her master.

An unwholesome grin spread slowly over Hannah's features. "I should know it soon enough," she declared boisterously, "and so would other people. Lord! There would be an upset! Chidham would have something to talk about for once. We should be in the paper—both of us."

Goddard forced a smile. "Dear me!" he said gently. "Your pen seems to be a dangerous weapon, Hannah, but I hope that the need to open it will not happen for another fifty years. You look well and strong."

The woman nodded. "I don't take up my troubles before they come," she said, with a satisfied air; "but there's no harm in trying to prevent them coming. Prevention is better than cure."

"Exactly," said her master; "and, by the way, there's no need for this little financial arrangement to be known by anybody else. I might become unpopular with my neighbours for setting a bad example. Of course, I am giving you this sum because I really think you are worth it."

"I'm sure you do," said Hannah. "I'm not sure I ain't worth more but this'll do to go on with. I shall get a girl for less than we are paying Milly, and that'll be another little bit extra for me."

"Certainly," said Goddard, and smiled again.

"Come to think of it," said Hannah, pausing at the door, "I ain't sure I shall get anybody else; then there'll be more than ever for me. If I do the work I might as well have the money."

Her master nodded, and, left to himself, sat down to think out a position which was as intolerable as it was dangerous. At a great risk he had escaped from the dominion of one woman only to fall, bound and helpless, into the hands of another.
However vague and unconvincing the suspicions of Hannah might be, they would be sufficient. Evidence could be unearthed. Cold with fear one moment, and hot with fury the next, he sought in vain for some avenue of escape. It was his brain against that of a cunning, illiterate fool; a fool whose malicious stupidity only added to his danger. And she drank. With largely increased wages she would drink more and his very life might depend upon a hiccupped boast. It was clear that she was enjoying her supremacy; later on her vanity would urge her to display it before other. He might have to obey the crack of her whip before witnesses, and that would cut off all possibility of escape.

He sat with his head in his hands. There must be a way out and he must find it. Soon. He must find it before gossip began; before the changed position of master and servant lent colour to her story when that story became known. Shaking with fury, he thought of her lean, ugly throat and the joy of choking her life out with his fingers. He started suddenly, and took a quick breath. No, not fingers—a rope.

III

Bright and cheerful outside and with his friends, in the house he was quiet and submissive. Milly had gone, and, if the service was poorer and the rooms neglected, he gave no sign. If a bell remained unanswered he made no complaint, and to studied insolence turned the other cheek of politeness. When at this tribute to her power the woman smiled, he smiled in return. A smile which, for all its disarming softness, left her vaguely uneasy.

"I'm not afraid of you," and said once, with a menacing air.

"I hope not," said Goddard in a slightly surprised voice.

"Some people might be, but I'm not," she declared. "If anything happened to me ——"

"Nothing could happen to such a careful woman as you are," he said, smiling again. "You ought to live to ninety—with luck."

It was clear to him that the situation was getting on his nerves. Unremembered but terrible dreams haunted his sleep. Dreams in which some great, inevitable disaster was always pressing upon him, although he could never discover what it was. Each morning he awoke unrefreshed to face another day of torment. He could not meet the woman's eyes for fear of revealing the threat that was in his own.

Delay was dangerous and foolish. He had thought out every move in that contest of wits which was to remove the shadow of the rope from his own neck and place it about that of the woman. There was a little risk, but the stake was a big one. He had but to set the ball rolling and others would keep it on its course. It was time to act.

He came in a little jaded from his afternoon walk, and left his tea untouched. He ate but little dinner, and, sitting hunched up over the fire, told the woman that he had
taken a slight chill. Her concern, he felt grimly, might have been greater if she had
known the cause.

He was no better next day, and after lunch called in to consult his doctor. He left
with a clean bill of health except for a slight digestive derangement, the remedy for
which he took away with him in a bottle. For two days he swallowed one	
tablespoonful three times a day in water, without result, then he took to his bed.

"A day or two in bed won't hurt you," said the doctor. "Show me that tongue of
yours again."

"But what is the matter with me, Roberts?" inquired the patient.

The doctor pondered. "Nothing to trouble about—nerves a bit wrong—
digestion a little bit impaired. You'll be all right in a day or two."

Goddard nodded. So far, so good; Roberts had not outlived his usefulness. He
smiled grimly after the doctor had left at the surprise he was preparing for him. A
little rough on Roberts and his professional reputation, perhaps, but these things
could not be avoided.

He lay back and visualised the programme. A day or two longer, getting
gradually worse, then a little sickness. After that a nervous, somewhat shamefaced
patient hinting at things. His food had a queer taste—he felt worse after taking it; he
knew it was ridiculous, still—there was some of his beef-tea he had put aside,
perhaps the doctor would like to examine it? and the medicine? Secretions, too;
perhaps he would like to see those?

Propped on his elbow, he stared fixedly at the wall. There would be a trace—a
faint trace—of arsenic in the secretions. There would be more than a trace in the
other things. An attempt to poison him would be clearly indicated, and—his wife's
symptoms had resembled his own—let Hannah get out of the web he was spinning if
she could. As for the letter she had threatened him with, let her produce it; it could
only recoil upon herself. Fifty letters could not save her from the doom he was
preparing for her. It was her life or his, and he would show no mercy. For three
days he doctored himself with sedulous care, watching himself anxiously the while.
His nerve was going and he knew it. Before him was the strain of the discovery, the
arrest, and the trial. The gruesome business of his wife's death. A long business. He
would wait no longer, and he would open the proceedings with dramatic suddenness.

It was between nine and ten o'clock at night when he rang his bell, and it was not
until he had rung four times that he heard the heavy steps of Hannah mounting the
stairs.

"What d'you want?" she demanded, standing in the doorway.

"I'm very ill," he said gasping. "Run for the doctor. Quick!"

The woman stared at him in genuine amazement. "What, at this time o'night?" she
exclaimed. "Not likely."

"I'm dying!" said Goddard in a broken voice.
"Not you," she said roughly. "You'll be better in the morning."
"I'm dying,' he repeated. "Go—for—the—doctor."

The woman hesitated. The rain beat in heavy squalls against the window, and the doctor's house was a mile distant on the lonely road. She glanced at the figure on the bed.

"I should catch my death o' cold," she grumbled.

She stood sullenly regarding him. He certainly looked very ill, and his death would by no means benefit her. She listened, scowling, to the wind and the rain.

"All right," she said at last, and went noisily from the room.

His face set in a mirthless smile, he heard her bustling about below. The front-door slammed violently and he was alone.

He waited for a few minutes and then, getting out of bed, put on his dressing-gown and set about his preparations. With a steady hand he added a little white powder to the remains of his beef-tea and to the contents of his bottle of medicine. He stood listening a moment at some faint sound from below, and, having satisfied himself, lit a candle and made his way to Hannah's room. For a space he stood irresolute, looking about him. Then he opened one of the drawers and, placing the broken packet of powder under a pile of clothing at the back, made his way back to bed.

He was disturbed to find he was trembling with excitement and nervousness. He longed for tobacco, but that was impossible. To reassure himself he began to rehearse his conversation with the doctor, and again he thought over every possible complication. The scene with the woman would be terrible: he would have to be too ill to take any part in it. The less he said the better. Others would do all that was necessary.

He lay for a long time listening to the sound of the wind and the rain. Inside, the house seemed unusually quiet, and with an odd sensation he suddenly realised that it was the first time he had been alone in it since his wife's death. He remembered that she would have to be disturbed. The thought was unwelcome. He did not want her to be disturbed. Let the dead sleep.

He sat up in bed and drew his watch from beneath the pillow. Hannah ought to have been back before; in any case she could not be long now. At any moment he might hear her key in the lock. He lay down again and reminded himself that things were shaping well. He had shaped them, and some of the satisfaction of the artist was his.

The silence was oppressive. The house seemed to be listening, waiting. He looked at his watch again and wondered, with a curse, what had happened to the woman. It was clear that the doctor must be out, but that was no reason for her delay. It was close on midnight, and the atmosphere of the house seemed in some strange fashion to be brooding and hostile.
In a lull in the wind he thought he heard footsteps outside, and his face cleared as he sat up listening for the sound of the key in the door below. In another moment the woman would be in the house and the fears engendered by a disordered fancy would have flown. The sound of the steps had ceased, but he could hear no sound of entrance. Until all hope had gone, he sat listening. He was certain he had heard footsteps. Whose?

Trembling, and haggard he sat waiting, assailed by a crowd of murmuring fears. One whispered that he had failed and would have to pay the penalty of failing; that he had gambled with Death and lost.

By a strong effort he fought down these fancies and, closing his eyes, tried to compose himself to rest. It was evident now that the doctor was out and that Hannah was waiting to return with him in his car. He was frightening himself for nothing. At any moment he might hear the sound of their arrival.

He heard something else, and, sitting up suddenly, tried to think what it was and what had caused it. It was a very faint sound—stealthy. Holding his breath, he waited for it to be repeated. He heard it again, the mere ghost of a sound—the whisper of a sound, but significant as most whispers are.

He wiped his brow with his sleeve and told himself firmly that it was nerves, and nothing but nerves; but, against his will, he still listened. He fancied now that the sound came from his wife's room, the other side of the landing. It increased in loudness and became more insistent, but with his eyes fixed on the door of his room he still kept himself in hand, and tried to listen instead to the wind and the rain.

For a time he heard nothing but that. Then there came a scraping, scurrying noise from his wife's room, and a sudden, terrific crash.

With a loud scream his nerve broke, and springing from the bed he sped downstairs and, flinging open the front-door, dashed into the night. The door, caught by the wind, slammed behind him.

With his hand holding the garden gate open, ready for further flight, he stood sobbing for breath. His bare feet were bruised and the rain was very cold, but he took no heed. Then he ran a little way along the road and stood for some time, hoping and listening.

He came back slowly. The wind was bitter and he was bitter and he was soaked to the skin. The garden was black and forbidding, and unspeakable horror might be lurking in the bushes. He went up the road again, trembling with cold. Then, in desperation, he passed through the terrors of the garden to the house, only to find the door closed. The porch gave a little protection from the icy rain, but none from the wind, and, shaking in every limb, he leaned in abject misery against the door. He pulled himself together after a time and stumbled round to the back-door. Locked! And, all the lower windows were shuttered. He made his way back to the porch, and, crouching there in hopeless misery, waited for the woman to return.
He had a dim memory when he awoke of somebody questioning him and then of being half-pushed, half-carried upstairs to bed. There was something wrong with his head and his chest, and he was trembling violently, and very cold. Somebody was speaking.

"You must have taken leave of your senses," said the voice of Hannah. "I thought you were dead."

He forced his eyes to open. "Doctor," he muttered, "doctor."

"Out on a bad case," said Hannah, "I waited till I was tired of waiting, and then came along. Good thing for you I did. He'll be round first thing this morning. He ought to be here now."

She bustled about, tidying up the room, his leaden eyes following her as she collected the beef-tea and other things on a tray and carried them out.

"Nice thing I did yesterday," she remarked, as she came back. "Left the missus's bedroom window open. When I opened the door this morning I found that beautiful Chippidale glass of hers had blown off the table and, smashed to pieces. Did you hear it?"

Goddard made no reply. In a confused fashion he was trying to think. Accident or not, the fall of the glass had served its purpose. Were there such things as accidents? Or, was Life a puzzle—a puzzle into which every piece was made to fit? Fear and the wind ... no: conscience and the wind ... had saved the woman. He must get the powder back from her drawer ... before she discovered it and denounced him. The medicine ... he must remember not to take it ...

He was very ill, seriously ill. He must have taken a chill owing to that panic flight into the garden. Why didn't the doctor come? He had come ... at last ... he was doing something to his chest...it was cold.

Again ... the doctor ... there was something he wanted to tell him ... Hannah and a powder ... what was it?

Later on he remembered, together with other things that he had hoped to forget. He lay watching an endless procession of memories, broken at times by a glance at the doctor, the nurse, and Hannah, who were all standing near the bed regarding him. They had been there a long time, and they were all very quiet. The last time he looked at Hannah was the first time for months that he had looked at her without loathing and hatred. Then he knew that he was dying.
The Marquis always talked very bad English when he was angry, and this morning he was very angry, indeed. Climbing up narrow and precipitous paths upon a surface of loose stones, pushing his way occasionally through brambles and undergrowth, and looking downwards from heights, which always made him giddy, had been undertakings which had combined to incense him. He was not dressed or built for such mad escapades. The sight of Madelon, bare-headed, and laughing, having the air of one to whom such excursions, instead of being a torture, were a keen pleasure, only irritated him, whereas the final note of exasperation he discovered in the pleasant good temper of Mr Samuel T. Billingham, their guide and host, who, with a huge cigar in his mouth, was walking with springy steps and unabated cheerfulness up the path which the Marquis had passionately declared to be only fit for goats and idiots.

"I can no further make this absurd promenade," the Marquis announced, sinking on to a heap of stones and dabbing with a scented pocket-handkerchief drops of moisture upon his forehead, which must not be allowed to reach his eyebrows. "It is an absurdity! I have a pain of the stomach, a pain of the knees, a pain of the back. It is not for this I came. Where is the automobile?"

"Poor uncle!" Madelon sympathised. "I had forgotten that you were not used to walking. You should have lived in England as I have done. But the view—you must admit that the view is marvellous!"

The comments of the Marquis upon the view were delivered in fluent and sacrilegious French. He displayed an acquaintance with the various forms of blasphemy peculiar to his language which moved even Mr Billingham to wondering admiration.

"When I feel better," he concluded, after a moment's electric pause, "I shall apologise. At present I will only say that the view from the window of my salon, which takes in the Casino and all that glorious sea, is better worth having."
"Less than a kilometre to go," Mr Billingham declared. "I reckon we shall strike the main road just beyond that clump of firs, and that's where I told the car to pick us up. Another quarter of an hour, Marquis, and we shall be in St Felix."

"If one could only drink something!" the latter observed pettishly, as he rose to his feet. "I miss my morning aperitif!"

"That's coming to you, sure," Mr Billingham promised. "I've done this tramp before, and unless I'm mistaken there's a little cafe where this path joins the cart track."

The prospect was sufficiently encouraging to induce the Marquis to struggle to his feet. They clambered another fifty yards or so up the stony path and found themselves in a rough track which had evidently been made by the carting of timber from the other side of the ravine. A little way alone there was a small white-plastered building, to which Mr Billingham pointed.

"The Café du Foret!" he exclaimed. "The worst ever, so far as I remember, but a Dubonnet won't poison us."

The Marquis almost smiled.

"A Dubonnet will be acceptable," he admitted. "The place appears poverty-stricken, but if one can secure an unopened bottle—"

"We'll find that," Mr Billingham interrupted confidently.

A few minutes' further climb brought them to the cafe. It was small, dilapidated and uninviting. Nevertheless, it proclaimed itself in rudely painted black letters to be a restaurant where "Vins et Consommations" were to be obtained. There were three iron tables outside with a couple of chairs at each, but no sign of life. The door stood open and his two companions followed Mr Billingham inside. There was no one behind the little counter, no one in the rude little compartment with its sanded floor and benches in place of chairs. There were bottles upon the shelves, however, and a tumbler half full of brandy upon the counter. Mr Billingham raised his voice and the glasses around shook.

"Hallo there!" he shouted.

"Allo, allo!" the Marquis echoed. "N'y a-t-il personne ici pour nous servir?"

There was a stolid, unsympathetic lack of response. They waited for a moment, then Mr Billingham opened the door of the room behind the bar and glanced around. It was a rough-looking kitchen, with a stone floor and a few clumsy articles of furniture. A string of onions, a scraggy piece of meat, and a rabbit bung down from iron hooks in the ceiling. There were pots and dishes upon the table, but no fire or any sign of recent occupation. Mr Billingham raised his voice again without result, opened still another door, and called up a flight of flimsy stairs—also without result. Then he returned to his companions.

"There is no one about at all," he announced.

"You might try outside," Madelon suggested.
Outside there was no garden but a little clearing, a rudely constructed shed built of pine logs from which the bark had not been stripped, and a lean-to shelter, with a corrugated iron roof, against the wall. Mr Billingham again, in stentorian tones, invited the presence of the missing innkeeper and again without response. He returned to the bar.

"Deserted!" he exclaimed.

"They were preparing for a fete at the small village we passed through last," Madelon remarked. "Perhaps, the people have gone there, or the man may work in the woods."

The Marquis smiled. He had been studying the labels upon the bottles.

"At least," he pointed out, "they have left a bottle of Dubonnet. Produce that excellent corkscrew of yours, my friend Billingham. We will serve ourselves and leave the money."

They opened the bottle of Dubonnet which the Marquis had dragged down from the shelf, found some thick wine-glasses, and seated themselves before one of the rude tables outside. Madelon gave a little exclamation of relief as they passed out into the pine-scented sunshine.

"That place gave me the shivers," she declared. "It seemed so very empty, so very silent."

"It's a lonely spot," Mr Billingham agreed, pouring out the Dubonnet. "They seem to have let off felling the timber round here, and I guess that took the trade away."

"So long as they are absent," the Marquis said, "one owes them gratitude that they left the place open. Never have I tasted Dubonnet with a better flavour. Tell me, my friend Billingham, how much further of this abominable promenade before we reach the automobile?"

"Not more than half a kilometre," Mr Billingham assured him. "There's a little path which leads straight up to the road from the cart track. There we shall find the automobile. In a few minutes more we shall be in St Felix. After that—the déjeuner!"

The Marquis breathed a little sigh of content and helped himself once more from the bottle. Madelon, who had set her glass down empty, was fidgeting about as though anxious to start.

"Hungry?" Mr Billingham inquired.

She shook her head.

"I have taken a dislike to this place," she confided. "Am I superstitious, I wonder? I have a terrible feeling about it."

The Marquis was sympathetic but entirely comfortable and not disposed to hurry. He lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair.

"I understand," he murmured. "A deserted inn on the edge of the forest! There are all the materials here for drama. There was a story I once read—"
He broke off abruptly and the cigarette fell from his fingers. Mr Billingham sprang to his feet. Madelon, who had wandered a few yards away from them and turned back towards the house, was standing suddenly rigid, suddenly pale. The cry which had startled them had escaped from her lips. She pointed to the window above the door.

"There was a face there!" she cried. "Someone up in the room!"

Mr Billingham remained composed.

"Well, I guess that isn't so terrible after all," he observed. "I dare say there's someone ill there. Who was it—a man or a woman?"

"I do not know," Madelon answered faintly. "I was—just a face!"

"Seems to have given you a shock," Mr Billingham continued. "Sit down, Miss Madelon, and drink half a glass more of this stuff. Guess I'd better hunt round and see if there's any help wanted."

Madelon—young woman of nerve and courage though she was—staggered into a chair and was utterly unable to raise to her lips the glass which her uncle hastily filled. Mr Billingham disappeared inside the building. In about five minutes he returned.

"There's only one room upstairs." He announced, "and there ain't a soul in it."

"But I saw someone," Madelon protested.

He strolled a yard or two away and looked back at the window, pausing a moment to re-light his cigar which had gone out.

"Well, there's no one there now," he assured her. "There's only one room and not a cupboard for a hiding-place. There are two beds—both look as though they'd been slept in—but there isn't a human being in the shanty. You can take my word for it."

Madelon looked at him steadfastly. She had drunk some of the Dubonnet and she was becoming herself again.

"Do you believe, then," she asked, "that I saw the face of someone who does not exist?"

"I shouldn't say you were the sort who saw spooks," Mr Billingham admitted. "All I say is, there's no one there now."

"You must surely have realized, my dear Madelon," the Marquis intervened, "whether the face was the face of a man or a woman."

"I should have said that it was the face of a young man," Madelon replied, "but it might have been the face of a girl. There was a mass of black hair. The face itself was smooth. It was the eyes that were horrible."

"You don't say!" Mr Billingham murmured with tolerant sympathy. "Kind of scared, were they?"

Madelon rose to her feet.

"Please let us go now," she begged. "I cannot talk about it any more. I can only assure you of one thing. Something terrible has happened here. Please, Mr
Billingham!"

"We'll get right along," was the prompt response. "Ten francs will square us for the bottle of Dubonnet, I guess—ten francs and what's left of the bottle. I'll put it underneath the glass—see? Now, we're right! Just a yard or two through the trees and then we'll leave this place behind us."

"I hope," Madelon murmured as they passed swiftly back to the cart track, "that I may be able to forget it."

The Marquis smiled.

"Pooh, pooh, my child!" he exclaimed. "You are too sensitive, too emotional! Material discomforts you scoff at. A fancy sometimes tortures you. Behold, the good news!"

He pointed upwards. At the end of the path was the curling main road and by the side of it the automobile Mr Billingham had hired for their day's excursion. No vehicle before had ever appealed so greatly to the Marquis.

"We've struck it right after all," Mr Billingham declared with satisfaction. "Gee, how hot the sun is out here! Lunch on the terrace in twenty minutes, Miss Madelon. Now, let's forget that dirty little shanty and its spook!"

The spook was not so easy to forget. Madelon, with Mr Billingham as her escort, was on her way that evening from the Casino to Ciro's when she suddenly gripped her companion's arm.

"Look," she cried, in a tone vibrant with absolute terror. "Look! The boy at that table!"

Mr Billingham's eyes followed her gesture. The young man was certainly an unusual sight in such surroundings. His clothes, although perfectly new, were clumsily fashioned and of the sort worn on fete days by the peasants. His hat was pushed to the back of his head, and, although it was of the sombrero order affected by the mountaineers of the district, it failed to conceal the masses of black hair which gave him almost a grotesque appearance. His complexion was the usual burnt olive of the Provengal labourer. It was again his expression which arrested. His eyes were large and black, without either the vacancy or the humour of the peasant on a holiday. They looked neither at the people who passed, the trees and flowers of the plaza, nor at the bottle of wine which stood half-empty by his side. They seemed to be looking at something which, if it existed at all, existed far away.

"That," Madelon said, "was the face I saw at the upstairs window of that place this morning."

Her hand was clutching nervously at his arm. Mr Billingham patted it gently.

"Say, this boy has got on your nerves some," he declared. "I'll go across and have a talk to him. Sit down and wait for me."

"I think I will for a moment," Madelon acquiesced.
She seated herself on one of the benches by the side of the pavement. Mr Billingham crossed the road and addressed the boy in hesitating but comprehensible French.

"Do you belong to the inn up near St Felix?" he inquired. "The young lady and I were there this morning."

The boy stared at his questioner for a moment with parted lips and terrified expression. He made absolutely no reply, however.

"We could not find anyone there," Mr Billingham continued, speaking with laborious care. "We hoped there was nothing wrong."

The boy broke out into a stream of rapid, unintelligible speech, to which Mr Billingham listened in ever-increasing confusion. He turned round to find Madelon by his side.

"Say, this young goat-herd has got hold of a lingo of his own," he complained. "I don't know as anyone but a monkey could tell what he's chattering about. Seems kind of annoyed with me, but I can't get a word of it."

"It is the dialect of the Italians here," Madelon explained. "Let me try."

She spoke to him patiently. The boy only shook his head. Presently he poured out another glass of wine and drank it. Then he sat quite still, stolid and inattentive. He took no notice of Madelon's questions. He showed no sign of understanding a word she said. In the end she was seized by a sudden revulsion. She tugged at her companion's arm.

"Come away!" she begged. "He will not reply. He pretends not to understand me, though I believe that he does. Let us leave him."

"Guess you're right," Mr Billingham assented. "He's a crazy loon, if ever there was one, or he wouldn't speak such gibberish. Anyway, it's not our business."

They passed on. The young man looked after them sullenly and helped himself to more wine. Ten minutes later, when Mr Billingham, obeying an unaccountable impulse, chose a moment when Madelon was talking to some acquaintances and hurried back, the chair was empty. The young man was gone.

"Anyway," Mr Billingham murmured to himself, struggling against a curious feeling of uneasiness, "it ain't our affair."

Notwithstanding the fact that Mr Billingham had twice declared that whatever trouble there might be or have been at the little inn on the edge of the forest was not his affair, it was barely ten o'clock in the morning when he left the automobile which he had hired in the Square at Monte Carlo, clambered down the steep path, made his way along the cart track, pushed through the clump of trees and found himself before the cafe. There was no smoke emerging from the chimney, and Mr Billingham gave a little start of surprise as he saw on the table, in front of the still open door, the half-consumed bottle of Dubonnet and the ten-franc note under one
of the glasses.

"I guess passers-by round here are pretty scarce," he ruminated. "Seems queer that whoever quit the place didn't trouble to look up. Left in a hurry, perhaps."

Mr Billingham would doubtless have scorned the suggestion that he talked to himself for the fact of any pleasure he might derive from hearing his own voice, and yet it was without a doubt true that the uneasy feeling of the day before had returned to an even larger extent. He pushed open the door. The half-emptied tumbler was still upon the counter. Some little disarrangement of the bottles upon the shelf, effected by their removal of the bottle of Dubonnet, still existed. He threw open the door leading to the kitchen and called out:

"Hallo there!"

There was no reply. He mounted the stairs with footsteps which he was half-ashamed to admit were reluctant ones. The bedroom was as empty as it had been on the previous day. There was no place to hide anywhere—no other room. As he descended, however, he realised that it was perfectly possible for the owner of the face whom Madelon had seen there to have escaped by the back door and reached the wood in the matter of a very few seconds. He returned to the kitchen. Here he noticed for the first time that by the side of the fireplace was a clumsy framework door, which looked as though it might have led into a pantry or cupboard. He moved towards it and raised the latch. Before he threw the door open, he knew. When he closed it again—in the space of a second or two—there were great beads of perspiration upon his forehead. The colour had left his cheeks and the blood seemed to have been drained from body. He staggered out into the bar, gripped the counter for a moment, saw a bottle of Martell's brandy on the bottom row of the shelf, seized it, made his faltering way outside, knocked off its neck against the top of one of the iron tables, and drank.

... Mr Billingham was a strong man and his recovery was prompt. Nevertheless, he was breathing heavily as he hastened up the hill to where his automobile was waiting.

"Drive to the Mairie at St Felix," he ordered ...

Arrived at the Mairie—a small wistaria-covered building on the outskirts of the straggling village of St Felix—Mr Billingham was ushered at once by a gendarme into a bare little apartment with whitewashed walls and a row of benches, in which a very formal-looking gentleman with a closely-trimmed black beard, very smoothly brushed hair, and gold-rimmed pince-nez, was seated at a table, signing documents. His work for the morning had consisted of adjudicating upon a highly important case of fowl stealing, and he looked with some surprise at his visitor's precipitate entrance. Mr Billingham's opening statement was in far from lucid English. The magistrate, with a puzzled expression, waved him to a seat.

"Comment, monsieur?" he exclaimed.
Mr Billingham pulled himself together. His French, though not rapid, was fairly precise, and he had no difficulty in making himself understood.

"A woman has been murdered at a little café at the edge of the forest," he announced.

The magistrate gasped. The gendarme gasped.

"Continue, monsieur," the former begged.

Mr Billingham told his story. The magistrate gave him his entire attention. It was a great day, this! A murder! Obviously a murder, in his district! He began to make notes of Mr Billingham's statement. He was friendly but official. It was quite hopeless for him to conceal the fact that the news had filled him with pleasurable interest. It had been the secret desire of his life to have the handling of such a case.

"I will accompany you to the inn myself at once, monsieur," he announced, rising to his feet. "You can accommodate a gendarme, perhaps, on the front of your car ... Let the Court remain open till my return," he directed a subordinate. "Tell me again your story as we proceed, monsieur."

Mr Billingham went though the few facts again. In response to his own inquiries the magistrate gave him certain information.

"The inn," he said, "was kept by a very respectable, good man, of the name of Pierre Anson. He lived there with his wife, the woman who without a doubt is the victim, and his nephew, a young man of whom one hears not too much of good. The wife, it is reported, had savings—savings of some account—and the nephew knew it. Three days ago news came to Anson of the death of a relative in Marseilles. This I know because he came to me for information as to the burying of the relative and as to his journey. He set off last Monday morning. He was expecting to return to-night. He left alone his wife and this nephew. One fears to reflect what may have happened!"

Mr Billingham sighed, because he was a kind-hearted man, and because a vision of that flashing knife of the guillotine is terrible to such. Nevertheless, it was his duty.

"Last night," he confided, "the young man, who apparently was the nephew of Pierre Anson, was drinking wine at the Café de Paris in Monte Carlo. He was pointed out to me by the young lady who declared that his was the face she saw at the window."

The magistrate nodded gravely.

"It is a crime," he said, "in effect simple, not uncommon amongst this race of people. When heated with wine and drunk with the desire of pleasure, the shedding of blood is nothing. I, who tell you this, know."

They arrived at their destination. The magistrate and the gendarme made their way to the little room. Mr Billingham sat outside. He had no soul for horrors. It was an hour before they rejoined him. The magistrate was carrying his notebook in his
"All is clear," he announced. "The savings of the poor woman have disappeared. To-night, or to-morrow at the latest, the young man will be in our hands. Your name and address, if you please, monsieur. You will attend the Court?"

"Certainly," Mr Billingham promised.

"The young man," the magistrate continued, "will have had two nights of that wild pleasure of which he had lain awake, here in this place of tranquillity, and dreamed. Afterwards— well—he may escape with the penitentiary. One knows little of his age."

Mr Billingham looked up at the blank window. The silence which brooded over the place remained unbroken. A gendarme, having closed the door, seated himself outside.

"Pierre Anson will arrive by the night train," the magistrate remarked. "It will be a sad home-coming for him."

"Better," Mr Billingham rejoined, with a little shiver, "than if he had found the house empty and opened that door, as I did." The most pathetic sight in the bare, whitewashed little room of the Mairie on the first morning of the examination was Pierre Anson, the woodman. The tears streamed down his brown, wrinkled face as the magistrate addressed his first few kindly questions. He had, at one time, as was evident, been a man of great strength. Now, he seemed shrunken up, stricken with the horror of his home-coming.

"Your wife had savings, Pierre Anson?" the magistrate asked him.

"She was a thrifty woman," was the tremulous reply. "She had always a stocking."

"Do you know how much was in it?"

"She never told me."

"Did your nephew—the young man between the gendarmes there—the young man whom you trusted alone with your wife— did he know?"

"I cannot tell," Pierre Anson answered. "He was always wanting money."

"You have been to Marseilles to bury a relative—is it not so?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You thought it safe to leave this youth, of whose character we hear little that is good, alone with your wife in such a desolate spot?"

"She was his aunt," the man announced, with a little sob. "How would I dream of anything so horrible?"

The magistrate bent over his papers. Mr Billingham, seated by his side, watched the shaft of sunlight which had found its way through the cobwebbed windows and had fallen upon the boy's face. Madelon, who had also been invited by the magistrate to occupy a chair near him, scribbled something on a piece of paper and passed it to her neighbour. He glanced at it and passed it on to the magistrate, who studied it through his pince-nez with pursed lips. Finally, with a little shrug of the shoulders,
he twiddled it between his fingers.

"Where did you stay in Marseilles, Pierre Anson?" he asked suddenly.

The woodman lifted his head and stared uncomprehendingly at his questioner.

"I asked you where you stayed in Marseilles," the magistrate repeated.

Pierre Anson shook his head.

"I do not remember," he said. "It was a small lodging-house down by the quay."

"You do not remember?" the magistrate echoed, in a tone of some surprise. "Is that not strange, Pierre Anson?"

"It was somewhere near where my cousin lay dead," the man answered, a little sullenly. "I could find the place—the name I never knew."

The magistrate's right arm suddenly shot out.

"Or, is it that you are lying, Pierre Anson?" he thundered. "Is it that you yourself, before you left home in the small hours of that Tuesday morning, murdered your wife and stole her savings, forced two of the notes on that half-witted youth, persuaded him to buy clothes and go down to Monte Carlo, and went yourself to Nice—your rendezvous at Nice—to your rendezvous with Lucie Bérard?"

The man half-rose to his feet. His eyes seemed suddenly bloodshot. He swayed about as though striving to speak.

"Bring the woman," the magistrate ordered.

Pierre Anson glanced fearfully towards the door. A woman in the care of a gendarme entered. They looked at one another across the room—the man and the woman—and one understood.

"The money of which you robbed your wife, Pierre Anson," the magistrate continued, "was found upon this woman. You have visited her month by month in Nice. You would have thrust the burden of this crime upon your nephew. You yourself are the murderer! Do you confess?"

A cry rang through the Court—not from the man, Pierre Anson, who was indeed incapable of speech, whose hands were fighting the air, who fought against unconsciousness, but from the boy who stood between the gendarmes. His eyes were fixed upon the woman who had entered the Court Room. His indifference had vanished. His eyes again were lit with fear.

"Mother!" he cried.

"It is I!" she answered.

The boy turned towards the magistrate.

"It was I who killed the woman," he pleaded. "No one else knows anything about it."

"You are a liar and a fool!" the woman declared angrily. "It was he, the bungler there," she added, pointing to Pierre Anson. "And, there is the money."

She dashed a bundle of notes upon the floor and stood with folded arms, defiant, the incarnation of an evil spirit. A gendarme touched Pierre Anson upon the
shoulder. The proceedings were over.

Afterwards the magistrate entertained his two distinguished guests with a bottle of sweet wine and biscuits in his retiring-room. He was well pleased with the whole business.

"Amongst the lowest classes of our peasants," he explained, "these family dramas are not uncommon. Pierre Anson, as the story goes now, loved both sisters. He married the older one—a widow with money. The rest of the story unfolds itself. Yet, Pierre Anson had cunning which few of these peasants possess. He deceived us all. It is to you, monsieur," he added, turning to Mr Billingham, "that we owe the clue by means of which we arrived at the truth."

Mr Billingham shook his head.

"Not to me" he rejoined; "to the young lady."

The magistrate bowed.

"Then might one inquire," he ventured, "what led the young lady to doubt the lad's guilt?"

Madelon was once more serious.

"Something in his eyes," she confided, with a little shudder of reminiscence; "something which was there and something which was not there."

The magistrate raised his glass and bowed first to Madelon, then to Mr Billingham.

"Something in his eyes," he repeated. "Well, one reads somewhere in a lay commentary upon our laws and the discovery of crime, that the born detective must have an instinct for the truth. Mademoiselle, there is a great vocation open to you."

Madelon smiled. She sipped her wine, but she remained silent.
The Chinese girl

By H. De Vere Stacpoole

I

It was in the smoke-room of the Van Buren coming from Surabaya that I met Mr Arthur Amrod.

Mr Amrod's business in life was not written upon him; given a guess you would have said he was a rubber man or a tobacco planter up from Banjermasin or Timor; in reality he was (and is) chief of the Tavas agency which deals with 'private investigation' in the Far East. It is, in fact, a detective agency working with all the Governments; international in its scope and reducible in its ultimate analysis to Amrod.

He is It.

A great deal of what is true and false has been written about detectives and their work. I asked Amrod when I got to know him what in his opinion was the quality most necessary in this business, and he answered me:

'The quality of application, same as in any other business; also, of course, the quality of not being a fool.' He laughed, then he went on: 'Also it is useful to speak and understand, if possible, all the known languages; if not, certainly the six major languages of each hemisphere; also it is useful to know everything that it is useful to know if you are dealing with that mixture of *homo ferox* and *homo sapiens*—the criminal.'

"And, that is everything?"

"Includes everything knowable, from the atomic weight of arsenic to the dynamic properties of—well, well, one talks and talks. Puts it shortly, that all knowledge is useful to the crime investigator and that the most essential branch of knowledge to him is the knowledge of men and women. That is good common-sense.

"As for human nature, a man in my position and way of life soon comes to know that there is Eastern human nature as well as Western. The Eastern man and woman are not quite the same basically as the Western man and woman. I have heard men dispute that, saying that all humanity is essentially the same. My mind, which is also my case book, disputes that."

He called the Java boy who looked after the smoke-room and wrote a chit for an onion cocktail; and as I looked at him it came to me that I would give a good deal to open that case book he spoke of and read some of the stories it undoubtedly contained. On the long run to Southampton this pleasure was given to me. Every
man likes to talk of his hunting to appreciative ears, and in the smoke-room, on the spar-deck, or the hinder-deck when the children were abed, or leaning on the after-rail watching the stern wash by the light of the Indian Ocean stars the locked case book of Mr Amrod would often open to the key of judicious questioning.

There were stories, alas! that cannot be told—incidents of his hunting that I hope to make stories of some day—and tales of his relationship with strange people like that which follows, and which I hope may amuse you.

This is the story he told.

I always take a Dutch ship when I cannot get an English one, that is to say, when a Dutch ship is procurable.

There is no difficulty that way east of 95 deg, and west of Papua, for you have the Nederland ships and heaven knows what other ships all stamped 'Amsterdam' to choose from.

A man said to me at Sandabar, "If you are going home next month and haven't booked your passage, go in the Hague; she doesn't roll, and she's Dutch, good grub, and you will meet more interesting people than you will on the English boats."

That was many years ago, when I was young in the East, and I found the advice had been worth taking, but, though the food was good enough in that special ship, the company was for the most part uninteresting.

I was very young in those days, not more than twenty, and I had not yet entered on my present career and knew little of the world and its ways, especially the world that lies beneath the coloured and glittering surface of the East. I was not a man given to looking after girls, but there was a girl on board the Hague that made me turn my head.

I saw her on the day I embarked. She was not a European, at least if she had any European blood in her veins it was not dominant; she was, in fact, and as I afterwards learned, Chinese on her father's side.

A touch of the Chinese sometimes makes for beauty, and I knew it as I stood there when she had cast her eyes on me and withdrawn them after they had lingered just a second too long.

You will say I am going to tell you a love story. I am—the only affair of love I have ever experienced and a story worth telling, I think—though not for that reason. However, you will judge for yourself.

She was standing beside a woman of Dutch type, her companion, as I afterwards found out, and as they moved away through the crowd of people who were embarking, led by a steward who was evidently showing them to their cabin, I followed them with my eyes and saw that he was taking them to one of the double cabins on the boat deck. Evidently well-to-do people, not second-class anyway, and I remember thinking with a sort of satisfaction that, travelling in the same class as we
were, I might have a chance of making a closer acquaintance with that girl. Then I went into the smoke-room.

II

In the smoke-room was sitting Mynheer Pel, a man I knew, who was going home to Rotterdam on a holiday, and there he was, very hot and flustered after the recovery of a bag which the stowage officer had sent down to the hold instead of to his cabin. He was having a vermouth with a drop of Schiedam, and I joined him, and he said how glad he was I was coming along on the voyage, and then he questioned me about my luggage. He was one of those fatherly men, never happier than when telling others how things should be done, notwithstanding that he often made a mess of his own affairs—witness that bag which had been mis-stowed owing to his own fault in not having it labelled 'Cabin.' Then he questioned me about my prospects and what I was going to do in Europe. I had known him in a business way and met him at the club, and he had never shown much inquisitiveness as to my affairs. It was the ship that brought out this side of him. People on board ship are different from people ashore; on board ship people take an added interest in others and extraordinary mushroom friendships spring to life that die and vanish at the first sight of land.

It is a strong friendship that comes through the Customs House, the struggle with porters and the scramble for the waiting train at the port of debarkation. But there was one point about Mynheer Pel that was both instructive and amusing. This seeming gossip never gave away anything of his own affairs, though his own affairs ought to have been interesting enough, seeing that he had made a fortune out of rubber and was reckoned to be making a fortune out of tin—notwithstanding that he never spoke of other people except in general terms or terms of praise—a very cautious man whose maxim was evidently 'Least said soonest mended.'

Then as the shore-fasts were cast off and the engines began to shake the ship the smoke-room began to fill up, mostly Dutch, and Mynheer Pel, who seemed to know everybody, turned his attention to others than myself.

III

I saw my fascinating girl at dinner. She and her companion occupied a little table on the right of the doorway of the saloon.

As I was seated at the first officer's table, however, I had little chance of watching her closely or making my interest in her felt by glance or expression; I had, in fact, to half-turn my head to see at all; but the glimpses I did catch did not lessen in the feeling that had begun to blossom in my breast.
She was, in fact, very lovely, and all the more lovely by contrast with her dowdy companion, who had even disdained to put on evening dress—a regular Dutch hausfrau-looking woman, but with an air of authority and decision that proclaimed her a Somebody.

I noticed, indeed, that the Java attendants were especially obsequious to her. Yes, evidently a Somebody, but all the same a nobody for me, whose eyes were entirely taken up by her companion.

The girl was not in evening dress like some of the Dutch women who were exhibiting their somewhat too ample charms. She wore a sort of Eastern scarf as only an Eastern woman could wear it, and no jewellery that I could see.

That somehow pleased me. Absurd, isn't it, that I should have taken an interest in her amounting to that? Well, not so absurd perhaps, considering her fascination and that glance which had seemed for a moment to rest favourably upon me—and my youth.

Just at the end of dinner I happened to look round. She was rising from table and about to follow her companion. Our eyes met, and held for a second, then she was gone.

Shortly after I left the saloon and came upstairs to the music-room, where the coffee-table was laid out. The place was soon crowded, but my girl was not there, neither she nor her companion. The band was playing, but I had no ears for the band nor for the conversation of Mynheer Pel. I took a cigar and went on deck and contemplated the moon that was rising over the sea. The moon, that chosen companion of lovers and the love-sick throughout the ages.

IV

They say that when a Negro takes the measles he takes it worse than a white because his system has not been made used to it by custom.

I expect it is the same with love and the young. At all events love, from my short experience of it, is a disease, if mind upset, unrest and sleeplessness are symptomatic of disease.

I tell you I could not keep still. In the morning I was on the lower deck after an early breakfast, looking at the sea, and then in a minute I was crawling up the ladder to the boat deck. Here, I got a seat from which I could see the door of her cabin, and I was rewarded for half an hour's watch in the hot sun by seeing a steward go in with a tray with breakfast things on it, evidently for two.

She was breakfasting in her cabin with her companion, and another half hour's watch in the broiling sun rewarded me with a sight of the companion.

The stout, plain woman came out of the cabin in a dressing gown, went to the rail of the deck and stood for a moment with her hands on it and her eyes taking in the
moving sea. Then she went back to the cabin and shut the door.

Such are the rewards of love.

Tricks—I tell you Nature is one great bag of tricks and the biggest trick in the bag is the one that makes men make fools of themselves in this way. Have you ever thought that this thing called passionate love—so obviously a device of Nature's for a set purpose—not only traps the unfortunates who chance to step on its mechanism but induces quite cold-blooded lookers-on to sing hymns in its praise and to see nothing at all ridiculous in the antics of the trapped ones, whether those antics take the form of guitar playing, money squandering, assassination, or simply sitting like a fool gazing at a cabin doorway?

In the late afternoon down on the lower deck she appeared, seated in a chair and with a fan in her hand, and I who had been on the watch for her so long, did I dare to approach her? Indeed

The smoke-room opened off the lower deck. I went in and ordered a cocktail to pull myself together, and I said to myself:

"Damn that old cat—I'll be even with her yet, but I must get help. Either out of my own mind and my own cunning or from someone else. Surely there is someone on board who knows her. I have seen her talking to several people. When she was going out of the saloon last night she stopped to say a word to a man who was leaving at the same time—well, well—let's think."

VI

Just at that moment into the smoke-room came Mynheer Pel.

He came and sat at the same table with me and ordered a drink.

The Hague was due to stop at Macassar on the morrow, and he asked me was I going on shore. He had been talking to the captain, who had told him it would be a twenty-four hours stop as there was cargo to be taken on, and he said nearly everybody would be going on shore. He proposed that we should go and stop at the Bay Hotel and dine and stay the night; and I agreed provisionally. I said, "I think I'll come, but I'll let you know when we get there. Don't count on me, for at the last moment I may decide to stick to the ship."

Meaning that if the girl was going on shore I would go, if not, not.

"Well, you can please yourself," said Pel, and then he began to talk of the bad ventilation of his cabin, which didn't interest me, and of the superior ventilation of the cabin on the boat deck—which did.

"Tell me," I said, "have you noticed a very pretty girl tied to an awful old woman? They have a cabin on the boat deck."

"Yes," said Pel. "She's an Asiatic."

"Do you know them?"
"Only by sight, not to speak to," said he.

"Well," said I—and then I said a lot. In fact, I said as much as a man can say to another on a subject like that—enough, anyhow, to let him see how deeply I was smitten, and he listened in his heavy way and then, as usual with him, he began to give advice. Why, the man had mis-labelled his luggage and he had not even taken the precaution to book a cabin on the port side to be sure of good ventilation, yet he must begin giving me advice on the conduct of my emotions!

"Young man," said Pel, "I have seen a good deal of the East, and I have never seen any happiness resulting from the mixture of the races, and when men come out from the West for the first time I always make it my duty to warn them against entanglements."

"You would," thought I.

"I will tell you something about mixed marriages," he went on. "The manager of the Sampong Company—young man with good prospects, good health, and fair ability, but an Asiatic-married an English girl. I never mention names or talk of other peoples' affairs if I can help it, but, still, there are affairs that serve as a warning to others and to hint of them is not gossip.

"Well, this man whom I will not name became acquainted with and married a girl belonging to a good business family, English, and for some months they seemed happy enough. And so things would have gone on, no doubt, had the man been European. But he was Asiatic, and suddenly he conceived in his heart a violent jealousy against another man, an absolutely reasonless jealousy.

"This other man had been a great friend of his wife's before marriage, and since the friendship was innocent, why should it not continue?

"Just so; from an ordinary sane European point of view there was no reason why it should not, but this Asiatic gentleman was not a sane European. He brooded on the matter and tried witchcraft—it all came out at the trial—and witchcraft failing, he just took a dagger and one night after a ball, as the guests were leaving, he stabbed the other man but failed to kill him. Well, he is now in the penitentiary and will be there for fifteen years more. Can you fancy the position of the wife, who is still alive and with a young child to look after?"

"No," I said, "I can't, and I don't want to. You are arguing from a particular instance, just as an Eastern, coming to Europe and going into a divorce court, might argue that all European marriages were failures."

"I am arguing from knowledge and common sense," said Pel, "and I could quote instances that occur all over these islands. Why, look you, do you see that man sitting by the door? That is Klinkert, and he could give you instances enough of the peculiarities of the East. He is an official of Macassar, a lively place, as you will see to-morrow. They tell me he has been hunting the islands for a Dyak maidservant of thirteen who ran off with her mistress's jewellery and also for a delightful woman
who killed her husband with powdered glass. And, if you were to ask him he'd no
doubt give you other instances and cases bearing on Eastern mentality and its little
peculiarities."

I didn't quarrel with him, for I thought he might be useful on the morrow, though
how I could not yet quite see, but it seemed to me that these opinionated people are
the most easy to flatter and that by the gentle art of flattery I might bring him to my
side and make him an assistant in my plans.

VII

When you asked me as to the qualities necessary for detective work I said
application, which is, in other words, attention to business.

I have that quality, and I had it in those days, though my business then was, for the
moment, simply love-making.

I lay awake that night devising ways and means. I had determined that, come what
might, I was going to talk to that girl and get to know her, with the full belief in my
mind that my passion for her would not be lessened by knowledge, and the curious
fact appeared that all Pel's talk about the women of the East and all his good advice,
so far from putting me off, increased my determination. If they left the ship at
Southampton, for which I was bound, well and good; if they went on to Amsterdam,
I would go on, too.

That was me in those days, and that is me still—ceaseless pursuit of the object I
am pursuing—in other words, attention to business raised to the nth power.

I must tell you that when I am working on a case I devote part of my energies to
the building of plans of action to suit possible developments, and that night I was
building plans to meet all contingencies.

The companion being evidently Dutch, it was a hundred to one they would be
going on to Amsterdam, and there, despite himself, Pel might be useful; also during
the long voyage across the Indian Ocean and through the Red Sea and
Mediterranean there would be sure to be chances. I determined to make friends with
the officers of the ship and so on.

Then I fell asleep and awoke to find the Hague at wharf of Macassar.

Now, the terrible thing that happened to me, the thing that one might compare to
an accident affecting the soul and leaving it with a dead spot towards certain things,
was like this:

Pel, whom I met at early breakfast in the saloon, was full of the prospect of his
trip ashore. In some ways he was like a great boy. He had got on his best clothes and
his best spirits, and he infected me with his joie de vivre, a joy, alas! destined for
swift extermination. The shore scents and sounds and glimpses through the open
portholes helped, and I agreed to go with him and not to wait, as I had intended, on
the chance of the girl remaining behind and being more accessible when the others were gone— I had the long voyage before me to make good in.

I put some night things in a bag and presently found myself with Pel among the crush of passengers at the gangway.

The girl was going ashore with the others, she and her companion. I pushed up till I was right behind her, and as I did so I heard Pel whispering to me excitedly, with the excitement of suddenly gotten news, something about powdered glass.

Then I saw that the girl's left wrist was manacled to the right wrist of her companion.

Klinkert was walking behind them.
When Mordecai Chiddock came to join the lighthouse staff on Shivering Sand, Jezreel Cornish was taking his allowance of sleep, and Chiddock, being new to the place, did not know who it was he would meet when Cornish woke up. Otherwise, the boat which had brought him and a month's provisions over from the mainland would never have gone back without him.

Until Chiddock came we had never been more than two at the Shivering Sand. That was a bad arrangement, of course, and it was I who got the worst of it. Once Reuben Cleary fell sick, and had to take to his bed. That was just after the monthly boat had been, and until it came again I had to work night and day and nurse him into the bargain. Then there was Pharaoh Nanjulian: he was a melancholy sort from his youth, and the loneliness and monotony affected his brain. His wits gave out at last, and he used to spend the whole day in singing psalms and hymns, and preaching to the sea-birds. We had great storms that autumn, and the monthly boat came a fortnight late, and found me about done for, what with living day and night with a madman, and doing work for two. And, it was because of what I said—not mincing matters—that it was decided to send a third man, so that in such cases as those of Cleary and Nanjulian the other man should not be utterly and badly along.

Chiddock was the man who was sent. Of course, neither Cornish nor myself knew who would be sent; all we knew was that the September boat would bring a third keeper off with it.

It was a fine, bright morning when he came, and I watched him narrowly as he came on to the platform at the foot of the lighthouse, which could only make at certain times. He was a thick-set, swarthy man of middle age; he had curling black hair and beard, and his eyes were shiftier than I cared about. However, he bade me good morning civilly enough, and when he had got his own things up from the boat, gave me a ready hand with the month's stores. It was not till the boat was off again that he seemed disposed for conversation.
"My name's Chiddock," he says. "Mordecai Chiddock."

He offered me a plug of tobacco, and took a sort of comprehensive glance all around him.
"This," he says, "is a lonelier place than most of 'em."
"You'll make all the more company," I says. "There'll be three of us now."

He gave a glance at the door at the top of the stone stairway, as if he expected to see the third man appear.
"Ah," he said, "and what sort of shipmate is the other partner?"
"Oh, he's all right," said I, off-hand. "He's only been here this last month, but he's a decent man, is Jezreel."

Chiddock turned round on me like a flash, and I saw a queer look come into his eyes.
"Jezreel!" he said, short and sharp-like. "That's an uncommon name. I knew a man of that name once. This man's other name, what might it be now, Graburn?"
"Cornish," I answered, "Jezreel Cornish."

Then I knew that something was amiss, for his cheeks lost all their dark colour and turned a strange pasty white, and I saw sweat burst out on them. He came a step nearer and looked at me with burning eyes, and his lips quivered under his black moustache.

"Jezreel Cornish!" he says, almost in a whisper. "Jezreel Cornish! A tallish, scraggy-built man with a long, sharp nose and red hair and ferrety eyes; is it a man like that?"

"And, what if it is?" I said, watching him.

He drew a long breath, and, turning, looked out across the bay after the boat from the mainland, as if he would call her back. But she was already a speck in the distance, and he turned again to me, breathing hard.

"If it is," he says, muttering his words, "if it is, mister—well, then, I wish I was in that craft out there, or on shore, or anywhere, that's all. Jezreel Cornish—ah!"

I saw his face suddenly change from white to red, and from red to white, and, turning, there was Cornish himself coming down the stairs, yawning and stretching after his sleep. And quick as lightning the newcomer's hand went round to his hip-pocket, and I guessed what he had there.

"If that's a pistol you've got," I says, sharp and quick, "you can leave it where it is. I'm boss here, and—"

He seemed to give no more heed to me than if I had been a child, and he kept his eyes on Cornish with the watchfulness of a dog that expects a blow. And, I turned then to look at Cornish, wondering what it was that was about to happen.

He was not a quick man at noticing things, Cornish, and he had got to the foot of the stairs before he looked fully at Chiddock. But when he looked, I saw all the
colour go out of his face, too, and when it came back it was a sort of dark red, and there was that in his eyes which meant murder. He crouched his body up and together, as an animal does when it's going to spring, and he came forward with his sharp teeth showing under his ragged red moustache; and I knew then that I was going to have a troublous time before the boat came again. For these two, Chiddock and Cornish, stood glaring at each other for all the world like wild beasts that are mad to be at grips, and I could see that it needed but a word to let hell loose between them.

Cornish was the first to speak, and I shouldn't have known his voice; it was so changed and so awful. And, it was to me that he spoke, and not to Chiddock.

"Is this the new keeper, Graburn?" says he. "Am I looking at him?"

"You are," I says, "and not any pleasanter than he's looking at you. Jezreel Cornish. And, I'm not so blind that I can't see that there's black, cruel, bad blood between you two, and I tell you I'll have none of that sort of thing here; so mind your manners, both of you."

"And, he'll be here with us, night and day, shut up with us on Shivering Sand!" says Cornish, watching Chiddock with the eyes of a hungry devil. "Shut up on Shivering Sand, and with me!"

"And with me, and both of you under my orders!" I rapped out sternly. "And I'll see that—"

Cornish spat on the ground at his feet.

"Last time I set eyes on your devil's face, Mordecai Chiddock," he says, in a voice that had suddenly turned as mild as milk, "I told you I'd murder you when the time came for my chance. It's come! I've got you to myself now, and by God above, I'll kill you!"

What next happened was over in a flash. For, Chiddock suddenly whipped the revolver out of his pocket and had Cornish covered. But before he could shoot I knocked it out of his hand, and the next instant had kicked it clean over the edge of the rock into the sea. And with that Chiddock suddenly turned more frightened than before, and it seemed to me that he was going to whimper like a child whose nurse has just checked it.

But Cornish only laughed in a sniggering, sneering fashion, and he turned away from us and went slowly up the stairway into the lighthouse, leaving Chiddock standing there before me with his limbs trembling as if he'd suddenly got the ague, and his damp face whiter than ever. When he spoke his voice was as spiritless as could be, and I saw the man was badly frightened.

"You've left me defenceless, Mr Graburn," he says, in a queer-sounding voice. "He'll kill me!"

"There's going to be no killing while I'm about here, my man," I answered; "and you'd best tell me what all this is about. There's blood feud between you?"
But, instead of answering me directly, he began to talk and murmur to himself, and I could make nothing of what I overheard; and all the time he talked his eyes, as restless as a freshly trapped animal's, were searching the sea all round us, as if he hoped to signal some vessel to come and take him off.

"There's no living soul will come to this rock until the boat comes a month hence, Chiddock," says I. "You can make up your mind to that. So, if you want me to help you you'd best to speak, quick."

He turned then, and glowered at me with a sullen rage burning in his eyes.

"If you hadn't treated me as you have," he said, nodding towards the spot where the revolver had gone, "I'd have shot him there and then, and been free of him. As it is, you'll have to stand between us."

"Jezreel Cornish has no firearms," I said. "There's nothing on the rock but an old fowling-piece, and the powder and shot are in my care, and nobody but me can come at them."

Now, this was not strictly true, because I had a revolver of my own carefully hidden away for emergencies; but I was not going to let anybody know of it. However, Chiddock seemed to think nothing of what I had just said.

"He'll kill me," he repeated, "and it'll be murder on your part if you let him! You'll have to get me away, Mr Graburn; and till you do, how will I get meat or sleep? I'm hungry and thirsty now."

"It strikes me you're a coward!" says I. "Sit you down while I go up and see what Cornish can tell me about this."

He sat himself down on a rock as obediently as a child might, and I climbed the stair and made into our living-room, where I found Cornish eating and drinking as unconcernedly as if nothing had happened.

"Now then, Cornish," I says, sitting down between him and the door, "what's all this about? I'm headkeeper here and I'm going to know what you're after."

"What I'm after," he says, coolly, "is killing that man outside, which I shall surely do. There's no hurry. The last time I met him I told him what I should do, and I should have done it then, but he was too cunning, and gave me the slip. That he cannot do this time. He can't swim to the mainland, and he can't fly; he's netted. I can bide my time, but he'll never go off this rock alive!"

"What's he done to you?" I asked him. "As you're so candid about killing him, you might as well be candid about the crime you've got against him."

Before he answered he cut himself a great slab of the corned beef he was eating, and ate heartily of it, just as if he hadn't a trouble in the world.

"That man," he said at last, nodding towards the open door, through which you could see a patch of dancing sea, "that man isn't a man at all; he's a devil! A low, mean, black devil, Mr Graburn. Him and me was shipmates once, and we were in Valparaiso together, and there we made a nice bit of money— never mind how. I
was struck down with a bad fever; the last thing I remembered was trusting him with my money, and his promising to send most of it home to my wife in England. Then the deliriums came on, and I never knew anymore until I came to in a charity hospital. The skunk had taken all I had and left me. What's more, he sailed home to England, found my wife, got her to sell up the home and a bit of a little shop she'd got together on pretense of sending the money to me, and persuaded her to trust him with the sending of it—which, naturally, he never did. And, when I did come home, my wife was dead—died in the workhouse, where I found the kids. And, of course, I've got to kill him!"

"If all you say's true, Cornish," I said, "he deserves more than that. But I'll have no killing here, understand, now!"

"I don't say that I'll kill him to-day, or to-morrow," he says, paying no more heed to me than if I hadn't been there.

"Any time'll do me, now that he's trapped. I'll play with him as a cat plays with a mouse. I'll make him as he can't sleep o' nights with fear that death's close on him. I shall enjoy thinking what way I'll kill him; I'll invent something good!"

"I'm inclined to think trouble and anger have turned your brain, Cornish," says I. "You can think what you're pleased to think," he says, still as cold in his manner as a jelly-fish, "but you'll see Mordecai Chiddock's corpse before the boat comes again."

"If his living body's turned into a corpse by you, Jezreel Cornish," says I, "you'll only swing for it."

He laughed at that in his sneering fashion.

The sound of it made me frightened, for I could not bring myself to decide whether the man was in his right mind or gone out of his senses like Pharaoh Nanjulian.

"You wouldn't have a chance of escape," I said.

"Who says I wanted one?" he says. "Since I found my wife dead in the workhouse I've only lived to kill Mordecai Chiddock. And, I say you shall see his corpse, Mr Graburn—and I don't care if you see mine after you've seen his. But I tell you, once for all, I'll kill him!"

I left him sitting there, still eating, and went down to the rocks again, to find Chiddock where I had left him. He turned round on me with fright in his eyes.

"If what I've heard about you is true," I said, "you're the lowest-down scoundrel I ever heard of, Chiddock. Death's too good for you, it's too easy. You ought to be skinned alive!"

"I knew that you'd side with him!" he growled. "But it'll be found out, and it'll be murder against the two of you—mind you that, mister."

"Leave that to me," says I, and put down at his side some victuals and drink that I had brought out with me. "And in the meantime," I says, "get that food into you and
be more of a man."

He made no reply to that, but fell upon the victual like a famished wolf, while I turned back again to the lighthouse. I had a notion in my head, and I was going to put it into shape at once.

There was nothing for it but to keep these two men apart. That Cornish would kill Chiddock I now had no doubt—no more than that Chiddock would have killed Cornish if I had not knocked the revolver out of his hand. Now, that revolver had given me an idea. I, being the only man of the three with a weapon, was certainly master of the situation. And accordingly, as soon as I re-entered the lighthouse, I went to my own chamber, secured and loaded my revolver, and turned into the living-room to speak, with authority, to Jezreel Cornish.

Jezreel had finished his eating, but he still sat at his end of the table, staring moodily at the empty plate. I sat down at the other end; when he at last looked up it was to look straight into the barrel of the revolver.

"What's—what's the meaning of that?" he growled.

"The meaning, Jezreel, my lad, is that," says I, "I'm master here in more ways than one, but especially because I'm the only man of the three that's got a weapon. Now, you and the man outside are not going to meet. It's your turn for duty; you'll go up that stair, and I shall lock you in. When it's your hour for coming off I'll let you out; but you'll not see him, because he'll be locked up, too, until you're locked in your own chamber. You and him, Cornish, are going to do all the work this next month; I'm going to do nothing but play gaoler and cook until the boat comes and takes one of you off. Now you can just go up to your duty, and I'll draw the bolt on you. Get under way, Cornish!"

"And, what if I don't?" he says, looking ugly.

"There's no ifs in this case," says I. "Come!"

He stared hard at me and the revolver for a good minute, then he pushed back his chair and got up.

"I want some tobacco out of the cupboard," he says. "I suppose I can get that?"

"You can get what you like out of the cupboard," I answered him, "so long as you get upstairs thereafter. And, remember I've got the drop on you, Cornish."

He mumbled something that I couldn't catch, and going over to the cupboard where we kept our general stores, went in. He mumbled and grumbled all the time he was in the cupboard, and his face was angry and scowling when he came out. But he marched straight off to the door of the winding stair which led up to the lantern, and in another second I had turned the key on him.

Now, I ought to tell you what this lighthouse was like. Some fifteen miles from the mainland, it stood on a gaunt, bare rock which rose behind a permanent bank in the sea, that had long been known as the Shivering Sand because of the strange motion of the water over it. The entrance was gained by a stone stairway, which led
to a double door some twenty feet above the rock; when you passed that door you found yourself in the living-room, which made a half of the circular space of the lighthouse; the other half was divided into four segments, each forming separate chambers. A winding stair went out of the living-room into an upper room, which we used for stores, material, and such-like; where it passed from one to the other was a strong door, the one that I had secured against Cornish's descent.

Above that was a stair of eighty-nine steps to the lamp-room and lantern, from which a revolving light shone out to warn all craft away from us.

So long as I was master I saw no difficulty in keeping Chiddock and Cornish separate. Every door in the place was fitted with good strong locks; on Cornish's I resolved to fit a bolt from a store of hardware which I had by me. Before I released one man from duty I would lock the other in his room; when the released man was safely locked up I would let the other out.

All this being settled, and Cornish safely secured, I went to the door and called to Chiddock, telling him that it would now be safe for him to enter. He came to the foot of the stairway, cringing and fearful; the more I saw of him the more I knew what an arrant coward he was. As things turned out I had to go halfway down the stair and explain what I had done before he would consent to gather his things together and come up.

"Now then, Chiddock," I said, showing him his chamber, "this is your room. You know the arrangement. You came here to do one turn of work in three, as things are you'll do one in two. And keep to what I've arranged, or I'll let Jezreel Cornish loose on you."

"He'll not forgive you for baulking him," he muttered. "Look to yourself, mister. You did me a bad turn in knocking that revolver away. I know Cornish when he's roused."

I made no answer to that, but went about the job of fixing the bolt on the outside of Cornish's door. And, with this and other things the afternoon passed quietly, and at the usual time I began to busy myself in making ready for supper.

Mordecai Chiddock sat watching me as if he meant to eat all that I was preparing for the table. For a man in his position and under such fear, he was the hungriest man I ever met, and when we sat down he fell upon the food and the hot coffee as if he had tasted nothing for years.

It gave me no pleasure to sit at meat with a man who had robbed his mate and his mate's wife and children, and I soon got up and left him to finish, after which I served out our usual allowance of rum. I made no answer when he gave me some sort of pledge or toast; instead, I carried my tot into my own chamber and sat down on my bunk to drink it at my leisure. After that I remember lying down for my usual forty winks and feeling more than usually sleepy, and then I remember nothing until I woke to find myself staring at Jezreel Cornish, whose sharp nose and ferrety eyes
were very close to my face. It did not take a moment to realise that I was bound about arms and shoulders with a rope that pressed somewhat unpleasantly, and that my revolver was in Cornish's right hand.

"You made a mistake in letting me go to that cupboard, Graburn," he said, sneering at me. "I drugged the coffee and the rum.

"And, as for locking me up like a gaolbird, you forgot that a man like me thinks nothing of coming down a hundred-foot rope. I told you I should kill Mordecai Chiddock."

"You've murdered him!" I gasped.

"I'm murdering him," he says, as cool as ever. "He's a-staring at his death in the face. I'm a merciful man, Graburn, I'm giving him time to repent. Come and see him die. And—quick!"

He suddenly menaced me so meaningly with the revolver that I struggled to my feet and let him half-pull, half-thrust me from the room. He forced me across the living-room, and through the double door, and down the stair upon the plateau of rock into the brightest and silverest moonlight I ever remember—a night so calm and still and beautiful that you'd have wondered any human being could have had anything but good thoughts in his heart between then and sunrise. But Jezreel Cornish was no longer a human being; the devil had taken possession of him.

"Come and see Mordecai Chiddock being a-murdered of, Graburn," he said, chuckling as if it was all a joke. "Come and hear him a-begging and a-praying for mercy—Mordecai what never had no mercy on man nor woman! Come, I tell you!" and he dragged me along as if I had been no more than an infant. "Now look at Mordecai Chiddock, a-facing of his death like the brave sailorman he is!"

From the point to which he dragged me I could see all the devilish ingenuity of what Cornish had done. In the outline of the rock on which Shivering Sand Lighthouse stood there was a crescent-shaped indentation which might have been cut through as you cut into a cheese with a tin scoop. We stood on the edge of one side of this; on the other, dangling from ropes which had been fastened about his waist and under his armpits, the bright moonlight shining full upon him, hung Mordecai Chiddock, a swaying, trembling figure against the silent, pitiless rock behind him.

And, he was up to his waist in the advancing tide, and he would soon be submerged and drowned!

I felt myself seized with a sudden fury at the sight of this specimen of Cornish's cruelty, and turned on him with a feeling that would have manifested itself in an attack on him if I had not been bound.

"You devil!" I cried. "You—"

But he raised the revolver, and for a second I thought my time was come.

"Keep a civil tongue, Mr Graburn," he said, sullenly. "It doesn't much matter to me whether you live or die, but I don't want to murder you. After all, I'm not
murdering Chiddock; I'm carrying out justice on him. Nice to hear him, isn't it?"

The wretch swinging in the rising sea not ten yards in front of us had caught sight of me and burst into frantic entreaties for help. But these entreaties were mingled with the most awful curses and blasphemies I had ever heard, and suddenly Cornish began to add a demoniac laughter and jeering to them.

There was nothing but Chiddock's head left above the waves at last. I knew exactly where the water would rise to, and that in another five minutes he would have gone. And, Cornish knew that too, and an idea seemed to strike him. He laughed aloud—a devilish laugh that made my blood turn to ice.

"He's only a few minutes left," he said, "I'll go nearer and whisper a few words of parting to him. It'll be a friendly thing, to remind him of what a lot of friends he'll meet presently."

He made off towards the point where Chiddock was hanging, with the evident intention of calling over the edge into the wretched man's very ears.

As he came near, just as if Providence had it in mind that he should be cheated of seeing his victim die, he tripped over the rope by which Chiddock was secured. He pitched head foremost over the edge of the rock, and I heard his head strike on the ledge beneath, and saw him cleave the oily-faced water like a plummet. And after that neither I nor any man ever saw Jezreel Cornish again.

It was then that I fainted, hearing a long cry of final despair from Chiddock. It may have been unconsciousness rather than fainting—it was long after daybreak when I came round. I crawled to the edge of the rock, and looked into the cove. Chiddock hung limp against the rock, his head dangling on his shoulder.

I could do nothing to help myself; Cornish had made certain in securing me. During the day I contrived to drag myself into shelter against the fierce sunlight, but I almost went mad with hunger and thirst and horror of my situation. That night no light shone out from the Shivering Sand. But its failure saved me, for the darkened lighthouse roused suspicion, and before midnight a fast Government vessel was at the rock to find one dead man hanging over the waves where another was tossing, and a man who was not far from dead, and utterly delirious, babbling incoherently of what he had seen.
The Adventure of the Speckled Band

By Arthur Conan Doyle

On glancing over my notes of the seventy-odd cases in which I have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stroke Moran. The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know that there are wide-spread rumours as to the death of Dr Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.

It was early in April in the year '83 that I woke one morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my bed. He was a late riser as a rule, and as the clock on the mantel-piece showed me that it was only a quarter past seven, I blinked up at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

"Very sorry to knock you up, Watson," said he, "but it's the common lot this morning. Mrs Hudson has been knocked up, she retorted upon me, and I on you."

"What is it, then—a fire?"

"No; a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. She is waiting now in the sitting-room. Now, when young ladies wander about the metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is something very
pressing which they have to communicate. Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. I thought, at any rate, that I should call you and give you the chance."

"My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything."

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis, with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes, and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

"Good-morning, madam," said Holmes, cheerily. "My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha! I am glad to see that Mrs Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observed that you are shivering."

"It is not cold which makes me shiver," said the woman, in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

"What, then?"

"It is fear, Mr Holmes. It is terror." She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and gray, with restless, frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature gray, and her expression was weary and haggard. Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances.

"You must not fear," said he, soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. "We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see."

"You know me, then?"

"No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station."

The lady gave a violent start, and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

"There is no mystery, my dear madam," said he, smiling, "the left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver."

"Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct," said she. "I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I can stand this strain no longer; I shall go mad if it continues. I have no one to turn to—none, save only one, who cares for me, and he, poor
fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you, Mr Holmes: I have heard of you from Mrs Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her sore need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, sir, do you not think that you could help me, too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me? At present it is out of my power to reward you for your services, but in a month or six weeks I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful."

Holmes turned to his desk, and unlocking it, drew out a small case-book, which he consulted.

"Farintosh," said he. "Ah yes, I recall the case; it was concerned with an opal tiara. I think it was before your time, Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best. And now, I beg that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the matter."

"Alas!" replied our visitor, "the very horror of my situation lies in the fact that my fears are so vague, and my suspicions depend so entirely upon small points, which might seem trivial to another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it as the fancies of a nervous woman. He does not say so, but I can read it from his soothing answers and averted eyes. But I have heard, Mr Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me."

"I am all attention, madam."

"My name is Helen Stoner, and I am living with my stepfather, who is the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England, the Roylotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey."

Holmes nodded his head. "The name is familiar to me," said he.

"The family was at one time among the richest in England, and the estates extended over the borders into Berkshire in the north, and Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four successive heirs were of a dissolute and wasteful disposition, and the family ruin was eventually completed by a gambler in the days of the Regency. Nothing was left save a few acres of ground, and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy mortage. The last squire dragged out his existence there, living the horrible life of an aristocratic pauper: but his only son, my stepfather, seeing that he must adapt himself to the new conditions, obtained an advance from a relative, which enabled him to take a medical degree, and went out to Calcutta, where, by his professional skill and his force of character, he established a large practice. In a fit of anger, however, caused by some robberies
which had been perpetrated in the house, he beat his native butler to death, and narrowly escaped a capital sentence. As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment, and afterwards returned to England, a morose and disappointed man.

"When Dr Roylott was in India he married my mother, Mrs Stoner, the young widow of Major-general Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery. My sister Julia and I were twins, and we were only two years old at the time of my mother's re-marriage. She had a considerable sum of money—not less than £1,000 a year—and this she bequeathed to Dr Roylott entirely while we resided with him, with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to each of us in the event of our marriage. Shortly after our return to England my mother died—she was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe. Dr Roylott then abandoned his attempts to establish himself in practice in London, and took us to live with him in the old ancestral house at Stoke Moran. The money which my mother had left was enough for all our wants, and there seemed to be no obstacle to our happiness.

"But a terrible change came over our stepfather about this time. Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbours, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house, and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather's case it had, I believe, been intensified by his long residence in the tropics. A series of disgraceful brawls took place, two of which ended in the police-court, until at last he became the terror of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger.

"Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a stream, and it was only by paying over all the money which I could gather together that I was able to avert another public exposure. He had no friends at all save the wandering gypsies, and he would give these vagabonds leave to encamp upon the few acres of bramble-covered land which represent the family estate, and would accept in return the hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end. He has a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely over his grounds, and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.

"You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. She was but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already begun to whiten, even as mine has."

"Your sister is dead, then?"

"She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish to speak to you.
You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see any one of our own age and position. We had, however, an aunt, my mother's maiden sister, Miss Honoria Westphail, who lives near Harrow, and we were occasionally allowed to pay short visits at this lady's house. Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there a half-pay major of marines, to whom she became engaged. My stepfather learned of the engagement when my sister returned, and offered no objection to the marriage; but within a fortnight of the day which had been fixed for the wedding, the terrible event occurred which has deprived me of my only companion.

Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed and his head sunk in a cushion, but he half-opened his lids now and glanced across at his visitor.

"Pray be precise as to details," said he.

"It is easy for me to be so, for every event of that dreadful time is seared into my memory. The manor-house is, as I have already said, very old, and only one wing is now inhabited. The bedrooms in this wing are on the ground floor, the sitting-room being in the central block of the buildings. Of these bedrooms the first is Dr Roylott's, the second my sister's, and the third my own. There is no communication between them, but they all open out into the same corridor. Do I make myself plain?"

"Perfectly so."

"The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. That fatal night Dr Roylott had gone to his room early, though we knew that he had not retired to rest, for my sister was troubled by the smell of the strong Indian cigars which it was his custom to smoke. She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where she sat for some time chatting about her approaching wedding. At eleven o'clock she rose to leave me but she paused at the door and looked back.

"'Tell me, Helen,' said she, 'have you ever heard anyone whistle in the dead of the night?'

"'Never,' said I.

"'I suppose that you could not possibly whistle, yourself, in your sleep?'

"'Certainly not. But why?'

"'Because during the last few nights I have always, about three in the morning, heard a low, clear whistle. I am a light sleeper, and it has awakened me. I cannot tell where it came from—perhaps from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. I thought that I would just ask you whether you had heard it.'

"'No, I have not. It must be those wretched gypsies in the plantation.'

"'Very likely. And yet, if it were on the lawn, I wonder that you did not hear it also.'

"'Ah, but I sleep more heavily than you.'
"Well, it is of no great consequence, at any rate.' She smiled back at me, closed my door, and a few minutes later I heard her key turn in the lock."

"Indeed," said Holmes. "Was it your custom always to lock yourselves in at night?"

"Always."

"And why?"

"I think that I mentioned to you that the doctor kept a cheetah and a baboon. We had no feeling of security unless our doors were locked."

"Quite so. Pray proceed with your statement."

"I could not sleep that night. A vague feeling of impending misfortune impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect, were twins, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two souls which are so closely allied. It was a wild night. The wind was howling outside, and the rain was beating and splashing against the windows. Suddenly, amid all the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth the wild scream of a terrified woman. I knew that it was my sister's voice. I sprang from my bed, wrapped a shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had fallen. As I ran down the passage, my sister's door was unlocked, and revolved slowly upon its hinges. I stared at it horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. By the light of the corridor-lamp I saw my sister appear at the opening, her face blanched with terror, her hands groping for help, her whole figure swaying to and fro like that of a drunkard. I ran to her and threw my arms round her, but at that moment her knees seemed to give way and she fell to the ground. She writhed as one who is in terrible pain, and her limbs were dreadfully convulsed. At first I thought that she had not recognised me, but as I bent over her she suddenly shrieked out in a voice which I shall never forget, 'Oh, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!' There was something else which she would fain have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the doctor's room, but a fresh convulsion seized her and choked her words. I rushed out, calling loudly for my stepfather, and I met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. When he reached my sister's side she was unconscious, and though he poured brandy down her throat and sent for medical aid from the village, all efforts were in vain, for she slowly sank and died without having recovered her consciousness. Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister."

"One moment," said Holmes: "are you sure about this whistle and metallic sound? Could you swear to it?"

"That was what the county coroner asked me at the inquiry. It is my strong impression that I heard it, and yet, among the crash of the gale and the creaking of an old house, I may possibly have been deceived."

"Was your sister dressed?"
"No, she was in her night-dress. In her right hand was found the charred stump of a match, and in her left a matchbox."

"Showing that she had struck a light and looked about her when the alarm took place. That is important. And, what conclusions did the coroner come to?"

"He investigated the case with great care, for Dr Roylott's conduct had long been notorious in the county, but he was unable to find any satisfactory cause of death. My evidence showed that the door had been fastened upon the inner side, and the windows were blocked by old-fashioned shutters with broad iron bars, which were secured every night. The walls were carefully sounded, and were shown to be quite solid all round, and the flooring was also thoroughly examined, with the same result. The chimney is wide, but is barred up by four large staples. It is certain, therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end. Besides, there were no marks of any violence upon her."

"How about poison?"

"The doctors examined her for it, but without success."

"What do you think that this unfortunate lady died of, then?"

"It is my belief that she died of pure fear and nervous shock though what it was that frightened her I cannot imagine."

"Were there gypsies in the plantation at the time?"

"Yes, there are nearly always some there."

"Ah, and what did you gather from this allusion to a band—a speckled band?"

"Sometimes I have thought that it was merely the wild talk of delirium, sometimes that it may have referred to some band of people, perhaps to those very gypsies in the plantation. I do not know whether the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them wear over their heads might have suggested the strange adjective which she used."

Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from being satisfied.

"These are very deep waters," said he; "pray go on with your narrative."

"Two years have passed since then, and my life has been until lately lonelier than ever. A month ago, however, a dear friend, whom I have known for many years, has done me the honour to ask my hand in marriage. His name is Armitage—Percy Armitage—the second son of Mr Armitage, of Crane Water, near Reading. My stepfather has offered no opposition to the match, and we are to be married in the course of the spring. Two days ago some repairs were started in the west wing of the building, and my bed-room wall has been pierced, so that I have had to move into the chamber in which my sister died, and to sleep in the very bed in which she slept. Imagine, then, my thrill of terror when last night, as I lay awake, thinking over her terrible fate, I suddenly heard in the silence of the night the low whistle which had been the herald of her own death. I sprang up and lit the lamp, but nothing was to be seen in the room. I was too shaken to go to bed again, however, so I dressed,
and as soon as it was daylight I slipped down, got a dog-cart at the 'Crown Inn,' which is opposite, and drove to Leatherhead, from whence I have come on this morning with the one object of seeing you and asking your advice."

"You have done wisely," said my friend. "But have you told me all?"

"Yes, all."

"Miss Roylott, you have not. You are screening your stepfather."

"Why, what do you mean?"

For answer Holmes pushed back the frill of black lace which fringed the hand that lay upon our visitor's knee. Five little livid spots, the marks of four fingers and a thumb, were printed upon the white wrist.

"You have been cruelly used," said Holmes.

The lady coloured deeply and covered over her injured wrist. "He is a hard man," she said, "and perhaps he hardly knows his own strength."

There was a long silence, during which Holmes leaned his chin upon his hands and stared into the crackling fire.

"This is a very deep business," he said, at last. "There are a thousand details which I should have desired to know before I decide upon our course of action. Yet, we have not a moment to lose. If we were to come to Stoke Moran to-day, would it be possible for us to see over these rooms without the knowledge of your stepfather?"

"As it happens, he spoke of coming into town to-day upon some most important business. It is probable that he will be away all day, and that there would be nothing to disturb you. We have a house-keeper now, but she is old and foolish, and I could easily get her out of the way."

"Excellent. You are not averse to this trip, Watson?"

"By no means."

"Then we shall both come. What are you going to do yourself?"

"I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am in town. But I shall return by the twelve o'clock train, so as to be there in time for your coming."

"And you may expect us early in the afternoon. I have myself some small business matters to attend to. Will you not wait and breakfast?"

"No, I must go. My heart is lightened already since I have confided my trouble to you. I shall look forward to seeing you again this afternoon." She dropped her thick black veil over her face and glided from the room.

"And what do you think of it all, Watson?" asked Sherlock Holmes, leaning back in his chair.

"It seems to me to be a most dark and sinister business."

"Dark enough and sinister enough."

"Yet, if the lady is correct in saying that the flooring and walls are sound, and that the door, window, and chimney are impassable, then her sister must have been
undoubtedly alone when she met her mysterious end."

"What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles, and what of the very peculiar words of the dying woman?"

"I cannot think."

"When you combine the ideas of whistles at night, the presence of a band of gypsies who are on intimate terms with this old doctor, the fact that we have every reason to believe that the doctor has an interest in preventing his step-daughter's marriage, the dying allusion to a band, and, finally, the fact that Miss Helen Stoner heard a metallic clang, which might have been caused by one of those metal bars which secured the shutters falling back into their place, I think that there is good ground to think that the mystery may be cleared along those lines."

"But what, then, did the gypsies do?"

"I cannot imagine."

"I see many objections to any such theory."

"And so do I. It is precisely for that reason that we are going to Stoke Moran this day. I want to see whether the objections are fatal, or if they may be explained away. But what in the name of the devil!"

The ejaculation had been drawn from my companion by the fact that our door had been suddenly dashed open, and that a huge man had framed himself in the aperture. His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters, with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand. So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross bar of the doorway, and his breadth seemed to span it across from side to side. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and his high, thin, fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey.

"Which of you is Holmes?" asked this apparition.

"My name, sir; but you have the advantage of me," said my companion, quietly.

"I am Dr Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran."

"Indeed, doctor," said Holmes, blandly. "Pray take a seat."

"I will do nothing of the kind. My step-daughter has been -here. I have traced her. What has she been saying to you?"

"It is a little cold for the time of the year," said Holmes.

"What has she been saying to you?" screamed the old man, furiously.

"But I have heard that the crocuses promise well," continued my companion, imperturbably.

"Hal You put me off, do you?" said our new visitor, taking a step forward and shaking his hunting-crop. "I know you, you scoundrel! I have heard of you before. You are Holmes, the meddler."
My friend smiled. 
"Holmes, the busybody!"
His smile broadened.
"Holmes, the Scotland-Yard Jack-in-office!"
Holmes chuckled heartily. "Your conversation is most entertaining," said he. "When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught."
"I will go when I have said my say. Don't you dare to meddle with my affairs. I know that Miss Stoner has been here. I traced her! I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! See here." He stepped swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with his huge brown hands.
"See that you keep yourself out of my grip," he snarled, and hurling the twisted poker into the fireplace, he strode out of the room.
"He seems a very amiable person," said Holmes, laughing. "I am not quite so bulky, but if he had remained I might have shown him that my grip was not much more feeble than his own." As he spoke he picked up the steel poker, and with a sudden effort straightened it out again.
"Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force! This incident gives zest to our investigation, however, and I only trust that our little friend will not suffer from her impudence in allowing this brute to trace her. And now, Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterwards I shall walk down to Doctors' Commons, where I hope to get some data which may help us in this matter."
It was nearly one o'clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his excursion. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, scrawled over with notes and figures.
"I have seen the will of the deceased wife," said he. "To determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. The total income, which at the time of the wife's death was little short of £1,100, is now, through the fall in agricultural prices, not more than £750. Each daughter can claim an income of £250, in case of marriage. It is evident, therefore, that if both girls had married, this beauty would have had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to a very serious extent. My morning's work has not been wasted, since it has proved that he has the very strongest motives for standing in the way of anything of the sort. And now, Watson, this is too serious for dawdling, especially as the old man is aware that we are interesting ourselves in his affairs; so if you are ready, we shall call a cab and drive to Waterloo. I should be very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your pocket. An Eley's No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel pokers into knots. That and a toothbrush are, I think, all that we need."
At Waterloo we were fortunate in catching a train for Leatherhead, where we hired a trap at the station inn, and drove for four or five miles through the lovely Surrey lanes. It was a perfect day, with a bright sun and a few fleecy clouds in the
heavens. The trees and way-side hedges were just throwing out their first green shoots, and the air was full of the pleasant smell of the moist earth. To me at least there was a strange contrast between the sweet promise of the spring and this sinister quest upon which we were engaged. My companion sat in the front of the trap, his arms folded, his hat pulled down over his eyes and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the deepest thought. Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed over the meadows.

"Look there!" said he.

A heavily-timbered park stretched up in a gentle slope, thickening into a grove at the highest point. From amid the branches there jutted out the gray gables and high roof-tree of a very old mansion.

"Stoke Moran?" said he.

"Yes, sir, that be the house of Dr Grimesby Roylott," remarked the driver.

"There is some building gong on there," said Holmes; "that is where we are going."

"There's the village," said the driver, pointing to a cluster of roofs some distance to the left; "but if you want to get to the house, you'll find it shorter to get over this stile, and so by the foot-path over the fields. There it is, where the lady is walking."

"And the lady, I fancy, is Miss Stoner," observed Holmes, shading his eyes. "Yes, I think we had better do as you suggest.

We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way to Leatherhead.

"I thought it as well," said Holmes, as we climbed the stile, "that this fellow should think we had come here as architects, or on some definite business. It may stop his gossip. Good-afternoon, Miss Stoner. You see that we have been as good as our word."

Our client of the morning had hurried forward to meet us with a face which spoke her joy. "I have been waiting so eagerly for you," she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. "All has turned out splendidly. Dr Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely that he will be back before evening."

"We have had the pleasure of making the doctor's acquaintance," said Holmes, and in a few words he sketched out what had occurred. Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "he has followed me, then."

"So it appears."

"He is so cunning that I never know when I am safe from him. What will he say when he returns?"

"He must guard himself, for he may find that there is someone more cunning than himself upon his track. You must lock yourself up from him to-night. If he is violent, we shall take you away to your aunt's at Harrow. Now, we must make the best use of our time, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to
examine."

The building was of gray, lichen-blotched stone, with a high central portion, and two curving wings, like the claws of a crab, thrown out on each side. In one of these wings the windows were broken, and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin. The central portion was in little better repair, but the right-hand block was comparatively modern, and the blinds in the windows, with the blue smoke curling up from the chimneys, showed that this was where the family resided. Some scaffolding had been erected against the end wall, and the stone-work had been broken into, but there were no signs of any workmen at the moment of our visit. Holmes walked slowly up and down the ill-Trimmed lawn, and examined with deep attention the outsides of the windows.

"This, I take it, belongs to the room in which you used to sleep, the centre one to your sister's, and the one next to the man building to Dr Roylott's chamber?"

"Exactly so. But I am now sleeping in the middle one."

"Pending the alterations, as I understand. By-the-way, there does not seem to be any very pressing need for repairs at that end wall."

"There were none. I believe that it was an excuse to move me from my room."

"Ah! that is suggestive. Now, on the other side of this narrow wing runs the corridor from which these three rooms open. There are windows in it, of course?"

"Yes, but very small ones. Too narrow for anyone to pass through."

"As you both locked your doors at night, your rooms were unapproachable from that side. Now, would you have the kindness to go into your room and bar your shutters."

Miss Stoner did so, and Holmes, after a careful examination through the open window, endeavoured in every way to force the shutter open, but without success. There was no slit through which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. Then with his lens he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built firmly into the massive masonry. "Hum!" said he, scratching his chin in some perplexity; "my theory certainly presents some difficulties. No one could pass these shutters if they were bolted. Well, we shall see if the inside throws any light upon the matter."

A small side door led into the whitewashed corridor from which the three bedrooms opened. Holmes refused to examine the third chamber, so we passed at once to the second, that in which Miss Stoner was now sleeping, and in which her sister had met with her fate. It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a gaping fireplace, after the fashion of old country-houses. A brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow white-counterpaned bed in another, and a dressing-table on the left-hand side of the window. These articles, with two small wicker-work chairs, made up all the furniture in the room, save for a square of Wilton carpet in the centre. The boards round and the panelling of the walls were of brown, worm-eaten oak, so old and discoloured that it may have dated from the original
building of the house. Holmes drew one of the chairs into a corner and sat silent, while his eyes travelled round and round and up and down, taking in every detail of the apartment.

"Where does that bell communicate with?" he asked, at last, pointing to a thick bell-rope which hung down beside the bed, the tassel actually lying upon the pillow.

"It goes to the house-keeper's room."

"It looks newer than the other things?"

"Yes, it was only put there a couple of years ago."

"Your sister asked for it, I suppose?"

"No, I never heard of her using it. We used always to get what we wanted for ourselves."

"Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there. You will excuse me for a few minutes while I satisfy myself as to this floor." He threw himself down upon his face with his lens in his hand, and crawled swiftly backward and forward, examining minutely the cracks between the boards. Then he did the same with the wood-work with which the chamber was panelled. He walked over to the bed, and spent some time in staring at it, and in running his eye up and down the wall. Finally, he took the bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

"Why, it's a dummy," said he.

"Won't it ring?"

"No, it is not even attached to a wire. This is very interesting. You can see now that it is fastened to a hook just above where the little opening for the ventilator is."

"How very absurd! I never noticed that before."

"Very strange!" muttered Holmes, pulling at the rope. "There are one or two very singular points about this room. For example, what a fool a builder must be to open a ventilator into another room, when, with the same trouble, he might have communicated with the outside air!"

"That is also quite modern," said the lady.

"Done about the same time as the bell-rope?" remarked Holmes.

"Yes, there were several little changes carried out about that time."

"They seem to have been of a most interesting character — dummy bell-ropes, and ventilators which do not ventilate. With your permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into the inner apartment."

Dr Grimesby Roylott's chamber was larger than that of his step-daughter, but was as plainly furnished. A camp-bed, a small wooden shelf full of books, mostly of a technical character, an arm-chair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a round table, and a large iron safe were the principal things which met the eye. Holmes walked slowly round and examined each and all of them with the keenest interest.

"What's in here?" he asked tapping the safe.
"My stepfather's business papers."
"Oh! you have seen inside, then?"
"Only once, some years ago. I remember that it was full of papers."
"There isn't a cat in it, for example?"
"No. What a strange idea!"
"Well, look at this!" He took up a small saucer of milk which stood on the top of it.
"No; we don't keep a cat. But there is a cheetah and a baboon."
"Ah, yes, of course! Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants, I dare say. There is one point which I should wish to determine." He squatted down in front of the wooden chair, and examined the seat of it with the greatest attention.
"Thank you. That is quite settled," said he, rising and putting his lens in his pocket. "Hello! Here is something interesting!"

The object which had caught his eye was a small dog-lash hung on one corner of the bed. The lash, however, was curled upon itself, and tied so as to make a loop of whip-cord.
"What do you make of that, Watson?"
"It's a common enough lash. But I don't know why it should be tied."
"That is not quite so common, is it? Ah, me! it's a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all. I think that I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner, and with your permission we shall walk out upon the lawn."

I had never seen my friend's face so grim or his brow so dark as it was when we turned from the scene of this investigation. We had walked several times up and down the lawn, neither Miss Stoner nor myself liking to break in upon his thoughts before he roused himself from his reverie.

"It is very essential, Miss Stoner," said he, "that you should absolutely follow my advice in every respect."
"I shall most certainly do so."
"The matter is too serious for any hesitation. Your life may depend upon your compliance."
"I assure you that I am in your hands."
"In the first place, both my friend and I must spend the night in your room."
Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in astonishment.
"Yes, it must be so. Let me explain. I believe that that is the village inn over there?"
"Yes, that is the 'Crown.'"
"Very good. Your windows would be visible from there?"
"Certainly."
"You must confine yourself to your room, on pretence of a headache, when your stepfather comes back. Then when you hear him retire for the night, you must open the shutters of your window, undo the hasp, put your lamp there as a signal to us, and then withdraw quietly with everything which you are likely to want into the room which you used to occupy. I have no doubt that, in spite of the repairs, you could manage there for one night."

"Oh yes, easily."

"The rest you will leave in our hands."

"But what will you do?"

"We shall, spend the night in your room, and we shall investigate the cause of this noise which has disturbed you."

"I believe, Mr Holmes, that you have already made up your mind," said Miss Stoner, laying her hand upon my companion's sleeve.

"Perhaps, I have."

"Then for pity's sake tell me what was the cause of my sister's death."

"I should prefer to have clearer proofs before I speak."

"You can at least tell me whether my own thought is correct, and if she died from some sudden fright."

"No, I do not think so. I think that there was probably some more tangible cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you, for if Dr Roylott returned and saw us, our journey would be in vain. Good-bye, and be brave, for if you will do what I have told you, you may rest assured that we shall soon drive away the dangers that threaten you."

Sherlock Holmes and I had no difficulty in engaging a bedroom and sitting-room at the "Crown Inn." They were on the upper floor, and from our window we could command a view of the avenue gate, and of the inhabited wing of Stoke Moran Manor House. At dusk we saw Dr Grimesby Roylott drive past, his huge form looming up beside the little figure of the lad who drove him. The boy had some difficulty in undoing the heavy iron gates, and we heard the hoarse roar of the doctor's voice, and saw the fury with which he shook his clenched fists at him. The trap drove on, and a few minutes later we saw a sudden light spring up among the trees as the lamp was lit in one of the sitting-rooms.

"Do you know, Watson," said Holmes, as we sat together in the gathering darkness, "I have really some scruples as to taking you tonight. There is a distinct element of danger."

"Can I be of assistance?"

"Your presence might be invaluable."

"Then I shall certainly come."

"It is very kind of you."

"You speak of danger. You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was
visible to me."

"No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine that you saw all that I did."

"I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose that could answer I confess is more than I can imagine."

"You saw the ventilator, too?"

"Yes, but I do not think it is such a very unusual thing to have a small opening between two rooms. It was so small that a rat could hardly pass through."

"I knew that we should find a ventilator before ever we came to Stoke Moran."

"My dear Holmes!"

"Oh yes, I did. You remember in her statement she said that her sister could smell Dr Roylott's cigar. Now, of course, that suggested at once that there must be a communication between the two rooms. It could only be a small one, or it would have been remarked upon at the coroner's inquiry. I deduced a ventilator."

"But what harm can there be in that?"

"Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?"

"I cannot as yet see any connection."

"Did you observe anything very peculiar about that bed?"

"No."

"It was clamped to the floor. Did you ever see a bed fastened like that before?"

"I cannot say that I have."

"The lady could not move her bed. It must always be in the same relative position to the ventilator and to the rope—for so we may call it, since it was clearly never meant for a bell-pull."

"Holmes," I cried, "I seem to see dimly what you are hinting at. We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible crime."

"Subtle enough and horrible enough. When a doctor does go wrong, he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession. This man strikes even deeper, but I think, Watson, that we shall be able to strike deeper still. But we shall have horrors enough before the night is over; for goodness' sake let us have a quiet pipe, and turn our minds for a few hours to something more cheerful."

About nine o'clock the light among the trees was extinguished, and all was dark in the direction of the Manor House. Two hours passed slowly away, and then, suddenly, just at the stroke of eleven, a single bright light shone out right in front of us.

"That is our signal," said Holmes, springing to his feet; "it comes from the middle window."

As we passed out he exchanged a few words with the landlord explaining that we
were going on a late visit to an acquaintance, and that it was possible that we might spend the night there. A moment later we were out on the dark road, a chill wind blowing in our faces, and one yellow light twinkling in front of us through the gloom to guide us on our sombre errand.

There was little difficulty in entering the grounds, for unrepaired breaches gaped in the old park wall. Making our way among the trees, we reached the lawn, crossed it, and were about to enter through the window, when out from a clump of laurel bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted child, who threw itself upon the grass with writhing limbs, and then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness.

"My God!" I whispered; "did you see it?"

Holmes was for the moment as startled as I. His hand closed like a vise upon my wrist in his agitation. Then he broke into a low laugh, and put his lips to my ear.

"It is a nice household," he murmured. "That is the baboon."

I had forgotten the strange pets which the doctor affected. There was a cheetah, too; perhaps we might find it upon our shoulders at any moment. I confess that I felt easier in my mind when, after following Holmes's example and slipping off my shoes, I found myself inside the bedroom. My companion noiselessly closed the shutters, moved the lamp onto the table, and cast his eyes round the room. All was as we had seen it in the daytime. Then creeping up to me and making a trumpet of his hand, he whispered into my ear again so gently that it was all that I could do to distinguish the words:

"The least sound would be fatal to our plans."

I nodded to show that I had heard.

"We must sit without light. He would see it through the ventilator."

I nodded again.

"Do not go asleep; your very life may depend upon it. Have your pistol ready in case we should need it. I will sit on the side of the bed, and you in that chair." I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table.

Holmes had brought up a long thin cane, and this he placed upon the bed beside him. By it he laid the box of marches and the stump of a candle. Then he turned down the lamp, and we were left in darkness.

How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? I could not hear a sound, not even the drawing of a breath, and yet I knew that my companion sat open-eyed, within a few feet of me, in the same state of nervous tension in which I was myself. The shutters cut off the least ray of light, and we waited in absolute darkness. From outside came the occasional cry of a night-bird, and once at our very window a long drawn cat-like whine, which told us that the cheetah was indeed at liberty. Far away we could hear the deep tones of the parish clock, which boomed out every quarter of an hour. How long they seemed, those quarters! Twelve struck, and one and two and three,
and still we sat waiting silently for whatever might befall.

Suddenly, there was a momentary gleam of a light up in the direction of the ventilator, which vanished immediately, but was succeeded by a strong smell of burning oil and heated metal. Someone in the next room had lit a dark-lantern: I heard a gentle sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the smell grew stronger. For half an hour I sat with straining ears. Then suddenly another sound became audible—a very gentle, soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continually from a kettle. The instant that we heard it. Holmes sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with his cane at the bell-pull.

"You see it, Watson?" he yelled. "You see it?"

But I saw nothing. At the moment when Holmes struck the light I heard a low clear whistle, but the sudden glare flashing into my weary eyes made it impossible for me to tell what it was at which my friend lashed so savagely. I could however, see that his face was deadly pale, and filled with horror and loathing.

He had ceased to strike, and was gazing up at the ventilator, when suddenly there broke from the silence of the night the most horrible cry to which I have ever listened. It swelled up louder and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all mingled in the one dreadful shriek. They say that away in the village, and even in the distant parsonage, that cry raised the sleepers from their beds. It struck cold to our hearts, and I stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until the last echoes of it had died away into the silence from which it rose.

"What can it mean?" I gasped.

"It means that it is all over," Holmes answered. "And perhaps, after all, it is for the best. Take your pistol, and we will enter Dr Roylott's room."

With a grave face he lit the lamp and led the way down the corridor. Twice he struck at the chamber door without any reply from within. Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his heels, with the cocked pistol in my hand.

It was a singular sight which met our eyes. On the table stood a dark-lantern with the shutter half-open, throwing a brilliant beam of light upon the iron safe, the door of which was ajar. Beside this table, on the wooden chair, sat Dr Grimesby Roylott, clad in a long gray dressing-gown, his bare ankles protruding beneath, and his feet thrust into red heel-less Turkish slippers. Across his lap lay the short stock with the long lash which we had noticed during the day. His chin was cocked upward and his eyes were fixed in a dreadful, rigid stare at the corner of the ceiling. Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his head. As we entered he made neither sound nor motion.

"The band! The speckled band!" whispered Holmes.

I took a step forward. In an instant his strange head-gear began to move, and there reared itself from among his hair the squat diamond-shaped head and puffed
neck of a loathsome serpent.

"It is a swamp adder!" cried Holmes; "the deadliest snake in India. He has died within ten seconds of being bitten. Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another. Let us thrust this creature back into its den, and we can then remove Miss Stoner to some place of shelter, and let the county police know what has happened."

As he spoke he drew the dog-whip swiftly from the dead man's lap, and throwing the noose round the reptile's neck, he drew it from its horrid perch, and carrying it at arm's length, threw it into the iron safe, which he closed upon it.

Such are the true facts of the death of Dr Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran. It is not necessary that I should prolong a narrative which has already run to too great a length, by telling how we broke the sad news to the terrified girl, how we conveyed her by the morning train to the care of her good aunt at Harrow, of how the slow process of official inquiry came to the conclusion that the doctor met his fate while indiscreetly playing with a dangerous pet. The little which I had yet to learn of the case was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we travelled back next day.

"I had," said he, "come to an entirely erroneous conclusion, which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from insufficient data. The presence of the gypsies, and the use of the word 'band', which was used by the poor girl, no doubt to explain the appearance which she had caught a hurried glimpse of by the light of her match, were sufficient to put me upon an entirely wrong scent. I can only claim the merit that I instantly reconsidered my position when, however, it became clear to me that whatever danger threatened an occupant of the room could not come either from the window or the door. My attention was speedily drawn, as I have already remarked to you, to this ventilator, and to the bell-rope which hung down to the bed. The discovery that this was a dummy, and that the bed was clamped to the floor, gave rise to the suspicion that the rope was there as a bridge for something passing through the hole, and coming to the bed. The idea of a snake instantly occurred to me, and when I coupled it with my knowledge that the doctor was furnished with a supply of creatures from India, I felt that I was probably on the right track. The idea of using a form of poison which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training. The rapidity with which such a poison would take effect would also, from his point of view, be an advantage. It would be a sharp-eyed coroner, indeed, who could distinguish the two little dark punctures which would show where the poison fangs had done their work. Then I thought of the whistle. Of course, he must recall the snake before the morning light revealed it to the victim. He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to him when summoned. He would put it through this ventilator at the hour that he thought best, with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope, and
land on the bed. It might or might not bite the occupant, perhaps she might escape every night for a week, but sooner or later she must fall a victim.

"I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room. An inspection of his chair showed me that he had been in the habit of standing on it, which of course would be necessary in order that he should reach the ventilator. The sight of the safe, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whipcord were enough to finally dispel any doubts which may have remained. The metallic clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her stepfather hastily closing the door of his safe upon its terrible occupant. Having once made up my mind, you know the steps which I took in order to put the matter to the proof. I heard the creature hiss, as I have no doubt that you did also, and I instantly lit the light and attacked it."

"With the result of driving it through the ventilator."

"And also, with the result of causing it to turn upon its master at the other side. Some of the blows of my cane came home, and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. In this way I am no doubt indirectly responsible for Dr Grimesby Roylott's death, and I cannot say that it is likely to weigh very heavily upon my conscience."
Mr Albert Trusworth Mackinder, having made much money in the City of London, retired to a house by the sea at Helmstone. He was at this time a widower of fifty-eight, and he was accompanied by his only daughter Elsa, a pretty child of sixteen. Mr Mackinder was satisfactory to the local society and was not displeased with it himself. But he had had many ideas in his life, and the idea which possessed him most strongly at present was that he was interested in the onward march of science. For this reason he interested himself deeply in Dr Bruce Perthwell. Dr Perthwell attended Miss Mackinder once and Mr Mackinder twice—on all three occasions for colds. When Dr Perthwell recommended that they should stay in bed, feed light, and take the medicine which he would send up to the house, results had been satisfactory on each occasion. But this did not impress Mr Mackinder nearly so much as the way in which Dr Perthwell spoke of the mysteries and magic of science. Dr Perthwell was a clean-shaven man, grey-haired, with an authoritative face and a very convincing manner.

Mr Mackinder liked him and asked him to dinner frequently, for though Mr Mackinder knew that it was too late in life for him to take up any really serious study of science, he was quite glad to have such scientific facts as Dr Perthwell might be disposed to let drop, duly prepared and seasoned to suit the appetite of the elderly. In this way Mr Mackinder learnt what was, roughly speaking, the velocity of light, and, if he happened to require Vitamin C, in what articles of diet he would do best to search for it. This was all very good for Mr Mackinder and kept him up in his belief that the world was an interesting place.

Now, it happened that Elsa Mackinder invited to stay with her a friend to whom she had been long attached, Miss Jessie Palkinshaw, of the same age as herself and destined for the nursing profession. On the night of her arrival Mr Mackinder, to square the table, invited Dr Perthwell to join them at dinner, which he did. Dr Perthwell got, perhaps, a little tired of preaching extreme moderation and
temperance all day, and liked to relax a little in the evening. Mr Mackinder's dinners were good. His cellar was good. There was no intolerable excess, but Mr Mackinder and his guest generally, as is sometimes said, did themselves fairly well. It was after the two ladies had retired to the drawing-room that Mr Mackinder refilled Dr Perthwell’s glass with arsenic which can so easily be traced?

"You know, Doctor, I was reading that murder case in the papers this morning. It puzzles me. Why do those poison people always bungle it? Why do they choose poison such as arsenic which can so easily be traced?"

Dr Perthwell fixed his meditative eyes on the ceiling.

"I should say it is principally from ignorance. No doctor, of course, would make such a blunder. But not even every doctor, not by a long way, knows what is actually possible."

"And, what is actually possible?" asked Mr Mackinder eagerly

"Well," said Dr Perthwell, "there are two drugs which can be procured at any chemist's without any formalities, and neither of them is in the least degree injurious. But if you mix, say, a quarter of a teaspoonful of one with a quarter of a teaspoonful of the other and give that in a glass of water to any person, in less than an hour that person will be dead. And no post-mortem, no examination of any kind will ever find the slightest trace of poison in the body."

"Amazing!" said Mr Mackinder. "Perfectly amazing! That is really so?"

"It is."

"I suppose I shouldn't ask it," said Mr Mackinder, "but could you tell me what the names of these two drugs are?"

"Undoubtedly I could," said the doctor, "but ..."

Mr Mackinder refilled the doctor’s glass.

"After all," said Dr Perthwell, "you are a student of science. You are no ordinary layman. I have no doubt that your interest is quite legitimate. Would you be willing to swear to me on your word of honour that you have no intention of murdering anybody, and that if I give you these names you will keep them strictly to yourself?"

"Certainly," said Mr Mackinder. "I am at peace with the world, and have no desire to injure anybody whatever—let alone murder them."

Dr Perthwell went to the door of the dining-room, opened it, closed it again, and returned to his seat.

"You will pardon me, Mr Mackinder. I had to be quite certain that I could not be overheard."

He gave the names of the two drugs and Mr Mackinder wrote them down in his notebook. He put each name down on a different page and the two pages were at some distance apart. Mr Mackinder was cunning.

On the following day Mr Mackinder purchased, without question or suspicion
being roused, one ounce of each of these drugs, at two different chemists’. He was surprised at the vast amount he got for sixpence. He had enough to murder the entire neighbourhood if he had had any spite against it.

He was a methodical man. He took two large sheets of white paper and cut them into small squares. Into each square he put a quarter of a teaspoon of the first drug and folded it into a neat packet. He then took two sheets of blue paper and did the same thing with the other drug, being perhaps inspired with the classical example of the Seidlitz powder. There was still some of each drug remaining, and this he destroyed in the fire. He placed the packets neatly in a cardboard cigarette-box and put the box in a large desk which in theory he always kept locked, and quite frequently did.

He had now the means at hand to destroy forty-eight people. He positively tingled with power. If the worst came to the worst—and at present there was no worst and it was not coming to anything—he felt that he could deal with it.

And the year went on. It happened that once Elsa asked her father:

"What are all those funny little papers in the cigarette-box in your writing-desk? I noticed them to-day when I went there to get stamps. By the way, you don't keep as many stamps as you used to."

"Well," said Mr Mackinder, "as regards the papers in the box I think I may tell you about them because they are of extraordinary interest. But so far as I remember, I am to some extent restricted. You would have to promise me that you would tell nobody what I am going to tell you."

"Of course," said Elsa.

Mr Mackinder then told his daughter precisely what Dr Perthwell had told him.

And the years still went on and Miss Jessie Palkinshaw became a fully qualified nurse and went in for private work. And then came the letter from Robert Filminster.

Mr Mackinder knew Mr Filminster, whose age was at this time verging on the nineties, quite well. He knew that Mr Filminster had been a friend of his father's and had, in fact, financed him over various crises before the business came to a position of steady security. He had been assured by Mr Filminster that the greater part of his property would go to Mr Mackinder for life and to his daughter after him.

Mr Filminster's letter was simply pathetic. He said that he knew he was on the verge of death. The end of the lease of his house was up and he had been unable, even by a most extravagant offer, to obtain just two or three weeks' prolongation. He felt that he could not go into a hotel, for that would kill him painfully and at once. He knew that he asked much, but would Mr Mackinder consent to put him up, together with his nurse, Jessie Palkinshaw, until the end came?

Mr Mackinder felt that he could not do otherwise than accept. His daughter Elsa
agreed with him. She was also glad of this coincidence which brought Jessie Palkinshaw back into her life. Questioned, Mr Mackinder could say very little about Mr Filminster. He remembered him as a very quiet and scholarly old gentleman. He reproached himself that they had not met more frequently in recent years.

So, Mr Filminster was accepted and arrived in his own expensive car with his nurse by his side. He seemed somewhat wearied with the journey and glad to get to bed. Not till he was safely asleep did Jessie Palkinshaw descend to talk things over with the eager Elsa Mackinder. They both rejoiced at the renewal of their rapturous friendship. Miss Palkinshaw looked like a saint of wonderful serenity in her nurse's uniform. Elsa, with her shingled hair, felt worldly and common in comparison.

"Tell me now, darling," said Elsa. "What kind of a man is this Mr Filminster?"

"I think," said Nurse Palkinshaw, "that you are likely to have trouble with him. It cannot be for long, however, because his own doctor assured me that he could not last for more than a week, and there was even some question whether he would not die in the car coming down here. But Mr Filminster does not like doctors and cannot be expected to do everything they say."

"But what kind of man is he?"

"He's more than one kind of man. The first week I was with him he was always very patient and nice and behaved himself. He can do it still if he wants to do it. He was all right when he arrived here to-day, for instance. Otherwise he has become so eccentric and wild—no doubt owing to his disease—that sometimes it is very, very difficult to put up with him. Of course, a nurse who is any good must be prepared to put up with absolutely anything. I was sent to him by a doctor who is well disposed towards me, and has plenty of work to give. I don't want to lose my market. Whatever Mr Filminster does or does not do I shall hang on until the lid's screwed down. When he is in one of his bad moods he uses the most terrific language you ever heard."

"Blasphemous?"

"That of course. Only yesterday in three words he implied that my soul was lost, that I had the hemorrhagic diathesis, and that I was of illegitimate birth. But that's not all, by a long way. He often uses language which is—well, physiological."

"But they have physiological language in books, don't they?"

"There are two kinds of physiological language. His is the other. I advise you to keep out of his way as much as possible."

"Oh, but I do want to help," said Elsa. "I don't want you to be worked to death. If you can put up with things, I must make up my mind to put up with them, too."

"Well," said the nurse, "he's not perhaps been quite so bad lately. He's had a good deal of pain and that always keeps him quiet. I don't think he's actually broken a measuring-glass for three days."

"I suppose the poor old man can't hold them properly."
"That's not it. He throws them, you know. He throws pretty well everything. He says it's the only form of exercise that he's got now. We buy our measuring-glass by the dozen, and they don't last long. Every now and then he gets a fit of wonderful activity and would go out into the street if he were allowed to have any clothes in his room. But he isn't. Of course, I have to use a good deal of tact. As a matter of fact, I could pick the old chap up and carry him. But if he used any great effort that might bring on the end suddenly. No, I shouldn't describe it as a soft case—not easy, by any means."

At dinner that night Mr Mackinder heard much of the story and was calmly philosophical.

"We must make up our minds to be patient," he said. "It is a question of a few days only. Surely we can put up with that. To-morrow Dr Perthwell will be in to see him. No doubt he will be able to tell us something."

On the next morning at breakfast Nurse looked a little worn. Mr Mackinder asked kindly how her patient was getting on.

"If anything he seems a little stronger. He had one of his fits of activity, but he's safely asleep again now. He's started porridge-sloshing again."

"Started which?" asked Mr Mackinder.

"Porridge-sloshing is what he calls it. He always will have porridge for breakfast, and the doctors say he is to have anything he likes. Some days he will eat it and some days he won't. It's when he won't that he starts this porridge sloshing. He fills the spoon full with porridge, holds the end of the handle in one hand, and with a finger of the other draws back the tip of the spoon and suddenly lets go. He can send it quite a considerable distance that way. He generally aims at the different pictures in the room, but he's got me with it two or three times. It always seems to amuse him. Of course, it makes a good deal of work clearing up afterwards."

"Naturally," said Mr Mackinder. "I should hate to be unkind, but I think I must just ask Perthwell if he doesn't think the poor old chap had better be put into a—one of those institutions where those old chaps are put, you know."

But Dr Perthwell gave no support to these hopes.

"My dear Mackinder," he said, "I could not possibly certify this Mr Filminster. He is eccentric, no doubt, and his temperament is much altered by his illness, as any medical man would expect. But he has no delusions and he is not dangerous to anybody. Even if he were I should advise you to let him remain. So far as I can see, in three days he must be dead. You do not want to stuff him into an asylum just for those last three days of his life."

"Certainly not," said Mr Mackinder. "I had not realised that the end was so near. Three days, I think you said."

"I may be wrong, but from my observations to-day I should think three days would be the limit."
But Mr Filminster had no great belief in doctors. He lived on for another two months, and by that time the nerves of Mr Mackinder, his daughter Elsa, and Nurse Palkinshaw were frazzled and pulped. Most of the work fell on them. The butler had already left on the grounds that he had been engaged for a private house and not for Bedlam. And Mr Mackinder did not care to risk losing any other of the upper servants. He and his daughter and the nurse saw it through, relieving one another at intervals. All Dr Perthwell could say was that he had never seen such a case before. He had never met with such extraordinary vitality. Any ordinary man must have been dead long before.

Mr Mackinder, his daughter and the nurse used no hypocrisy. They longed for Mr Filminster's death. As a concession to decency they said it would be a blessed release for all concerned.

After luncheon Nurse Palkinshaw and Elsa Mackinder were taking two hours off duty for the preservation of their health and sanity. The nurse had had a fit of hysterics of brief duration just before luncheon. Mr Mackinder remained on duty. From his study he could easily hear Mr Filminster’s bell if he struck it. However, Mr Fillminster was now asleep, and Mr Mackinder hoped that, as usual, there would be nothing for him to do. Requiring a postcard, he opened his desk, and he left it open. And then, he heard the whir of the bell on the table by Mr Filminster's bedside. Almost immediately it was repeated. Mr Mackinder hurried upstairs.

He had hardly got inside the door when a slipper, thrown with considerable force, struck him in the face, the heel of the slipper barking his nose.

"Why don't you pay attention?" said Mr Filminster. "I want a whisky-and-soda. The doctors said I could have anything I liked? When you're on duty you're jolly well on duty, and don't you forget it another time or I might hop out of bed and twist your blessed nose."

(The more salient and picturesque adjectives have been omitted or substitutes have been provided.)

"That is hardly the way to speak to me," said Mr Mackinder. "And you've caused the bridge of my nose to bleed. However, I will bring you what you require."

Mr Mackinder went downstairs with blue murder in his heart. He remembered the open desk and the cigarette-box with the papers in it. Without hesitation he took a glass and emptied into it a white powder and a blue powder. In this he poured whisky and subsequently soda-water. Mr Filminster took the contents of the glass in one draught, told Mr Mackinder where he could go, and then flung the glass after him, but fortunately missed. In two minutes more Mr Filminster was asleep again.

Downstairs, Mr Mackinder wrestled with his agonized conscience. But as he summed up the question he could not see that he had done much harm. There was not a day when Mr Filminster did not beg them to give him something to put an end to it all. There was the best medical opinion that he could only live for a few hours
now. The man was simply killing his daughter Elsa and Nurse Palkinshaw, and they were both absolute wrecks. On the whole Mr Mackilnder decided he had acted wisely. He then put a small strip of pink plaster across the bridge of his nose.

He waited impatiently for the return of his daughter and the nurse about an hour later. In reply to their inquiries he said that he had taken up a whisky-and-soda to Mr Filminster and this was all there had been for him to do.

He waited for them to go upstairs and to come down quickly announcing that Filminster was dead.

They did not come down quickly. When they appeared in the drawing-room Elsa rang for tea quite casually and Nurse Palkinshaw said that Mr Filminster seemed stronger but was not in a good temper.

Mr Mackinder reflected. Those drugs had been in his desk for some time. Possibly they had now lost their efficacy. He was in reality not sorry to think so.

On the following morning, as Mr Mackinder sat at his early breakfast at eight o'clock, Nurse Palkinshaw entered the room.

"Mr Filminster is dead," she said. "He seems to have passed away in his sleep. I have telephoned to Dr Perthwell. But that is not all. I was tried beyond human endurance. I have a confession to make to you."

She made it.

"What am I to do?" she cried despairingly.

"Nothing whatever at present," said Mr Mackinder. "Leave things entirely in my hands. I will tell you more after the funeral."

And then, after the nurse had gone out, Elsa entered. She helped herself to a poached egg and a cup of China tea and then burst into tears and said she must confess all. Her father heard the confession and gave his instructions.

"At present," he said, "say nothing to anybody. After the funeral we must decide what is the right and moral thing to do.

Dr Perthwell had not the least hesitation in giving a certificate that the death was due to natural causes, and in due course the funeral took place. Afterwards, by appointment, Dr Perthwell attended Mr Mackinder at his house.

"I think," said Mr Mackinder, "by your certificate you attribute poor Fillminster's death to his illness."

"Of course I did. It was the truth. Why not?"
A Lesson in Crime

By G.D.H. and M. Cole

Joseph Newton settled himself comfortably in his corner of a first-class compartment on the Cornish Riviera express. So far, he had the compartment to himself; and if, by strewing rugs, bags, books and papers about he could make himself look numerous enough to drive fellow-travellers away there was hope he might remain undisturbed—for the long train was far from full. Let us take a look at him, and learn a little about him before his adventures begin—and end.

Age? Forty-five would not be a bad guess, though, in fact, he is rather less. As for his physical condition, 'well-nourished' is a polite description; and we, who desire to have no illusions, can safely call him paunchy, and, without positive grossness, flabby with good living. His face is puffy, and whitish under the eyes; his mouth is loose, and inclined to leer.

His fair hair, which is rapidly growing thin, is immaculately brushed, and his clothes are admirably cut and well-tended, though he has not the art of wearing them well. Altogether he looks a prosperous, thoroughly self-satisfied, and somewhat self-indulgent member of the British middle-class; and that is precisely what he is.

His walk in life? You would put him down as a business man, possibly a merchant or a middle-sized employer, not a professional man. There you would be both right and wrong. He is a professional man, in a sense; and he is certainly in business.

In fact, he is Joseph Newton, the best-seller, whose crime stories and shockers were plastered all over the bookstall he has just left with his burden of newspapers under his arm. He has sold—heaven knows how many million copies of his stories, and his serial rights, first, second, and third, cost fabulous sums to secure.

But why describe him further? All the world knows him. And now he is on his way to Cornwall, where he has a pleasant little seaside cottage with twenty-seven bedrooms.

The train starts, and Newton's carriage still remains empty save for himself. He
heaves a fat sigh of relief and picks up a magazine, in which he turns instinctively to a story by himself. For the moment he cannot remember who wrote it. Poor stuff, he thinks. He must find out which 'ghost' was responsible, and sack him.

Joseph Newton was interrupted in his reflections at this point by the consciousness that someone was looking at him. He glanced up and saw the figure of a man who was standing in the corridor and staring fixedly at him, with a curious air of abstraction. Newton stared back, trying to look as unwelcoming as possible. It would be really bad luck, he felt, if someone were to invade his compartment now.

The newcomer, after a moment more of staring, pushed back the door and came in, flinging down on top of one of Newton's bags a rug and a pillow up in a strap. He seemed to have no other luggage. Newton unwillingly got up and cleared a corner of his bejondings, and the stranger sat down and began to unbuckle his strap. Then he settled himself comfortably with the pillow behind his head, and closed his eyes. "I hope to goodness he doesn't snore," Newton thought.

While our second traveller is thus peacefully himself for a doze, we may as well take a good look at him also; for' it may be important to know him later on. He is a scraggy little man, probably of sixty or more, with a completely bald pink head and a straggling grey beard which emerges from an incredibly folded and puckered yellow chin. His height is hardly more than five foot six, and his proportions are puny; but there is a wiriness about his spare person that contrasts strongly with Newton's fleshy bulk.

He is dressed, not so much ill as with a carelessness amounting to eccentricity. His clothes, certainly cut by a good tailor, hang in bags all over him. His pockets bulged. His waistcoat is buttoned up wrong, and sets awry, and his shirt has come apart at the neck, so that a disconsolate shirt-stud is hanging out on one side, while his red tie is leaning towards the other. Moreover, the sole of one of his boots has come loose, and flaps helplessly as his crossed legs swing slowly to the rhythm of the train.

Yet, despite these appearances, the newcomer is certainly a gentleman, and one is inclined to deem him eccentric rather than poor. He might be an exceptionally absent-minded professor; though, as a matter of fact, he is not. But who he is Joseph Newton has no idea.

For some time there was silence in the compartment, as the Cornish Riviera sped westward past the long spreading ribbon of London. Newton's fellow-traveller did not snore. His eyes were closed whenever Newton glanced at him; and yet between whiles the novelist had still a queer feeling of being stared at. He told himself it was nonsense, and tried to bury himself in a Wild West story, but the sensation, remained with him. Suddenly, as the train passed Maidenhead Station, his companion spoke, in a quiet positive voice, as of one used to telling idiots what idiots they were. A professorial voice, with a touch of Scots accent.
"Talking of murders," it said, "you have really no right to be so careless."

"Eh?" said Newton, so startled that his magazine dropped from his hand to the floor. "Eh, what's that?"

"I said you had no right to be so careless," repeated the other.

Newton retrieved his magazine, and looked his fellow-traveller contemptuously up and down. "I am not aware," he said, "that we were talking of murders, or of anything else, for that matter."

"There, you see," said the other, "you did hear what I said the first time. What I mean to say is that, if you expect intelligent people to read your stories, you might at least trouble to make them plausible."

Newton suppressed the rejoinder that rose instantly to his lips. It was that he had far too large a circulation among fools to bother about what intelligent people thought. He only said, "I doubt, sir, if you are likely to find my conversation any more satisfactory than my books," and resumed his magazine.

"Probably not," said the stranger. "I expect success has spoiled you. But you had some brains to begin with... Those Indian stories of yours—"

Perhaps, no other phrase would have induced Joseph Newton to embark upon a conversation with the stranger. But nobody nowadays ever read or bothered about his Indian stories, though he was very well aware that they were the best things he had ever done.

"—had glimmerings of quality," the other was saying, "and you might have accomplished something had you not taken to writing for money."

"Are you aware, sir," Newton said, "that you are being excessively rude?"

"Quite," said the other with calm satisfaction. "I always am. It is so good for people. And really, in your last book, you have exceeded the limit."

"Which of my last books are you talking about?" asked Newton, hovering between annoyance and amusement.

"It is called The Big Noise," said the other, sighing softly.

"Oh, that," said Newton.

"Now, in that book," the stranger went on, "you call the heroine Elinor and Gertrude on different pages. You cannot make up your mind whether her name was Robbins with two b's or with one. You have killed the corpse in one place on Sunday and in another on Monday evening. That corpse was discovered twelve hours after the murder still wallowing in a pool of wet blood. The coroner committed no fewer than seventeen irregularities in conducting the inquest; and, finally, you have introduced three gangs, a mysterious Chinaman, an unknown poison that leaves no trace, and a secret society of international Jews high up in the political world."

The little old man held up his hands in horror as he ended the grisly recital.

"Well," Newton asked, "any more?"

"Alas, yes," said the other. "The volume includes, besides many misprints, fifteen
glaring inconsistencies, nine cases of gross ignorance, and enough grammatical mistakes to—to stretch from Paddington to Penzance."

This time Newton laughed outright. "You seem to be a very earnest student of my writings," he said.

The stranger picked up the rug from his knees and folded it neatly beside him. He removed the pillow, and laid that down, too. He then moved across to the corner seat opposite Newton and, taking a jewelled cigarette case from his pocket, selected a cigarette, returned the case to his pocket, found a match, lighted up, and began to smoke. Then he again drew out the case and offered it to Newton. "Lavery's," he said. "I know your favourite brand."

As a matter of fact, Newton never smoked Lavery's; but for a handsome sum he allowed his face, and a glowing testimonial to their virtues, to their advertisements. Well, he might as well find out what the things were like. He took the proffered cigarette, and the stranger obligingly gave him a light. Newton puffed. Yes, they were good stuff—better than might be expected, though rather heavy.

"Now, in my view," the stranger was saying, "the essence of a really good murder is simplicity. All your books—all most people's books—have far too much paraphernalia about them. A really competent murderer would need no special appliances, and practically no preparations. Ergo, he would be in far less danger of leaving any clues behind him. Why, oh, why, Mr Newton, do you not write a murder story on those lines?"

Again, Newton laughed. He was disposed to humour the old gentleman. "It wouldn't make much of a story," he said, "if the murderer really left no clues."

"Oh, but there you are wrong," said the other. "What is needed is a perfectly simple murder, followed by a perfectly simple solution—so simple that only a great mind could think of it, by penetrating to the utter simplicity of the mind of the murderer."

"I can't abide those psychological detectives," Newton said. "You'd better go and read Mr Van Dine." ("Or, some of those fellows who would give their ears for a tenth of my sales," his expression added.)

"Dear me, you quite misunderstand me. That wasn't what I meant at all. There would be no psychology in the story I have in mind. It would be more like William Blake's poetry."

"Mad, you mean," said Newton.

"Crystal sane," replied the other. "Perhaps, it will help you if I illustrate my point. Shall I outline the sort of murder I have in mind?"

"If you like," said Newton, who found himself growing suddenly very sleepy.

"Very well," said the stranger. "Then I'll just draw down the blinds."

He jumped up and lowered the blinds on the corridor side of the compartment.

"That's better," he said. "Now we shall be undisturbed. Now supposing—only
supposing, of course—that there were two men in a railway carriage just like us, and they were perfect strangers, but one of them did not really care for the other's face—Are you listening, Mr Newton?"

"Yes," said Newton, very sleepily. He was now having real difficulty in keeping his eyes open.

"And, further, supposing neither of them had brought any special paraphernalia with him, expect what any innocent traveller might be carrying—say, a rug, a pillow, and a rugstrap—"

As he spoke, the stranger picked up the rug-strap from the seat beside him.

"Hey, what's that about a rug-strap?" said Newton, roused for a moment by a connection of ideas he was too sleepy to sort out.

"Except, of course, just one doped cigarette, containing an opiate—strong, but in no wise fatal," the other went on blandly.

"What the—?" murmured Newton, struggling now vainly against an absolutely stupefying drowsiness.

"There would really be nothing to prevent him from committing a nice, neat murder, would there?" the old man continued, rising as he spoke with startling agility and flinging the loop of the rug-strap over Newton's head. "Now, would there?" he repeated, as he drew it tight around his victim's neck and neatly fastened it. Newton's mouth came wide open; his tongue protruded, and he began to gurgle horribly; his eyes stuck out from his head.

"And then," said the stranger, "the pillow would come in so handy to finish him off." He dragged Newton down on the seat, placed the pillow firmly on his upturned face, and sat on it, smiling delightedly. The gurgling slowly ceased.

"The rug," the cheerful voice went on, "has proved to be superfluous. Really, Mr Newton, murder is even easier than I supposed—though it is not often, I imagine, that a lucky chance enables one to do a service to the literary craft at the same time."

Newton said nothing; for he was dead.

The stranger retained his position a little longer, still smiling gently to himself. Then he rose, removed the pillow from Newton's face, and, after a careful survey of the body, undid the strap. Next, he picked up a half-smoked cigarette and threw it out of the window, folded his rug neatly, did it and the pillow up in the strap, and, opening the door into the corridor, walked quietly away down the train.

"What a pity!" he murmured to himself as he went. "It would make such a good story; and I am afraid the poor fellow will never have the sense to write it."

The body of Joseph Newton was actually discovered by a restaurant-car attendant who was going round to collect orders for the first lunch. Opening the door of a first-class compartment, which had all its blinds drawn down, he found Newton, no pleasant sight and indubitably dead, stretched out upon the seat where his companion
had left him.

Without waiting to do more than make sure the man was dead, he scuttled along to fetch the guard. A brief colloquy of train-officials then place in the fatal compartment, and it was decided to stop the train short of Newbury Station, and send for the police before anyone had a chance of leaving it. It seemed clear, as there had been no stop since they left Paddington, that the murderer must still be on it, unless he had leaped from an express travelling at full speed.

The police duly arrived, inspected the body, hunted the compartment in vain for traces of another passenger—for the murderer had taken the precaution of wearing gloves throughout his demonstration—took the name and address of every person on the train, to the number of some hundreds, had the carriage in which the murder had occurred detached, with much shunting and grunting, from the rest of the train, and finally allowed the delayed express to proceed.

Only those travellers who had been actually in the coach of which Newton's compartment had formed a part were kept back for further inquiries. But Newton's companion was not among them. Having given his correct name and address to the police, he proceeded quietly upon his journey in the empty first-class compartment two coaches farther back to which he had moved after his successful experiment in simplicity.

There were four hundred and ninety-eight passengers on the Cornish Riviera express whose names were taken by the police at Newbury; or, if you count Newton, four hundred and ninety-nine. Add guards and attendants, restaurant-car staff, and the occupants of a travelling Post Office van—total five hundred and nineteen.

Of these one hundred and twenty-six were women, one hundred and fifty-three children, and the rest men. That allowed for quite enough possible suspects for the police to follow up. They followed up, exhaustively. But it did not appear that any single person among them had any acquaintance with Joseph Newton, or any connection with him save as readers of his books. Nor, did a meticulous examination of Newton's past suggest the shadow of a reason why he should have been murdered.

The police tried their hardest, and the public and the Press did their best to assist, for the murder of a best-seller, by a criminal who left no clue, was enough to excite anybody's imagination. Several individuals, in their enthusiasm, went so far as to confess to the crime, and gave Scotland Yard several days' work in disproving their statements. But nothing helpful was forthcoming, and at long last the excitement died down.

It was more than three months later that the young Marquis of Queensferry called upon Henry Wilson, formerly the chief official of Scotland Yard, and now the foremost private detective in England. His modest request was that Wilson should solve for him the mystery of Joseph Newton's murder.
When Wilson asked him why he wanted it solved, the Marquis explained that it was for a bet. It appeared that his old uncle, the Honourable Roderick Dominic Acres-Noel, had bet him fifty thousand pounds to a penny he could not solve the problem, and he, who had the title but not the money, would be very willing to lay his hands on fifty thousand pounds which his uncle, who had the money but not the title, would never miss. Asked the reason for so unusual a bet, he replied that the reason was Uncle Roderick, who was always betting on something, the sillier the better.

"Our family's like that, you know," the Marquis added. "We're all mad. And, my uncle was quite excited about the case, because he was on the train when it happened. He even wrote to the Times about it."

Wilson rejected the idea that he could solve a case which had utterly baffled Scotland Yard when the trail was fresh, now that it was stone cold, and all clues, presumably, vanished into limbo. Even the most lavish promises of shares in the fifty thousand pounds did not tempt him, and he sent the young Marquis away with a flea in his ear.

But, after the Marquis had gone, he found that he could not get the case out of his head. In common with everybody else, he had puzzled his brains over it at the time; but it was weeks since he had given it a thought. But now—here it was again—bothering his mind.

Hang it all, it wasn't reasonable—it was against nature—that a man should be able to murder another man and get away without leaving any clue at all. So, at any rate, the Marquis's crazy old uncle seemed to think, unless, indeed, he was merely crazy. Most likely he was.

Wilson could not say exactly at what moment he decided to have one more shot at this impossible mystery. Perhaps it was when he recollected that, according to the Marquis, Mr Acres-Noel had himself travelled on that train to Cornwall. It might be that Mr Acres-Noel had noticed something that the police had missed; he was just the sort of old gentleman who would enjoy keeping a tit-bit of information to himself. At any rate, it was one thing one could try.

Wilson rang up his old colleague, Inspector Blaikie, at Scotland Yard, and Blaikie guffawed at him.

"Solve it, by all means," he said. "We'll be delighted. We're sick of the sound of Newton's name. ... Yes, old Acres-Noel was on the train—I don't know anything more about him. ... Oh, mad as a hatter. Completely. ... Yes, he wrote to the Times, and they printed it. ... Three days afterwards, I think. Shall I have it looked up for you? ... Right you are. Let us know when you catch the murderer, won't you?"

Wilson sent for his own file of the Times and looked up the letter of Mr Acres-Noel. The Times had not thought it worth the honour of the middle page, but fortunately had not degraded it into the 'Points' column.
"Sir," it ran,—

"The methods of the police in dealing with the so-called Newton Mystery appear to show more than the usual official incompetence. As one of the passengers on the train on which Mr Newton died, I have been subjected to considerable annoyance—and I may add compensated in part by some amusement—at the fruitless and irrelevant inquiries made by the police.

"It is plain the police have no notion of the motives which prompted the murder. Their inquiries show that. If they would devote more attention to thinking what the motive was, and less to the accumulation of useless information, the apparent complexity of the case would disappear. The truth is usually simple—too simple for idiots to see. Why was Newton murdered? Answer that, and it will appear plainly that only one person could have murdered him. Motive is essentially individual.

"I am, yours, etc.,

"R.D. Acres-Noel."

"Upon my word," said Wilson to himself, "that's a very odd letter."
He read it several times over, staring at it as if the name of the murderer was written between the lines.

Suddenly he leaped to his feet, and with an excitement he seldom showed, dashed down Whitehall to Inspector Blaikie's office. Within ten minutes he was making a proposition to that official which left him starkly incredulous.

"I know," Wilson persisted, "it isn't a certainty, it's a thousand to one chance. But it is a chance, and I want to try it. I'm not asking the Department to commit itself in any way, only to let me have a couple of men standing by. Don't you see, the whole point about this extraordinary letter is the way it stresses the question of motive? And, more than that, it suggests that the writer knows what the motive was. Now, how could he do that unless—"

"But, if that's so, the man's mad!" Blaikie protested. "Whoever heard of anyone murdering a complete stranger just to show him?"

"Well, he certainly is mad, isn't he? You said so yourself, and his family's notoriously crazy."

"He'll have to be pretty well off his rocker," Blaikie remarked, "if he's to be kind enough to come and shove his neck in a noose for you."

"One can but try," Wilson said. "If you won't help me I'm going to try alone. I must have one shot at getting to the bottom of it." And eventually Blaikie agreed.
The upshot was that Wilson, immediately after his interview, arranged for the posting of the following letter, forged with extreme care so as to imitate the handwriting of the supposed author. It was dispatched from the pillar-box nearest to Joseph Newton's Cornish cottage.
"Dear Mr Acres-Noel," it said,—

"Ever since our chance meeting a few months ago, I have been thinking over the very interesting demonstration you were kind enough to give me on that occasion. May I confess, however, that I am still not quite satisfied; and I should be even more deeply obliged if I could induce you to repeat it. As it happens, I shall be returning to London this week-end, and travelling down again to Cornwall on the Riviera express next Wednesday. If you too should chance to be travelling that way, perhaps we may meet again.

"Yours very truly,

"Joseph Newton."

Someone remarkably like the late Joseph Newton settled himself comfortably in the corner of a first-class compartment in the Cornish Riviera express. He had the compartment to himself, and, although the train had begun to fill up, no other traveller had entered when the train drew out of the station. Very discreetly, passengers who came near it had been warned away by the station officials.

The train had not yet gathered its full speed when the solitary-traveller became conscious that someone was standing outside the compartment, and staring in at him. He raised his eyes from the magazine he was reading, and looked back. Slowly, the newcomer pushed back the sliding door, entered the compartment, and sat down in the far corner.

He was a little old man, with a straggling beard, wearing very shabby clothes. He flung down on the seat beside him a rug and a pillow tied up in a strap. Undoing his bundle, he settled himself with the pillow behind his head, the rug over his knees, and the strap on the seat beside him. Then he closed his eyes.

Wilson did and said nothing. It was nervous work, waiting for his cue. But by this time he knew he was right. The millionth chance had come off.

The train flashed at length—it seemed hours—through Maidenhead Station. Suddenly the old man spoke.

"Talking of murders," he said, "it is my turn to apologise. I am afraid I bungled it last time."

"Not at all," said Wilson, hoping that his voice would not give him away; "but if you would kindly just show me again how—"

"With pleasure," said the old man.

He moved with alacrity to the corner opposite Wilson, took from his pocket a jewelled cigarette-case, and proffered it. Wilson took a cigarette, and did a second's rapid thinking before the match was produced. A cigarette was something he had not allowed for, and it might even turn out to be poisoned. However, no use to hesitate now. He suffered Mr Acres-Noel to light it, and the heavy sweetish taste confirmed his fears.
Fortunately, however, it was hardly alight before the other rose and went to the window.

"You won't mind my pulling down the blinds, will you?" he said; and Wilson took advantage of his movement to effect a lightning exchange of the suspicious cigarette for one of his own. This was a relief, but clearly he must show some signs of being affected by it. Sleepiness seemed the most likely cue. He yawned.

"You follow me-so far, I trust," said the other.

"Perfectly," said Wilson slowly. "Please—go—" Slowly his eyes closed, and his head began to wag.

The old man seized the rug-strap.

"This is the next step," he said, attempting to cast it over Wilson's head. But Wilson sprang to his feet, warded off the strap, and pressed a button beside him which had been fixed to communicate with the adjoining compartment.

Almost as he grappled with his now frenzied antagonist, two stalwart policemen in plain clothes rushed in to his aid. Mr Acres-Noel, alternately protesting his innocence and shrieking with wild laughter, was soon safely secured. The train slowed down and stopped at the deserted station of Newbury Racecourse, where captors and captive descended almost unnoticed. Then it sped upon its way.

Mr Acres-Noel, safe in Broadmoor, has only one complaint. The authorities will not supply him with Joseph Newton's new books. He wants to see whether that popular writer has benefited by his lesson in practical criminology.
A Job Well Done

By Ruskin Bond

Dhuki, the gardener, was clearing up the weeds that grew in profusion around the old disused well. He was an old man, skinny and bent and spindly-legged; but he had always been like that; his strength lay in his wrists and in his long, tendril-like fingers. He looked as frail as a petunia, but he had the tenacity of a vine.

'Are you going to cover the well?' I asked. I was eight, a great favourite of Dhuki. He had been the gardener long before my birth; had worked for my father, until my father died, and now worked for my mother and stepfather.

'I must cover it, I suppose,' said Dhuki. That's what the 'Major sahib' wants. He'll be back any day, and if he finds the well still uncovered he'll get into one of his raging fits and I'll be looking for another job!

The 'Major sahib' was my stepfather, Major Summerskill. A tall, hearty, back-slapping man, who liked polo and pig-sticking. He was quite unlike my father. My father had always given me books to read. The Major said I would become a dreamer if I read too much, and took the books away. I hated him; and did not think much of my mother for marrying him.

'The boy's too soft,' I heard him tell my mother. 'I must see that he gets riding lessons.'

But, before the riding lessons could be arranged the Major's regiment was ordered to Peshawar. Trouble was expected from some of the frontier tribes. He was away for about two months. Before leaving, he had left strict instructions for Dhuki to cover up the old well.

'Too damned dangerous having an open well in the middle of the garden,' my stepfather had said. 'Make sure that it's completely covered by the time I get back.'

Dhuki was loth to cover up the old well. It had been there for over 50 years, long before the house had been built. In its walls lived a colony of pigeons. Their soft cooing filled the garden with a lovely sound. And during the hot, dry, summer months, when taps ran dry, the well was always a dependable source of water. The
bhisti still used it, filling his goatskin bag with the cool clear water and sprinkling
the paths around the house to keep the dust down.

Dhuki pleaded with my mother to let him leave the well uncovered.

'What will happen to the pigeons?' he asked.

'Oh, surely they can find another well,' said my mother. 'Do close it up soon, Dhuki. I don't want the Sahib to come back and find that you haven't done anything about it.'

My mother seemed just a little bit afraid of the Major. How can we be afraid of those we love? It was a question that puzzled me then, and puzzles me still.

The Major's absence made life pleasant again. I returned to my books, spent long hours in my favourite banyan tree, ate buckets of mangoes, and dawdled in the garden talking to Dhuki.

Neither he nor I were looking forward to the Major's return. Dhuki had stayed on after my mother's second marriage only out of loyalty to her and affection for me; he had really been my father's man. But my mother had always appeared deceptively frail and helpless, and most men, Major Summerskill included, felt protective towards her. She liked people who did things for her.

'Your father liked this well,' said Dhuki. 'He would often sit here in the evenings, with a book in which he made drawings of birds and flowers and insects.'

I remembered those drawings, and I remembered how they had all been thrown away by the Major when he had moved into the house. Dhuki knew about it, too. I didn't keep much from him.

'It's a sad business closing this well,' said Dhuki again. 'Only a fool or a drunkard is likely to fall into it.'

But he had made his preparations. Planks of sal wood, bricks and cement were neatly piled up around the well.

'Tomorrow,' said Dhuki. 'Tomorrow I will do it. Not today. Let the birds remain for one more day. In the morning, baba, you can help me drive the birds from the well.

On the day my stepfather was expected back, my mother hired a tonga and went to the bazaar to do some shopping. Only a few people had cars in those days. Even colonels went about in tongas. Now, a clerk finds it beneath his dignity to sit in one.

As the Major was not expected before evening, I decided I would make full use of my last free morning. I took all my favourite books and stored them away in an outhouse, where I could come for them from time to time. Then, my pockets bursting with mangoes, I climbed into the banyan tree. It was the darkest and coolest place on a hot day in June.

From behind the screen of leaves that concealed me, I could see Dhuki moving about near the well. He appeared to be most unwilling to get on with the job of covering it up.
'Baba!' he called, several times; but I did not feel like stirring from the banyan tree. Dhuki grasped a long plank of wood and placed it across one end of the well. He started hammering. From my vantage point in the banyan tree, he looked very bent and old.

A jingle of tonga bells and the squeak of unoiled wheels told me that a tonga was coming in at the gate. It was too early for my mother to be back. I peered through the thick, waxy leaves of the tree, and nearly fell off my branch in surprise. It was my stepfather, the Major! He had arrived earlier than expected.

I did not come down from the tree. I had no intention of confronting my stepfather until my mother returned.

The Major had climbed down from the tonga and was watching his luggage being carried on to the verandah. He was red in the face and the ends of his handlebar moustache were stiff with brilliantine. Dhuki approached with a half-hearted salaam.

Ah, so there you are, you old scoundrel!' exclaimed the Major, trying to sound friendly and jocular. 'More jungle than garden, from what I can see. You're getting too old for this sort of work, Dhuki. Time to retire! And where's the Memsahib?'

'Gone to the bazaar,' said Dhuki.

'And the boy?'

Dhuki shrugged. 'I have not seen the boy, today, Sahib.'

'Damn!' said the Major. 'A fine homecoming, this. Well, wake up the cook-boy and tell him to get some sodas.'

'Cook-boy's gone away,' said Dhuki.

'Well, I'll be double-damned,' said the major.

The tonga went away, and the Major started pacing up and down the garden path. Then he saw Dhuki's unfinished work at the well. He grew purple in the face, strode across to the well, and started ranting at the old gardener.

Dhuki began making excuses. He said something about a shortage of bricks; the sickness of a niece; unsatisfactory cement; unfavourable weather; unfavourable gods. When none of this seemed to satisfy the Major, Dhuki began mumbling about something bubbling up from the bottom of the well, and pointed down into its depths. The Major stepped on to the low parapet and looked down. Dhuki kept pointing. The Major leant over a little.

Dhuki's hands moved swiftly, like a conjurer's making a pass. He did not actually push the Major. He appeared merely to tap him once on the bottom. I caught a glimpse of my stepfather's boots as he disappeared into the well. I couldn't help thinking of Alice in Wonderland, of Alice disappearing down the rabbit hole.

There was a tremendous splash, and the pigeons flew up, circling the well thrice before settling on the roof of the bungalow.

By lunch time—or tiffin, as we called it then—Dhuki had the well covered over
with the wooden planks.

The Major will be pleased,' said my mother, when she came home. 'It will be quite ready by evening, won't it, Dhuki?'

By evening, the well had been completely bricked over. It was the fastest bit of work Dhuki had ever done.

Over the next few weeks, my mother's concern changed to anxiety, her anxiety to melancholy, and her melancholy to resignation. By being gay and high-spirited myself, I hope I did something to cheer her up. She had written to the Colonel of the Regiment, and had been informed that the Major had gone home on leave a fortnight previously. Somewhere, in the vastness of India, the Major had disappeared.

It was easy enough to disappear and never be found. After several months had passed without the Major turning up, it was presumed that one of two things must had happened. Either he had been murdered on the train, and his corpse flung into a river; or, he had run away with a tribal girl and was living in some remote corner of the country.

Life had to carry on for the rest of us. The rains were over, and the guava season was approaching.

My mother was receiving visits from a colonel of His Majesty's 32nd Foot. He was an elderly, easy-going, seemingly absent-minded man, who didn't get in the way at all, but left slabs of chocolate lying around the house.

'A good Sahib,' observed Dhuki, as I stood beside him behind the bougainvillaea, watching the colonel saunter up the verandah steps. 'See how well he wears his sola topee! It covers his head completely.'

'He's bald underneath,' I said.

'No matter. I think he will be all right.'

'And if he isn't,' I said, 'we can always open up the well again.'

Dhuki dropped the nozzle of the hose pipe, and water gushed out over our feet. But he recovered quickly, and taking me by the hand, led me across to the old well, now surmounted by a three-tiered cement platform which looked rather like a wedding cake.

'We must not forget our old well,' he said. 'Let us make it beautiful, baba. Some flower pots, perhaps.'

And together we fetched pots, and decorated the covered well with ferns and geraniums. Everyone congratulated Dhuki on the fine job he'd done. My only regret was that the pigeons had gone away.
The public taste in murders is often erratic, and sometimes, I think, fallible enough. Take, for example, that Crippen business. It happened seventeen years ago, and it is still freshly remembered and discussed with interest. Yet, it was by no means a murder of the first rank. What was there in it? The outline is crude enough; simple, easy, and disgusting, as Dr Johnson observed of another work of art. Crippen was cursed with a nagging wife of unpleasant habits; and he cherished a passion for his typist. Whereupon he poisoned Mrs Crippen, cut her up and buried the pieces in the coal-cellar. This was well enough, though elementary; and if the foolish little man had been content to lie quiet and do nothing, he might have lived and died peaceably. But he must needs disappear from his house—the action of a fool—and cross the Atlantic with his typist absurdly and obviously disguised as a boy: sheer, bungling imbecility. Here, surely, there is no single trace of the master's hand; and yet, as I say, the Crippen Murder is reckoned amongst the masterpieces. It is the same tale in all the arts: the low comedian was always sure of a laugh if he cared to tumble over a pin; and the weakest murderer is sure of a certain amount of respectful attention if he will take the trouble to dismember his subject. And then, with respect to Crippen: he was caught by means of the wireless device, then in its early stages. This, of course, was utterly irrelevant to the true issue; but the public wallows in irrelevance. A great art critic may praise a great picture, and make his criticism a masterpiece in itself. He will be unread; but let some asinine paragraphist say that the painter always sings 'Tom Bowling' as he sets his palette, and dines on boiled fowl and apricot sauce three times a week—then the world will proclaim the artist great.

II

The success of the second-rate is deplorable in itself; but it is more deplorable in
that it very often obscures the genuine masterpiece. If the crowd runs after the false, it must neglect the true. The intolerable Romola is praised; the admirable Cloister and the Hearth is waived aside. So, while the very indifferent and clumsy performance of Crippen filled the papers, the extraordinary Battersea Murder was served with a scanty paragraph or two in obscure corners of the Press. Indeed, we were so shamefully starved of detail that I only retain a bare outline of this superb crime in my memory; but, roughly, the affair was shaped as follows: In the first floor of one of the smaller sets of flats in Battersea a young fellow (? 18-20) was talking to an actress, a 'touring' actress of no particular fame, whose age, if I recollect, was drawing on from thirty to forty. A shot, a near shot, broke in suddenly on their talk. The young man dashed out of the flat, down the stairs, and there, in the entry of the flats, found his own father, shot dead. The father, it should be remarked, was a touring actor, and an old friend of the lady upstairs. But here comes the magistral element in this murder. Beside the dead man, or in the hand of the dead man, or in a pocket of the dead man's coat—I am no sure how it was—there was found a weapon made of heavy wire—a vile and most deadly contraption, fashioned with curious and malignant ingenuity. It was night-time, but the bright light of a moon ten days old was shining, and the young man said he saw someone running and leaping over walls.

But mark the point: the dead actor was hiding beneath his friend's flat, hiding and lying in wait, with his villainous weapon to his hand. He was expecting an encounter with some enemy, on whom he was resolved to work at least deadly mischief, if not murder.

Who was that enemy? Whose bullet was it that was swifter than the dead man's savage and premeditated desire?

We shall probably never know. A murder that might have stood in the very first rank, that might have vied with the affair of Madeleine Smith—there were certain indications that made this seem possible—was suffered to fade into obscurity, while the foolish crowd surged about elementary Crippen and his bungling imbecilities. So there were once people who considered Robert Elsmere as a literary work of palmary significance.

III

Naturally, and with some excuse, the war was responsible for a good deal of this sort of neglect. In those appalling years there was but one thing in men's heads; all else was blotted out. So little attention was paid to the affair of the woman's body, carefully wrapped in sacking, which was found in Regent's Square, by the Gray's Inn Road. A man was hanged without phrases, but there were one or two curious points in the case.
Then, again, there was the Wimbledon Murder, a singular business. A well-to-do family had just moved into a big house facing the Common, so recently that many of their goods and chattels were still in the packing-cases. The master of the house was murdered one night by a man who made off with his booty. It was a curious haul, consisting of a mackintosh worth, perhaps, a couple of pounds, and a watch which would have been dear at ten shillings. This murderer, too, was hanged without comment; and yet, on the face of it, his conduct seems in need of explanation. But the most singular case of all those that suffered from the preoccupations of the war was, there is no doubt, the Islington Mystery, as the Press called it. It was a striking headline, but the world was too busy to attend. The affair got abroad, so far as it did get abroad, about the time of the first employment of the tanks; and people were trying not to see through the war correspondents, not to perceive that the inky fandangoes and corroborees of these gentlemen hid a sense of failure and disappointment.

IV

But as to the Islington Mystery—this is how it fell out. There is an old street, not far from the region which was once called Spa Fields, not far from the Pentonville or Islington Fields, where Grimaldi the clown was once accused of inciting the mob to chase an overdriven ox. It goes up a steep hill, and the rare adventurer who pierces now and then into this unknown quarter of London is amazed and bewildered at the very outset, since there are no steep hills in the London of his knowledge, and the contours of the scene remind him of the cheap lodging-house area at the back of hilly seaside resorts. But if the site is strange, the buildings on it are far stranger. They were no doubt set up at the high tide of Sir Walter Scott Gothic, which has left such queer memorials behind it. The houses of Lloyd Street are in couples, and the architect, combining the two into one design, desired to create an illusion of a succession of churches, in the Perpendicular or Third Pointed manner, climbing up the hill. The detail is rich, there are finials to rejoice the heart, and gargoyles of fine fantasy, all carried out in the purest stucco. At the lowest house on the right-hand side lived Mr Harold Boale and his wife, and a brass plate on the Gothic door said, Taxidermist: Skeletons Articulated'. As it chanced, this lowest house of Lloyd Street has a longer garden than its fellows, giving on a contractor's yard, and at the end of the garden Mr Boale had set up the apparatus of his craft in an outhouse, away from the noses of his fellow-men.

So far as can be gathered, the stuffer and articulator was a harmless and inoffensive little fellow. His neighbours liked him, and he and the Boule cabinet-maker from next door, the Shell box-maker over the way, the seal-engraver and the armourer from Baker Square at the top of the hill, and the old mercantile marine
skipper who lived round the corner in Marchmont Street, at the house with the ivory junk in the window, used to spend many a genial evening together in the parlour of the Quill in the days before everything was spoilt by the war.

They did not drink very much or talk very much, any of them; but they enjoyed their moderate cups and the snug comfort of the place, and stared solemnly at the old coaching prints that were upon the walls, and at the large glass painting depicting the landing of England's Injured Queen, which hung over the mantel piece, between two Pink Dogs with gold collars. Mr Boale passed as a very nice sort of man in this circle, and everybody was sorry for him. Mrs Boale was a tartar and a scold. The men of the quarter kept out of her way; the women were afraid of her. She led poor Boale the devil's own life. Her voice, often enough, would be heard at the Quill door, vomiting venom at her husband's address; and he, poor man, would tremble and go forth, lest some worse thing might happen. Mrs Boale was a short dark woman. Her hair was coal-black, her face wore an expression of acid malignity, and she walked quickly but with a decided limp. She was full of energy and the pest of the neighbourhood, and more than a pest to her husband.

The war, with its scarcity and its severe closing-hours, made the meetings at the Quill rarer than before, and deprived them of a good deal of their old comfort. Still, the circle was not wholly broken up, and one evening Boale announced that his wife had gone to visit relations in Lancashire and would most likely be away for a considerable time.

"Well, there's nothing like a change of air, so they say," said the skipper, "though I've had more than enough of it myself."

The others said nothing, but congratulated Boale in their hearts. One of them remarked afterwards that the only change that would do Mrs Boale good was a change to Kingdom Come, and they all agreed. They were not aware that Mrs Boale was enjoying the advantages of the recommended treatment.

V

As I recollect, Mr Boale's worries began with the appearance of Mrs Boale's sister, Mary Aspinall, a woman almost as ill-tempered and malignant as Mrs Boale herself. She had been for some years nurse with a family in Capetown, and had come home with her mistress. In the first place, the woman had written two or three letters to her sister, and there had been no reply. This struck her as odd, for Mrs Boale had been a very good correspondent, filling her letters with 'nasty things' about her husband. So, on her first afternoon off after her return, Mary Aspinall called at the house in Lloyd Street to get the truth of the matter from her sister's own lips. She strongly suspected Boale of having suppressed her letters. "The dirty little tyke; I'll sever him," she said to herself So came Miss Aspinall to Lloyd Street and brought out
Boale from his workshop. And when he saw her his heart sank. He had read her letters. But the decision to return to England had been taken suddenly; Miss Aspinall had therefore said not a word about it. Boale had thought of his wife's sister as established at the other end of the world for the next ten, twenty years, perhaps; and he meant to go away and lose himself under a new name in a year or two. And so, when he saw the woman his heart sank.

Mary Aspinall went straight to the point.

"Where's Elizabeth?" she asked. "Upstairs? I wonder she didn't come down when she heard the bell."

"No," said Boale. He comforted himself with the thought of the curious labyrinth he had drawn about his secret; he felt secure in the centre of it.

"No, she's not upstairs. She's not in the house."

"Oh, indeed. Not in the house. Gone to see some friends, I suppose. When do you expect her back?"

"The truth is, Mary, that I don't expect her back. She's left me—three months ago, it is."

"You mean to tell me that! Left you! Showed her sense, I think. Where has she gone?"

"Upon my word, Mary, I don't know. We had a bit of a to-do one evening, though I don't think I said much. But she said she'd had enough, and she packed a few things in a bag and off she went. I ran after her and called to her to come back, but she wouldn't so much as turn her head, and went off King's Cross way. And, from that day to this I've never seen her, nor had a word from her. I've had to send all her letters back to the post office."

Mary Aspinall stared hard at her brother-in-law and pondered. Beyond telling him that he had brought it on himself, there seemed nothing to say. So, she dealt with Boale on those lines very thoroughly, and made an indignant exit from the parlour. He went back to stuff peacocks, for all I know. He was feeling comfortable again. There had been a very unpleasant sensation in the stomach for a few seconds—a very horrible fear at the moment that one of the outer walls of that labyrinth of his had been breached; but now all was well again.

And, all might have been permanently well if Miss Aspinall had not happened to meet Mrs Horridge in the main road, close to the bottom of Lloyd Street. Mrs Horridge was the wife of the Shell box-maker, and the two had met once or twice long ago at Mrs Boale's tea-table. They recognised each other, and after a few unmeaning remarks Mrs Horridge asked Miss Aspinall if she had seen her sister since her return to England.

"How could I see her when I don't know where she is?" asked Miss Aspinall with some ferocity.

"Dear me, you haven't seen Mr Boale, then?"
"I've just come from him this minute."
"But he can't have lost the Lancashire address, surely?"

And so, one thing led to another, and Mary Aspinall gathered quite clearly that Boale had told his friends that his wife was paying a long visit to relations in Lancashire. In the first place, the Aspinalls had no relations in Lancashire—they came from Suffolk—and secondly, Boale had informed her that Elizabeth had gone away in a rage, he knew not where. She did not pay him another visit then and there as she had at first intended. It was growing late, and she took her considerations back with her to Wimbledon, determined on thinking the matter out.

Next week she called again at Lyoyd Street. She charged Boale with deliberate lying, placing frankly before him the two tales he had told. Again, that horrid sinking sensation lay heavy upon Boale. But he had reserves.

"Indeed," he said, "I've told you no lies, Mary. It all happened just as I said before. But I did make up that tale about Lancashire for the people about here. I didn't like them to have my troubles to talk over, especially as Elizabeth is bound to come back some time, and I hope it will be soon."

Miss Aspinall stared at the little man in a doubtful, threatening fashion for a moment, and then hurried upstairs. She came down soon afterwards.

"I've gone through Elizabeth's drawers," she said with defiance. "There's a good many things missing. I don't see those bits of lace she had from Granny, and the set of jet is gone, and so is the garnet necklace, and the coral brooch. I couldn't find the ivory fan, either."

"I found all the drawers wide open after she'd gone," sighed Mr Boale. "I supposed she'd taken the things away with her."

It must be confessed that Mr Boale, taught, perhaps, by the nicety of his craft, had paid every attention to detail. He had realized that it would be vain to tell a tale of his wife going away and leaving her treasures behind her. And so, the treasures had disappeared.

Really, the Aspinall vixen did not know what to say. She had to confess that Boale had explained the difficulty of his two stories quite plausibly. So, she informed him that he was more like a worm than a man, and banged the hall door. Again, Boale went back to his workshop with a warmth about his heart. His labyrinth was still secure, its secret safe. At first, when confronted again by the accusing Aspinall, he had thought of bolting the moment he got the woman out of the house; but that was unreasoning panic. He was in no danger. And he remembered, like the rest of us, the Crippen case. It was running away that had brought Crippen to ruin; if he had sat tight he would have sat secure, and the secret of the cellar would never have been known. Though, as Mr Boale reflected, anybody was welcome to search his cellar, to search here and there and anywhere on his premises, from the hall door in front to the workshop at the back. And, he proceeded to give his calm, whole-souled
attention to a fine raven that had been sent round in the morning.

Miss Aspinall took the extraordinary disappearance of her sister back with her to Wimbledon and thought it over. She thought it over again and again, and she could make nothing of it. She did not know that people are constantly disappearing for all sorts; that nobody hears anything about such cases unless some enterprising paper sees matter for a 'stunt', and rouses all England to hunt for John Jones or Mrs Carraway. To Miss Aspnall, the vanishing of Elizabeth Boale seemed a portent and a wonder, a unique and terrible event; and she puzzled her head over it, and still could find no exit from her labyrinth—a different structure from the labyrinth maintained by the serene Boale. The Aspinall had no suspicions of her brother-in-law; both his manner and his matter were straightforward, clear, and square. He was a worm, as she had informed him, but he as was certainly telling the truth. But the woman was fond of her sister, and wanted to know where she had gone and what had happened to her; and so she put the matter into the hands of the police.

VI

She furnished the best description that she could of the missing woman, but the officer in charge of the case pointed out that she had not seen her sister for many years, and that Mr Boale was obviously the person to be consulted in the matter. So, the taxidermist was again drawn from his scientific labours. He was shown the information laid by Miss Aspinall, and the description furnished by her. He told his simple story once more, mentioning the incident of his lying to his neighbours to avoid unpleasant gossip, and added several details to Miss Aspinall's picture of his wife. He then furnished the constable with two photographs, pointed out the better likeness of the two, and saw his visitor off the premises with cheerful calm.

In due course, the 'Missing' bill, garnished with a reproduction of the photograph selected by Mr Boale, with minute descriptive details, including the 'marked limp', was posted up at the police stations all over the country, and glanced at casually by a few passers-by here and there. There was nothing sensational about the placard; and the statement, "Last seen going in the direction of King's Cross," was not a very promising clue for the amateur detective. No hint of the matter got into the Press; as I have pointed out, hardly one per cent of these cases of 'missing' does get into the Press. And just then, we were all occupied in reading the paeans of the war correspondents, who were proving that an advance of a mile and a half on a nine-mile front constituted a victory which threw Waterloo into the shade. There was no room for discussing the whereabouts of an obscure woman whom Islington knew no more.

It was sheer accident that brought about the catastrophe. James Curry, a medical student who had rooms in Percy Street, Tottenham Court Road, was prowling about
his quarter one afternoon in an indefinite and idle manner, gazing at shop windows and mooning at street corners. He knew that he would never want a cash register, but he inspected the stock with the closest attention, and chose a fine specimen listed at £75. Again, he invested heavily in costly Oriental rugs, and furnished a town mansion in the Sheraton manner at very considerable expense. And so, his tour of inspection brought him to the police-station; and there he proceeded to read the bills posted outside, including the bill relating to Elizabeth Boale.

"Walks with a marked limp."

James Curry felt his breath go out of his body in a swift gasp. He put out a hand towards the railing to steady himself as he read that amazing sentence over again. And then, he walked straight into the police-station.

The fact was that he had bought from Harold Boale, three weeks after the date on which Elizabeth Boale was last seen, a female skeleton. He had got it comparatively cheaply because of the malformation of one of the thigh-bones. And now, it struck him that the late owner of that thigh-bone must have walked with a very marked limp.

VII

M'Aulay made his reputation at the trial. He defended Harold Boale with magnificent audacity. I was in court—it was a considerable part of my business in those days to frequent the Old Bailey—and I shall never forget the opening phrases of his speech for the prisoner. He rose slowly, and let his glance go slowly round the court. His eyes rested at last with grave solemnity on the jury. At length he spoke, in a low, clear, deliberate voice, weighing, as it seemed, every word he uttered.

"Gentlemen," he began, "a very great man, and a very wise man, and a very good man once said that probability is the guide of life. I think you will agree with me that this is a weighty utterance. When we once leave the domain of pure mathematics, there is very little that is certain. Supposing we have money to invest: we weigh the pros and cons of this scheme and that, and decide at last on probable grounds. Or, it may be our lot to have to make an appointment; we have to choose a man to fill a responsible position in which both honesty and sagacity are of the first consequence. Again, probability must guide us to a decision. No one man can form a certain and infallible judgment of another. And so, through all the affairs of life: we must be content with probability, and again and again with probability. Bishop Butler was right.

"But every rule has its exception. The rule which we have just laid down has its exception. That exception confronts you terribly, tremendously, at this very moment. You may think—I do not say that you do think—but you may think that Harold
Boale, the prisoner at the bar, in all probability murdered his wife, Elizabeth Boale."

There was a long pause at this point. Then: "If you think that, then it is your imperative duty to acquit the prisoner at the bar. The only verdict which you dare give is a verdict of 'Not Guilty'."

Up to this moment, Counsel had maintained the low, deliberate utterance with which he had begun his speech, pausing now and again and seeming to consider within himself the precise value of every word that came to his lips. Suddenly his voice rang out, resonant, piercing. One word followed swiftly on another:

"This, remember, is not a court of probability. Bishop Butler's maxim does not apply here. Here, there is no place for probability. This is a court of certainty. And unless you are certain that my client is guilty, unless you are as certain of his guilt as you are certain that two and two make four, then you must acquit him.

"Again, and yet again—this is a court of certainty. In the ordinary affairs of life, as we have seen, we are guided by probability. We sometimes make mistakes; in most cases these mistakes may be rectified. A disastrous investment may be counter-balanced by a prosperous investment; a bad servant may be replaced by a good one. But in this place, where life and death hang in the balances which are in your hands, there is no room for mistakes, since here mistakes are irreparable. You cannot bring a dead man back to life. You must not say, 'This man is probably a murderer, and therefore he is guilty.' Before you bring in such a verdict, you must be able to say, 'This man is certainly a murderer.' And that you cannot say, and I will tell you why."

M'Aulay then took the evidence piece by piece. Scientific witness had declared that the malformation of the thighbone in the skeleton exhibited would produce exactly the sort of limp which had characterized Elizabeth Boale. Counsel for the defence had worried the doctors, had made them admit that such a malformation was by no means unique. It was uncommon. Yes, but not very uncommon. Perhaps not. Finally, one doctor admitted that in the course of thirty years of hospital and private practice he had known of five such cases of malformation of the thighbone. M'Aulay gave an inaudible sigh of relief; he felt that he had got his verdict.

He made all this quite clear to the jury. He dwelt on the principle that no one can be condemned unless the corpus delicti, the body, or some identifiable portion of the body of the murdered person can be produced. He told them the story of the Campden Wonder; how the 'murdered' man walked into his village two years after three people had been hanged for murdering him. "Gentlemen," he said, "for all I know, and for all you know, Elizabeth Boale may walk into this court at any moment. I say boldly that we have no earthly right to assume that she is dead."

Of course, Boale's defence was a very simple one. The skeleton which he sold to Mr Curry had been gradually assembled by him in the course of the last three years. He pointed out that the two hands were not a very good match; and, indeed, this was a little detail that he had not overlooked.
The jury took half an hour to consider their verdict. Harold Boale was found 'Not Guilty'.

He was seen by an old friend a couple of years ago. He had emigrated to America, and was doing prosperously in his old craft in a big town of the Middle West. He had married a pleasant girl of Swedish extraction.

"You see," he explained, "the lawyers told me I should be safe in presuming poor Elizabeth's death."

He smiled amiably.

And finally, I beg to state that this account of mine is a grossly partial narrative. For all I know, assuming for a moment the severe standards of M'Aulay, Boale was an innocent man. It is possible that his story was a true one. Elizabeth Boale may, after all, be living; she may return after the fashion of the 'murdered' man in the Campden Wonder. All the thoughts, devices, meditations that I have put into the heart and mind of Boale may be my own malignant inventions without the shadow of true substance behind them. In theory, then, the Islington Mystery is an open question. Certainly; but in fact?
The body of Barbosa Machado, the Portuguese strong man, who could lift a horse, was found in his caravan battered and disfigured almost out of recognition. It was discovered in the early hours of the morning, when the men were getting astir in the grey light to shift Ablett's circus from Sandhurst to Benenden. Saw-Ka, the little Burmese in charge of the elephant, who slept in the caravan with Machado, was found trembling, frightened, obviously at his wit's end, lying on a heap of hay in the elephant's tent. Still in his night garments. A dirty pair of pants.

After the first shock of the discovery of Machado's obviously murdered body, they had looked for the little Burmese. His bunk in the caravan had been slept in, but it was empty.

"Where's little Sawker?" asked one of the men, and after a search, they had found him, breathing quickly the pungent atmosphere of the elephant's tent and lying on that heap of hay as though the hand of the powerful Portuguese had picked him up and flung him there.

"Who killed the Mikado?" they asked him without finesse.

He stared at them. The steady light of the storm-lantern that one of them was carrying pinched two points of yellow out of his eyes. With a massive unconcern the elephant was picking up little wisps of hay from behind Saw-Ka's back and slipping them into the dull pink cavern of its mouth. The little Burmese saw nothing and said nothing. He might have been staring at no more than a dream. A dream of that group of men huddled together in a mass of their own shadows the storm-lantern scattered about on the canvas ceiling of the tent. He had raised himself on his elbow out of the deep gloom beneath the elephant's belly. The whole tent was a confusion of gigantic shadows thrown by the glimmer of that burning wick.

"Who killed the Mikado?" they repeated.

The question appeared to them so expedient and so direct that they had forgotten for the moment he could not speak and did not understand a word of English.
Recovering their memory of this fact when he was still silent, they went off to wake Mr Ablett, leaving one of the grooms to keep an eye on Saw-Ka.

Sam Collins, the bare-back rider, stayed at the entrance of the tent while the others went across to Mr Ablett's caravan. He kept one eye on the little Burmese and the other on the most obvious means of escape. A man who could batter the Portuguese to a pulp like that was not to be trusted. Saw-Ka lay quite still on his heap of hay staring at the narrow slit of morning through the flaps of the tent.

Mr Ablett who knew how to deal with matters of crime in his circus, but had never been mixed up with a murder before, sent his son for the police. Tom Ablett, aged seventeen, sleeping with his sister on the bunk above the old man, felt himself of some importance that morning as he ran through the street of Sandhurst.

The local policeman arrived, hastily dressed, to inspect the disfigured body of Barbosa Machado. Blood was spattered on the walls of the caravan as though someone had been exuberant with a pot of red paint. Mr Waddy surveyed it all with an unemotional eye. In the whole of his career he had never seen a human being so smashed about, not even in a motor accident. But he was not prepared to say so. As an officer in the police force, it was not to be supposed there was any horror in life he had not witnessed with imperturbability. Saying nothing and without looking anything, he regarded the bloody sight of Machado's body in stolid silence. After a few moments he said—

"Pretty certain he didn't do all that to himself." Then with the air of one who is suddenly called upon to decide the fortunes of his fellow-men, he added—"Where are you off to this morning?"

They told him. Benenden.

"You won't get to Benenden to-day," said Mr Waddy portentously, whereupon, taking one last look at the body and thinking, from what he saw, what a foolish thing the human eye looks when dislodged from its socket, he went away to telephone to his sergeant that there was a case for Scotland Yard.

On the way out of the field where the circus was pitched someone said—

"Little Sawker slept with the Mikado last night, you know."

Mr Waddy stopped. Of course, there had been another bed in the caravan. He had noticed it, but it had not penetrated his thoughts. Frankly, the sight of that powerful body of the Portuguese had upset him. From a sensation in his stomach, as though it were insecurely suspended within him, he felt he would not be able to eat his breakfast with his usual appetite that morning.

"Who's Sawker?" he asked with a penetrating eye.

"The little Burmese chap as looks after the elephants."

"Where is he?"

"In the elephant tent."

Mr Waddy sharply turned his steps in that direction. He felt if he did not hurry, a
man with the slyness and agility of one of these darkies might escape him. An ordinary Englishman, even though he might have committed murder, he felt he understood. He had never had to tackle one of these foreigners. Pushing aside Sam Collins, he looked into the tent.

It was quite a moment, while his eyes were accustoming themselves to the immediate and mountainous rump of the elephant, before Mr Waddy could distinguish the tawny, yellow face of Saw-Ka, still seated in a silent isolation on the slowly diminishing heap of hay.

"That him?" he asked. This, he felt, was not a moment to make mistakes.

With a genuine desire to assist the investigations of the police, the man who played the coronet with one hand and conducted the band with the other said—

"That's Sawker right enough."

Diving in a capacious pocket for his note-book, Mr Waddy pronounced the warning in the grey light of the tent that the little Burmese need not answer any of the questions he was going to put to him unless he liked.

"No good your putting any questions at all," said Mr Ablett. "He don't understand a word of English. He just looks after the elephant."

With evident regret and increased suspicion, Mr Waddy slowly put his note-book away. A man who could not speak the language that Mr Waddy understood gave him the instinctive impression that he was trying to hide something. Issuing solemn instructions to Sam Collins not to move from the entrance to that tent for the next quarter of an hour, he informed them he must go and telephone.

"That's the worst of being single-'anded," he said—"because there ain't a doubt I shall 'ave to detain him. But first I'd better go and see what the sergeant says."

Mr Waddy strode away, with the little group of circus men and by this time most of the women following him. Sam Collins, now feeling somewhat the importance of an official position and gaining a communal kind of courage from it, remained where he was put.

In the darkness at the back of the tent on his heap of hay, Saw-Ka listened to the strange retreating voices. The wrinkled, leather belly of the elephant loomed up above him. The warm snorts of its breath heated the back of his neck as it reached with its trunk for the wisps of hay.

From where he sat in the semi-darkness, crouching in his shirt and pants, he could see the black figure of the body of one of those men keeping guard. Through the flap of the tent the sky was lightening, but it was still the colour of lead. Thin, low clouds were scudding. A slight rain had begun to fall. It was driving in a faint whisper of sound against the canvas. Through a small rent over Saw-Ka's head it was beginning to drip in ever larger and quickening sounds on to the hay.

Every few moments the hand of a man or a woman would pull aside the flap of the tent and they would look in. Their faces were bent down, peering under the
elephant's belly, to catch a sight of him. There he was. Sawker. In his shirt and pants. Their eyes took note of certain definite things. They were not even mystified that the quiet little elephant-trainer had killed the Portuguese strong man. Facts were facts. They had seen Machado's body in its mess on the bunk. They had seen the blood splashed on the walls.

Sitting there in the elephant's tent until something happened, Saw-Ka's brown eyes had the appearance of a glazed inwardness. If they looked out at all from under his low brows, it was beyond rather than towards any definite object. He was just aware of those peering faces as of shadows that pass and pass again. Sam Collins peeped at him occasionally, if only to see he was still there. He felt a peculiar vaporousness about his own specific identity as the Burmese gazed back at him. It was uncanny. What was the little chap thinking about? If he had made all that mess of the Mikado then, apart from his size, you'd never think it to look at him. And, if he had and was going to be strung up for it—for Sam Collins assumed without question that Saw-Ka knew the law of England—then you'd never think he realized it from that queer, faraway look in his eyes.

There was no doubt he'd been a bit excited when they first found him. If Sam Collins were asked about that by the judge, he would have to say it. A bit breathless—like as if his heart was thumpin'. But he was quite calm now, sitting there under the elephant. If the old beast had lifted his foot and brought it down on Sawker's head, there'd have been another mess besides that of the Mikado.

P'raps he hadn't done it. And yet, it was conclusive to the intelligence of Sam Collins, graduated in the school of evening newspapers, that he had. His bed had been slept in. The mallet they used to drive the tent-peg's in, with which the deed had obviously been committed, was lying on the floor by the Mikado's side. The mind of Sam Collins required no more damning evidence than that.

Then what was he thinking about? Sitting there?

It was not within the range of Sam Collins' knowledge of the world or even of his imagination to hear soft thumping sounds, the sounds of women grinding rice, or the faint clink of their spinning-loom's. He could not have distinguished above those early morning noises of a circus on the move the airy clanging of pagoda bells on a festival day after the October rains had passed. He could not see, through the grey light of his English climate, the clear sun rising and falling and a harvest moon pouring streams of silver over rice fields. He could not taste the scent of orchids and hibiscus. All he could smell was the pungent odour of the elephant in the tent. The light of the storm-lantern swaying here and there as the men move between the groups of caravans in the dark field was nothing more than, as he would have described it—the bloody lantern—to him. He could not visualize in its gleam a whole flotilla of tiny rafts, each with its twinkling light, floating down the current of a jungle stream on balmy nights of festival.
How could he have imagined these things?
He had never been to Burmah. Nor, in the service of Mr Ablett, visiting the village on the South Coast, was he ever likely to go.
All he could do towards an understanding of Saw-Ka was to peep in at the little man sitting there on his heap of hay and wonder what the hell he was thinking about.

Such evidence as the police could collect, the bloodstained mallet, the dirty pair of pants Saw-Ka was wearing which also smeared with blood, the box containing Machado's saving which had been smashed open, were assembled at the Court House in Maidstone, where the trial of the Burmese elephant-trainer took place.

A circus was an unusual setting for a murder. There were performing animals. Naphtha flares. Lady bareback riders. Amongst those concerned with feeding a public appetite for news, there was a pleasurable feeling in Fleet Street that here was an interesting crime. It had colour.

By that time, through the interpreting services of Maung Khan, a Burmese law student studying in London, Saw-Ka had made a statement. He declared that two men had come into the caravan late that night. They must have known Machado kept his money in a box under the bed. The Portuguese was fast asleep, but he, Saw-Ka, had wakened at once. Directly they saw he was not asleep, one of the men seized hold of him while the other attacked Machado, who by that time was also awake. He saw the man swing the mallet to strike Machado. He heard the first blow. But he saw and heard nothing more. Escaping out of the hands of the men who held him, he succeeded in escaping out of the door. He must have run straight to the elephant's tent, believing they would not look for him there. But he could not remember. He was so frightened. The first thing he properly remembered was when the men came and found him on the hay. They spoke to him, but he did not know what they had said. Later, when he saw Machado's body on the bunk in the caravan, he knew the two men must have killed him.

Evidence for the Crown was mainly concerned with proving that Saw-Ka's story of the two men was a fabrication. Through the two days of the trial the little Burmese sat in the dock between two warders, listening to the monotonous flow of unintelligible speech from the lips of counsel, witnesses and judge. Was he listening? He never moved. With the impassive face of an ivory Buddha shrined in that dock, he stared at the judge.

Considerable importance turned upon the mallet found in the caravan beside Machado's bed. The prosecution called the evidence of Jim Rumens, the oldest hand in the circus. In his young days Rumens had been a trapeezist. Later a clown. Later still, merely a hand to scrub down the draft-horses and help with the tent. Last of all an old man on sufferance, sleeping under the cart that carried the sitting boards and poles. A kind of night watchman, living in daily apprehension of the sack from Mr
Ablett.

Whenever the old circus proprietor saw him, he would shoot an eyebrow at him and say—
"Well—what are you doing?"

And, often, it was nothing at all. They might be on the road between one town and another. But it was an awful look to Jim Rumens, that look of the old man's. For two or three days afterwards he held his breath when he heard the boss's voice calling a name. It might be him.

Jim Rumens didn't know how old he was and he believed he could drive a peg as well as any. But he had a sickening feeling he was going to get the sack all the same. And then? What then?

With more importance than he had felt for some years, he walked across the court into the witness-box. They'd called the boss of course. His circus. And they'd called Sam Collins to say what Sawker was like in the elephant tent. But they hadn't called no one else. 'Cept him.

"Your name's Jim Rumens?"
"Yes, sir."

He was standing up as straight as his rheumatism would allow so that the boss in court could get a good look at him. If the old man didn't think he was of much consequence, these people, the lawyers and so on, they did. Him and Sam Collins, the Russian bareback rider, they didn't want no one else.

He was answering questions airily with a pleasant sensation of confidence mingled with these emotions of superiority when he heard the gentleman with the papers say—
"Was this the mallet that was used for hammering in the tent-peggs with? Take it in your hand and have a look at it."

A polite gentleman without a wig handed him the mallet. It was the same. He would have known it anywhere. For the last twenty years in the service of the boss he'd handled that mallet. Course it had a new head. Three or four times. But you couldn't want a better handle.

"You seem to take a long while deciding if it is."
"No, sir. No, sir. That's the mallet. I was just lookin' at it."
"And it was in use for various purposes until after the tent was dismantled?"
Dismantled? Probably a legal word. He must mean struck.
"Yes, sir."
"Were you using it yourself?"
"Yes, sir. Me and the Pimp."
"The Pimp?"
"Yes, sir. A young fella that came on along with us last April at Margate. Sings songs and dresses up female. Pimp we calls 'im."
"Can he swing a mallet?"

Silly damn fools those people laughin'! 'Cos of them the boss probably hadn't heard him say—"Not as well as I can, sir. Hasn't got the punch."

He was giving evidence. He scowled at the court, and then the gentleman said—

"Can you tell his Lordship that you saw the mallet off and on all that evening?"

He both could and would. He was about to do so at some length so that the boss could hear all the various things he had done with it, only apparently his Lordship was easily satisfied.

"And what was done with it after your night's work was over?"

"I put it on the property wagon."

"Would anyone other than those employed in the circus know it was there?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see anything of Saw-Ka on that particular night? After the performance?"

"Yes, sir. He was standing there watching us strike."

"Could he have taken the mallet without your noticing it?"

"If he'd slipped round to the property wagon."

"Exactly. I didn't mean he could have conjured it into his possession."

"No, sir."

"I believe your duty is that of a sort of night watchman—isn't it?"

"Night watchman! Night watchman! And he going all the time from daybreak! Which of 'em had told him that?"

"Anyhow you sleep in a horse-blanket under the property wagon?"

"Yes—and used to sleep in one of the best caravans in the show once."

There'd never been a chance like that in his life to let everyone know. He was so concerned with saying it that he did not hear counsel remark that his career was probably an interesting one, but it did not concern them there.

"What I am suggesting," he added, "is that if any strangers to the circus had come looking about for that mallet on the property wagon during the night, you'd have been aware of it."

Jim Rumens laughed. Aware of it! There hadn't been a thing stolen since he'd been looking after them.

"And, you slept there all that night?"

Who'd ever have though they'd have asked him that? It had rained that night. With a wind in the east. Bloody cold. The clock on Sandhurst Tower had struck two when he woke up shivering. And, there was the zebra, those wild cats in cages, two mules and a couple of monkeys on chains all warm in a tent by themselves.

Who was there to know he'd just stepped over there and laid down with his back up against one of the mules till the first streak of daylight? The boss didn't, and he never should know it.
"Yes, sir." He had hardly even paused.
"So, that in your opinion no stranger to the circus could have come and procured that mallet without your knowledge?"
"No, sir."
"Thank you."

The gentleman sat down. Time he did. Jim Rumens was beginning to feel uncomfortable. He was glad that Sawker didn't know what he was saying, because if Sawker had come while he was in with the zebra and got the mallet to do the Mikado in—there was no doubt in Rumens' mind as to the crime—he would have seen the vacant place beneath the wagon. However, there was his face in the dock as much like a lump of wood as that mallet. And that was all. He was just stepping out of the witness-box when a fat gentleman with more papers jumped up and said—
"Have you ever suffered from insomnina?"
Insomnina? What was he talkin' about?
"Sleeplessness?"
Him? After a hard day's work?
"No, sir."
"You sleep quite well?"
"Yes, sir."
"Thank you."

Now what the hell did he mean by that? He went and sat next to Sam Collins who whispered in his ear.
"You've done him all right. Not but what he didn't do it, of course. But what you said about the mallet. He'll get the bit of rope all right."

The bit of rope. With the sensation of it round his own neck, Jim Rumens looked across the court at Saw-Ka. Not a look, not a movement in his little yellow face. What the hell was he thinkin' about?

The case for the prosecution was closed on the first day. Circumstantial evidence was overwhelming. Counsel for the defence would do his best, but he felt it necessary to warm Mr Maung Khan that the position was fairly hopeless.

"You must prepare him or not as you think best," he said sympathetically. "But I don't fancy I shall get a verdict."

"He will understand," said Maung Khan unemotionally. "In Burmah we believe in reincarnation. This is only one life. He believes that. I don't know whether he has done this thing. He has just made that statement to me. When you call me to-morrow, all I can say is that I have known him since he came to England in charge of his elephant. So far as was possible I looked after him. He stayed in the same house with me a few days before he joined the circus. He is a quiet—you call it sensitive little man. I could not have believed he would have hurt anything. We do not like to kill in
Burmah. I should have said he was like that I do not think he wanted to come to England at all. He loves his native place which is far from Rangoon near the forests. If you have heard the long silence of the forests, you do not love places like England. He does not tell me why he came here. I think it was some trouble with the father and mother of a little girl he wanted to marry. He was poor. You know how these things happen. He was sorry directly he came away. I suppose it was an impulse. Before he reached England he was longing to be back in Burmah. And, here—these grey skies. You can understand. He was saving up his money to return. Perhaps, it was that little more he wanted in the box. Though I could hardly believe it could rouse him to such powerful madness. He is only a little man, and the other was so strong. Still, if it is to be, it will be. This is only one life."

In the interval for lunch on the second day, before the counsel's speech for the defence, Maung Khan told Saw-Ka he need not hope. The two carved faces looked at each other in silence and without movement.

"What will happen?" said Saw-Ka at last.
"They will kill you," said Mr Maung Khan.
Saw-Ka nodded his head once in stolid acceptance of the fact, but did not inquire how. All he said was—
"Then I shall go back to Burmah."
As though this were quite a simple statement of incontrovertible fact, the other lowered his eyes in acquiescence.
"Then I will say," said Saw-Ka, "I did it."
"That is right," replied Mr Maung Khan.

"It was rain that night," Saw-Ka continued. "There was no moon. There is no moon. I have seen no moon. It is not the season of rains. It is always rain. And black mud. You drink because it rains so much. Barbosa drink in every town we go and look for women. When there are not women, there is Saw-Ka. It is like that, and we go from town to town. Sometimes when I can hide, I go and sleep with my elephant. I sing to him. He came with me from Burmah. He has stood in the forest rivers. In the harvest moon, when no one was there to see, he has flapped his ears in the rice-fields. I have seen him. I tell him so He understands. Barbosa only understands women in their dirty clothes, and when there are no women—there is Saw-Ka.

"I knew that night there were no women in that place. Barbosa went out to the house to drink when he had lifted the horse. He took me by the arm and shook me. I knew what he was saying in his language. If I hid, he would find me. I was to be in the caravan that night when he came back."

Saw-Ka stared at Mr Maung Khan.
"I have loved a little girl in Burmah," he said.

The sudden contrast of that remark was all that appeared to be needed to his
Oriental mind.

Mr Maung Khan nodded. Saw-Ka went on.

"I had seen them hit the pegs with that mallet. I got it and brought it to the caravan. It was still raining when Barbosa returned. There was a smell of fire in his breath. It seemed to burn me. I could hear the rain against the wood of the house. There was no moon. There is no moon. He got into his bed and call me. He was not looking. I came with the mallet in my hands. I could not live like that. I have loved a little girl in Burmah. Then I hit. His head. He does not get up and hit me back, and I hit again. Then it is all blood and I hit and hit as if it was a peg. And, there is blood everywhere. But all I think— what do I think?"

Mr Maung Khan shook his head.

"I think I will go back to Burmah. I am mad like I was when I came away. So I go to take the money from his box. I break it open and then I am frightened. There is so much blood. I run away with fear. The morning is coming with the rain. There is my elephant."

He said no more.

"I must tell this to the counsel," said Mr Maung Khan.

Saw-Ka said—

"Yes."

He inquired how he would know what was to happen to him. The law student told him about the piece of black cloth.

"When that is put on the judge's head," said Mr Maung Khan with technical knowledge of these things, "there is nothing more."

They bowed to each other.

Addressing the little Burmese after the jury's verdict of guilty, the judge said—

"Saw-Ka, I shall not address any remarks to you, for the simple reason that you do not understand English. I shall only say that the jury have justly and conscientiously arrived at and delivered their verdict which in my opinion could not have been otherwise than it is. All that remains for me to do then is to pass upon you the sentence of death."

While the words were being spoken and the black cap adjusted on the judge's head, the eyes of Sam Collins, the Russian bareback rider, and those of Jim Rumens were searching Saw-Ka's face.

There he was, standing up there between the two warders. And, never a look. Never a sign. Not until they brought out the black cap. Was it a smile then?

What the devil was he thinkin' about?
The Unexpected

By Jack London

It is a simple matter to see the obvious, to do the expected. The tendency of the individual life is to be static rather than dynamic, and this tendency is made into a propulsion by civilisation, where the obvious only is seen, and the unexpected rarely happens. When the unexpected does happen, however, and when it is of sufficiently grave import, the unfit perish. They do not see what is not obvious, are unable to do the unexpected, are incapable of adjusting their well-grooved lives to other and strange grooves. In short, when they come to the end of their own groove, they die.

On the other hand, there are those that make toward survival—the fit individuals who escape from the rule of the obvious and the expected, and adjust their lives to no matter what strange grooves they may stray into or into which they may be forced. Such an individual was Edith Whittlesey. She was born in a rural district of England, where life proceeds by rule of thumb, and the unexpected is so very unexpected that when it happens it is looked upon almost as an immorality. She went into service early, and, while yet a young woman, by rule-of-thumb progression she became a lady's-maid.

The effect of civilisation is to impose human law upon environment until it becomes machine-like in its regularity. The objectionable is eliminated, the inevitable is foreseen. One is not even made wet by the rain nor cold by the frost; while death, instead of stalking about gruesome and accidental, becomes a pre-arranged pageant, moving along a well-oiled groove to the family vault, where the hinges are kept from rusting and the dust from the air is swept continually away.

Such was the environment of Edith Whittlesey. Nothing happened. It could scarcely be called a happening when, at the age of twenty-five, she accompanied her mistress on a bit of travel to the United States. The groove merely changed its direction. It was still the same groove and well oiled. It was a groove that bridged the Atlantic with uneventfulness, so that the ship was no longer a ship in the midst of
the sea, but a capacious, many-corridored hotel that moved swiftly and placidly, crushing the waves into submission with its colossal bulk until the sea was as a mill-
pond, monotonous with quietude. And, at the other side the groove continued on over the land, a well-disposed, respectable groove, that supplied hotels at every stopping-place, and hotels on wheels between the stopping-places.

In Chicago, while her mistress saw one side of social life, Edith Whittlesey saw another side; and when she left her lady's service and became Edith Nelson, she betrayed, perhaps faintly, her ability to grapple with the unexpected and to master it. Hans Nelson, immigrant, Swede by birth and carpenter by occupation, had in him that Teutonic unrest which drives the race ever westward on its great adventure. He was a large-muscled, stolid sort of a man, in whom little imagination was coupled with immense initiative, and who possessed, withal, loyalty and affection as sturdy as his own strength.

"When I have worked hard and saved me some money, I will go to Colorado," he had told Edith on the day after their wedding. A year later they were in Colorado, where Hans Nelson saw his first mining and caught the mining-fever himself. His prospecting led him through the Dakotas, Idaho, and eastern Oregon, and on into the mountains of British Columbia. In camp and on trail Edith Nelson was always with him, sharing his luck, his hardship, and his toil. The short step of the house-reared woman she exchanged for the long stride of the mountaineer. She learned to look upon danger clear-eyed and with understanding, losing for ever that panic fear which is bred of ignorance, and which afflicts the city-reared, making them as silly as silly horses, so that they await fate in frozen horror instead of grappling with it, or stampede in blind self-destroying terror which clutters the way with their crushed carcasses.

Edith Nelson met the unexpected at every turn of the trail, and she trained her vision so that she saw in the landscape, not the obvious, but the concealed. She, who had never cooked in her life, learned to make bread without the mediation of hops, yeast, or baking-powder, and to bake bread, top and bottom, in a frying-pan before an open fire. And when the last cup of flour was gone and the last rind of bacon, she was able to rise to the occasion, and of moccasins and the softer-tanned bits of leather in the outfit to make a grub-substitute that somehow held a man's soul in his body and enabled him to stagger on. She learned to pack a horse as well as a man—a task to break the heart and the pride of any city-dweller—and she knew how to throw the hitch best suited for any particular kind of pack. Also, she could build a fire of wet wood in a downpour of rain and not lose her temper. In short, in all its guises she mastered the unexpected. But the Great Unexpected was yet to come into her life and put its test upon her.

The gold-seeking tide was flooding northward into Alaska, and it was inevitable that Hans Nelson and his wife should be caught up by the stream and swept toward
the Klondike. The autumn of 1897 found them at Skagway, but without the money to carry an outfit across Chilcot Pass and float it down to Dawson. So Hans Nelson worked at his trade that winter and helped to rear the mushroom outfitting town of Skagway.

He was on the edge of things, and throughout the winter he heard all Alaska calling to him. Latuya Bay called loudest, so that the summer of 1898 found him and his wife threading the mazes of the broken coast-line in seventy-foot Siwash canoes. With them were Indians, also three other men. The Indians landed them and their supplies in a lonely bight of land a hundred miles or so beyond Latuya Bay, and returned to Skagway; but the three other men remained, for they were members of the organised party. Each had put an equal share of capital into the outfitting, and the profits were to be divided equally. In that Edith Nelson undertook to cook for the outfit, a man's share was to be her portion.

First, spruce trees were cut down and a three-room cabin constructed. To keep this cabin was Edith Nelson's task. The task of the men was to search for gold, which they did; and to find gold, which they likewise did. It was not a startling find, merely a low-pay placer, where long hours of severe toil earned each man between fifteen and twenty dollars a day. The brief Alaskan summer protracted itself beyond its usual length, and they took advantage of the opportunity, delaying their return to Skagway to the last moment. And then it was too late. Arrangements had been made to accompany the several dozen local Indians on their fall trading trip down the coast. The Siwashes had waited on the white people until the eleventh hour, and then departed. There was no course left the party but to wait for chance transportation. In the meantime the claim was cleaned up and firewood stocked in.

The Indian summer had dreamed on and on, and then, suddenly, with the sharpness of bugles, winter came. It came in a single night, and the miners awoke to howling wind, driving snow, and freezing water. Storm followed storm, and between the storms there was the silence, broken only by the boom of the surf on the desolate shore, where the salt spray rimmed the beach with frozen white.

All went well in the cabin. Their gold dust had weighed up something like eight thousand dollars, and they could not but be contented. The men made snowshoes, hunted fresh meat for the larder, and in the long evenings played endless games of whist and pedro. Now that the mining had ceased, Edith Nelson turned over the fire-building and the dish-washing to the men, while she darned their socks and mended their clothes.

There was no grumbling, no bickering nor petty quarrelling in the little cabin, and they often congratulated one another on the general happiness of the party. Hans Nelson was stolid and easy-going, while Edith had long before won his unbounded admiration by her capacity for getting on with people. Harkey, a long, lank Texan, was unusually friendly for one with a saturnine disposition, and, so long as his
theory that gold grew was not challenged, was quite companionable. The fourth member of the party, Michael Dennin, contributed his Irish wit to the gaiety of the cabin. He was a large, powerful man, prone to sudden rushes of anger over little things, and of unfailing good-humour under the stress and strain of big things. The fifth and last member, Dutchy, was the willing butt of the party. He even went out of his way to raise a laugh at his own expense in order to keep things cheerful. His deliberate aim in life seemed to be that of a maker of laughter. No serious quarrel had ever vexed the serenity of the party; and, now that each had sixteen hundred dollars to show for a short summer's work, there reigned the well-fed, contented spirit of prosperity.

And then, the unexpected happened. They had just sat down to the breakfast-table. Though it was already eight o'clock (late breakfasts had followed naturally upon cessation of the steady work at mining), a candle in the neck of a bottle lighted the meal. Edith and Hans sat at each end of the table. On one side, with their backs to the door, sat Harkey and Dutchy. The place on the other side was vacant. Dennin had not yet come in.

Hans Nelson looked at the empty chair, shook his head slowly, and with a ponderous attempt at humour, said, "Always is he first at the grub. It is very strange. Maybe he is sick."

"Where is Michael?" Edith asked.

"Got up a little ahead of us and went outside," Harkey answered.

Dutchy's face beamed mischievously. He pretended knowledge of Dennin's absence, and affected a mysterious air, while they clamoured for information. Edith, after a peep into the men's bunkroom, returned to the table. Hans looked at her, and she shook her head.

"He was never late at meal-time before," she remarked.

"I cannot understand," said Hans. "Always has he the great appetite like the horse."

"It is too bad," Dutchy said, with a sad shake of his head. They were beginning to make merry over their comrade's absence.

"It is a great pity!" Dutchy volunteered.

"What?" they demanded in chorus.

"Poor Michael!" was the mournful reply.

"Well, what's wrong with Michael?" Harkey asked.

"He is not hungry no more," wailed Dutchy. "He has lost der appetite. He do not like der grub."

"Not from the way he pitches into it up to his ears," remarked Harkey.

"He does dot shust to be politeful to Mrs Nelson," was Dutchy's quick retort. "I know, I know, und it is too pad. Why is he not here? Pecause he haf gone out. Why haf he gone out? For der defelopment of der appetite. How does he defelop der
appetite? He walks barefoots in der snow. Ach! Don't I know? It is der way der rich people chases after der appetite when it is no more und is running away. Michael haf sixteen hundred dollars. He is rich peoples. He haf no appetite. Derefore, pecause, he is chasing der appetite. Shust you open der door und you will see his barefoots in der snow. No, you will not see der appetite. Dot is shust his trouble. When he sees der appetite he will catch it und come to breakfast."

They burst into loud laughter at Dutchy's nonsense. The sound had scarcely died away when the door opened and Dennin came in. All turned to look at him. He was carrying a shotgun. Even as they looked he lifted it to his shoulder and fired twice. At the first shot Dutchy sank upon the table, overturning his mug of coffee, his yellow mop of hair dabbling in his plate of mush. His forehead, which pressed upon the near edge of the plate, tilted the plate up against his hair at an angle of forty-five degrees. Harkey was in the air, in his spring to his feet, at the second shot, and he pitched face-down upon the floor, his 'My God!' gurgling and dying in his throat.

It was the unexpected. Hans and Edith were stunned. They sat at the table with bodies tense, their eyes fixed in a fascinated gaze upon the murderer. Dimly they saw him through the smoke of the powder, and in the silence nothing was to be heard save the drip-drip of Dutchy's spilled coffee on the floor. Dennin threw open the breech of the shotgun, ejecting the empty shells. Holding the gun with one hand, he reached with the other into his pocket for fresh shells.

He was thrusting the shells into the gun when Edith Nelson was aroused to action. It was patent that he intended to kill Hans and her. For a space of possibly three seconds of time she had been dazed and paralysed by the horrible and inconceivable form in which the unexpected had made its appearance. Then she rose to it and grappled with it. She grappled with it concretely, making a cat-like leap for the murderer, and gripping his neckcloth with both her hands. The impact of her body sent him stumbling backwards several steps. He tried to shake her loose and still retain his hold on the gun. This was awkward, for her firm-fleshed body had become a cat's. She threw herself to one side, and with her grip at his throat nearly jerked him to the floor. He straightened himself and whirled swiftly. Still faithful to her hold, her body followed the circle of his whirl, so that her feet left the floor and she swung through the air fastened to his throat by her hands. The whirl culminated in a collision with a chair, and the man and woman crashed to the floor in a wild struggling fall that extended itself across half the length of the room.

Hans Nelson was half a second behind his wife in rising to the unexpected. His nerve processes and mental processes were slower than hers. His was the grosser organism, and it had taken him half a second longer to perceive, and determine, and proceed to do. She had already flown at Dennin and gripped his throat, when Hans sprang to his feet. But her coolness was not his. He was in a blind fury, a Berserker rage. At the instant he sprang from his chair his mouth opened and there issued forth
a sound that was half-roar, half-bellow. The whirl of the two bodies had already started, and still roaring, or bellowing, he pursued this whirl down the room, overtaking it when it fell to the floor.

Hans hurled himself upon the prostrate man, striking madly with his fists. They were sledge-like blows, and when Edith felt Dennin's body relax she loosed her grip and rolled clear. She lay on the floor panting and watching. The fury of blows continued to rain down. Dennin did not seem to mind the blows. He did not even move. Then it dawned upon her that he was unconscious. She cried out to Hans to stop. She cried out again. But he paid no heed to her voice. She caught him by the arm, but her clinging to it merely impeded his effort.

It was no reasoned impulse that stirred her to do what she then did. Nor was it a sense of pity, nor obedience to the 'Thou shalt not' of religion. Rather was it some sense of law, an ethic of her race and early environment, that compelled her to interpose her body between her husband and the helpless murderer. It was not until Hans knew he was striking his wife that he ceased. He allowed himself to be shoved away by her in much the same way that a ferocious but obedient dog allows itself to be shoved away by its master. The analogy even went further. Deep in his throat, in an animal-like way, Hans' rage still rumbled, and several times he made as though to spring back upon his prey, and was only prevented by the woman's swiftly-interposed body.

Back, and farther back, Edith shoved her husband. She had never seen him in such a condition, and she was more frightened of him than she had been of Dennin in the thick of the struggle. She could not believe that this raging beast was her Hans, and with a shock she became suddenly aware of a shrinking instinctive fear that he might snap her hand in his teeth like any wild animal. For some seconds, unwilling to hurt her, yet dogged in his desire to return to the attack, Hans dodged back and forth. But she resolutely dodged with him, until the first glimmerings of reason returned and he gave over.

Both crawled to their feet. Hans staggered back against the wall, where he leaned, his face working, in his throat the deep and continuous rumble that died away with the seconds and at last ceased. The time for the reaction had come. Edith stood in the middle of the floor, wringing her hands, panting and gasping, her whole body trembling violently.

Hans looked at nothing, but Edith's eyes wandered wildly from detail to detail of what had taken place. Dennin lay without movement. The overturned chair, hurled onward in the mad whirl, lay near him. Partly under him lay the shotgun, still broken open at the breech. Spilling out of his right hand were the two cartridges which he had failed to put into the gun, and which he had clutched until consciousness left him. Harkey lay on the floor, face downward, where he had fallen; while Dutchy rested forward on the table, his yellow mop of hair buried in
his mush-plate, the plate itself still tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees. This tilted plate fascinated her. Why did it not fall down? It was ridiculous. It was not in the nature of things for a mush-plate to up-end itself on the table, even if a man or so had been killed.

She glanced back at Dennin, but her eyes returned to the tilted plate. It was so ridiculous! She felt a hysterical impulse to laugh. Then she noticed the silence, and forgot the plate in a desire for something to happen. The monotonous drip of the coffee from the table merely emphasised the silence. Why did not Hans do something? Say something? She looked at him, and was about to speak, when she discovered that her tongue refused its wonted duty. There was a peculiar ache in her throat, and her mouth was dry and furry. She could only look at Hans, who, in turn, looked at her.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a sharp metallic clang. She screamed, jerking her eyes back to the table. The plate had fallen down. Hans sighed as though awakening from sleep. The clang of the plate had aroused them to life in a new world. The cabin epitomised the new world in which they must thenceforth live and move. The old cabin was gone for ever. The horizon of life was totally new and unfamiliar. The unexpected had swept its wizardry over the face of things, changing the perspective, juggling values, and shuffling the real and the unreal into perplexing confusion.

"My God, Hans!" was Edith's first speech.

He did not answer, but stared at her with horror. Slowly his eyes wandered over the room, for the first time taking in its details. Then he put on his cap and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" Edith demanded, in an agony of apprehension.

His hands were on the doorknob, and he half-turned as he answered, "To dig some graves."

"Don't leave me, Hans, with—" her eyes swept the room "—with this."

"The graves must be dug some time," he said.

"But you do not know how many," she objected desperately. She noted his indecision, and added, "Besides, I'll go with you and help."

Hans stepped back to the table and mechanically snuffed the candle. Then between them they made the examination. Both Harkey and Dutchy were dead—frightfully dead, because of the close range of the shotgun. Hans refused to go near Dennin, and Edith was forced to conduct this portion of the investigation by herself.

"He isn't dead," she called to Hans.

He walked over and looked down at the murderer.

"What did you say?" Edith demanded, having caught the rumble of inarticulate speech in her husband's throat.

"I said it was a damn shame that he isn't dead," came the reply.
Edith was bending over the body.
"Leave him alone," Hans commanded harshly, in a strange voice.
She looked at him in sudden alarm. He had picked up the shotgun dropped by Dennin, and was thrusting in the shells.
"What are you going to do?" she cried, rising swiftly from her bending position.
Hans did not answer, but she saw the shotgun going to his shoulder. She grasped the muzzle with her hand and threw it up.
"Leave me alone!" he cried hoarsely.
He tried to jerk the weapon away from her, but she came in closer and clung to him.
"Hans! Hans! Wake up!" she cried. "Don't be crazy!"
"He killed Dutchy and Harkey!" was her husband's reply, "and I am going to kill him."
"But that is wrong," she objected. "There is the law."
He sneered his incredulity of the law's potency in such a region, but he merely iterated, dispassionately, doggedly, "He killed Dutchy and Harkey."
Long she argued it with him, but the argument was one-sided, for he contented himself with repeating again and again, "He killed Dutchy and Harkey." But she could not escape from her childhood training nor from the blood that was in her. The heritage of law was hers, and right conduct, to her, was the fulfilment of the law. She could see no other righteous course to pursue. Hans' taking the law in his own hand was no more justifiable than Dennin's deed. Two wrongs did not make a right, she contended, and there was only one way to punish Dennin, and that was the legal way arranged by society. At last Hans gave in to her.
"All right," he said. "Have it your own way. And tomorrow or next day look to see him kill you and me."
She shook her head and held out her hand for the shotgun. He started to hand it to her, then hesitated.
"Better let me shoot him," he pleaded.
Again, she shook her head, and again he started to pass her the gun, when the door opened, and an Indian came in without knocking. A blast of wind and flurry of snow came in with him. They turned and faced him, Hans still holding the shotgun. The intruder took in the scene without a quiver. His eyes embraced the dead and wounded in a sweeping glance. No surprise showed in his face, not even curiosity. Harkey lay at his feet, but he took no notice of him. So far as he was concerned, Harkey's body did not exist.
"Much wind," the Indian remarked by way of salutation. "All well? Very well?"
Hans, still grasping the gun, felt sure that the Indian attributed to him the mangled corpses. He glanced appealingly at his wife.
"Good morning, Negook," she said, her voice betraying her effort. "No, not very
well. Much trouble."

"Good-bye, I go now, much hurry," the Indian said, and without semblance of haste, with great deliberation stepping clear of a red pool on the floor, he opened the door and went out.

The man and woman looked at each other.

"He thinks we did it," Hans gasped—"that I did it."

Edith was silent for a space. Then she said briefly, in a businesslike way—

"Never mind what he thinks. That will come after. At present we have two graves to dig. But, first of all, we've got to tie up Dennin so he can't escape."

Hans refused to touch Dennin, but Edith lashed him securely, hand and foot. Then she and Hans went out into the snow. The ground was frozen. It was impervious to a blow of the pick. They first gathered wood, then scraped the snow away and on the frozen surface built a fire. When the fire had burned for an hour, several inches of dirt had thawed. This they shovelled out, and then built a fresh fire. Their descent into the earth progressed at the rate of two three inches an hour.

It was hard and bitter work. The flurrying snow did not permit the fire to burn any too well, while the wind cut through their clothes and chilled their bodies. They held but little conversation. The wind interfered with speech. Beyond wondering at what could have been Dennin's motive, they remained silent, oppressed by the horror of the tragedy. At one o'clock, looking towards the cabin, Hans announced that he was hungry.

"No, not now, Hans," Edith answered, "I couldn't go back alone into that cabin the way it is and cook a meal."

At two o'clock Hans volunteered to go with her, but she held him to his work, and four o'clock found the two graves completed. They were shallow, not more than two feet deep, but they would serve the purpose. Night had fallen. Hans got the sled, and the two dead men were dragged through the darkness and storm to their frozen sepulchre. The funeral procession was anything but a pageant. The sled sank deep into the drifted snow and pulled hard. The man and woman had eaten nothing since the previous day, and were weak from hunger and exhaustion. They had not the strength to resist the wind, and at times its buffets hurled them off their feet. On several occasions the sled was overturned, and they were compelled to reload it with its sombre freight. The last hundred feet to the graves was up a steep slope, and this they took on all-fours, like sled-dogs, making legs of their arms, and thrusting their hands into the snow. Even so, they were twice dragged backward by the weight of the sled, and slid and fell down the hill, the living and the dead, the haul-ropes and the sled, in ghastly entanglement.

"Tomorrow I will put up head-boards with their names," Hans said, when the graves were filled in.

Edith was sobbing. A few broken sentences had been all she was capable of in the
way of a funeral service, and now her husband was compelled to half-carry her back to the cabin.

Dennin was conscious. He had rolled over and over on the floor in vain efforts to free himself. He watched Hans and Edith with glittering eyes, but made no attempt to speak. Hans still refused to touch the murderer, and sullenly watched Edith drag him across the floor to the men's bunk-room. But try as she would she could not lift him from the floor into his bunk.

"Better let me shoot him, and we'll have no more trouble," Hans said in final appeal.

Edith shook her head and bent again to her task. To her surprise the body rose easily, and she knew Hans had relented and was helping her. Then came the cleansing of the kitchen. But the floor still shrieked the tragedy, until Hans planed the surface of the stained wood away, and with the shavings made a fire in the stove.

The days came and went. There was much of darkness and silence, broken only by the storms and the thunder on the beach of the freezing surf. Hans was obedient to Edith's slightest order. All his splendid initiative had vanished. She had elected to deal with Dennin in her way, and so he left the whole matter in her hands.

The murderer was a constant menace. At all times there was the chance that he might free himself from his bonds, and they were compelled to guard him day and night. The man or the woman sat always beside him, holding the loaded shotgun. At first Edith tried eight-hour watches, but the continuous strain was too great, and afterwards she and Hans relieved each other every four hours. As they had to sleep, and as the watches extended through the night, their whole waking time was expended in guarding Dennin. They had barely time left over for the preparation of meals and the getting of firewood.

Since Negook's inopportune visit the Indians had avoided the cabin. Edith sent Hans to their cabins to get them to take Dennin down the coast in a canoe to the nearest white settlement or trading-post, but the errand was fruitless. Then Edith went herself and interviewed Negook. He was head-man of the little village, keenly aware of his responsibility, and he elucidated his policy thoroughly, in few words.

"It is white man's trouble," he said, "not Siwash trouble. My people help you, then will it be Siwash trouble, too. When white man's trouble and Siwash trouble come together and make a trouble, it is a great trouble, beyond understanding and without end. Trouble no good. My people do no wrong. What for they help you and have trouble?"

So, Edith Nelson went back to the terrible cabin with its endless alternating four-hour watches. Sometimes, when it was her turn and she sat by the prisoner, the loaded shotgun in her lap, her eyes would close and she would doze. Always she around with a start, snatching up the gun and swiftly looking at him. These were
distinct nervous shocks, and their effect was not good on her. Such was her fear of
the man, that even if she were wide awake, if he moved under the bedclothes she
could not repress the start and the quick reach for the gun.

She was preparing herself for a nervous breakdown, and she knew it. First came
a fluttering of the eyeballs, so that she was compelled to close her eyes for relief. A
little later the eyelids were afflicted by a nervous twitching that she could not
control. To add to the strain, she could not forget the tragedy. She remained as close
to the horror as on the first morning when the unexpected stalked into the cabin and
took possession. In her daily ministrations upon the prisoner she was forced to grit
her teeth and steel herself, body and spirit.

Hans was affected differently. He became obsessed by the idea that it was his duty
to kill Dennin; and whenever he waited upon the bound man or watched by him,
Edith was troubled by the fear that Hans would add another red entry to the cabin's
record. Always she cursed Dennin savagely and handled him roughly. Hans tried to
conceal his homicidal mania, and he would say to his wife, "By and by you will
want me to kill him, and then I will not kill him. It would make me sick." But more
than once, stealing into the room when it was her watch off, she would catch the two
men glaring ferociously at each other, wild animals the pair of them—in Hans' face
the lust to kill, in Dennin's the fierceness and savagery of the cornered rat. "Hans!
" she would cry, "wake up!" and he would come to a recollection of himself, startled
and shamefaced and unrepentant.

So, Hans became another factor in the problem the unexpected had given Edith
Nelson to solve. At first it had been merely a question of right conduct in dealing
with Dennin; and right conduct, as she conceived it, lay in keeping him a prisoner
until he could be turned over for trial before a proper tribunal. But now entered
Hans, and she saw that his sanity and his salvation were involved. Nor, was she long
in discovering that her own strength and endurance had become part of the problem.
She was breaking down under the strain. Her left arm had developed involuntary
jerkings and twitchings. She spilled her food from her spoon, and could place no
reliance in her afflicted arm. She judged it to be a form of St Vitus's dance, and she
feared the extent to which its ravages might go. What if she broke down? And the
vision she had of the possible future, when the cabin might contain only Dennin and
Hans, was an added horror.

After the third day Dennin had begun to talk. His first question had been, "What
are you going to do with me?" And this question he repeated daily and many times a
day. And always Edith replied that he would assuredly be dealt with according to
law. In turn she put a daily question to him, "Why did you do it?" To this he never
replied. Also, he received the question with outbursts of anger, raging and straining
at the rawhide that bound him, and threatening her with what he would do when he
got loose, which he said he was sure to do sooner or later. At such times she cocked
both triggers of the gun, prepared to meet him with leaden death if he should burst
loose herself trembling and palpitating and dizzy from the tension and shock.

But in time Dennin grew more tractable. It seemed to her that he was growing
very weary of his unchanging recumbent position. He began to beg and plead to be
released. He made wild promises. He would do them no harm. He would himself go
down the coast and give himself up to the officers of the law. He would give them
his share of the gold. He would go away into the heart of the wilderness, and never
again appear in civilisation. He would take his own life if she would only free him.
His pleadings usually culminated in involuntary raving, until it seemed to her that he
was passing into a fit; but always she shook her head and denied him the freedom
for which he worked himself into a passion.

But the weeks went by, and he continued to grow more tractable. And through it
all the weariness was asserting itself more and more. "I am so tired, so tired," he
would murmur, rolling his head back and forth on the pillow like a peevish child. At
a little later period he began to make impassioned pleas for death, to beg Hans to put
him out of his misery, so that he might at least rest comfortably.

The situation was fast becoming impossible. Edith's nervousness was continuing,
and she knew her breakdown might come at any time. She could not even get her
proper rest, for she was haunted by the fear that Hans would yield to his mania and
kill Dennin while she slept. Though January had already come, months would have
to elapse before any trading schooner was even likely to put into the bay. Also, they
had not expected to winter in the cabin, and the food was running low; nor could
Hans add to the supply by hunting. They were chained to the cabin by the necessity
of guarding their prisoner.

Something must be done, and she knew it. She forced herself to go back into a
reconsideration of the problem. She could not shake off the legacy of her race, the
law that was of her blood, and that had been trained into her. She knew that whatever
she did she must do according to the law, and in the long hours of watching, the
shotgun on her knees, the murderer restless beside her, and the storms thundering
without, she made original sociological researches, and worked out for herself the
evolution of the law. It came to her that the law was nothing more than the judgment
and the will of any group of people. It mattered not how large was the group of
people. There were little groups, she reasoned, like Switzerland, and there were big
groups like the United States. Also, she reasoned, it did not matter how small was
the group of people. There might be only ten thousand people in a country, yet their
collective judgment and will would be the law of that country. Why, then, could not
one thousand people constitute such a group? She asked herself. And if one
thousand, why not one hundred? Why not fifty? Why not five? Why not—two?

She was frightened at her own conclusion, and she talked it over with Hans. At
first he could not comprehend, and then, when he did, he added convincing evidence. He spoke of miners' meetings, where all the men of a locality came together and made the law and executed the law. There might be only ten or fifteen men altogether, he said, but the will of the majority became the law for the whole ten or fifteen, and whoever violated that will was punished.

Edith saw her way clear at last. Dennin must hang. Hans agreed with her. Between them they constituted the majority of this particular group. It was the group-will that Dennin should be hanged. In the execution of this will Edith strove earnestly to observe the customary forms; but the group was so small that Hans and she had to serve as witnesses, as jury, and as judges—also as executioners. She formally charged Michael Dennin with the murder of Dutchy and Harkey, and the prisoner lay in his bunk and listened to the testimony, first of Hans and then of Edith. He refused to plead guilty or not guilty, and remained silent when she asked him if he had anything to say in his own defence. She and Hans, without leaving their seats, brought in the jury's verdict of guilty. Then, as judge, she imposed the sentence. Her voice shook, her eyelids twitched, her left arm jerked, but she carried it out.

"Michael Dennin, in three days' time you are to be hanged by the neck until you are dead."

Such was the sentence. The man breathed an unconscious sigh of relief, then laughed defiantly, and said, "Thin I'm thinkin' the damn bunk won't be achin' me back anny more, an' that's a consolation."

With the passing of the sentence a feeling of relief seemed to communicate itself to all of them. Especially was it noticeable in Dennin. All sullenness and defiance disappeared, and he talked sociably with his captors, and with even flashes of his old-time wit. Also, he found great satisfaction in Edith's reading to him from the Bible. She read from the New Testament, and he took keen interest in the prodigal son and the thief on the cross.

On the day preceding that set for the execution, when Edith asked her usual question, "Why did you do it?" Dennin answered, "'Tis very simple. I was thinkin'—"

But she hushed him abruptly, asked him to wait, and hurried to Hans' bedside. It was his watch off, and he came out of his sleep rubbing his eyes and grumbling.

"Go," she told him, "and bring up Negook and one other Indian. Michael's going to confess. Make them come. Take the rifle along, and bring them up at the point of it if you have to."

Half an hour later Negook and his uncle, Hadikwan, were ushered into the death-chamber. They came unwillingly, Hans with his rifle herding them along.

"Negook," Edith said, "there is to be no trouble for you and your people. Only is it for you to sit and do nothing but listen and understand."

Thus did Michael Dennin, under sentence of death, make public confession of his crime. As he talked, Edith wrote his story down, while the Indians listened, and Hans
guarded the door for fear the witnesses might bolt.

He had not been home to the old country for fifteen years, Dennin explained; and it had always been his intention to return with plenty of money and make his old mother comfortable for the rest of her days.

"An' how was I to be doin' it on sixteen hundred?" he demanded. "What I was after wantin' was all the goold—the whole eight thousan'. Thin I cud go back in style. What ud be aisier, thinks I to meself, than to kill all iv yez, report it at Skagway for an Indian-killin', an' thin pull out for Ireland? An' so I started in to kill all iv yez; but, as Harkey was fond of sayin', I cut out too large a chunk an' fell down on the swallowin' iv it. An' that's me confession. I did me duty to the devil, an' now, God willin', I'll do me duty to God."

"Negook and Hadikwan, you have heard the white man's words," Edith said to the Indians. "His words are here on this paper, and it is for you to make a sign, thus, on the paper, so that white men to come after will know that you have heard."

The two Siwashes put crosses opposite their signatures, received a summons to appear on the morrow, with all their tribe, for a further witnessing of things, and were allowed to go.

Dennin's hands were released long enough for him to sign the document. Then a silence fell in the room. Hans was restless, and Edith felt uncomfortable. Dennin lay on his back, staring straight up at the moss-chinked roof.

"An' now I'll do me duty to God," he murmured. He turned his head towards Edith. "Read to me," he said, "from the Book." Then he added, with a glint of playfulness, "Mayhap 'twill help me to forget the bunk."

The day of the execution broke clear and cold. The thermometer was down to twenty-five below zero, and a chill wind was blowing which drove the frost through clothes and flesh to the bones. For the first time in many weeks Dennin stood upon his feet. His muscles had remained inactive so long, and he was so out of practice in maintaining an erect position, that he could scarcely stand. He reeled back and forth, staggered, and clutched hold of Edith with his bound hands for support.

"Sure, an' it's dizzy I am," he laughed weakly.

A moment later he said, "An' it's glad I am that it's over with. That damn bunk would iv been the death iv me, I know."

When Edith put his fur cap on his head and proceeded to pull the flap down over his ears, he laughed and said—

"What are you doin' that for?"

"It's freezing cold outside," she answered.

"An' in ten minutes' time what'll matter a frozen ear or so to poor Michael Dennin?" he asked.

She had nerved herself for the last culminating ordeal, and his remark was like a
blow to her self-possession. So far, everything had seemed phantom-like, as in a
dream, but the brutal truth of what he had said shocked her eyes wide open to the
reality of what was taking place. Nor, was her distress unnoticed by the Irishman.

"I'm sorry to be troublin' you with me foolish spache," he said regretfully. "I mint
nothin' by it. 'Tis a great day for Michael Dennin, an' he's as gay as a lark."

He broke out in a merry whistle, which quickly became lugubrious and ceased.

"I'm wishin' there was a priest," he said wistfully, then added swiftly, "But
Michael Dennin's too old a campaigner to miss the luxuries when he hits the trail."

He was so very weak and unused to walking, that when the door opened and he
passed outside the wind nearly carried him off his feet. Edith and Hans walked on
either side of him and supported him, the while he cracked jokes and tried to keep
them cheerful, breaking off once long enough to arrange the forwarding of his
share of the gold to his mother in Ireland.

They climbed a slight hill and came out into an open space among the trees.
Here, circled solemnly about a barrel that stood on end in the snow, were Negook
and Hadikwan and all the Siwashes, down to the babies and the dogs, come to see the
way of the white man's law. Nearby was an open grave which Hans had burned into
the frozen earth.

Dennin cast a practical eye over the preparations, noting the grave, the barrel, the
thickness of the rope, and the diameter of the limb over which the rope was passed.

"Sure, an' I couldn't iv done better meself, Hans, if it'd been for you."

He laughed loudly at his own sally, but Hans' face was frozen into a sullen
ghostliness that nothing less than the trump of doom could have broken. Also, Hans
was feeling very sick. He had not realised before the enormousness of the task of
putting a fellow-man out of the world. Edith, on the other hand, had realised; but the
realisation did not make the task any easier. She was filled with doubt as to whether
she could hold herself together long enough to finish it. She felt incessant impulses
to scream, to shriek, to collapse into the snow, to put her hands, over her eyes and
turn and run blindly away, into the forest, anywhere, away. It was only by a supreme
effort of soul that she was able to keep upright and go on and do what she had to do.
And in the midst of it all she was grateful to Dennin for the way he helped her.

"Lind me a hand," he said to Hans, with whose assistance he managed to mount
the barrel.

He bent over so that Edith could adjust the rope about his neck. Then he stood
upright while Hans drew the rope taut across the overhead branch.

"Michael Dennin, have you anything to say?" Edith asked in a clear voice that
shook in spite of her.

Dennin shuffled his feet on the barrel, looked down bashfully like a man making
his maiden speech, and cleared his throat.

"I'm glad it's over with," he said. "You've treated me like a Christian, an' I'm
thakin' you hearty for your kindness."
"Then may God receive you, a repentant sinner," she said.
"Ay," he answered, his deep voice as a response to her thin one, "may God receive me, a repentant sinner."
"Good-bye, Michael," she cried, and her voice sounded desperate.
She threw her weight against the barrel, but it did not overturn.
"Hans! Quick! Help me!" she cried faintly.
She could feel her last strength going, and the barrel resisted her. Hans hurried to her, and the barrel went out from under Michael Dennin.

She turned her back, thrusting her fingers into her ears. Then she began to laugh, harshly, metallically; and Hans was shocked as he had not been shocked through the whole tragedy. Edith Nelson's breakdown had come. Even in her hysteria she knew it, and she was glad that she had been able to hold up under the strain until everything had been accomplished. She reeled towards Hans.
"Take me to the cabin, Hans," she managed to articulate.
"And let me rest," she added. "Just let me rest, and rest, and rest."
With Hans' arm around her, supporting her weight and directing her helpless steps, she went off across the snow. But the Indians remained solemnly to watch the working of the white man's law that compelled a man to dance upon the air.
(The above is a true story. Michael Dennin was hanged at Latuya Bay by Mrs Nelson in 1900.)
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