

THE LADY OF LITTLE HELL

EDGAR WALLACE



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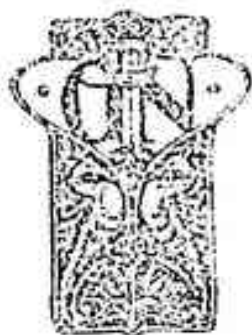
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By EDGAR WALLACE



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THE LADY OF LITTLE HELL

(AN END OF THE WAR STORY)

I

THE WOMAN IN THE VEIL

A dozen boisterous voices greeted the young soldier who stood smiling in the big vestibule of Lord Mortimer's house in Grosvenor Square.

He had come through the swing doors unannounced, a fine stalwart figure of youth in the uniform of the Flying Corps, and was handing his British warm to a servant when his aunt hailed him from the head of the majestic stairway.

Lady Mortimer came fluttering down the stairs to greet him, and there was no mistaking the welcome in her face.

"My dear boy, I am so glad you could come. When we heard of the tremendous work the Flying Corps was doing we despaired of seeing you."

"I told the skipper it was your birthday party, auntie, and he gave me leave," laughed Tom Broadwood as he kissed her.

They clustered round him, a noisy, laughing, admiring throng of boys and girls he had known from their pinafore days. Eager young faces lifted to his, a dozen dance-cards were thrust at him, with base and reckless invitation to scratch out any initials he wished and substitute his own. He waved them off in mock terror and taking his aunt's arm mounted to the big ball-room.

Tom Broadwood was a child of fortune, unspoilt. An orphan and the heir of Morgan Broadwood's millions, he had left Oxford and joined up at the first hint of war. He had served as a private at the defence of Ypres, and later had his commission, first as an officer in a Lancashire regiment and later in the Corps of corps.

"I wanted to talk with you, Aunt Selina," he said, when at last he had piloted her to the deserted library.

"You have made me very unpopular with quite a number of people who want to meet you," she chided him.

Lady Mortimer was a woman of forty-five, who retained much of the beauty which Sargent had rendered imperishable in his Academy picture of 1901. She looked down at Tom as he sank into a deep chair and handed him a silver cigarette box.

“Selina,” he said—he never called her “aunt” when they were alone—“I wanted to tell you that I have fixed up things with my solicitors, so that if anything happens to me in France my money and property go to your two boys; the work I am doing now is particularly dangerous.”

“More than usual?” she asked anxiously.

He nodded.

“The fact is I have been in the Special Intelligence Department for months. I have been in Germany three times lately.”

She gasped.

“Tom!”

“Usually I am dropped from an aeroplane; sometimes I take my own machine, but that is for short work. Next week I am going over on rather a hazardous mission. That was one of the reasons I came home to see you. I want to put my estate in trim for your boys.”

She nodded gravely.

“Please God they will never inherit the money,” she said quietly. “I look forward to the day when you will have a son of your own.”

“That sounds queer to me,” he laughed. “I’ve never met the girl, and anyway I have to tell you this: I have asked Gretton—he’s my solicitor—to come along and see you when I’ve gone and give you a full account of my interests. You are the only relative I have in the world.”

She shook her head.

“I’m not,” she smiled mischievously; “that’s the fun of it—and that is why I wanted to parade you around. You have an unique opportunity of meeting a second cousin.”

“A second cousin! I didn’t know . . . what is its name?”

“Dawn Marsh.”

He pulled a little face.

“Is it masculine or feminine?”

“Very much feminine! She’s unique—a product of the century.”

“O lor’!” exclaimed Tom dismally; “that means she’s neurotic or drinks cocktails and admires Morris dances, and has red hair and a soul!”

His aunt smiled mysteriously.

“You shall see. She’s the daughter of a cousin—Tom Marsh was in the Consular service and poor—lost all his money in South African Mines and developed a taste for art. The girl was educated in Paris, Munich, and some other weird place, and I’m sure would be the most intelligent being in the world if——”

“If?”

“Well, you shall judge. I confess I don’t like sporty girls or doggy girls or Amazon girls, and I do like them to be feminine—but the droopy, snoopy girl who must wear a dressing robe that harmonises with the bath mat——”

“Oh, she’s that kind, is she? Where did she spring from?” asked Tom. “I don’t seem to have heard of her before.”

“America. She’s Californian by preference, though British by birth.”

Tom rose.

“You pique my curiosity. How does she live if she’s so poor?”

Lady Mortimer shook her head.

“Heaven knows—that is a mystery. She has a suite at the Ritz-Carlton, she travels in style, dresses like a queen—and Tom Marsh left exactly three hundred pounds to meet ten thousand pounds worth of liabilities.”

Tom laughed aloud.

“Lead me to this financial genius,” he said.

So Tom Broadwood came to the presence of Dawn Marsh in a spirit of amused interest. He saw her and his amusement died—but his interest multiplied at an amazing rate.

She sat on a large crimson settee in one of the alcoves of the ball-room annexe. A young man, faultlessly attired, sat by her side, but Tom had no eyes but for the girl. She was, he judged, above medium height. What she wore he could never describe. It was a delicate material of creamy white, and there were touches of black and gold on the dress and a bandeau of black and gold in her hair. He classified her peculiar beauty by his elastic and limited standard as something between a Gibson and a Kirchner girl.

The face was healthily and delicately pale, the eyes big and set wide apart, the lips full and crimson, the nose and chin well moulded.

She looked up at him steadfastly and with a certain interest which was childlike in its unfeigned curiosity.

“This is your second cousin, Dawn—Tom Broadwood,” said Lady Mortimer, and she raised her coal-black eyebrows with a little smile of pleasure.

“I have heard of you—the slayer of Flying Men,” she said. Her voice was a soft contralto, distinct despite its drawl. “Sit down, Aunt Selina.”

“I must go—I have been neglecting everybody shamefully. I will see you, Tom, before you leave.”

He nodded.

The apparition of this girl had momentarily silenced him. He thought he had never seen anything so lovely.

“Sit down, won’t you, Tom,” she invited; “you know Count Stopl—don’t fight, please; the count is Swedish and we aren’t at war with Sweden,” she laughed.

The man, who had risen, smiled politely, but it struck Tom that he was not pleased. He was young and decidedly good-looking, though the trim moustache was set over a square jaw and hid lips which, were they exposed, might have detracted something from his pleasing appearance.

“Miss Marsh is joking, always joking—but always charming,” he said, with a click of heels; “for myself I never can fathom the gracious Miss Marsh, though often I have had the surpassing honour of meeting her.”

“The count is terribly curious,” she said, with a sidelong smile at her companion, “and yet is so polite. Confess, count, you have been questioning and cross-questioning me for two dances.”

“My dear lady!” said the shocked nobleman; “never! I would die before such a rudeness! Is it wonderful, Mr. Broadwood, that all mademoiselle’s interests are of first importance to her friends?”—he shrugged his shoulders despairingly—“I but ask you if you ride, if you walk, if you play golf or tennis?”

“I am so sorry, count,” she interrupted; “you take me so seriously, and really I am not a very serious person.”

She turned to Tom.

“The count was so good to me on the voyage. I am sure if we had met a U-boat he would have vouched for my respectability.”

The count smiled and bowed.

“If I have your permission I will take my leave,” he said; “I have arranged to meet a compatriot. Does mademoiselle leave for New York soon?”

“To-morrow,” said the girl, “and if you ever come to California won’t you come and see me?”

“I will give myself that pleasure and happiness.”

She watched him as he retired and there was neither regret nor relief in that steady gaze.

“Now, cousin,” she said, turning suddenly to the young man, “promise me you won’t ask me if I ride or walk or box.”

“I can promise you that,” said Tom.

“And confess that you have never heard of me before to-night,” she challenged.

“It is unpardonable of me,” said Tom, “but I never have.”

She looked at him from under her lowered lashes and laughed softly.

“You are not staying long in London?” he said.

“Neither are you, they tell me,” she replied. “I shall be glad to go out of it. The life here is too strenuous. I was intended for Arcadian surroundings, mossy banks, shady bowers and fluting shepherds.”

“With two French maids and a manicurist,” he added, and she laughed.

“Some day I will build a house where you press buttons and electricity does the rest. Don’t you hate work and hustle, Cousin Tom?”

“I can’t say that I do,” said Tom, “but I have not had much experience.”

“And now you are going to war, which is the hardest work of all”—she shivered; “it’s all very horrible and unpleasant and crude and elemental,” she said.

Tom had recovered from the awe which she had inspired in him, but he still retained that curiously irritating feeling that he was in the presence of a superior force, mental and, strangely enough, physical.

“I was awfully surprised to hear you don’t ride,” he said.

“I don’t ride from choice,” she agreed, “and it’s perfectly true that golf doesn’t interest me. The fact is,” she laughed, “I am constitutionally lazy. I need my French maids and my manicurist and my chauffeur and secretary. They are the necessities of life just as a cup of tea is to the girl in the government office. You are disappointed, aren’t you?” she said suddenly.

“Why, no,” replied Tom; “only my theory is that everybody should work.”

“I will buy a laundry to-morrow,” she said, “and you shall come and see me every Saturday and collect your shirts.”

“You are laughing at me, and I am afraid I am impertinent,” said Tom.

“I don’t exactly know what work a girl can do except keep house,” she suggested; “a woman’s place, you know, is the home.”

“Some women’s places,” he said boldly, “are those rosy bowers and mossy banks of yours, and they would look oddly foreign in any other environment.”

“If that is intended for a compliment, I thank you,” she said gravely. “Would you pick up my dance programme? It is lying within three inches of my hand and I haven’t been able to summon sufficient energy—thank you. It has been worrying me for the last half-hour, and I dare not tell the count lest he grovelled on the floor and picked it up between his teeth.”

They both laughed together.

“Now you are dying to go away,” she said, “but I won’t let you till someone comes. I know you are only making a flying visit to Town, but I am intensely selfish. I know hundreds of people want to see you, but they must be patient till I have finished with you. Will you please call that waiter—I want an ice—and could you reach over and pick up my shawl? You see I like being waited upon.”

Tom was amused. This was a new type to him and not unpleasant. He supposed that in course of time the novelty would pall, and the naked selfishness and helplessness of the girl would irritate him, but for the time being it was all very charming, and when at last her partner came to claim her he took farewell with regret.

“Please write to me from France,” she said; “you know my place at Mollinos.”

He thought of the late Tom Marsh and his three hundred pounds’ estate and wondered.

She laid her cool palm in his and for a second or so her splendid eyes held him. They seemed to search his mind, his very soul. Then:

“Good-bye, Cousin Tom. Remember to write. Don’t tell me horrible things—how many Germans you have killed; and please, please don’t tell me of your sufferings or your privations because I am awfully sensitive!”

He found himself that night standing outside Lord Mortimer’s house, looking up at the lighted windows of the upper floors, speculating upon which of those rosy curtains shut out the world from this dainty and fragrant lady.

It was half-past twelve, and he had arranged to spend the night in the flat of an old Oxford friend, now a silver badge man working for the Red Cross.

London has a charm of its own and, declining the use of Lady Mortimer’s car, he strolled aimlessly in the direction of his lodging. He called in at his club and wrote a few letters, met a man of his squadron on leave, who delayed him at a street corner whilst Tom retailed the latest news from the Front, and it was nearly two o’clock when he set forth in earnest to discover his friend’s flat.

Like every Londoner, he did not know his London very well, though the West End is very difficult to lose yourself in. Nevertheless he found himself in a poor quarter of the town, without any idea as to where he was wandering or in which way he could reach Portland Place.

He was in a street of mean tenements when his adventure occurred. The door of one of the houses opened and a woman walked down the steps, crossed the road diagonally and in a direction which eventually brought her to the same sidewalk and ahead of Tom.

She might be unaware of his presence in the street, for he wore rubber protectors on his field boots, and certainly she gave no indication that she knew she was being followed.

At the corner of one of the cross streets she stopped suddenly, and Tom crossed the roadway so that he need not pass her. He thought possibly she had seen him and stopped to speak to him, and he had no particular desire for conversation.

He was half-way across to the opposite sidewalk when he saw he was mistaken. A man was approaching her furtively, and presently she spoke to him. Tom saw the newcomer take something from his pocket, a package of some kind, and hand it to the girl—and at that moment came a diversion.

From the shadows sprang another man, and Tom saw that it was a policeman. Where he came from, what secret hiding-place, the young soldier could only guess.

Without a word the policeman sprang upon the man, and Tom saw his truncheon rise and fall, and his victim collapse with an ominous limpness. Tom stood watching, a frown of indecision on his face. He knew that the blow which felled this wretched wanderer of the night was struck with no ordinary club. He knew, too, that English policemen do not ordinarily use their truncheons except in moments of peril.

Instinctively he realised that the man on the ground was dead. The policeman seized the girl by the arm and then, for the first time, he spoke.

“Your *coup* did not develop as you hoped,” he said.

She answered him in a low tone.

“And nobody suspected it,” he sneered. “I alone dared doubt you—all your plans, all your——”

What followed passed so swiftly that Tom had not taken half a dozen swift strides toward them when the thing was done.

He saw the policeman seize the woman, caught the flash of steel, and saw her wrench herself free. The man stooped to spring, and at that moment a quivering thread of flame leapt from the woman’s hand, the crash of a report woke the echoes of the silent streets, and the policeman staggered, swayed, and fell.

At that moment Tom reached them.

“What have you done?” he demanded.

He could not see the face, hidden behind a thick veil, but he saw in the light of a street standard that she was dressed in black from head to foot, and the figure was that of a girl.

The hand that held the pistol was bare and the space between thumb and forefinger was black with the back-fire of the automatic.

This he saw; then:

“Stand back!” She waved him off with the weapon, then turning, she flew swiftly.

He started in pursuit, but remembered the fallen policeman and turned back. Other feet were running, and she would probably meet the constable

on the next block. He had nearly reached the fallen policeman when he saw something lying on the ground and stooped to pick it up. It was a thin, flat piece of white ivory, the size of a five-shilling piece, and it bore a rough resemblance to an eagle with outstretched wings. On its surface and burnt into the ivory were the ciphers "395" and the letters "K.I."

He slipped the "bone" into his pocket and was stooping over the dead officer when two other policemen arrived.

"What's this?" said one.

"I am afraid one of your men has been shot."

"One of our men?" said the policeman who wore the chevrons of a sergeant; "what is one of our men doing here? He's dead enough," he said, after a cursory examination. "Do you know this man, Constable Smith?"

"No, sir," said the other.

Tom looked over their heads as they unbuttoned the man's coat.

"Why," exclaimed one of the policemen in surprise, "he's in evening dress!"

He had flung back the uniform overcoat and disclosed the glazed shirt-front and the white waistcoat. Over the heart was a little red patch where the bullet had struck.

Tom leant down closer and received his second shock.

"Why—why——" he said.

"Do you know him?" asked the policeman.

"Yes, I know him," said Tom quietly; "his name is Count Stopl, and he is a friend of Lord Mortimer's."

A quarter of an hour later he was ringing the bell of the darkened house he had left before midnight. His aunt came down in her wrap. Briefly Tom narrated the events of the past crowded hour, and Lady Mortimer shook her head pityingly.

"The poor boy! I must go up and tell Dawn."

She left the room and was gone ten minutes. When she returned she was accompanied by the girl, who looked radiantly lovely in a flowered silk dressing-gown. She had, apparently, been roused from her slumbers, for her hair had been hastily stuffed under a boudoir cap.

She listened in silence whilst Tom told the story.

“It is all very dreadful,” she said; “and now for the second time, Cousin Tom, good-night.”

He took her hand in his and held it, looking down till she snatched it back from him.

“Good-night,” he said, and went back to the police station to spend the time when he should have been sleeping making a signed statement of the crime he had witnessed, all the time conscious of the knowledge that between the thumb and the finger of Dawn’s right hand was that little black splash of powder which an automatic pistol makes when it throws back.

II

LITTLE HELL

The Chief Intelligence Officer of the 16th British Army looked up as Captain Tom Broadwood entered his bureau.

“Sit down, Broadwood, for a moment,” he said with a smile; “I won’t keep you long.”

He finished signing the papers before him, and as his clerk was going he said:

“Sergeant Lorry, I am not to be interrupted, and see that nobody comes near that door.”

“Yes, sir,” said the non-com. and disappeared.

Colonel Waterson leant forward, his elbows on his desk, and dropped his voice:

“Broadwood, I shall want you to leave to-morrow night—are you ready?”

“Yes, sir,” smiled Tom. “I have been ready for a fortnight, ever since I came back from leave.”

“Oh, by the way,” a thought struck the Intelligence Officer, “that man Stopl whose end you witnessed in London—he has been identified.”

“Identified?”

“Well, he wasn’t a count, you know, and his name wasn’t Stopl. His real name was Brakzand, and he was known to the American police as a particularly dangerous German agent.”

“But he moved in good society. Surely the Swedish Embassy would have exposed him?”

“It was difficult. You see, there was a Count Stopl who died in some outlandish place in South America. He had no relations who knew him or anything of him. When the spurious Stopl turned up in London, he was accepted. He had plenty of money and apparently knew all the best people in American society. But he was undoubtedly a bitter enemy of Britain. That is by the way. I thought you would be interested. They have not found the woman who killed him, but the general theory is that she also was a German spy who had quarrelled with him.”

Tom’s face was thoughtful. He had been trying to forget things in the past fortnight—trying to forget a pair of the loveliest eyes in the world, and a hand which had been blackened by the back-throw of an automatic pistol.

“You know quite a lot about the matter, colonel,” was all he said.

The other nodded.

“I’m supposed to know something about spies,” he said grimly, and went on with the business in hand. “You have had all the instructions you want about your present job? Good. I will repeat the important points. In the uniform of a private of the Royal Air Force you will take a machine—an obsolete one, which will give you about 180 miles’ range—leaving late tonight. You will make your landing near the prison camp at Ingolsberg, burn your machine, and surrender to the prison camp authorities. Between now and next Monday we shall plant a machine for you in a barn which was erected by one of our agents for the purpose, at the farm called Halle Stadt, which looks out on to a lonely bit of moorland. Whilst you are at the farm you are to discover the identity of the Baroness von Zimmermann, a friend of the commandant’s and a frequent visitor.”

“How long do I remain a prisoner?” asked Tom glumly.

The colonel smiled.

“You will escape when you receive orders from Parry to get away.”

“Parry? who is Parry?”

“That is the name of a mysterious somebody who needs your help. I confess I don’t know Mr. Parry—whether he is young or old, tall or fat, bearded or clean-shaven.”

“It’s a mysterious stunt, sir,” said Tom. “I can’t say I like the prisoner of war idea.”

“You don’t want to go?” asked the colonel quickly.

“Go, sir! Why, of course I’ll go—only——”

The colonel nodded.

“Unsatisfactory, eh? Well, that’s just how it struck me.”

Tom left the aerodrome early the next morning, riding an old “pusher” bus, which had this advantage, that if it was slow it was sure. He carried no arms and no other bomb than the incendiary bomb which was to ignite the machine.

He passed over the line, heavily shelled, though he had avoided the more sensitive spots in the enemy’s defensive system, and crossed the broad steel ribbon of the Rhine an hour before dawn.

He found Ingolsberg—sighted its forbidding laager in the grey hours of a raw morning, and came down calmly within a hundred yards of an old and astonished sentry, who blinked through full-moon spectacles, and did not realise that he was witnessing a manifestation of war until the aeroplane burst into red flame and a good-looking young man in the unfamiliar uniform walked across to him and said:

“I am British.”

An hour later, with a palpitating sentry on either side of him, he met, for the first time, the Prussian officer of tradition. Hitherto the Germans he had met—mostly on the right side of the British line—had been courteous. Now he was to meet, not the fighting soldier, but the military politician, the martinet of the theoretic school, a soldier who had not as yet experienced the humanising effect of battle.

Colonel Heyderbrand was a man of fifty-six, lean, straight, and wasp-waisted. His hair and trim moustache were white, his face otherwise being clean-shaven.

He sat at his table, a long cigar between teeth which were suspiciously white and regular for so old a man, and surveyed the prisoner.

“English?” he asked harshly.

“Yes.”

“Say ‘sir,’ you swine!”

Tom did not answer.

“Where did you come from, and why did you land?”

“Went astray in the night and finished my petrol.”

“Say ‘sir,’ damn you!”

No answer.

The colonel’s face flushed red.

“I will teach you . . . yes, by God, I’ll teach you! Take him away, *Feldwebel*.”

So Tom Broadwood was bundled from the room and was turned loose in a great wired cage to wait his captor’s pleasure.

And here it was that he met that remarkable man, Dusty Miller. He stood stiffly erect, his back to a pole, and his constancy in that position was due less to an ingrained respect for authority than three separate sets of straps which bound him there.

The brown face was small and rugged, the mouth big and whimsical, and his blue eyes ranged his restricted field of vision with hope and expectancy. He whistled a little tune in slow time—a melancholy tune, suggestive of partings and weeping mothers and flower-strewn graves, and ever and anon exchanged an unfriendly word with the sentry who marched within insulting distance.

Tom approached the scene in wonder and wrath. It hurt his manhood to see a fellow-man treated like cattle; it stung a certain pride in the common ancestry which he and the prisoner shared.

As for the bound man, he ceased whistling when the other approached, and eyed him curiously.

“Ostraylian?” he asked.

Tom smiled and shook his head.

“Flying Corps,” he said.

The man’s blue eyes opened wide.

“A pilot—a fightin’ pilot? How many of the perishers did you ‘out’ before they pinched you?”

“Three or four,” and the soldier beamed.

“Say ‘forty’ an’ cheer me up,” he begged.

The sentry approached with a frown.

“You must not speak to the prisoner whilst he is undergoing ‘strafe,’ ” he said in German.

“Take no notice of ’im,” begged the man at the pole. “Hector, I’m surprised at you intrudin’ yourself between friends. Here—what’s—your—name?”

“Broadwood—Thomas Broadwood,” laughed Tom.

“You’re either Tommy or Broady—make up your mind.”

“Any old thing.”

“Well, Broady, I finish my ‘strafe’ to-day—come over to F. 7 an’ have a yarn,” urged the man. “My name’s Miller—commonly called ‘Dusty.’ ”

“What did you get this for?” Tom indicated the pole.

“Escape,” said the other laconically; “my ninth. I’ve had ten days of this an’ twenty-one days ‘strooben’ arrest—that’s German for ‘dark hole an’ little grub.’ But the worst ain’t much worse than the best in Little Hell.”

“Little Hell?”

The man nodded and grinned.

“Little Hell,” he said with relish; “the one camp in Germany that no nootral ambassador ever visited. Every man here’s a dog—an’ treated like it. Nine escapes I’ve made, but I’ve got a better idea for my tenth escape. Here comes the *feldwebel*,” he muttered, “hop it!”

And Tom “hopped it” in time to avoid meeting the martinet of the camp.

It was not until the next afternoon that he met the cheerful little man, and then learnt that he was getting acquainted with one of the most famous men of Germany. For Dusty was an escape expert. He had been a prisoner since the battle of Mons and, as he said, had made a get-away nine times. Thrice he had been captured on the Dutch frontier, within sight of liberty, once on the Swiss frontier. He had employed a score of tricks and subterfuges, he had smuggled compasses and maps, files and wire-cutters, he had indeed broken every law governing the prisoner of war, and had suffered imprisonment in Cologne, Munster, Dresden, and Ingolsberg, to say nothing of minor terms of solitary confinement in local camps.

The two men strolled across the recreation ground together and half a dozen watchful eyes followed them.

“I’ve never had a pal who spoke German,” explained Dusty; “if I had I’d have made an escape years an’ years ago. I’ve been in these dam’ laagers for a hundred an’ fifty years an’ six months, as a prisoner counts time. Now the question is, are you game?”

Tom looked at the little man. The time might come when it would be necessary to get away and such a man as this might be useful.

“I’ll help you escape if you want to get away,” he said steadily, “but for the time being I don’t want to go myself.”

The little man stared at him.

“Been hit by a shell or something?” he asked anxiously; “don’t want to get away?”

“Not yet,” smiled Tom.

“I’ve often thought I’d like to go to Monte Carlo,” said Dusty loudly as a German non-commissioned officer in silent shoes overtook them; “I’m told it’s rather a pretty little place, but a bit wild.”

When the officer had passed out of hearing Dusty spoke again.

“You’ve got to be careful; some of these poor fellows talk English better than me an’ you. Don’t forget I’m watched—they search the room I sleep in three times a night. I’m so popular with the other fellows who have to turn out of bed in the cold an’ be inspected that I expect to die young. But do you mean you’d help me hop it?”

Tom nodded.

“You said you had a plan,” he said.

“So I have. Listen. The commandant of this place is sweet on a girl—a Baroness.”

Tom started. He expected to have some trouble in learning things which were, apparently, public property.

“She comes here once a week to tea,” Dusty went on; “every Thursday. She’s the widder of a German officer, husband killed in the war, I’m sorry to say—lend me your handkerchief, I’m crying!—an’ Commandant Heyderbrand is fairly——”

“Crazy is the word you want.”

“Potty was the word *I* wanted, but yours will serve, Broady. They have tea in the commandant’s quarters, an’ she drives up in a motor-car, which

comes inside the wire of the camp an' is run into a stable alongside the quarters. My plan is this: we get into that stable an' hide in the car. It always goes out before my lady an' drives about a mile up the forest road an' waits, an' the silly old—our respected commandant strolls up with the girl to the spot. I've seen him do it."

His chance had come within an hour of his arrival. Tom turned the proposition over in his mind.

"How do you get to the stable?" he asked.

"There's only one way," explained Dusty, lowering his voice, for they had turned and were walking back to the huts; "there's a door from the commandant's quarters and his house can be reached through a tunnel me an' a feller named Golder dug the last time we was here—I was transferred to another camp before it could be used for another grand plan I had in connection with the commandant."

"What was that?" asked Tom.

"To cut his dam' throat," said the little man with such concentrated malignity that Tom shivered.

The days dragged slowly, for life in Ingolsberg Laager was a dreary and wearisome thing. He was herded in a big hut with two hundred other men. The food was vile, the bread half sawdust and the mess which was called by courtesy "soup," wholly impossible.

Every evening he drew as near as possible to the big gate, hoping that the woman would put in an appearance. He spent his nights conning his chief's instructions. Who was the mysterious Parry, the secret agent at whose word he must attempt escape, and in what manner would he make known his order?

In a way the prison experience was interesting and helped pass the time of waiting. He was meeting, not for the first time—he had served as a private in the early days of the war—the working-class Englishman. At first he thought him a dull brute, whose language was deplorable; then he realised that the dullness was diffidence, the brutality a sort of rough philosophy. His language meant nothing, his threats of violence addressed to such of his comrades in misfortune as annoyed him less than nothing. Under the crudity of speech and manner Tommy was a sentimentalist, unswervingly loyal, and a great player of the game. It shocked him to hear them speak disrespectfully of the "Belgiums"—they never said "Belgians"—but he was to discover that the Flemish prisoners had the best

time in camp and repaid the kindness showed them by their guards by a little unofficial espionage upon their fellows.

He learnt that the French and the English were polite friends, but did not “mix,” and that Tommy’s greatest friend in adversity was the Russian soldier, “loyal and lousy,” as an English N.C.O. described him. And he discovered why. The Russian was a child and Tommy was a child; it was the affinity between unsophistications.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday passed and, to his relief, Dusty Miller made no attempt to approach him.

On the Thursday occurred the extraordinary happening. He had gone to the cookhouse to stand in a long queue, with a basin in his hand, to receive his midday “soup.” The mixture was brown water, quite transparent, with a few scraps of vegetables floating on the surface.

As he carried his ration back to the dining-hall he looked into the concoction—and almost dropped it. For, at the bottom, was an oblong slip of ivory and it bore the one word, which could be plainly read:

“PARRY.”

He looked round to see if he were observed and fished the slip from the basin. He turned it over and read in microscopic writing:

“Be prepared to leave. Message will be delivered to you at Halle Stadt.”

That was all. In what manner he should leave was not suggested.

That afternoon, when the bell had sounded for supper and the prisoners were moving from the recreation ground to their huts, Dusty strolled toward him.

“Look, but don’t take too much notice,” he said, and jerked his head to the north side of the camp where the commandant’s wooden house stood. Tom turned his eyes in the direction the other had indicated. A big limousine was standing before the house, the straight-backed colonel was bowing his greetings to a graceful woman who was at that moment alighting.

“That’s her,” said Dusty, in a tone of proprietorship. “Would you like a bath?”

“Would I what?” asked the startled Tom.

“A bath?” said the other calmly; “we’re allowed one between four an’ six. There’s the bathroom—that red hut. Stroll over an’ turn on the tap; I’ll be with you in a minute.”

Tom obeyed instructions, tingling with excitement. Had “Parry” arranged this? was the little man himself Parry? No one challenged him as he made his way leisurely to the frame hut that served the prisoners for their ablutions. It was a roomy place, with a broad trough of running water in the centre, and in two corners were small cubicles. Tom had tubbed once that day but he knew he was expected for once to carry out orders.

He turned the faucet, let the water splash into the big concrete basin that served as a bath, and it had run half full when he heard Dusty’s quick step.

“That’s the wrong one. Come over here,” whispered Miller; “quick—here’s a knife; prize up that floor-board whilst I watch.”

The floor-board yielded easily, revealing a cavity of uncertain depth beneath.

“Squeeze down and drop—I’ll put back the board,” said Miller; “hurry!”

Tom struggled through the slit and, with some misgiving, let go. He fell only a few inches and presently his companion was at his side. The “champion escaper” deftly replaced the floor-board and presently Tom heard him strike a match.

The light of the candle he lit showed they were in a roughly excavated pit about eight feet deep and four feet square. Against one side of the pit hung a ragged piece of sacking.

“Just as we left it!” whispered Dusty in admiration.

He pulled the canvas down and revealed the entrance of the tunnel. It was the size of a large drain-pipe, but the brief examination which Tom made showed that it had been scientifically constructed. It was supported by wooden props—pieces of wood filched from time to time by the amateur engineers and applied to the purpose with infinite labour.

“It took eight of us three months to make it. I’ll go first,” said Dusty.

He crawled into the entrance and Tom followed. The going was slow and laborious. He found himself unbearably hot and gasping for breath, for of ventilation there was little.

After they had been crawling for twenty minutes—it seemed hours—the hollow voice of Dusty said:

“Come up farther and stand up.”

To his surprise, Tom found he could stand erect and stretch his cramped and aching limbs.

Dusty relit the candle. They were standing in a pit very much the same size as that into which they had dropped half an hour before, with this exception, that one of the pit sides was faced with brick.

Dusty took a chisel from his pocket, searched for something in the wall, and then gently pressed the edge of the chisel into what appeared to be mortar.

“Soap an’ sand,” he whispered hoarsely, “me an’ Nobby Clark opened this wall the day before they shifted us to another camp.”

Working rapidly, he removed brick after brick, Tom crouching by his side holding the candle. Presently a hole was made big enough to pass through, and again Dusty led the way.

They were in a cellar, well stocked with wine and beer. A flight of steps led up to a trap-door and Dusty removed his boots.

“Get yours off, Broady,” he said, “climb that ladder while I’m puttin’ these bricks back an’ push up the trap—there’s nobody there or we should hear ’em. I tried but I ain’t strong enough.”

Tom mounted the steps and pushed gingerly upward. The trap yielded slightly. He pressed harder, putting forth all his strength, and he heard a soft rustle as something slid down the inclined surface of the trap. He listened but there was no sound from the room and he pushed open the trap without difficulty and climbed into a room which was evidently used as a forage store, for it had been a sack of oats lying on the trap which had made it so difficult to open.

Dusty was by his side in a minute, the trap replaced, and the sack of oats returned to its position.

Dusty tried the door and it opened. A brief reconnaissance and they emerged into a corridor, from which opened three doors, the one at the farther end of the passage which faced them being covered by a heavy velvet portière, and the others to the left and the right.

“That’s the one,” whispered Dusty, indicating the left; “it leads into the garage.”

He moved forward and grasped the knob when a smothered exclamation from Tom stopped him.

“What’s wrong?” snarled the Cockney, turning.

He saw Tom’s eyes fixed upon the doorway at the end of the passage, and following the direction of their gaze he stood open-mouthed at what he saw, for a hand parted the curtains, a gloved hand, and it pointed urgently to the other door.

Only for a moment was Tom paralysed, then, with two swift strides, he reached the portière and pulled the curtain aside. There was nobody there. He was confronted by a heavy oaken door which did not yield to his pressure.

The little space between door and curtain held a delicate fragrance. It was a woman, then!

He came back, puzzled.

“Quick!” urged Dusty in a whisper.

“Not that door. The hand pointed the other way,” said Tom.

They moved to the opposite door, turned the handle and pushed it open, and confronted Colonel Heyderbrand!

Resistance was useless. They stood still whilst the commandant shouted his orders.

They were still standing when the soldiers burst in and secured them.

“Pigs! dogs!” hissed the commandant. “Why did you not go into the garage, eh? You would have been finished with Little Hell then! To the larger Hell you would have gone! You know what would happen? I was waiting for you. You would have been shot down as you opened the door. You have had a lucky escape, for you have been watched ever since you went into the bathroom, and I was hoping to make an end of this swine,” and he lashed Dusty across the face. “Take them away,” he said—“but stay, our good friend shall see this scum.”

He walked across the ornate room in which the arrests had been made and flung open a door.

“Gracious lady,” he called, “Baroness von Zimmermann! Let me show you some of my wild animals!”

He stood aside with a little bow as the woman entered.

“My God!” cried Tom, for it was Dawn Marsh who stood smiling in the doorway and viewing him superciliously through a pair of lorgnettes!

THE GIRL FROM THE ETHER

Cape Race said "O.L." and had been saying "O.L." at regular intervals for a quarter of an hour. Not in any spirit of profanity did Cape Race speak, but soberly, almost wistfully—for "O.L." decoded meant no more than the s.s. *Thibetian*.

Strictly speaking, it applied less to twenty thousand inanimate tons of riveted steel plate and spinning turbines, than to Carter Jackson, for he was the operator on duty and should have been sitting at his table, ear-pieces clamped to his head, left hand on key, right hand manipulating pencil on paper, his whole mind absorbed in the message that Cape Race had to send.

Instead of which, his ear-pieces lay on the table; he could hear the whine of the code call, but heeded it not. For he was deliciously deep in the lily land of might-have-been. There is a big white house which stands back from the post-road—a house whose upper stories are hidden when the maple is in leaf. And way behind there is a wide porch, where sentimental young people can sit and watch the full moon fretting a silver path across Long Island Sound . . .

"Had she have loved me? Just as well
She might have hated, who can tell."

growled Carter, and stretched his arm for the receivers.

Suppose Balderwood Jackson, uncle and patron of his one spoiled nephew, had weathered the financial storm which beat him down. It had seemed ludicrously impossible to Carter that there could have been a storm at all, for did not all men agree that never in the history of the country had money been so plentiful or its prosperity so great? Out of a clear sky had the lightning struck. Meteorological experts are familiar with such happenings; there is a death-rate to the wealthiest of communities when Midas touched a cabbage and turned it to gold, some peasant was short a perfectly good vegetable.

Anyway, Balderwood Jackson who, although he was a good citizen, did nevertheless contravene the Sullivan Act, which forbids the possession of lethal weapons, laid hands upon himself, and his name figured largely in the evening editions.

For he had sold short certain stock, which might be likened in general uninterest of appearance to the domestic cabbage, and a Midas corporation

had turned them into gold.

They brought the news to Carter at his home on the Sound. He kept the reporters waiting because he was trying out his new wireless set. When he heard and understood, he went back to his tiny wireless-room and tapped out into the ether the Twenty-Eighth Psalm, which he knew by heart. There was no reason why he should do this, indeed it was at best a mechanical performance—machine work for the settlement of his panicking thoughts. But it was immensely confusing to other amateur radiographers who were listening-in.

In a sense this exercise was strangely fitting as a commentary upon Balderwood Jackson's life and failure.

The passing of his uncle's estate, the sordid business of auction sales, the vulgarity of court proceedings, none of these things had touched Carter. For he was twenty-four and superior to material things. He had called upon Grace Meredith and had formally released her from her engagement, and she, to his amazement, had accepted the release in a few well-chosen and appropriate words.

That hurt. . . .

“O.L.” . . . “O.L.”

There was an impatient note in the call. Carter sighed, turned over a switch, and the key quivered under his hand.

“Wts mtr wi u?” asked Cape Race—Carter could almost hear the operator's snarl, and grinned.

“Go hd,” he said, and there came an avalanche of “welcomes,” “rooms reserved,” stock prices and the like.

For an hour he wrote rapidly, then with a final sarcasm Cape Race was silent.

Carter folded the messages into envelopes and addressed them to the passengers—asleep now, if their several consciences permitted—and put them aside for early morning delivery.

He sat for a while reaching out into space, lengthening and shortening his wave-lengths. Once he heard faintly, so faintly that he could detect no sequence to the letters, the far-off voice of Aberdeen. Somewhere on the rugged coast of Scotland an operator was jabbering to Rome, and the faded fringe of the message came into the waters of the dark Atlantic. Then he

heard the *Berengaria*, and she was speaking to the *Olympic* very severely. . . . It was all about an ocean letter that had gone astray. . . .

Carter took off his receiver and then rising walked out on to the dark boat-deck as Granger took over the watch.

Leaning over the rail he puffed critically at the butt of the wonder-cigar. It had been donated him by a misguided passenger, who felt that his gift would accelerate the dispatch of an anguished message. Carter accepted the bribe with dignity, and put ten dollars' worth of slushy sentiment through Cape Race in its turn.

The days of the passionate "remember me's" and the "never forget you's" had passed. Poldhu was a faint and blurred whine of sound. Only the talk of outward steamers and occasionally the fragments of incoherent talk, and that in tones as thin and high as the shrill of the cicala, from Aberdeen, reached the wireless-room.

Carter made his cigar last for two hours, and as eight bells went for'ard, he went back to the house of mystery.

The myopic Granger was polishing his big spectacles, and glared round as the other slammed the door.

"Here you are, are you?" he said fretfully and unnecessarily. "Eight bells went quarter-'n-hour ago."

"You're a liar," said Carter amiably. "Any one around?"

"Not a soul," replied Granger, climbing into his jacket, "*and* there's no news."

"No news!" repeated the wrathful Carter; "you big, fat, lazy devil, do you mean to tell me that you've been stalling here all this watch, and you haven't been out for news?"

"No news," said Granger at the door, and not without satisfaction, "and as to going out for news, why, I've prodded the ether to Mars—and even she said nothing."

Carter snorted.

"How are the first-class passengers going to last a day without news?" he demanded severely. "What is going to happen to-morrow night when they go down to dinner and there's no ship's bulletin?"

"Fake it," suggested Granger helpfully from the open door. "It's easy. Say the Jugo Slavs are restless, an' that the Allies are holdin' a conference,

an' somebody's been shot in Ireland——”

“Get out!” snapped Carter, and the door banged.

He sat down at the table, fixed his ear-pieces, and tapped a key. Then he turned a little knob on a dial and again rattled the key. It was hardly true that there was “nobody about.” A hundred and fifty miles away the big Cunarder *Aurelia* was pushing her nose into a sou'-westerly squall, and he heard the chatter of her.

“Hullo!” tapped Carter, “what's biting you?”

But still the *Aurelia* chattered. Presently she stopped and whined her code number, “K.M.”

“J.L.,” tapped Carter. “How's Corky?”

“Fine,” came the reply—Corky, chief operator of the *Aurelia* had had pneumonia the last time the ships had spoken. Then:

“Got any news?” asked Carter.

“No,” was the reply. “Aberdeen very faint—shall I relay from *Tusamic*?”

“Are you in touch with *Tusamic*?”

“No——”

“Then what the hell are you talking about?”

“E . . . E . . . E . . . E . . . !” exploded *Aurelia* in sheer merriment.

Carter grinned and sent out another length . . . Aberdeen—unmistakably Aberdeen, but unintelligible. He shortened and picked up news about Senator Billister. . . . Ponsons tender had been accepted . . . should specifications go forward to Paris. . . .

Carter waited awhile until he heard the code. The message was for the eastern-bound White Star boat. There would be no news. That crazy Granger must have missed it.

He played scientifically with a key, and then:

“I—LOVE—YOU—VERY—MUCH.”

He wrinkled up his nose and stared at the words which he had written mechanically.

A fragment of some moony passenger's message . . . an errant scrap of sentiment torn from its context? Strange that it should be spelt out without any of the professional contractions. It should have run! “I—LOV—U—VY—

MCH.” An amateur? What amateur would be sending at one o’clock in the morning—and what amateur radiographer operated from the wide ocean? For his dial told him that this message had come from a ship in a sea somewhere in the northern seas.

“Rum,” he said, and then:

“C—A—R—L—O—D—E—A—R.”

Carter Jackson made a little sound. Carlo! Grace used to call him “Carlo.” The word brought back that big house of the maples and the porch—and the netted silver of the moonlit Sound.

“Who are you?”

His fingers trembled on the key.

“Who are you—this is ‘Thibetian’—Carter Jackson operator!” he rapped.

In slack hours Granger shaved himself in the instrument room, and in the tiny mirror against a bulkhead Carter caught a glimpse of his face. The staring light of the great valve lamps made a man look ghastly at the best, but they did not print old-looking lines about his eyes.

No answer came, and he waited. The thud of his heart beat twice to the thud of the screws.

Again his fingers rested delicately on the ebony key, when:

“I A—M SO SORRY I WANT YOU SO MUCH CARLO BOY.”

The face of Carter Jackson was wet, and yet he felt deadly cold.

“Grace is it you—tell me please—it is Carter.”

He did not trouble to think rationally. The absurdity of his conclusion only came to him in the morning, hours after he had been relieved from duty, and when the steward woke him with tea and certain futile references to the weather.

Carter had not slept very well, but he had slept well enough for the angle of his vision to undergo a new orientation.

Grace knew nothing about wireless telegraphy. He had tried to get her interested, and she was only bored. And she was hardly likely to be in the northerly seas.

“I wonder if I dreamt it,” he asked himself, and sliding from his bunk, began to search in his pockets. No, there were the scraps of paper on which he had written the messages; he had even marked the hour and the minute they had been received.

If it were Grace, why had she not answered that frantic appeal of his? She had been silent, ignoring; the cold hauteur of her lofty silence was inexplicable. But of course it wasn't Grace.

Operator Granger was inclined to be offensive that morning.

“Say,” said he, “*Aurelia* has been asking who is the poor fish who loves Grace dearer'n life itself, eh? *Aurelia* says that all the time we ought've been reachin' out for the murders 'n hold-ups an' bank robberies that constitutes the news of God's beautiful world, we were shovin' through mush about undyin' adoration. *Aurelia* says——”

“Damn *Aurelia!*” snarled Carter Jackson.

“But who sent it?” persisted the other. “I've been lookin' through all the blanks, an' the nearest to a love letter was that 'I'se-a-tummin' ' message from the Hebrew tobacco man from Chicago.”

“*Aurelia* is lying,” said Carter more calmly. “Did you get any news?”

“I did,” complained the other, “got it from *Aurelia*. He's pretty sick at havin' to give it, and I'm pretty sick at havin' to take it. It was your job, anyway.”

The *Thibetian* passed Fire Island on the following morning, and came into dock in the afternoon.

Carter, reporting at the Purser's office, discovered that the ship would be an extra six days in port. Not especially cheerful news to Carter, for he seldom left the confined area of No. 32 pier.

But suppose . . .

He dismissed the idea as being unworthy of a brain. Grace Meredith was, in all probability, married now. He had neither seen nor heard of her in three years.

Once a neighbour of theirs had travelled on the *Thibetian*, but him had Carter laboriously and irritably avoided.

Still . . .

On the third day after the ship's arrival in New York, he dressed in shore-going kit and went up town.

At the cost of a quarter he could set at rest all his doubts. His hand shook as he turned the leaves of the telephone directory. (He knew the number, of course, but it pleased him, unaccountably, to pretend that he had forgotten.)

It was Stardon, the Merediths' butler, who answered him. So Stardon hadn't been fired over that mystery of the missing port—the great question and crisis which had preoccupied the Jacksons and the Merediths just before the crash came.

“Yes, sir—what name did you say?”

“Smith. William B. Smith,” said Jackson huskily. “Is Miss Meredith at home?”

“Yes, sir.”

Carter's heart sank.

“Do you want to speak to her, sir?”

He did not want to speak to anybody, but hung up the receiver, leaving an annoyed butler tapping the hook and speaking evilly of the American telephone system.

So that was that. The end of a cruel and fantastic dream. Men dreamt this way continuously. Some of easy money, of fortunes deposited in their hand; some of power (these went mad in time); some of love and lovers.

Carter walked back to the ship and went to his cabin.

Here or hereabouts he might have stayed until the ship left port, but Granger dug him out on the Sunday.

“I'm going to take you down to Coney Island,” he said enthusiastically, when he had discovered that Carter had never experienced the hectic joys of that resort. “There is a fellow I know who has a classy motor-boat; it is coming alongside on Sunday.”

Carter protested, but yielded eventually. He was being too sorry for himself, and the poison of self-pity was an insidious and hateful one.

Granger had not exaggerated the classiness of his friend's boat, nor had he over-stated its comfort.

Sitting at ease, with a hot sun overhead, and a gentle breeze blowing in from the Atlantic, Carter Jackson felt immensely superior to fate. The chug-

chug of the busy little engine, the gentle motion of the boat, and a gradually dawning sense of the mercies which had been vouchsafed to him, brought him almost to a condition of content long before Coney Island rose to their view.

“That’s a nice-looking ship,” said Carter suddenly.

A big white steam-yacht was coming toward them from the sea.

Granger’s friend, who was both encyclopædia and Who’s Who of the yachting world, nodded vigorously.

“Yuh,” he said. “She’s a dandy boat; belongs to Meredith, the hardware man—*Dog Star* she’s called. Cost. . .”

He recited exactly to the last cent the value of the yacht, but Carter was not listening.

Meredith! The old hopes trembled, the old doubt stirred again.

“Yuh,” said Granger’s friend, nodding, “that’s right; he lives on Long Island; got a beautiful home, cost . . .”

The motor-boat was turning landward, when Carter was seized with a sudden inspiration.

“I’d like to see that yacht nearer at hand,” he said. “Could you get alongside?”

“Sure I could,” said the other enthusiastically, and spun the wheel.

Nearer and nearer it came; Carter could see figures on the sun-deck—some women, a man or two in yachting attire.

Granger’s friend brought the boat almost under the yacht bows.

“Dandy, eh?” he said, with the air of a proprietor.

Carter said nothing; he was looking up to the down-turned face of a girl leaning over the rails.

If she saw him she made no sign. It seemed to Carter that she looked past him, and was gone before he could decide whether he would attract her attention, whether he dared wave to her or not.

“You can see her from the other side,” said the owner of the classy boat, as he brought her under the yacht’s stern. “I could keep up with her—I can beat her for speed, I tell you.”

“No, no,” said Carter huskily, “I want to see Coney Island.”

Granger's friend was hurt, but recovered sufficiently before he reached the landing-stage, to record certain marvellous performances of his craft.

Jackson did not hear him. He was stunned with the tremendous possibility of his discovery.

When he came back to the ship that night, without any very clear idea of how he had spent the day, he was as tired as Granger was jubilant; somebody or something had evidently pleased that short-sighted young man, who beamed benevolently at him from the doorway of the cabin.

"Did you ever see such hair? . . . She's in the beauty chorus at the . . . Some girl, eh, Carter?"

"Some girl," agreed Carter, and was momentarily puzzled to know who Granger was speaking about.

By the next afternoon he had made up his mind. He went ashore, and with a recklessness which frightened him, took the first train for the pleasant place he had once called "home."

He did not recognise a single taxi-man at the station, but he saw old Weltheim come out of the store, and he recognised Doctor Felling as he flashed past in his resplendent automobile. The Merediths' house shocked him. In two years the pleasant old home of John Meredith had been swept away, and a stone mansion, turreted and gabled, timbered before and stuccoed behind, floated up from its ruins.

Stardon, the butler, recognised him.

"Why, Mr. Jackson!" he said, with such a beam of welcome that Carter decided that this rotund man could not have stolen the port after all. "Well, this is a surprise! Mr. Meredith is in the library. I'll go right along and tell him."

John Meredith gave him the welcome he expected. Carter had always been a favourite of his, and now he ran out, a stout, wild-haired man, and gripped Carter's hand in his.

"It's good to see you, Carter," he bellowed. "Been out west, eh? Come back with a fortune like the young men in the movies?"

He led Carter to the library, and Carter, conscious that he had not come back either from the west, or with a fortune, was a little uneasy.

"If you had come yesterday we should not have been here," said Meredith. "Sit down, Carter. Some changes since you went away, eh? Well, I

had to get a bigger house. The old home was falling to pieces, though I hated to part with it; but my sister—you have met Miss Meredith—she is staying with us now.”

Of course! It was to the maiden sister of John Meredith that the butler had been referring.

“She was kind of set on this kind of house, though Grace hasn’t been civil to me since it was built,” he chuckled. “Yes, I have been away on a yacht cruise,” he rattled on. “Grace was getting a bit peaked, and, gosh, the weather was hot . . . fierce . . . and as I had the yacht lying up on the slips, I thought I’d go away beyond the Sound . . . into the Arctic Circle, my boy. Now what have you been doing, Carter—tell me?”

“I haven’t been entirely west, sir,” said Carter, with a smile. “East a little and west a little.”

“Europe, eh?”

Carter nodded.

“You left in such a damned hurry that I didn’t see you—we’ve missed you a whole lot,” said the old man.

“I—I didn’t say good-bye to anybody,” said Carter awkwardly. “How is—Grace?”

“Fine,” said Mr. Meredith, and looked at him curiously. “What happened with you and Grace?” he asked. “I never understood why you two people fell out.”

Carter was saved the embarrassment of replying. Grace came in at that moment. He thought she was looking paler than when he had last seen her. She was certainly more beautiful: the indefinable something which distinguishes the woman from the girl had come to her. To say “older” would have been a looseness of description. She had matured as a bud matures in a night.

She met his eyes steadily, and her cool hand rested in his for a second.

“It is good to see you, Carter,” she said; “where have you been?”

So she did not know, he thought in dismay, and there came a definite end to his dream.

“He’s been to Europe,” interrupted her father. “Made a lot of money, Carter?”

"I've made none," said Carter grimly. "My worldly possessions at this moment amount to a hundred and twelve dollars back pay."

"Have you been working?" she asked.

"I'm on the *Thibetian*," he said shortly; "wireless operator—eighty dollars a month."

"A wireless operator!" said Meredith slowly, and in a tone of surprise. "Why, of course, you were always——"

"Will you come along and see our new garden?" interrupted the girl. "It is quite beautiful, if you forget the architectural monstrosity which it surrounds."

She led him away, Mr. Meredith protesting feebly.

Once in that silent walk Carter looked at her hand. The ring he feared to see was absent from her white finger.

"Do you find us strange?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"What have you been doing all this time, Grace?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"What does a girl do? I've been to horse shows; I've been to theatres and operas, to Palm Beach, to Daddy's camp; I've read the best sellers and heard all the best music and danced all the worst two-steps——" She paused.

"Have you probed into the mysteries of wireless telegraphy," he asked slowly, and held his breath, waiting her reply.

It came after a long pause.

"Wireless telegraphy, no. Why do you ask, Carter?"

He shook his head.

"I don't know exactly; it's very amusing. Some people learn the Morse code—just for fun."

"I learn nothing—for fun," she answered.

Thereafter they exchanged banalities.

"You're not staying to dinner, Carter?" said Mr. Meredith in horror.

"No, I've got to get back to New York." Carter was insistent. "I have to take my turn of duty."

“But surely there is no duty when your ship is in harbour?” said the girl.

Carter lied valiantly.

She came down to the station to see him off, and as the car swung out of the big drive on to the post road, he looked back at the house.

“It isn’t beautiful, is it?” she said, with a little grimace.

“It is immensely decorative,” he said gravely, “especially those two flag-staffs on the top of the towers.”

He was glad in the end to leave her. The silences were painful. Not once had any reference on either side been made to the past, and he was almost relieved when the train drew out.

He half expected to receive a letter from her before the ship sailed. . . .

“You’re a fool,” he said savagely, “a hopeless imbecile.”

When the bell was ringing the visitors ashore, a presence exploded into his cabin.

“Oh, there you are!” said the breathless Mr. Meredith. “I swore to Grace I wouldn’t see you—but I am not a fool—you’re a fool! I’m too old for foolishness, anyway. Do you see, Carter? You’re a fool and Grace is a fool,” he repeated inconsequently, “and there goes that damn bell.”

He gripped the young man’s hand and shook it.

“Come along and see the *Dog Star* when you come back; she’s got a fine radio set—Grace can work that set better than any operator. I never dreamt then you were on the *Thibetian* doing this kind of work. Grace never told me—good-bye.”

He dashed out of the cabin, only to dash back again; he was a violently moving man.

“L.T.V.,” he said mysteriously, and nodded, and there was mystery in his nod also. “Didn’t you see the aerials—no, of course you didn’t—we had ’em when we were away—they’re up now, Carter. They look fine, too.”

“I don’t understand you,” said the bewildered Carter. “Aerials?”

And then he remembered the significant flag-posts on the Meredith house.

“They’re up now—talk to her, my boy, L.T.V.!”

He left Carter Jackson considerably disturbed.

“L.T.V.?”

He looked up the code book, and found it: “Yacht, *Dog Star*.” She would not be on the yacht, but the code would find her—if she was listening-in.

At one o’clock in the morning he relieved Granger; Cape Race, immensely talkative at this stage of the voyage, was gabbling commercially.

“Excuse me,” said Carter gently, and devoted himself to the old emergency set, which was more suitable for messages over a comparatively short distance.

“L.T.V.” he tapped. “L.T.V.” and then the answer came.

“*Send slowly, I am only a beginner.*”

So that was why she had not heard him. In his excitement on that electric night, he had sent his message at so tremendous a rate, that none but an expert could have understood him, and then:

“I LOVE YOU CARTER,” said L.T.V. “WHEN YOU COME BACK . . .”

At half-past two Cape Race picked up the U.S. Mail steamer *Kentucky*.

“Can you get *Thibetian*?” asked Cape Race in a fury.

“I could, but being human, I won’t,” said *Kentucky* rapturously. For *Kentucky* had been listening-in. Presently Cape Race was satisfied; the whine of the *Thibetian*’s signal came through:

“WHRN L U BN,” asked Cape Race furiously.

“Go hd,” came the reply, “I’ve finished——”

In a little room under one of the grotesque towers of Mr. Meredith’s new home, a girl sat at a bench, her head on her arms, and she was fast asleep. Therefore, she did not hear what Cape Race was saying to Carter Jackson, and was spared the gentle sarcasm of the mail steamer *Kentucky*.

FATE AND MR. HOKE

Lord Derrymere read the paragraph again, removed his pince-nez and placed them carefully on his Empire writing-table. Then, after a moment's consideration, he pressed the bell that was neatly labelled "Secretary." There was an interval of nearly a minute before Mary Bush came in, to meet the grave scrutiny of eyes, which, whilst they approved her undeniable prettiness, could yet disapprove of the notoriety which had come to her in the past few days, and which had created such intense sensation in the servants' hall of Derrymere House.

Mary stood demurely before the table, book in hand, wondering just what he would say, and what form his injured dignity would take. Or was it about Jimmy he wished to speak? He had made no reference to his discovery, though she had expected one every time she saw him.

"Miss Bush"—he leant back in his chair, fixed his pince-nez on his long nose, and folded his well-manicured hands—"I have been reading, in a cutting from the public press, the story of your remarkable good fortune; and whilst, as a Justice of the Peace, I deprecate, without any reservations whatever, the breach of the law which a lottery involves, yet I must offer you my congratulations upon your success in the Grand National Sweepstake, organised, I understand, on behalf of certain charitable institutions—though whether those charitable institutions benefit to any extent is extremely doubtful. . . . Fifteen thousand pounds!"

Mary smiled uncomfortably.

"Fifteen hundred, Lord Derrymere," she corrected.

With great care his lordship adjusted his glasses and read the cutting again.

"Peer's Secretary wins Fortune in Hospital Lottery," he read. "Girl wins £15,000 by the Victory of Sergeant Mariati."

"Fifteen hundred," said Mary again. "The promoters must have given the wrong figures to the press."

He inclined his head courteously.

"I am sorry," he said simply. "Fifteen thousand pounds is a substantial sum, and would have made a very considerable difference to your—ah—"

future.”

Mary Bush agreed silently, but she knew her employer too well to place any obstacle in the flowing stream of his eloquence.

“In this democratic age,” said his lordship, “when we see on every hand the introduction of—ah—plebeian blood into the greatest and oldest of the families, it would be contrary to the spirit of the times if I offered any foolish objections to a union on which the heart of my son seems to be irrevocably set. But we are, as you know from your intimate acquaintance with my affairs, an extremely poor family, and I confess that, in contemplating a—ah—marriage, I had in mind the possibility of his choice resting upon some wealthy member of the manufacturing class. But fifteen hundred pounds—” He pulled a long face. “I fear . . .” he shook his head—“I greatly fear. . . . You have no other prospects?”

“You mean money, Lord Derrymere?” she asked. “I’m afraid I haven’t. There are some distant relatives of mine in Australia who are immensely wealthy, and I have an uncle in Russia.”

“In Russia?” said Lord Derrymere, interested. “A Bolshevik? I understand those gentlemen have accumulated considerable property——”

She laughed.

“No, he isn’t a Bolshevik, and I’m under the impression that he isn’t very rich.”

She was discreetly silent upon the many stories which had come to her of Uncle Algernon’s lurid past. He was one of those relations about whom people never boast, and his continued presence in Russia was, she guessed, due very largely to the lax view which the Soviet officials had taken of the sacred rights of property.

“It is very regrettable,” said Lord Derrymere, and she took his nod, rather than the words, for her dismissal.

Jimmy, whose other name was the Viscount Bournvale, was waiting for her in the garden. He was a young man immensely energetic, and though he was possessed of the optimism which is the peculiar gift of youth, he waited for her reappearance with some anxiety.

“What did he say?” he asked.

“It isn’t what he said, it’s what he suggested,” said Mary wearily. “Jimmy, we’ll have to be sensible. You’re poor, I’m poor——”

“You’ve got fifteen hundred pounds: that’s more than the governor’s ever had in one sum for years,” suggested Jimmy indignantly. “He wasn’t offensive to you, was he?”

She shook her head.

“No, dear, he was just kind and logical and loquacious.”

He took her arm, and they paced the long path to the rosary.

“If it had been fifteen thousand pounds, it would have made a difference, Jimmy. I think your father likes me.”

“Did he ask about your relations? He’s rather keen on relations,” asked the gloomy Jimmy.

She laughed.

“I have only one I could have advanced, but oh, Jimmy, he’s dreadful—”

Mary Bush had come into the poverty-stricken household of the twelfth Earl of Derrymere as resident-secretary to a peer who had much to say on the Irish Land Act, and said it for four hours a day, in language acceptable to the dullest of the English reviews. In such moments as he could bring his mind from the contemplation of Governmental enormities, Lord Derrymere had vaguely observed the friendship which had grown up between the girl and his heir; but until one momentous evening, when he had walked without knocking into his secretary’s office, the exact nature of the relationship had not dawned upon him.

“Jimmy, I’m glad, really glad, we’ve been such good pals, and I’m even glad he saw you kissing me; but, dear boy, we’ve come to the end, and you’ll marry something in the brewing trade, and I’ll—I’ll”—she choked—“go back to find another amiable gentleman who splits his infinitives. . . .”

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

“Mary,” he said solemnly, “I’ve got a hunch that fate is working for us—and fifteen hundred pounds is a lot of money. Did you get it?”

“I got the cheque this morning,” she said miserably. “Oh, Jimmy, do you think it is worth while buying any tickets for the Derby?”

Fate indeed was working, but in a manner that Mary Bush could not guess, for she knew nothing of Mr. Abraham Hoke, that world-wanderer, so could hardly be expected to appreciate his immeasurable sense of humour.

Abraham Hoke came swinging along Tchistoproudsky Boulevard at peace with the world, though he had no reason to be, by all civilised reckoning. His lean face was tanned to the colour which furniture-dealers describe as fumed oak, the little lines which seamed his face were many, his hair, powdered grey, was tidily brushed under the rusty green hat which sat jauntily on the side of his head, his soiled clothes were white with the dust of the road to Skatchka, and a black-rimmed monocle was fixed in his eye.

As he walked he swung a sagging panama cane jauntily and sang a song about women. He did not hum it, he sang it, loudly enough to attract attention to himself, but not so loud as would excuse the warning and the admonition which trembled on the lips of that unenlightened Red police agent who watched the eccentric figure with a smile which was half a frown.

Behind Mr. Abraham Hoke and his assurance, as he cheerfully footed it along the broad boulevard, was the wide world and the experience thereof—more immediately in his rear was the Skatchka and a racehorse called Grom, which unaccountably failed to win.

Hoke had invested all that he possessed—a trifle of 5,000,000 roubles—upon the equine traitor. When he saw the gaudy jacket of Grom toiling in the rear of the field, he waited some time for a miracle to happen, and then, remarking that providence was fighting on the side of the moneyed classes, he tore up his pari-mutuel ticket and said, “Nitchivo,” which is Russian for “never mind.”

He stood head and shoulders taller than the average man, and gave the observer the impression that he was thin. But the average man’s coat would have split over Abraham Hoke’s broad shoulders, and the average man’s sleeve would have come to a little below his elbows.

From time to time as he walked, casting an occasional and approving glance at the Kremlin’s bulk, he would take his monocle from his eye, and, with glass daintily poised, and head swaying from side to side, conduct an invisible orchestra, to the consternation of sober passers-by, who stopped to look after him, crossing themselves as they realised his madness.

Yet they were no more sober than he, be it known. God had given Abraham Hoke, tramp of the world, a glad heart and a sunny mind, and though half the detectives in Europe knew him by repute, though many men, from the Chief of Police at Tomsk to the genial Commissioner O’Hara of Seattle, desired most passionately to meet him, none grudged him credit for his joy in life.

He crossed Miasnitokaya, singing a sinful song about a peasant who came to worship at the shrine of St. Inokente and met a girl *en route*. Fortunately for the morals of Moscow, he trolled his lay in that peasant Russian which is not met this side of Lake Braikal.

He was hungry long before he reached his destination, which was an inexpensive house in the Prospekt, rented by Mr. Algernon Bush, though at that time, for diplomatic reasons, he was known as the Senhor Dom Jerome Xavier de Castro y Pembalino of Paraguay.

He was sitting at his big carved oak writing-table when Hoke entered, and might have been a successful stockbroker, if one judged him by his neat but expensive attire and the single pearl which, with a thin gold watch-guard, represented his stock of visible jewellery.

He looked up with a smile as Hoke came in, and motioned to a deep leather chair by the side of the desk.

“Ha, Hoke!” His voice was pitched high, and he had a little nasal twang not unpleasant to hear. “You are late—but I’ll forgive you. I want you to do something for me, and it will be worth your while.”

“Material advantage, as opposed to the balm of an untroubled mind,” said A. B. Hoke, “I have never sought. In the language of my young friend Tillett, I demand the right to live without the distressin’ after effects which accompany the too strenuous employment of my voluntary muscular system; for the moment, I hunger.”

The other pushed a bell, and an untidy man appeared.

“Bring some sandwiches and drink,” said Bush.

“Continually bring the sandwiches,” added A. B. Hoke in a murmur.

He sat in silence till the man came back with a tray and laid some rough-hewn sandwiches on a little table.

“I give you this,” said Bush, when the man had gone. “After, you will have sufficient money to provide for yourself.”

“I am no porcine hog,” said A. B. Hoke, as he diluted his whisky. “The greed for gold an’ lust for power, which serves but to swell the surplus of the incorruptible Commissioner of National Wealth, are not for me. I demand only of the world that it serves me as a habitation an’ free foodery, an’ in the pursuance of my hobby I have crossed lands where the foot of white man would never tread if there was a railway handy.”

Bush was content that he should babble on. Leaning back in his padded chair, he stroked his small black moustache and listened.

“Years ago,” said Mr. Hoke reminiscently, “I found myself in the western side of Thibet—me an’ a chink named Li, himself a lover of Nature, and a born financier. I will not at the moment discuss the chain of adventurous circumstances which brought us to the inhospitable plateau, or the remarkable happenin’s which preceded our arrival at Dras, *en route* for the Zoji Pass an’ the far-famed glories of Kashmir.”

He paused, and for a moment was lost in thought.

“As one who has said me *jolli* to the Grand Lama—though you’d discredit that statement as vergin’ on the borderline of boastfulness—as one who has roosted under the lee of Nangar Parbat, that hogback of crystal heaven, and has, moreover, pigged it with the Ladaki, the Chatrali, and other disgustin’ products of the trans-Himalayan territories, I am entitled to advance the opinion that there are easier ways of acquirin’ pice.”

“I’m going to give you an easier,” said Mr. Bush. “When I heard you had drifted into Moscow, I thought ‘Here is the very man!’ ”

“And I am.” Mr. Hoke spoke through sandwich. “Far be it from me to pry into your domestic affairs—but there is a musical tinkle to your conversation. Have you, for the fourteenth time, sold rolling-stock to the deluded rulers of this land? That you are alive is more than remarkable. Did not Horace Sellaermein, a German but a gentleman, perish miserably at the hands of Commissary K, to whose spouse he sold the veritable Crown jewels for a paltry billion?”

Mr. Bush shifted uneasily.

“I’ve had a pull,” he said, “and now I have a push. The big fellow at the Kremlin, who was behind me, was shot last week for bribery and theft. I have twenty-four hours to leave Russia, and my capital could, with luck, be converted into ten pounds English.”

Hoke stared at him.

“This imposing mansion . . .?”

“Was lent by my friend,” said Bush. “I’m going to England. Read this.”

He passed a newspaper cutting across the table, and Hoke read.

“Mary Bush,” he said, as he handed back the paper.

“Fifteen thousand pounds, and I’m one of her two relatives.” Mr. Bush was impressive. “My only relation, if I cut out my brother Joshua. And I have cut him out, Hoke! There is a man worth a million—he has so much money that he’s ill with it, and yet he allows his own brother to battle with dirty-necked Russkis for his daily bread.”

“Dirty-necked they may be, but with soap at a million roubles a cake, cleanliness is swank,” said Hoke philosophically. “But what is the graft?”

Mr. Algernon Bush folded up the paper and put it in his pocket.

“Fifteen thousand pounds is a lot of money,” he said. “Mary is my niece. I am a man of the world—can advise her in the matter of investments. You get me, Hoke? There’s a monkey for you in this. You’ve got to come and brag for me. You’re the friend who can tell her about my estates in . . .”

“Trans-Caucasia?” suggested Hoke helpfully.

“Anywhere . . . it means a week’s work, and there’s a monkey in it, as I said. . . .”

“Monkeys have no appeal to one who has observed their restless habits,” said Hoke firmly. “Swindles of a general character appeal to one of my nimbleness of wit and wealth of vocabulary, but swindles involving gentle ladies—no!”

“Look here”—Bush sprang up, and with two rapid strides placed himself between Hoke and the door—“I have asked you to make five hundred, with no risk.”

“Prince of true hearts,” said Hoke courteously, “no risk! What of the untroubled pool of conscience into which you are throwin’ half a brick! What of the mud of self-despiser you are stirrin’ with the rod of temptation! No—K-N-O-U-G-H—No! Robbery is a pastime, an occasional fatal accident, a hobby, but a robbery of babes-in-arms—no! I take my leave.”

With a bow he made for the door.

“No, you don’t,” growled Bush. “You dog! You miserable continental sneak-thief! You’re going to do as I tell you——”

Hoke shrugged his shoulders.

“Out of my way, beef,” he said loftily.

Bush, with an oath, dropped one of his powerful hands on the other’s shoulder—only for an instant. Then a big, bony hand gripped him by the

throat, a hand as inflexible as steel, and he was swept from Hoke's path. He might have been a feather, so lightly was he tossed aside.

He stood for a moment bewildered, then, with a froth of curses, he sprang to his desk and pulled open a drawer.

"Depress it, depress it, dear lad," said A. B. Hoke gently.

He was holding his revolver so that all Bush saw was the cold, black cavity of the barrel.

"Go in peace, find another side-partner, and enjoy the fruits of your depredations—for A. B. Hoke the long trail to Tiflis, where there are pickings for one who, like myself, has the Koran at my finger-tips."

Still humming his tune, Hoke strutted back the way he had come, halting before the door of the Chief of Foreign Intelligence, where a man can rest awhile and read foreign newspapers a month old, slightly soiled but otherwise entertaining.

An hour later, when Algernon Bush was roping the last of his trunks, Mr. Hoke made an unexpected appearance.

"Well—have you changed your mind?" he asked.

Mr. Hoke smiled sadly.

"Hunger drives with a short rein," he quoted. "I have buried my conscience in synthetic vodka—open the gate of your monkey-house—A. B. Hoke has fallen!"

Three weeks later Mary Bush came into the library and found Lord Derrymere sitting before a large map. He greeted her with an almost tender smile.

"Good morning, Mary," he said gently. "I have just seen your uncle—an extraordinarily entertaining man! Not perhaps so widely travelled as Colonel Hoke, whose description of his adventures in Thibet should be written—I have just communicated with the editor of *Statesmanship*, suggesting that the Colonel might very well write a most entrancing series of reminiscences—but one cannot exactly expect a man of Mr. Bush's wealth to have had so varied a career. A rolling stone, as you may have heard, gathers very little moss. I have been studying the position of his concessions in Trans-Caucasia—you are an extremely fortunate young woman!"

Mary did not reply. Her fortune, in truth, had bewildered her, and the emergence from the obscurity of the Russian mists of a millionaire uncle had taken her breath away.

“His generosity is amazing,” mused his lordship, shaking his head in admiration. “You have heard, of course, what he proposes doing—or am I betraying a confidence, I wonder?”

“I can’t understand it,” said Mary. “I never dreamt Uncle Algernon was a rich man. In fact . . .” She thought it wiser not to relate what she had thought of her erratic relative. “Yes, he told me last night; he said that his lawyer would bring the deed to-day. It does seem too good to be true!”

“Such things happen,” said his lordship seriously. “All along I had some suspicion of this possibility. You will probably recall my words, that he might have accumulated great possessions. I do not, of course, approve of the Russian Government, but there is no doubt that any shrewd man, settled in Russia during the past few years, has had unrivalled opportunities—unrivalled! He tells me that he is investing your money in an oil concession he has obtained from the Government?”

Mary nodded. For some reason, she was not particularly enthusiastic about this investment. She had never possessed so large a sum before, and contemplated its parting with a little sense of dismay, which, in view of all the circumstances, was rather absurd.

“I think you are wise,” said Lord Derrymere. “I also am thinking of investing a few hundreds. You are indeed a very lucky girl!”

In the private sitting-room at the Star and Garter Inn, the one place of entertainment that the village of Derrymere possessed, Mr. Algernon Bush lay moodily in an arm-chair, his hands thrust into his pockets, a frown of discontent upon his placid features.

“Fifteen hundred!” he said bitterly. “Curse these newspapers! It will hardly pay expenses. I did think the old boy would put in a thousand or two, but he hasn’t got two sixpences to rub together. Hoke, that ‘monkey’ is off! It’s as much as I shall do to clear expenses, and if I can squeeze out a hundred for you, you’ll have something to be thankful for!”

Mr. Hoke stood by the window, whistling softly to himself, his bright eyes searching the road.

“I am content, little friend of the poor,” he said, “for monkeys, with their flea-chasing habits, are unpopular with me.”

“And why the devil did you suggest that deed of gift? Two hundred thousand! I wonder the size of it didn’t scare her—and me without the price of a magnum! The lawyer’s fee will cost me the best part of ten pounds,” demanded Bush violently. “She’d have parted without all that tomfoolery.”

“Confidence—establish confidence,” murmured Hoke. “And think of the pleasure you gave, the bright flush of joy that suffused her maidenly cheeks; think of the two tender hearts that will be united; think of an ancient home saved from ruin.”

“Stuff!” snarled the other. “I’m thinking of the cost of stamps—fifty is as much as I shall be able to spare for you, Hoke.”

“Fifty is wealth,” said Mr. Hoke complacently, “to one who has shared the begging-bowl of the wandering fakir, and has comforted his stomach on the bark of trees——”

“You’re a fool, and I was a fool to bring you,” growled Mr. Bush.

He made a little sum on the back of an old envelope, and recovered something of his spirits. Fifteen hundred pounds was fifteen hundred, and he had the girl’s cheque in his pocket, and at ten o’clock the next morning, when the Troubridge banks opened, that slip of paper, and another which he hoped to receive from an impressed lordship, would be converted into cash.

He was quite cheerful when he drove up to Derrymere House that afternoon, and, in the presence of a lawyer and a fascinated household, fixed his sign and seal to the imposing and involved document through which a well-trained lawyer had gabbled, without apparently stopping to take breath. The girl took the parchment in her hand and gazed at it open-mouthed.

“It’s really too wonderful!” she gasped. “I can’t believe my good fortune, uncle.”

He waved aside her thanks.

“My dear, that is very little, compared with what you will one day inherit,” he said soberly. “It is, if you will forgive the vulgarity, a fleabite compared with the return you will receive from your investment.”

He drove back to the inn, Mr. Hoke preferring to walk. At seven o’clock, when dinner was served, the wanderer had not returned, nor did midnight bring him, and an uneasy Algernon Bush returned from one of his many excursions along the road in a troubled frame of mind.

At ten o’clock the next morning, when Mr. Bush was walking out of the bank, with a rustling pad of notes in his right-hand trousers’ pocket and a

gleam of satisfaction in his eye, Mr. Abraham Hoke was sitting with the senior partner of Bracken, Thompson, Brown, Smith & Jones, which, as their names will disclose, were an eminent firm of lawyers.

“This,” said Mr. Hoke, as he took from a ragged note-case a small slip of paper, “I saw in Moscow: a chance scrutiny of an ancient newspaper—and yet, how providential!”

He read the paragraph with unction:

“‘If this should meet the eye of Algernon John Bush, of Sydney, South Australia, will he communicate with Bracken, Thompson, Brown, Smith & Jones, 907 Leadenhall Street, solicitors of Joshua Bush, deceased.’”

The lawyer eyed the odd figure curiously.

“You know where Mr. Bush is—I think you said as much in your letter?”

“Yes, sir, I can tell you within a few yards where he is to be found,” said Mr. Hoke.

The lawyer nodded.

“There is nothing more to say than what you already knew a fortnight ago. The amount that Mr. Algernon Bush has inherited is just short of a million pounds. Fortunately for the purposes of administration, most of the money is in cash at the Bank of England. He died in London, as you are probably aware. As to the other question you asked me in your letter, as to whether a deed of gift made by Mr. Bush without the knowledge of his inheritance would be valid, I must reply in the affirmative. He would hardly convey property in a deed of gift unless he possessed—what was the sum?”

“Two hundred thousand pounds,” murmured Mr. Hoke.

“Exactly. As I say, if he gave, by deed of gift, that sum, the amount would be immediately recoverable.”

Mr. Hoke drew a long sigh.

“I always thought it would be,” he said. “Yes, I always thought it would be. And now, could you give me the address of a hard-faced lawyer? The kind of man who would battle with a soulless robber of orphans, and wring from his reluctant mitt, and to the last penny, the money he owes her? A lawyer of the world, to whom a shark is the merest goldfish, and the clinging

tentacles of an octopus are as the tendrils of a passion-flower—in fact, a lawyer?”

Mr. Bracken obliged, and Hoke went down the stairs two at a time, a song in his heart and his everlasting pilgrimage before his eyes.

That night Mr. Bush arrived at his London hotel, *en route* for the Continent, and found two letters awaiting him. The first was staggering—the second filled him with the deepest melancholy.

“And, dear friend,” wrote Hoke, “you’ll pay! For the first time in your ill-spent life you have so much money that you can’t afford to run away. Ponder well on this—wealth has its responsibilities. The advice of one who has supped with wise men on the slopes of Everest is not to be despised—and I wait lest I be called to give evidence of fraud and testify to your ungentleness. Pay, monkey-man.”

In the end Mr. Bush paid, but it hurt very much.

“DECLARED TO WIN”

John Petworth came out of the Army with a slight limp, an inadequate pension, and an extraordinary knowledge of horses. It is a fairly simple matter to set up in business as a trainer of racing thoroughbreds, if you have a wide circle of rich friends, a plausible manner, and the right kind of conversational powers.

This lean-faced young man, however, was unusually shy and silent. He was a member of no night-clubs, for the Mauser bullet had carried away a few small but necessary bones of his ankle and put an end to his dancing; and the only friend he had—and he scarcely dared think of her as such—was Jane Seymour, who was comfortably off but could not, by any stretch of imagination, be called rich. And this, despite the fact that she had a flat in Park Lane and £2500 per annum—flat and income having been left to her by a maiden aunt who, with the exception of the £500 per annum she left to Gerald Seymour, bequeathed the residue of her estate to an institution for providing homes for friendless girls.

It was almost a miracle that Jane talked with this diffident young man at all. They met, of all the unlikely places, at a Berkshire flower-show. The Rector of Stanbridge introduced the embarrassed young man as a grower of chrysanthemums—which he was. Jane thought he was an amateur horticulturist until, in his vague, rather helpless way, he betrayed his lowly occupation.

“How wonderful!” said Jane enthusiastically. “Won’t you let me come and see your stable?”

Mr. Petworth went very red, fingered his little moustache guiltily, and blurted out the truth. He had a stable and he had a hack—but he had no other horses. He had had three: one of them won a selling race and disappeared; the owner of the other two, who expected to win races every time his horses ran, had taken them away and sent them to a more optimistic trainer. Nevertheless, Jane insisted upon inspecting the stable *qua* stable; and Mrs. Gill, with whom she was staying, drove her over one afternoon to the pretty little farmhouse near the downs, and gradually the story of Jack Petworth’s trouble was unfolded. It wasn’t what he told her, but rather what she saw. The shabby furniture, the odd cups and saucers, the skimping economy revealed in a dozen ways, made her heart ache. His cheerful faith that “some

day” he would train “the winner of a big race” almost reduced her to tears, and Jane Seymour was the least emotional of young ladies.

She saw him again before she left Berkshire, and, going back to London, made a very careful study of racing; and the result of it all was that she accepted the Gills’ invitation for the Doncaster week, and on the Thursday morning, rather breathlessly and self-consciously, purchased the yearling colt Abbeyland for £300, and, with the assistance of a knowledgeable stableman, had him boxed and sent to the station nearest John Petworth’s stable.

“Why on earth are you sending him to Petworth?” asked her brother Gerald, aghast. “I’ve never heard of the fellow.”

“He’s a very good trainer,” said Jane recklessly, “one of the best in England.”

She sent a note to John:

“DEAR MR. PETWORTH,—I am sending you a horse to train. Will you please enter him in the Derby and any other kind of race you think he’s likely to win? And will you please tell me what I have to pay you, and whether I ought to send a cheque in advance?”

John replied very gravely, very precisely. She was a little disappointed that he was not enthusiastic. He was, in fact, somewhat critical. He did not like the horse’s legs, but hoped for an improvement. And he didn’t exactly like the horse’s neck, and there no improvement was possible. But he said, “Abbeyland has a sensible head.” Jane wrote back to say that that was the very reason she had bought the animal, though, in truth, his head and his legs, no less than his neck, seemed like the head, neck, and legs of other horses she had seen.

Abbeyland did not run as a two-year-old: she hardly expected he would. The only thing she hoped was that he wouldn’t die. From time to time she went down to Berkshire and inspected her purchase, and the lean young trainer limped round after her with a look on his face that she might have been happier had she seen.

“About this Abbeyland, Miss Seymour,” he said awkwardly, one morning in early spring, “I think he’s just about coming to hand, and he might win a little race for you. . . . I don’t know how good he is: unfortunately I have nothing to try him with.”

“Abbeyland? Isn’t he in the Derby or something?” she asked innocently.

“That’s what I was going to talk about. You know, Miss Seymour, it will cost you a hundred pounds to run him. If you scratched him now, it would only cost you twenty-five pounds—the entry, I mean.”

She smiled.

“We will run him,” she said magnificently.

Just before she left:

“I suppose you hadn’t an opportunity of speaking to Mr. Blass?”

He saw her colour change, and felt a brute.

“I haven’t had the right kind of opportunity,” she said, and left rather hurriedly.

She *had* talked to Mr. Blass, but on quite another subject than the advisability of his sending a few horses to the stable of a struggling gentleman trainer.

Ronny Blass was a very rich young man. He was so rich that he felt superior to almost everybody he knew, for he was one of those cash-conscious people that are so rarely met with. It was his misfortune that he had had a doting mother who thought that public schools were horrid places where boys learnt dreadful things; she did not know that a public school is an institution in which the youth of Britain is taught by soulless prefects that if you have money you must not talk about it—this lesson being emphasised into a permanent conviction by the toe of the prefect’s boot or the long, pliant cane that he wields in the charge-room between afternoon prep. and tea-time.

Ronny had a succession of tutors, who prepared him for the university; and at the university there is practically no discipline worth mentioning, and if a man is a cad he can, by searching, find congenial company.

Ronny met with other mamma’s boys, and acquired a large number of club ties and a smattering of Latin verse—for he was on the classical side. He came down from Oxford without a degree, but with the confident assurance that he was a man of the world. His fond mamma having gone to heaven in the meanwhile, Ronny’s bloated bank balance was still further augmented.

It seemed to him that Life was a very desirable shop full of polite, even sycophantic, assistants, who were ready to sell him anything he wanted. One

of the first articles he picked was Jane Seymour, who had a flat in Park Lane, £2500 a year, and a brother. He picked her because she was beautiful and had big, solemn grey eyes and a figure like pliant steel. One night, when they were dancing at the Ritz, he broke the news of her good fortune. She did not swoon or tremble or go pale. Nor did she display any other symptoms of nausea as she looked up into his pallid and shapeless face.

“Marry you?” she said, and added something he could not catch.

They were rather near the syncopated orchestra when she said this, and he thought she had said, “How wonderful!” and smiled.

“There’s nothing wonderful about it, Jane,” he began. “You’re an awfully charming kid——”

“‘Funny’ was the word I used,” she said calmly.

He missed a step and trod on her foot in his agitation.

“I don’t see——” he began.

“You wouldn’t. There are forty reasons why I wouldn’t marry you, and the first is, I don’t love you and I don’t respect you. Let us sit down, shall we?”

They found a settee.

“I won’t bother you to tell me the other thirty-nine,” he said stiffly, and, leaving her, made his way to the buffet.

Gerald Seymour, her brother, heard the news over a glass of port, and was both sympathetic and sententious.

“A woman’s ‘no,’ old man, means nothing,” he said. “Leave the matter to me.”

He was two years Jane’s senior. Wisely he did not discuss the matter until they reached home in the early hours of the morning.

“Now look here, Jane—about Ronny,” he began, with that wise-old-man air which is so becoming in a veteran of twenty-three. “He isn’t a bad fellow—in fact, he’s one of the best. And awfully rich. He’ll win the Derby this year——”

“Good-night,” said Jane kindly. “I’m going to bed. You ought to go yourself, Jerry. You’re talking in your sleep already.”

He did not think of a suitably snappy answer until he woke up in the middle of the night.

It was true that Ronny was an owner of great thoroughbreds. You can buy them “in the shop” at Doncaster or Newmarket. He knew no more about horses than he knew about cats, and less about his own than the most youthful of speculators who write bets at the street corner.

But the owner of horses is an important person. People come to him and ask him for tips; and it is fine to stand in the centre of the parade ring and have jockeys touch their caps to you; and when your horse wins there are paragraphs in the press:

“Mr. Ronald Blass was present at Newbury yesterday to see his good-looking Swynford colt win the Berkshire Nursery . . .”

And the routine and mechanics of racing were rather fascinating. Almost as fascinating as a razor can be to a child of four.

On the morning after his rejection, he met Jerry Seymour at the Haviland Club for an early cocktail.

“She simply treated me like a bit of dirt, old boy,” said Ronny gloomily. “You might imagine I was—well, anybody. Just laughed at me. . . . And there isn’t a thing in the world I wouldn’t have done for her.”

Jerry made sympathetic noises. He also said the one thing that he shouldn’t have said.

“I think it’s this wretched training fellow—Petworth. She’s always dashing down to see that wretched horse of hers.”

“Horse?” Mr. Blass was more interested in the horse than the trainer. “I didn’t know she had a horse.”

“It’s in the Derby,” said Jerry.

Ronny produced from his pocket a small book and turned the pages.

“What’s it called—Abbeyland? Yes, here it is. Why on earth has she got a horse in the Derby? Bless my soul, I never knew she was a racing girl!”

“She isn’t,” said Jerry treacherously. “It’s this fellow Petworth. He’s an old soldier with a game leg—the fellow must be at least thirty!”

“In the Derby?” said Ronny, amazed. “My dear, good chap, the girl must be mad! Skyward or Tester are certain to win.” He looked at Jerry thoughtfully, pursing his lips. “I’ve a jolly good mind to tell you something,” he said.

Jerry's eyes opened wider.

"If it is anything that will help a fellow financially, I'll be awfully obliged, Ronny," he said.

For the moment the lunacy of Jane Seymour was forgotten, whilst the racing expert explained his great plan.

There is no man so rich that he does not desire to be richer. Ronny Blass had a grievance against all the money that was not at his bankers, and out of his knowledge of racing, its intricacies and finesses, he had evolved a scheme.

To an ordinary man the winning of the Derby would be a prize sufficiently large; but Ronny was no ordinary man. In a dark and secluded corner of the smoke-room he outlined the Wonderful Idea.

When an owner has two horses running in a race, he may "declare to win" with one of them. That is to say, he may "pull" the second in order to let the declared animal win. The declaration, however, has a deeper significance. It must appear on the notice-board, and the consequence is that the horse who is not "declared" invariably drifts out to a long price, because the public know that he is not fancied and that his stable-companion is the better of the two.

"Now, Jerry, you'll swear by this and that that you won't tell a soul. . . ."

The vow was made, solemnly and soberly, and Mr. Blass revealed the swindle that was contemplated upon an unsuspecting public.

"Mind you, old boy, it's quite in order. I'm running horses for myself, and not for the beastly public. If they burn their fingers, that's their look-out. Now, listen: I'm running Skyward and Tester in the Derby. Tester is a stone better horse than Skyward, and can leave him standing. I'm going to declare to win with Skyward. You see what I mean, old boy? The silly bookmakers will offer any price against Tester; a lot of my pals will back him at the last moment, and we'll win a fortune."

Jerry, who had some sort of a conscience, squirmed a little.

"But, I say, isn't that rather dishonest?"

"Dishonest!" scoffed Ronny. "Don't be absurd! It's done every day, old boy. You don't understand these things. Now I know racing from A to Z. All the tricks of the trade, old man. You can stand on me."

He was such a thin young man that, had Jerry accepted his invitation, he must have done Mr. Ronald Blass a very serious injury. Happily, Jerry did not accept the suggestion literally.

It was a week before the Derby when Jane Seymour had a letter from Berkshire.

“DEAR MISS SEYMOUR,—The horse is very well indeed. In fact, he is much better than I dreamt he would be with such legs. He went splendidly in a gallop to-day, but, as you know, I have nothing to gallop him with except my hack. I borrowed a horse from Mr. Stanton, the trainer, however, and with that we went the Derby distance, Abbeyland pulling over the other all the way _____”

“What does ‘pulling over’ mean?” she looked up from her letter to ask.

Gerald growled something about asking silly questions.

“—pulling over the other all the way. I don’t think he can possibly win the Derby: that would be too tremendous a stroke of luck for me—and, of course, for you. But if you wish to run him, I can get Stoll the jockey to ride.”

“What the dickens are you reading?” asked Gerald irritably.

He wore a flowered silk dressing-gown, his hair was very untidy, and he had not shaved.

“It is about Abbeyland,” she said.

He closed his eyes wearily. There were times when he found it very difficult to humour her.

“Abbeyland! Who wants to know anything about Abbeyland?” he asked. “Do you imagine that you can buy a Derby winner for three hundred pounds? How absurd you are, Jane! That beastly little horse has cost you over five hundred pounds to train, and Heaven knows how much on entrance fees, and he hasn’t won a race! And when I *mention*—only mention—a new car, you go up in the air! Ronny Blass tells me he got eighty out of his De Swinzey, between Oxford and Cheltenham. And for six hundred quid I could have got it! I could get it now,” he added encouragingly.

But Jane was not to be encouraged.

“You have a car, Gerald,” she said. “It is quite fast enough for any sane man. And you have a licence that is as busy as a pass-book. I really can’t see that you have room in it for any more convictions. Poor Abbeyland!”

Jerry Seymour sighed, crumpled up his serviette, and strolled to the window, there gloomily to survey Park Lane and the green of tree-shaded grass beyond.

“Ronny will win the Derby—everybody knows that. His horse is favourite.” And then, curiosity overcoming him: “What does that lame fellow say?”

“Do you mean Mr. Petworth?” she asked coldly.

“Why call him ‘mister’?” he demanded pettishly. “If you want to exercise your charity on a wretched amateur trainer, by all means do so, but for Heaven’s sake don’t give him airs!”

She mastered her wrath with an effort.

“He says Abbeyland is better now than he has ever been, and he thinks it’s almost certain he will win,” she said mendaciously.

He gaped at her.

“Abbeyland . . . win the Derby?”

She nodded solemnly.

“You’re pulling my leg.”

“I wouldn’t do anything so indelicate.” She folded up the letter and put it into her pocket. “Mr. Petworth says he has—what is the word?—‘tried’ him, and he is certain to win.”

Consternation was in his face.

“Good Lord! I hope not,” he gasped. “I’ve got five hundred on one of Ronny’s.”

She stared at the young man.

“Five hundred—pounds?”

“What did you think it was?” he snapped. “You can’t bet in farthings! And the money’s as good as in my pocket.”

“But if you lose——?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“I couldn’t lose, but if I did I could sell the car.”

“You told me yesterday that it wasn’t worth a hundred. Oh, Jerry, how could you?”

Mr. Gerald Seymour sulked out of the room and, dressing hastily, went in search of his friend.

Now human credulity is never expressed in so remarkable a measure as in the game of horse-racing. Ronny listened, was at first amused, then scornful, and passed naturally into a condition of doubt and panic.

“Abbeyland?” He scratched his nose, and again consulted his little book. “It’s jolly well bred, old boy,” he said. “That would be a disaster, wouldn’t it? I mean, she’d be so cock-a-hoop over winning the Derby that the next time I asked her she’d treat me like mud.”

He spent an hour telephoning to various sporting acquaintances—knowledgeable men for whom racing had no mysteries—and at the end of his quest was a little comforted.

There was one result to his inquiries: they set tongues wagging. Two sporting newspapers on the following morning had a reference to the “dark” Abbeyland. His name appeared in the betting at 33-1. A lay journal noted that:

“There have been some inquiries for the dark Abbeyland, trained by Petworth at Newbury. This horse has yet to make his appearance on a racecourse, but rumour credits him with being a little more than smart.”

The alarmed John Petworth made a special journey to London—an infrequent excursion for him.

“I don’t know where these fellows have got this yarn about Abbeyland,” he said, “but I assure you, Miss Seymour, that it was not from me. I don’t think you have a ghost of a chance of winning, though he may run very well. The three-year-olds this year are a pretty bad lot, and it’s quite conceivable that Abbeyland may make a good showing. But from what I’ve heard, Mr. Blass’s two horses are superior to anything we’ve seen out, and Tester beat the Guineas winner easily at Newmarket a month ago.”

What made her ask the question she did not know.

“Suppose we win, Mr. Petworth? It will be a splendid thing for you, won’t it?”

He gave her one of his rare little smiles.

“It would make all the difference in the world,” he said. “Incidentally, it would put twenty thousand pounds in your pocket.”

She looked at him incredulously.

“In mine? Why?”

Until that moment she had never even considered the possibility of gain from such a victory, and the sum he mentioned took her breath away. He explained that the stake was worth £10,000, and that a Derby winner might be worth anything from £10,000 to £20,000 as a selling proposition.

“But how would it affect you?”

He flushed a little.

“Isn’t it the custom of the owner to make a”——she hardly knew how to phrase the sentence——“present to the trainer?” she asked.

His face had gone a dull red.

“Not in this case,” he said stiffly. “You have been most kind to me.” And then, with a laugh, “Really, I don’t think we need discuss such a wonderful possibility.”

“But suppose it happened?”——her eyes were fixed on his——“What would you——like? Because”——her voice was unaccountably husky——“there is nothing in the world you could ask for that I would not give.”

Her heart was thumping: how could he fail to hear it?

“That is a tremendous promise,” he said in a low voice——“such a tremendous promise that I would offer my soul to win the Derby for you.”

There was a long and almost painful silence.

“If I do not win this race, perhaps I may win another.”

He had taken her hand in his, and she scarcely realised the fact. Slowly she withdrew it.

“If you do not win a race——there are other things to be won,” she said steadily.

In the seclusion of her pretty little room overlooking the Park, Jane Seymour very calmly and deliberately reviewed herself, and felt no shame at her barefaced proposal.

That there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip is so frequently illustrated at the great game, that a man more experienced than Ronny Blass might have heard a warning voice whisper through the shouts of his exhilaration. For he had journeyed into Wiltshire and had witnessed the final gallop of his two horses. They had been tried with a steady and reliable old performer which had run second in the Jubilee Handicap, and the two colts had outstripped him at every part of the race.

“The stake’s in your pocket, Mr. Blass,” said the trainer. “I don’t see what is to beat yours. Shall you make a declaration?”

Whereupon Ronny took him aside, and, to the consternation of the trainer, told his great scheme.

“There will be an awful row if this comes out, Mr. Blass,” said the trainer seriously. “I don’t see any advantage, except from the betting point of view.”

“Isn’t that an advantage?” asked Mr. Blass. “Don’t be silly, Oscam; we’ll clean up the ring!”

He came back to London, however, feeling far from satisfied.

Suppose there was a row? Suppose the disgruntled public hooted him as he went out to lead in the winner? Ronny Blass was a little sensitive for his reputation. He desired to be thought well of, and the nearer and nearer he came to the day of the race, the more unpleasant seemed the consequences of his muddle-headed scheme.

On the night before the Derby he gave a dinner to his friends. It lasted until eight o’clock in the morning, at which hour he stepped into a cold shower, and from the shower to the hands of his valet. Jerry, who had spent the night with him, was in little better case, and over a breakfast of devilled bones and a large bottle of Bollinger they entered upon a grave discussion, the subject of which was the Integrity of Ronald Blass.

“I’ve got to be careful, old man,” said Ronny, a little thickly. “Reputation of the family’s at stake, old boy. It’d be terrible for me, old man, if all those beastly cads in the crowd started howling at me, old boy, because I won with the wrong horse, old thing.”

“You’re quite right, old man,” said Jerry, shaking his head owlishly. “It would be simply fearful.”

“It’d be a terrible thing for the family, old boy,” said Ronny. “The Jockey Club would get fearfully peevish, old man. I think the best thing we

can do is to scrash Skyward and make no declaration.”

Jerry pondered the “scragging” of Skyward for a long time.

“If Skyward was scragged,” he said, “there’d be no necess’y for making the declaration.”

Ronny stretched out his hand and gripped his friend’s.

“You’re a genius, old boy,” he said. “Let’s have another bottle. And remind me, old man, that I send a wire to that dear little thing we met at the Foxtrot Club—I promised the dear soul a tip, old boy, an’ I mus’ keep my word.”

At eleven o’clock two rather pallid, red-eyed young men walked steadily to a waiting car. They took the route through Wimbledon, and half-way up the main street Ronny tapped at the window. The chauffeur pulled up by the sidewalk.

“Gotta scrag that horse,” he said.

“Splendid idea,” said Ronny languidly.

In a stately fashion the top-hatted Ronny marched into the telegraph office, and at the second attempt, detached a form. He addressed the wire with the greatest care to “Racing Calendar, London.” Tester would win; his price would be short, but what did that matter? Good old Tester! Jolly old Tester! There was no horse in the world like Tester! It would be in the newspaper that night how Tester won. . . . “Wealthy Young Owner Leads in His First Derby Winner.” The picture of Tester would be in to-morrow’s paper. . . . Little pictures, half begun and half formed, moved like a distorted cinema film through his somewhat confused mind. He wrote as evenly as possible: “Please scrag——”

And then he remembered “the dear little thing.” He must send her a tip. He scrawled a few lines—the last words were “much love, old thing.” The clerk behind the counter demanded a shilling: he recollected that afterwards.

“Done it, ole boy,” he said, as he climbed back into the car. “Mus’ act like a gen’leman, old man——”

And then the memory of the shilling came lurching through his fuddled brain.

“Didn’t scrag it after all, old boy—silly ass! I sent wire to Lottie Maybridge but didn’ scrag horse at all.”

“Does it marrer?” asked Gerald, half asleep.

“Norrabbit,” said his friend.

They were wide awake by the time they reached Epsom, for it was Jerry’s idea that they should stop in Ewell at the house of a doctor, who was by way of being a Cambridge friend of Ronny’s; and the doctor, in his youthful enthusiasm, concocted a draught which just didn’t kill them, but brought them to a condition of shaky sobriety.

In the paddock they saw a limping figure, and, walking beside him, Jane Seymour. Ronny greeted the girl with a sickly smile.

“You look ill,” she said. “Are you very anxious about your horse?”

“Not at all,” he said, “but I had rather a thick night.”

Ronny never disguised his little excesses. He felt he was so rich that it was unnecessary that he should.

“Where’s this old crock of yours?” he asked jocularly.

John Petworth pointed. Certainly Abbeyland was not a beauty. He was a thought too long in the legs for an Epsom horse, his neck was not his best feature, and his hocks would hardly have satisfied a veterinary expert.

“But he can gallop,” said Petworth quietly.

He did not look at the girl; he had hardly looked at her since they met in the paddock.

“Are you going to win?” asked Ronny, with heavy humour.

John Petworth smiled.

“I don’t even know that he will lose,” he said cryptically.

The Gills were not at Epsom for the Derby, and they had lent the girl their box. After the parade, Petworth hurried round to join her, and they sat together watching the horses make their slow way through the dip to the starting-post.

“Tester is a screaming favourite,” he told her.

“Isn’t Ronny running two horses?”

He shook his head.

“Only one—but then, everybody knew that Tester was the better of the two. There was some talk of his running them both and making a declaration to win with Skyward. I’m very glad he didn’t.”

After a long pause:

“Do you think Tester will win?”

He nodded.

“He is a certainty,” he said quietly. “I shall have to wait some time before I win my—other race—and my reward.”

It was the boldest sentiment John Petworth had ever expressed in his life, and he went hot and cold as he said it. She did not answer or even turn her head; her eyes were fixed upon the horses now lining up at the gate. Jane Seymour’s heart beat a little faster as she picked out her own pink and grey jacket.

“It would be wonderful,” she said, almost under her breath, “if——”

The white tape leapt up at that moment, and the field of horses surged forward as one.

They had not gone two hundred yards before the field was divided into three groups. In the first of these was Tester, leading by a length; behind him something that bore a black jacket, and close third, Abbeyland. Up the hill they pounded, passed out of sight behind the bushes, to reappear with Tester leading by two lengths, and going easily. John Petworth shook his head.

“The race is all over,” he said quietly.

“But they’ve a long way to go yet!” she said in surprise.

“The farther they go, the farther Tester will win,” he said, “but Abbeyland is running remarkably well. I shouldn’t be surprised if you are second.”

Round Tattenham Corner the field came into the straight. Tester was out by himself, at least four lengths clear of Abbeyland, and in this order they ran home, Tester winning by eight lengths, Abbeyland beating the third by a neck.

“That’s that!” said John Petworth, with a wry little smile. “But he ran splendidly.”

“I think it’s wonderful of you that Abbeyland should have done so well.” She was shaking with excitement. As she laid her hand on his: “Aren’t you awfully pleased?”

He nodded.

“Very pleased. I should have been swooning if we had won—at least, I am conscious!”

He escorted her down to the crowded little unsaddling enclosure, a place usually sacred to the male of the species. They heard the cheers of the crowd as an exalted Ronny led in his horse, and then, guided by Petworth, she went out to meet Abbeyland.

“He ran right well,” said the jockey, as he slipped off and began unbuckling the girths, “but he never had a chance with that fellow.”

“You did well to get second, Stoll,” said Jane.

The glory of owning even a Derby second was beginning to glow within her.

“That was easy. I could have beaten the third by a couple of lengths,” said the little jockey, as he pulled off the saddle and struggled towards the weighing-room.

She waited by Abbeyland, who seemed in no sense wearied, and accepted her caresses as his right, and then—

A distant voice bawled:

“Don’t pay!”

John Petworth looked round in amazement.

“An objection?” he said, and, even as he spoke, the red flag went up by the number board.

Inside the stewards’ room Ronny, in a state of frenzy, faced the imperturbable stewards.

“I know all about that, Mr. Blass,” said the senior steward patiently, “but here is the point: did you or did you not scratch a horse this morning?”

“Of course I scratched him!” Ronny almost howled.

“From the Wimbledon Post Office at eleven-thirty-six?”

“I don’t know the name of the Post Office, but I scratched him. I scratched Skyward——”

The senior steward shook his head.

“Fortunately the telegram has been sent down to us, though it did not reach us before your jockey weighed out.”

Ronny took the yellow form with his shaking hand and read:

“Scratch Tester. Much love, old thing.

“RONALD BLASS.”

“And may I say, Mr. Blass,” said the steward icily, “that when you address officials of the Jockey Club, it is not necessary to be affectionate!”

Like a man in a dream, John Petworth went back to the box to tell the news of the disqualification.

“He must have been sending another wire and got them mixed,” he explained. “But isn’t it wonderful? Isn’t it a miracle . . .?”

She lifted up her face; it seemed almost like an invitation, which John Petworth was too great a gentleman not to accept. . . .

THE CROSS OF THE THIEF

Pamela Wilson once lectured the awe-stricken first-year girls at Newnham on the subject of "Romance."

"Romance," said she, "is one of the curiosities of History; it belongs to an age that knew not electric light or the aeroplane. It has gone with the true colour of the East and the popularity of the lute as an adjunct to courtship; with political assassinations and the stage coach. Romance to-day is something to be dusted but never used."

Pamela left Newnham at a tender age. This is undeniable, though she would have been both amazed and indignant at the accusation of youthfulness. For it seemed to her that great erudition had aged her prematurely. This is an illusion from which the very young and the very clever are never quite free.

She was twenty-two, nicely shaped, with a skin like silk and eyes of sapphire-blue. And she wrote. Her special subjects were Syrian history and the growth of the Christian Church. Such matters as the Arianism, Gnostic heresies, and the Apologia of Justin of Iranæus, were to her more real and understandable than is Liberalism, Conservatism, and the pronouncements of ex-President Wilson to the average man of to-day.

She was a good girl but not goody, being so clever that she was superior to piety. When she was twenty-one, a learned review published her monograph on Joseph of Arimathea. By the time she left Cambridgeshire her views were quoted with respect by white-bearded gentlemen, who, picturing her as a white-headed lady devoting a placid lifetime to the study of doctrinarianism, wrote her long letters which began "Dear Colleague."

It occurred to Pamela one day, when she was sitting in her little Chelsea flat, her cheeks bulging with a chunk of well-advertised toffee, that the fabric of her growing reputation as an Authority was based upon the discoveries of other people. That she was living on the brains of dead writers, presenting conclusions—in a novel way, it is true—which she had found ready-made in the library at Newnham.

She put down the camisole she was sewing and puckered her brows. For the first time in her life there came to her a sense of her inadequacy, and it was a disturbing sensation. She must go out into the world and find things for herself. She must make revelations upon which unborn students of

Newnham would theorise and write books which they could paraphrase and improve upon. No, not improve upon. She could not go so far as to think disloyally of herself.

Her opportunity came almost instantly. There had been a discovery in Palestine—a momentous discovery. Pamela scoffed at its authenticity. She scoffed in six hundred scornful words which she sent to the *Daily Megaphone*, and which the *Daily Megaphone* printed under a respectable heading, describing Pamela Wilson as “The Well-Known Authority upon the Holy Land.”

There followed in a few days a telephone message, and Pamela presented herself at Megaphone House.

“Good lord!” said the editor in dismay, “I thought you were much older!”

Pamela flushed and was inclined to be haughty.

“Sit down,” said the editor, recovering from the shock, as editors do recover from shocks, with extraordinary rapidity. “We want you to go out to Palestine and write us half a dozen articles. Will you do it?”

Pamela knew that it was undignified to lose control of her voice, and that her tremulous acceptance did not accord with her character as “A Well-Known Authority on the Holy Land.”

“You’ve never been, of course?” said the editor. “I guessed that from the assurance in your article which, by the way, has been extensively quoted in France and Germany. Come and see me to-morrow, and I will fix everything for you. By the way, if you are in any kind of trouble, see Yisma Effendi. That is a very secret and confidential tip from the Foreign Office.”

Pamela went home elated, yet in a way depressed. It was glorious that she was going to see with her own eyes . . . but the editor had not treated her as an unusual being. Perhaps he was used to meeting Well-Known Authorities. She comforted herself with that thought, but decided that the men who conducted the daily press lacked that enthusiasm and stately courtesy which was so charming a characteristic of the gentlemen who edited or wrote for the more important reviews—one of whom, the Dean of Wenbury, hearing that she was going to Palestine, sent her a letter of introduction to Brother Bokoslava: “You will find him a charming fellow; my son was at Oxford with him.”

On a day, Pamela sailed for Egypt, and the news of her departure was wired in code to Moscow, Erzurum, Alexandria, and Jaffa by a hook-nosed

and shabby man who had shadowed her for a week.

Pamela did not know this; the editor of the *Daily Megaphone*, who knew such things as the reason the Grand Duke Muchoff never appeared in public and the date of the next General Election, even he did not know this, or he would have sent a real reporter to follow Pamela and report happenings.

Some weeks after Pamela sailed and four years before the Turkish guns thundered over the Black Sea, Mahmud Ali sat in the sun near the Gate of David, waiting for chance fortune, his back to the broad stone slabs that even Herod had looked upon as ancient, his eyes fixed alternately upon the lower road which leads down to Beth-salem and the passing throng.

There was nothing in all Jerusalem to tempt Mahmud to work. His clean-cut face, his slightly aquiline nose, the insolent breeding of his creamy-brown face, all testified to his House, for he was of a stock which had come into Palestine in the days of Saladin.

He watched the passers-by with impressive interest—the goat-herds, the shepherds, the donkey train newly come from Bethlehem—and was so watching when Arak el Selum, a notorious gossip, dropped down by his side—not unseen, for Mahmud had recognised him from the tail of his eye.

“There is a talk in Beth-salem that you will be taken by soldiers and cast into prison,” said Arak cheerfully.

Mahmud chewed in thought, but made no answer.

“Also Mahomet ben Abra will beat you with a stick because you spied on him for Yisma.”

“Croaking dog,” said Mahmud, “how long is it since vultures learned to sing?”

The mean, pock-marked face of Arak creased in a grin. He caught up a handful of pebbles and jingled with them idly.

“Men who rob alone,” quoted he, “have company in prison.”

“Sheep go in flocks to slaughter,” answered Mahmud readily. “I will see Mahomet ben Abra in hell yet—he and the fat women of his house.”

Even Arak was shocked at the shameless reference to the harem, and made a disparaging noise.

“How can a man consider this old goat,” asked Mahmud, “and such a man as I, who have been to the ends of the world? I am the servant of Yisma^[1] the Frank, and that is true. All men know this; and he knows well

that they know—for truly he is the Ear of El Kuds, the Sanctuary. But if I were a lone man I should mock such low and foolish men as M'met ben Abra. For I have sat amidst the roses of Shiraz, and read the verses of Hafiz written in gold. Remember this also, Kaffir,"—he wagged the insult home with his crooked finger,—“that I have been to Long Island—such a place as you cannot imagine. As a child I lived with the Mericani, learnt at their schools and worshipped in their mosques. I know their poets, Long-fello, Shakespeare—say that, ignorant dog!”

But Arak would not frame the clumsy word. “Sakaspah” he could manage, but no more.

Mahmud sat with his keen face toward the road which leads past Silvam. Perhaps he was thinking of the eccentric gentleman whose freakish fancy carried a little Arab boy to America, and whose death released a lank youth from the irksome restraint of a New England boarding-school to the joyous life of the Near East.

A faint sound came to them, and Arak came up to his feet as though he were on springs.

“It is the hour of prayer,” he said; “come with me to the Mosque of Yasul.”

“Go to the devil!” responded the other, and flung a stone after the retreating Arak—flung it without effort, yet with such effect that the tarboosh was whisked from the other’s head as by an invisible string.

Mahmud picked himself up, and stood for a minute or two with his eyes fixed on the gate as though loath to take himself away.

Then he saw what he was waiting for. Tewfik Effendi, very stout and very dark, a heavy black moustache ending the lower part of his face. Tewfik walked with difficulty because he had dropsy, and the two soldiers who followed him had to shuffle at a snail’s pace.

The Chief of the Police saw Mahmud, frowned, and beckoned him.

“What thieving pig are you?” asked he, “that you should steal from the Nazarene Fathers of the Ass?”

“Effendi,” said Mahmud, with great care, “I am neither pig nor thief, but a follower of the Prophet who said: ‘You shall not eat of that which is unclean,’ and as for thieving, I know a man who works with a Nazarene priest and lies about the finding of a certain cross.”

Tewfik Effendi turned yellow.

“Men who know too much must find new heads,” he muttered. “You have been denounced as a traitor to the Divine Commander of the Faithful, and I have hung men for less—even on the public places of Jerusalem I have hung them.”

Mahmud smiled.

“I saw a magistrate hung,” he said, “also Abdul Mahmet Bey of Lower Syria. Who shall say that we will not hang together, you and I?”

Tewfik Effendi made a little face and swallowed hard.

“God send you grace, Mahmud Ali,” he said mildly; “you address the Chief of Police as though he were a donkey-boy. Now come soon to my house by the Babsith-Maryam, and I will give you coffee and a cigarette. You are a bright and comely boy—with my help, who knows——?”

“Who knows?” mocked Mahmud gravely.

He waited until a corner of the street hid the Commissioner of Police from sight, then he clapped his hands gently, and a beggar, who sat against the opposite wall drowsing in the shade, rose swiftly.

“Go follow Tewfik Effendi, and bring me word of all that happens,” he said, and the man departed. He himself took the Street of David at a rapid pace. He turned sharply to the left, by the Syrian Convent, and crossing by the Citadel he reached the White House within the Jaffa Gate, passed unbidden to the garden, and scarcely waited for the invitation which decency demanded, before he pushed apart the green doors of Yisma Effendi’s reception-room.

That calm young-old man sat cross-legged on a *diwan* smoking a cigarette through eight inches of amber tube. On his knees was outspread a large vellum map, and littering the dark red *diwan* on either side were innumerable documents.

He looked up with a little frown as Mahmud Ali entered.

“Peace upon they house, Yisma Effendi, and great prosperity,” said Ali, squatting in the centre of the room as he spoke, and offering the tribute of a hurried salaam.

“Upon you peace, Mahmud Ali,” responded John Hazell. “What brings you here?”

Mahmud was eyeing his host curiously. Yisma Effendi wore his robe of grey silk with the inevitable cummerbund of scarlet, and the tarboosh on his

head was set at that rakish angle which the rich Mohammedan youths of Jerusalem affected.

“Effendi,” said Mahmud Ali, “there is talk here of a miracle which the Patriarch of a new Moskobi religion has performed.”

Hazell smiled faintly.

“Do you come at my full hour to tell me of miracles?” he asked in the Syrian-Arabic, “or of a new Moskobi religion? For I tell you, Mahmud Ali, that never the sun comes up over Palestine but it sees a new sect, and never does it set save on the miracle of a day.”

Mahmud Ali closed his mouth tightly and shrugged his shoulders. Hazell waited a little while, then he asked:

“Tell me news of my friends—such news as does not come to me through the windows of my house.”

Mahmud Ali ignored the gentle sarcasm.

“There is a great feud between Selik Arabi and the Sheik of the wild people beyond Bethany—the Mutesarrif has sent ten soldiers, under Captain Abdullah Harsim, to bring in the Sheik. Tewfik Effendi goes often to the Wadi Balak to meet an Armenian priest——”

“Who pays him money because he lies scandalously,” interrupted Hazell, and grinned at his spy’s discomfiture.

“Effendi,” said he in an injured tone, “this I could have told you three days since, but I wished to know his business—now I can tell you.”

“This Armenian has discovered the Cross of the Thief, as all the world knows,” said Hazell. “It has been concealed for a thousand years in the roof of a Khan near by Shechem. That Khan between the Tomb of the Forty Prophets and the Well of the Woman of Samaria.”

He was telling one of those periodical scandals which set Jerusalem in a ferment. There are men, evil, soulless men, who make God a factor of commerce; who barter and cheat in the name of religion. From time to time they organise great schemes of plunder, and such a scheme had come to fruition in these past days.

Reduced to penury, the Order (its clever organiser called it “The Faith of the True Armenian Church”) was at its last gasp when came the providential discovery of the Cross of the Penitent Thief. Widely advertised, money flowed into the coffers of the Armenian Monastery. Copts and Greeks,

Latins and Anglicans, had thundered their denunciation of the fraud. Moscow had foamed at the mouth and had written passionately in strange characters; even the sedate English reviews had been stirred to vexation. Incidentally, Pamela Wilson had written six hundred sarcastic words in the *Daily Megaphone*, which had disturbed the True Armenians more profoundly than any other criticism, for people read and foreign correspondents quote a daily newspaper, whereas they never by any chance open the pages of the learned monthlies.

Yisma Effendi—his real name was Hazell, and he was Intelligence Officer for five nations—sat motionless on his *diwan*, his chin in his hand, his eyes fixed upon the tessellated pavement near the fountain.

“You may go, Mahmud,” he said at last, and Mahmud, knowing himself to be rather a man of hearing than a man of doing, salaamed and went.

For five long minutes Yisma continued staring at the sun-flooded court and at the glittering drops that were flung from the fountain’s feathery top, and then he clapped his hands.

From nowhere, as it seemed—though in reality he came through a narrow door at the corner of the apartment—appeared an old man, who salaamed in reverence.

“Send to me Dhin,” said Yisma, and the servant withdrew noiselessly.

Dhin came, but through no narrow door, being of a size which precluded such finesse. He was very fat, and waddled in his walk. His face, clean-shaven, was alive with humour, his forehead everlastingly damp. He saluted with great earnestness.

“Effendi,” he said importantly, “I was at prayers when your Excellency sent for me, for knowing how great is the reliance which you place in me, and how important is my place in your lordship’s household, I go not to the Mosque, but recite the *Surah* from ‘In the name of God’ to ‘who go not astray’ three times—this I do on your lordship’s house-top over against the tent, for I am a modest man.”

“To-night,” said Hazell, giving the recital no attention, “there comes from Jaffa a young Frankish woman. Watching her will be the Armenian Yusef, who runs and carries for the Monastery of the True Armenians. At the hour of *Subh* that man must be here and none must see him coming. . . .”

“At the hour of *Subh*,” said the man earnestly, “I pray in the Mosque of Sidna Omar for my brother’s wife who has a carbuncle on her neck. Lord, I entreat you by the hundred and twenty and four thousand prophets of Islam,

that you find another hour, for though, as God knows, there is no other man in Jerusalem who loves you better, yet I am a poor sinner.”

“Go in peace,” said Yisma.

“O Effendi,” pleaded Dhin the Fat, “if you give me two poor medizi for alms . . .”

“No.”

“One miserable medizi,” begged the other, “as bashish to the spirits, O my beloved . . .”

“Get out!” snarled Yisma, and the man waddled to the door. Here he paused and raised his solemn hand. “Though I dwell for ever in Gehenna,” he said, his voice quivering, “I will do what you ask, risking my soul’s salvation for no more than five piastres to give to the poor, who sit at the gate of the Mosque.”

Yisma pointed to the open door, and with one more supplicating glance the big figure was swallowed up in the dark doorway.

To Pamela Wilson the journey from Jaffa to Jerusalem was a pilgrimage of delight, in spite of the bleak unloveliness of the country through which the train puffed and struggled. The blue-grey mountains of Judea had a mystery, the olive plantations were a joy to her eyes. She passed through strange, queer-smelling towns, jumbles of squalid buildings which had once been great cities, the dowries of kings’ daughters, the abiding-places of Solomon and of Pharaoh. The little train smoked and spluttered over battlefields where Philistines and Jews had fought for the supremacy of their small world; it climbed into stark cañons, rumbled across little rivers which David had known, and came, after four hours that seemed like minutes, to the outskirts of a dusty station labelled in French-Arabic and German and English.

She was in Jerusalem!

The courteous gentleman who throughout the journey had acted as guide-book and commentator, smiled at her obvious excitement.

“Well, you are there—or nearly there,” he said, “and now you will be able to see for yourself how much truth there is in the ridiculous story.”

He was a sallow-faced man with a slight black moustache. She thought he was foreign, although he spoke English perfectly. And, of course, Pamela Wilson had talked quite frankly about the object of her visit. There was no reason why she should not, especially, after seeing her name on the suit-

case, he had asked if she was “*the* Pamela Wilson” who had written so entrancingly of the True Armenian artless fraud.

“Oh yes, I have read the article. It was taken over and translated by a German newspaper, the *Lokalanziger*, I think. It has made quite a stir in archæological circles.”

She was fluttered by this tribute to her fame.

“No, I am going to Jerusalem on business,” he said, and introduced himself as Mr. John Scarpi. His manner was perfect: he was differential, quiet, and, in a sense, reserved.

The train waited for some time before it pulled into the station, and Pamela went to the window and looked out. When she came back she laughed.

“I almost feel as if that man were keeping guard on the door,” she said; “every time I have been to the window I have seen him there. The conductor called him ‘Yussef,’ and he seems to be well-known.”

“A dragoman probably,” said Mr. Scarpi; “he is keeping near you in the hope of your engaging him. I will see.”

He looked out of the window and said something in a language which was not Arabic. The man looked scared and scuttled away. This Pamela saw, looking over his shoulder.

He collected her baggage and handed her into a cab; glancing backward as she drove away, she saw him talking to the man Yussef.

That disreputable person was glad when the interview was through, for the trailing of tourists was not to his liking. Moreover, he had an assignation with a woman in the Haret el Maidan. He stopped at a wine-shop near the station to drink the dust of travelling from his throat, and a fat man approached him.

“Peace on you, Yussef. You have come a long journey?” seating himself opposite the Armenian.

“On you peace, fat man,” said Yussef arrogantly; “drink wine?”

Dhin shook his head.

“It is against my religion,” he said, “and the wine here is not good.”

“Then go to the devil,” said Yussef, swallowing.

Dhin selected a large bottle with great care, and smashed it on the man's head. The methods of Dhin were neither subtle nor refined.

"This pig insulted my faith," he explained, when the keeper of the shop came. "Help me put him into a carriage and I will take him to the Nazarene Hospital."

"May he roast in hell," responded his compatriot.

When Yussef the Armenian recovered his senses, he was lying on a marble seat, and a man was looking down at him with a quizzical smile. Yussef groaned and sat up, fingering his damaged head.

"Yisma Effendi," he said, "your servant did this, and go to Tewfik Effendi for justice."

"What happened to the Frankish woman whom you followed from Jaffa?" asked Yisma, and the man scowled.

"I know nothing," he said.

"To whither has your master taken her?" asked Yisma, and the man's eyes opened wide.

"She has gone?"

Yisma nodded.

"When I sent for her she was gone," he said, which was the truth. Five minutes after her arrival at Fast Hotel, Pamela Wilson had gone out and had not returned.

"I know nothing," said Yussef, but with a certain satisfaction.

Yisma clapped his hands and two men came.

"Burn his feet until he speaks," said Yisma simply.

Yussef waited only so long as would enable him to discover if Yisma Effendi threatened unfaithfully, then he spoke, nursing a scorched sole. . . .

To Pamela Wilson, the sudden appearance of her travelling companion at her elbow was a delightful surprise.

Mr. John Scarpi, hat in hand, a smile upon his thin, sallow face, was pleased with her pleasure, being human.

"You will get lost in these narrow streets," he said, "and really, there is nothing worth buying here—all the relics are fakes and imported by the car load. Let me show you the real bazaars."

A carriage was near at hand: she thought it was a cab, and jumped in without hesitation. Later—

“Surely we have left the city?” she said, pulling aside the curtains.

“There is a suburb just outside,” he answered glibly, “and it is there that the more interesting things are sold.”

They were a long time reaching the suburb. When at last the sweating horses were jerked back on their haunches, she alighted, to find herself before a small and dilapidated house, half surrounded and wholly hidden from the road by stunted olive trees.

“Will you come in, please?”

She hesitated.

“Is this a shop?” she asked, and then his hand gripped her arm and she was flung through the open doorway. She stumbled and fell to her knees on the earthen floor, speechless with surprise and fear.

Mr. Scarpi shut the thick door and bolted it.

“How dare you!”

She sprang to the door, but his arm was about her waist and she was dragged back.

“Don’t make a fuss or you’ll be sorry,” he said, and his voice was sharp and threatening. “You can scream if you want, but you are miles from anybody except the Arab shepherds.”

“What is the meaning . . .?” she began in a shaking voice.

“Sit down,” he commanded, and pointed to an untidy bed. “I am keeping you here until night, and then you will be taken to the Convent of the True Armenians. In that convent you will have a vision, eh? A wonderful vision. You will then write to all your friends and say that the discovery of the cross, about which you have written so cleverly, was a true discovery. You will write this, saying also that in your repentance at finding how wicked you have been, you have become a convert to the True Armenian faith.”

She could only look at him open-mouthed.

“You have done me a great deal of harm,” he went on, “for I am the head of the Order. Subscriptions toward the building of a new monastery have fallen from a thousand Egyptian pounds a day to a few paltry roubles. I am

putting matters to you very plainly, Miss Wilson. I am a business man, you may know my name.”

He took a card-case from his pocket, extracted a large square paste-board and handed it to her.

She took it from his hand and tore it up without looking at the elegantly engraved script.

“I don’t want to know who you are—it is preposterous . . . absurd!” she said energetically. “Do you imagine that I will submit to your ridiculous proposal? I shall go straight to the British Consulate——”

“You will never have an opportunity of going straight to the British Consul,” said her captor, calmly lighting a cigar. “Don’t you realise that if I were mad enough to let you go, I should probably spend the rest of my life in prison? You will find the Sisters at the convent a little dull of understanding, for they are mostly peasant girls from Georgia. I practically bought them from their parents—I had to make a start somehow, and converts came very slowly. With your intellectual attainments, you ought to establish a moral supremacy over them and become in time a kind of a saint. I have views on that matter too,” he said, flicking the ash off his cigar. “If you take my advice, Miss Wilson, you will bow to the inevitable, and be glad that nothing worse has happened to you or is likely to happen. I tell you this, that if there is a chance, the remotest chance, of my being saddled with this offence, I shall not go to prison without cause. You are a very attractive young lady,” he said significantly, “and I am showing the greatest self-restraint in treating you as though you were the plainest and least desirable woman on earth.”

She shivered.

“I have friends,” she began.

“Not in El Kuds,” he corrected. “Here you are a tourist. Even in England you have not many friends, and no relations.”

At that moment a name came to her memory that she had not recalled since her interview with the editor of the *Daily Megaphone*. She had dismissed the suggestion which the editor had made that in time of trouble she should call upon the assistance of somebody who had been recommended by the Foreign Office, because she had never dreamt for one moment that she ever would be in any trouble. After all, the world was civilised, romance was dead, and these were not the days of brigandage and outrage.

“Yisma Effendi will know,” she said at random.

It was bluff on her part, for there was no particular reason why Yisma Effendi—whoever he might be—should find himself in the slightest degree interested in her plight. But the effect upon the man was magical. He leapt to his feet, and in the half-light she saw his face grow pale.

“Yisma Effendi!” he stammered; “do you know him?”

“He is a personal friend of mine,” she said boldly. “I was going to call on him when you took me away.”

He licked his dry lips.

“You said nothing to me in the train about Yisma Effendi,” he accused. “You told me you had no friends at all in Jerusalem. You are lying!”

She herself was amazed at the change of tone her words had produced.

“He knows I am in Jerusalem,” she said, again drawing upon her imagination.

She saw the hand that stroked his chin shake, and his lips were bloodless.

“You are lying,” he said at last. “Somebody in London told you about Yisma Effendi, and you have only just remembered the name. Ah! That is true!” His finger jerked to her triumphantly.

She had opened her mouth to speak, when there came through the one deep-barred window of the room a shrill, mournful whistle. The man looked round, unbolted the door, and rushed out. In a few seconds he was back, and was pulling the bed from the wall. Beneath was a square of faded carpet that hid a trap-door of well-worn cedar. He pulled up the flap, disclosing a flight of steps.

“Go down there,” he said curtly.

“I refuse!” said Pamela in defiance.

His hand shot out and seized her by her dress.

“Go down,” he said between his teeth, “or I’ll throw you down.”

She bit her lips, and summoning her courage, descended slowly down the uneven steps. Her head was only clear of the floor when he dropped the trap, replaced the carpet, and pushed back the bed. He had hardly time to stroll into the open with a look of unconcern, when the four horsemen drew up before the door and Yisma Effendi leapt lightly to the ground.

“Good afternoon, Father,” said Yisma Effendi.

“Good afternoon, my son,” replied the other gravely.

In his modern well-fitting dress, the attitude of parental authority sat grotesquely upon him. He looked up into the heavy face of Tewfik Effendi, who grimaced horribly, surveyed the two soldiers who rode behind the fat Commissioner of Police with a frown of wonder, and then:

“Are you going far, Yisma Effendi?” he asked.

“Not very far,” said Yisma. “No farther than this house, I hope. I want Miss Wilson.”

“Miss Wilson?” The man was all open-eyed astonishment. “Why, isn’t that the lady who travelled up from Jaffa with me by train?”

“It is the lady you have been waiting for at Jaffa for the past fortnight,” said Yisma briefly. “The same lady you drove from the Bazaar of Weeping to this house, where that very same lady is now concealed.”

The other’s look was one of pain and forgiveness.

“I certainly drove the lady to the Gate of David and left her there,” he said. “I have not seen her since. If you think she is in this house, you are at liberty to search.”

“I shall search with or without liberty,” said Yisma, and walked into the one apparent room of the house. He looked round and came out again.

“Where is she?” he asked quietly.

“I tell you——”

“Look!” Yisma pointed to the floor, where the fragments of the man’s visiting-card were scattered. “You do not tear your own card up, do you, my friend? Where is she?”

“I tell you——”

Yisma made a sign to the soldiers, who had dismounted, and they seized the man and flung him down upon his face.

“Blindfold him”; and then: “My friend,” said Yisma, “at your infernal monastery you have a hoard of gold and you have many years of life before you.” He spoke in Syrian-Arabic, and his harsh words fell on the other’s ears like the stroke of a hammer. “Will you live to enjoy what you have, or will you die because you want more than you can spend?”

“This is an outrage,” sobbed the man.

“Strike,” said Yisma, and the quivering victim heard the whistle of a sword as it came from a scabbard.

And then something stung his neck, and he fainted.

Yet it was only the thong of Yisma’s riding-whip that struck him lightly. . . .

“Glad to be alive?” asked Yisma pleasantly, when the man stared around. “Now the next time it shall be the sword, by Allah!”

“She is in the cellar under the bed,” quavered the prisoner.

Pamela Wilson came blinking into the daylight to meet the steady grave eyes of an agreeable-looking young Turkish gentleman.

Half-way back to Jerusalem she had recovered herself sufficiently to talk of the British Consul, and the steps she would take to secure satisfaction for the behaviour to which she had been subjected.

“I don’t think so, Miss Wilson,” said Yisma, who was riding at her side. His voice was quiet, but he seemed amused.

“If this man is an agent of the True Armenians,” she said, “I shall complain direct to the head of the Order, Father John Bokoslava. I have a letter of introduction to him from the Dean of Wenbury.”

“Take my advice,” said Yisma, “and don’t present it.”

“Why not?” she asked in astonishment.

“Because the gentleman we have just left behind with the soldiers—Tewfik Effendi has moments of extreme delicacy and did not wish to have him bastinadoed in your presence——”

“Well, what about him?” she said, when he paused.

“He is John Bokoslava,” said Yisma, and laughed softly to himself all the way back to Jerusalem.

[1] Literally, “He will hear.”

BILL AND THE TAPPERS

There was a very clever detective at Scotland Yard called "Bill."

Bill was wandering through Berkshire on a wet and rather stormy evening, and came to a nice little house that had been built in the midst of a pine wood. It was the one of the four houses in the neighbourhood that Bill was anxious to see. Mr. Crollen, a florid man, sat at the open window of his dressing-room, for it was a warm evening, and from time to time addressed his pretty wife, who was drinking a cup of tea.

"Sooner or later they're pretty sure to get wisdom, and then it's you and me for a nice long world voyage, Lou——"

"You and I," she corrected, being something of a purist. He was absurdly proud of her erudition, and purred gratefully.

"Tha's so. You and I—*and* me! This Scotland Yard aren't—isn't all bone-headed. A feller in town—Joe Saute, the 'con.' man—told me they've got a whale of a feller up at the Yard—Bill Somep'n. I've heard about this feller from a boy that's workin' the Paris hotels. . . ."

"Oh, Bill!" she wailed wearily; "there's always a Bill somewhere! There was a Bill at the O. and E. so darned clever that he couldn't find his latch-key."

There was an esoteric jest here. Mr. Crollen laughed heartily. This Lou of his had been an operator on the Oriental and European Telegraph Company when he first met her and introduced her to a wider and more expensive life.

She left ten minutes ahead of the city detective who came to arrest her for utilising information that came across the wire for her own private enrichment.

She saw Crollen crane his head out of the window.

"Saw a car pass the drive," he explained, "then the engines stopped. Hullo!"

Bill was walking carelessly up the gravelled drive, smoking a cigarette.

Lou, at her husband's side, saw the intruder.

"You'd better go down and see what that kid wants."

Mr. Crollen obeyed.

He came back in ten minutes.

“Run out of petrol, that’s all,” he explained, “and——”

Lou had a small instrument at her ear, and now raised a warning finger.

“D.H. 97 coming through,” she said; “now for three hours hell’s dullness.”

They forgot all about Bill, for at 11.47 that night Mr. John Mortimer confided his secret to the ether.

When Senator Grannit went to Paris, from New York, taking with him eighty thousand dollars in negotiable stock, the European press hardly commented upon the circumstances under which he was relieved of his wealth, though it was especially interesting to the student of criminology. Nobody knew that the Senator carried this money, except the Bank of France and Mr. Grannit himself. Yet within an hour of his arrival in Paris, the money was lifted.

Scotland Yard investigated the matter at a distance when Sir Hubert Loam, reaching his house in Berkeley Square, found a young man waiting to receive a cheque on account of a deal he had concluded when he was still on board the *Mauretania*.

The cheque was an open one, and was handed to the representative of The North & South Land Syndicate without hesitation. It was presented and paid—but the money never went to the Land Syndicate. Nor had the suave clerk, waiting in Sir Hubert’s drawing-room, the slightest association with known syndicates of any kind.

That is when the police began to take notice. There followed almost at once the case of Mrs. Crimack-Leggatt of Pittsburg. She lost exactly ten thousand pounds’ worth of jewels which she had sent to be reset.

“The whole thing is rather extraordinary,” said Inspector Lander, Chief of the Confidence Branch at Scotland Yard. “Neither of these people is talkative; they made no friends on the voyage; yet in some way the gang that worked the swindles knew everything about them that was worth money. This is a job for Bill!”

Two months later came John Mortimer, by a crack White Star liner. The boat was delayed by fog, and he arrived on Saturday, after business hours; but life was such good fun, and London so homey, that business hours did not worry him.

After the boat had left Cherbourg, there appeared a new face on board.

John noticed casually, at lunch, a grey-haired man with a dark, saturnine face. Later, when he was packing his hand-bag, the stranger appeared.

“Sorry to bother you, Mr. Mortimer . . .” he handed the confident young passenger a card.

“Detective-Inspector Lander,” read John in the corner of the paste-board.

“I travel the boat from Cherbourg to England,” explained the detective apologetically. “I don’t know whether you have any valuables aboard——?”

He gave John Mortimer the impression that he knew very well.

“Well, in case . . . we’ve told Bill to keep an eye on you.”

“Thank you!”

Mr. Mortimer’s tone was sardonic. He was of the age when, taking a dispassionate view of humanity, he could find none more efficient than himself.

A few hours later he was gloating over London—the London he had not seen these eight years. And the stone balcony of his bedroom at the Admiralty Hotel was royally set for gloating. Beneath him was the green of the Embankment Gardens, with its little statues and flower-beds and its squat bandstand. Beyond, the broad stretch of the Embankment, and beyond that the pageantry of the Thames.

The wintry sunset was all rose and russet, and the river stared up at him with the reflection of a paling sky. Two tugs abreast swept down-stream, their port lights greening the water; a police launch stole from the shadows of moored barges on the farther shore, and swung in a wide circle towards its neat pier by Scotland Yard. The street cars were already glittering with lights, and against the western light the clock tower of Parliament was sharply defined.

He was conscious that somebody had come into his bedroom. Ordinarily, the appearance of a hotel servant would not have disturbed him, but now there were excellent reasons why he should not leave any caller unchallenged. It had been careless in him that he should have forgotten to turn the key in the lock.

“A young lady to see you, sir.” The floor waiter passed him a card.

“Miss Monica Bradley,” he read; and, in the corner: “From Mr. Store.”

Of course! He had forgotten the secretary.

“Ask her up to the sitting-room, please,” he said; and noticed that the waiter passed through the door to that apartment.

So the bedroom door was locked after all. He tested it and found it was so. Then he tried the wall-safe near the head of the bed. It was hidden behind a sliding oak panel. All the big suites at the Admiralty Hotel had their private safes. That fact was widely advertised, and had determined the hotel for many a traveller in John Mortimer’s position. Nine little keyholes ran down one edge of the steel door, but only two locks operated, and Mortimer had the two keys in his pocket. With every new guest the combination was changed by one official at the hotel. It seemed an ingenious idea to John Mortimer, who had reason for desiring security.

He returned to the sitting-room as the girl was shown in. She was a head shorter than he, and he was pleasantly shocked to discover that she was pretty. Two grave grey eyes met him; when she spoke she had the voice of a lady.

“You’re from Mr. Store,” he smiled. “Very kind of you, Miss Bradley, to come on Saturday afternoon. I thought English people didn’t work after one o’clock!”

She smiled faintly at this.

“This English person works seven days a week,” she said, as she put down her bag on the table and began to strip her gloves.

She was very self-possessed—capable, he imagined. Better-dressed than he might have expected.

“Mr. Store sent you, of course,” he nodded. “I had forgotten I had wirelessly for a secretary.”

He was bland, very much the man of affairs. She had met his type before, but never observed such obvious qualities. Tall, good-looking, immensely confident . . . she liked him.

He looked at his watch. It was rather late in the afternoon, and he was rather chary of starting his business at such an hour. She anticipated his question when she said:

“I was expecting that you would wish me to work late, Mr. Mortimer.”

She opened the little attaché-case she had placed on the table, took out a note-book and pencil—

“The typewriter will come up later,” she said, and looked at him expectantly.

There was a whole heap of work to do: letters to the Rajah’s representatives in Paris, cables which he should have sent an hour ago to announce his safe arrival. Yet he was rather too full of his own pleasant emotions to settle down to work.

“Mr. Store is our agent,” he said. There was a hint of patronage in his tone that went well with his youthfulness. “I haven’t told Mr. Store what has brought me to Europe, but it is rather an important matter.”

She nodded.

“I know you’re bringing some emeralds for the Rajah of Rajpoona.”

He stared at her open-mouthed. He was indeed exporting emeralds from New York—a circumstance which might sound queer to Hatton Garden. But John Mortimer and his partner had been making this collection for fifteen years—at least, his senior partner had, for he was a member of one of the most famous firms of jewellers in New York. Some of the stones had been in the possession of old colonial families for a hundred years.

“How on earth did you know that?” he asked in dismay.

She smiled again, and she really had a lovely smile.

“Probably your partner cabled Mr. Store,” she said; and then, almost carelessly: “I suppose you have put the stones in a safe place? Eight hundred thousand dollars’ worth of emeralds are rather a responsibility, aren’t they?”

He looked at her suspiciously.

“They are in a *very* safe place,” he said.

She nodded. “Naturally,” said she.

There was something in her tone that was faintly irritating. Before he could properly analyse that particular inflection, she went on: “You’re expecting to meet the Rajah’s agent in London—Mr. Koenig—aren’t you?”

He was ruffled—some of his pleasant mystery had been dissipated.

“I notified his address in London and in Paris,” he said shortly, “but I guess he must be in Paris, for I haven’t heard of him.”

“You will,” she said, nibbling at the end of her pencil, her thoughtful eyes fixed on his.

He stared at her.

“Of course I shall,” he said, with a touch of asperity in his voice.

“Then *that’s* all right.”

Her smile was altogether disarming. She smoothed her note-book flat and looked at him inquiringly. But he was not in an immediate mood to work.

“You rather took my breath away—but then, London does that,” he said. “It is like coming back to a strange world. What a law-abiding little burg this is! It may make you happy to know that Bill is looking after me! I presume Bill is a detective, so if he comes whilst I am out, you might order some beer for him—if he drinks beer.”

“Bills drink nothing else,” she said.

He was graciously amused.

“I can tell you, I shouldn’t have been walking through New York with these infernal emeralds except I had a Burns man walking on each side of me and another behind,” he said. “By the way, do you know whether Store heard from Koenig?”

She shook her head.

“I’m pretty sure he hasn’t,” she said. “He doesn’t even know that there is such a man.”

Whether it was the exhilaration of finding himself in his native city, or from the sheer joy of finding somebody with whom he could talk, and who, he knew, shared his secret, or for some reason which he could not understand, he babbled on.

“We did not tell Store. You see, this was rather a big deal, and the fewer people who knew about it, the better.” And then, suddenly, his face went blank again. “But how the dickens did you know about—the emeralds, I mean? Renstein couldn’t have been so foolish——”

“All men are foolish,” she said quietly.

He felt that if he spoke he would only say something extraordinarily inane.

“You didn’t bring your own secretary, Mr. Mortimer?”

“That seems fairly obvious,” said John, as coldly as he knew how. “We have no women stenographers in our office.”

She was nibbling at the end of her pencil again, staring through the open French windows on to the murky skyline.

“Women are not very efficient, I suppose?” she asked.

“Women talk,” said John crushingly. “When they should be working they—er—are chattering.”

To his surprise, she nodded her agreement.

“About men,” she said. “That’s queer, isn’t it?—men only talk about themselves!”

He might have said something very sharp if he could have thought of anything to say. Instead, he compromised by dictating three cables, two of which were absolutely unnecessary, and two rather dignified letters which contained nothing of what he intended to say. She was an efficient stenographer, and was always waiting for the next sentence. He cleared his throat.

“I think that will be all,” he said.

She put down her pencil and looked up at him.

“I am afraid I have annoyed you,” she said. “And secretaries who annoy principals come to a very sticky end! You see, I am not used——” she stopped suddenly.

“You are not used——?” he suggested, and his suspicions grew when he saw how confused she was.

Fortunately, the typewriter arrived at that moment, and he left her to her work.

She was half-way through when Mr. Koenig called him on the ’phone. The telephone was in the sitting-room, and he had perforce to interrupt her in her work, and since there was an excuse for her stopping, there was also a reason why she should listen.

“Just arrived, Mr. Koenig. You got my wire? Good!”

“Coming right along!” said a thick and hearty voice.

John hung up the receiver as his secretary asked:

“Do you know Mr. Koenig?”

It is very difficult for a pretty girl to be wholly impertinent. John Mortimer’s intelligence told him that that was a question he might well have

answered more or less offensively. The sentimentalist in him produced a fairly coherent reply.

“No, he has never been to America, and naturally I have not met him,” he said, a little stiffly.

He snapped the words, and Miss Bradley was inwardly amused.

He was the most easy-going of young men, but objected to being laughed at, and that this very pretty and capable lady was laughing at him was most obvious to John Mortimer. He wished Store had shown a little more discrimination. After all, it was all very well to employ a lady in that capacity, and John Mortimer was a democrat and all that sort of thing; but he was also a man who for seven days had allowed his self-importance to grow in proportion to his responsibility, and this chance-found girl had made him feel most astonishingly small. He was a little alarmed, too. This was not a moment when he required the association of unusual people.

“I suppose you are Mr. Store’s confidential secretary?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“No; he has never confided anything to me—not even his love affairs,” she said, with such calmness that he almost forgot to be shocked by this outrageous disclaimer.

“I thought Mr. Store was an elderly man——” he began.

She had a most exasperating trick of interrupting him.

“Eighty, and possibly ninety. But even quite ancient men have love affairs.”

He went out and slammed the door behind him.

He was in no pleasant mood to receive the lady whom Monica brightly announced by tapping on the door.

“A lady?” He frowned. “Who is it?”

“Miss Koenig.”

John Mortimer was a little staggered. He had not endowed the Rajah’s agent with a family, certainly not with as attractive a family as the slim, rather pale, sad-eyed girl who greeted him when he came out.

“My father is not here yet?” She spoke with a slightly foreign accent. “He told me he would be here, that I must call at six.”

She looked at the jewelled watch on her wrist, and was apparently embarrassed.

Mortimer noticed that she glanced from time to time at his temporary secretary. Miss Monica Bradley was annoyingly interested in the personality of the visitor, and it appeared that the interest was mutual.

“This is my—um—secretary,” introduced John awkwardly.

Miss Koenig inclined her head slightly, and took a swift look at the girl sitting with folded hands before her typewriter, and in that swift glance Mortimer could have sworn he saw a half-recognition.

“Indeed?” said Miss Koenig politely. And then: “Have I not seen you at some time? Did you not call at my house——”

Monica shook her head.

“Somewhere . . . a house we had in the country. . . . I was at the window when you came; my brother saw you.”

Monica shook her head again.

“You’re mistaken,” she said coolly, and John Mortimer knew that she was lying.

He saw the visitor give the typist a long and searching scrutiny, saw the suspicion that lived and died in her eyes, and the slight shrug of her shapely shoulders; and then, before John could speak, there came a rap at the door, a bell-boy entered, followed by the bluff and hearty Mr. Koenig.

He was a little man, rather stout and bald. Two humorous blue eyes shone behind the thick lenses of his horn-rimmed spectacles.

“Ah, my frient Mr. Mortimer!” he boomed, gripped John heartily by the hand, and then grinned round at his daughter. “Dis is de good fellow, eh? He comes to rob your poor farder! Worse dan de fellows who steal the money from the poor silly peoples who travel on ships.”

He drew up a chair with a thump, sat down on it, drew out a big pocket-case which he slammed on the table. It was, John saw, packed tight with notes.

“The Rajah comes to-night by ’plane from Paris,” he explained. He spoke rapidly. “You understant? I must place my business before he comes or I make no profit. The sum is a hundred and seventy-t’ree t’ousand, which I pay——”

And then his eyes fell upon the girl typist watching him curiously, and John saw his brows meet.

“Why, young lady! I think I have met you, eh?”

“So your aunt was saying,” said Monica genially.

“My aunt——?”

“Your daughter; I’m sorry.”

She was very apologetic.

“Did you not call at my house once for . . . petrol?”

He was going to say something else, but checked himself.

“Miss Bradley is from Mr. Store, our London agent.”

Koenig’s face cleared.

“Ah, yes, Store.” And then, quickly: “Is he here?”

“He left for Australia last night,” said the girl gravely, and Koenig’s jaw dropped.

“Australia?” incredulously. “My dear young lady——” And then he laughed. “You confuse me and make me feel a fool!” he chuckled. He took a gold cigarette-case from his pocket. “Indeed you are a remarkable young lady.”

He pushed the case towards John, who took a cigarette, and then to the girl, who shook her head.

“I never smoke in business hours. Poor Senator Grannit had one of your cigarettes, and what happened to him? Don’t light that, Mr. Mortimer,” she said sharply, as John was in the act of striking a match.

Koenig glared at her for a second, and then, turning, ran to the door and flung it open. The two Scotland Yard men who were waiting found him rather a difficult handful, but “Miss Koenig” went quietly in the hands of Monica Bradley.

“Yes, I am Bill,” said Monica demurely, when she interviewed her employer that night. “I suppose you’d call me a detective, but really I only work out odd problems. The oddest problem of all was to discover how this little crowd cleaned up so easily. It was really very simple. They have a very powerful wireless set at a house in Sunningdale, and the young lady tuned in

to the homeward-bound American liner, and took down the private messages that were coming through to London. Sometimes she heard, and wrote hundreds without getting any profitable information, but occasionally she and her husband learned little secrets which indiscreet people had confided to the wireless. It is a very simple matter to pick up any liner: did you know that? Once you have their code number, the rest is fairly simple. They got to know Grannit was bringing money; they knew Loam was expecting a man to call for a cheque; and that a rather wealthy and foolish old lady had wirelessly to a big jeweller saying that she wanted her diamonds reset. It was as easy as eating pie to intercept the real message, and, in your case, a simpler matter to get the genuine agent out of the way. For example, Mr. Store is now in Paris with the real Mr. Koenig, awaiting your arrival. We located a big receiving-set at Sunningdale—at least, I did—and we arranged to get duplicates of all the messages that were coming through to the Radio Company. Naturally, we had to guess who was to be the victim, but that wasn't so difficult as you'd think. We didn't know exactly how we were going to deal with your case, but after you wirelessly for a secretary, it was easy."

Mr. John Mortimer had recovered from his natural annoyance.

"And you are the Bill that is supposed to be 'looking after' me?"

She nodded.

"Continue!" he said. "I want you to escort me to the hotel safe, where I'll deposit those infernal stones, and then you can escort me to a place where we can get supper and a dance."

Bill did not demur. Officially she was still on duty.

THE PRAYING GIRL

The girl drove to the Bahnhof holding her husband's hand in hers. Now and again she shot a shy glance into the bronzed face, and his blue eyes lost a little of their hardness as they met hers.

The straight way was through the Kaiserstrasse, but she would have the fiacre turn into the Münsterstrasse that they might pass the Minster.

"I shall go here every day and pray for you," she whispered, and he pressed her hand.

"Every night . . . I shall pray for you," she said, as she stood on the platform by the carriage window. He looked almost god-like in the tight-fitting grey of his German air-service uniform.

"You will not take risks . . . the English are very kind to Saxon prisoners."

He laughed.

"Oh, you little traitress!" he rallied her. "You want me to desert and go over to the English!"

"If you were safe—I would not care," she said, and stood twisting her little handkerchief into a ball as the train drew slowly from the station, its windows crowded with cheering men, the glass roof re-echoing to a roar of "Hochs!"

Burleigh's Six nose-dived from a height of 2000 metres, flattened at the exact moment, and came skimming along the ground of the aerodrome, pulling up within a few yards of the Flying Commander.

Grey walked slowly over to the machine as Burleigh heaved himself to the ground, stretching his cramped limbs with a painful little smile.

"What happened to you?" asked Grey curiously.

"Nothing much," replied Burleigh, and gave his machine a critical scrutiny before he turned again to his chief.

"You didn't get your Taube, did you?"

The other shook his head.

“Couldn’t you climb up?” suggested the Flight-Commander.

Burleigh nodded.

“Couldn’t you reach him?”

Burleigh nodded again, and looked at his superior very earnestly and very thoughtfully.

“What the devil’s the matter with you, Burleigh?” asked Major Grey irritably. “You aren’t usually so reticent.”

“No,” agreed the other at once, and there was a long pause. Then he checked an exasperated comment which was trembling on the lips of the Flight-Commander with, “Do you believe—er—in—prayer?”

A new look of interest came to the Commander’s face.

“That depends,” he said cautiously, “on who does the praying.”

Burleigh nodded, as he stripped the leathern helmet from his head, and slowly ungloved. “That’s exactly my opinion,” he said.

With a little nod he made his way across to his hut.

Grey watched him with an anxious tenderness. He turned to the mechanics who were handling Burleigh’s Six—it was called Burleigh’s Six to distinguish it from the five machines which Burleigh had previously flown, all of which were either under repair, or were frankly scrap-iron, for Burleigh was the most daring member of this section of the Royal Flying Corps, and had come some unholy purlers—and then, with his hands thrust deep into his breeches pockets and his chin on his breast, Flight-Commander Grey made his way to the Orderly-room.

The hard-faced Colonel, who commanded the wing, was sitting at his table busily signing indents when his subordinate entered.

“Burleigh back?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” replied the other.

“Did he get a Bosche?”

“No, sir,” and then, “I’d like to speak to you about Burleigh, sir.”

The Colonel took off his pince-nez.

“What’s the matter?” he asked quickly.

The supply of flying-men was barely adequate. The supply of reliable men as opposed to mere machine smashers was very small. Burleigh was the

most daring man in the wing. He had the Instinct, which was half the battle so far as airmanship was concerned. Sooner or later there comes a time when every airman must break. The Colonel had hoped that Burleigh's time was far distant.

When Grey, glum of face, came to the Orderly-room and "wanted to talk about" members of the Corps, it meant only one thing.

"Nerves gone, I suppose," growled the Colonel. "Well, he's stuck it longer than most of 'em—you can't expect fellows to fly over guns everlasting. What are the symptoms?"

Grey stared through the little window with a frown on his face.

"Rather curious," he said, "he asked me if I believed in prayer. Of course, one sometimes . . . Lord, sir, I've prayed like anything! I had a tail slip over Douai—I stalled too steep and she let back . . . but I didn't talk about praying."

"H'm!" said the Colonel, and rising from his table walked to the window that overlooked the officers' huts. "That's bad, and yet . . . have you ever noticed that air-nerves never develop into religious melancholia? It breaks a fellow up until he is only a dithering wreck, but religion . . . no! Send for Burleigh."

Ten minutes later Burleigh came, a lean, brown-faced man, with a pair of humorous blue eyes. He saluted his chief and waited.

"Um . . . Burleigh," began the Colonel, "I think you had better have a rest, my boy . . . too much 'archie,' eh?"

For answer, Captain Burleigh stretched out a sinewy hand and held it unwavering at right angles to his body.

To the wonder of the Colonel it did not tremble or shake. It was, in fact, as steady as the arm of a railway signal.

"Nothing much wrong with that, sir," he said.

The Colonel rubbed his chin.

"What is this talk of praying?" he asked abruptly.

Burleigh indulged in that soft laugh of his.

"I understand now, sir," he turned his smiling eyes on Grey. "I asked you if you believed in prayer—I do."

There was an awkward pause. Certain things men do not discuss in public. Religion and the public avowal of faith is not out of place in a Colonel or even in a Major of some seniority. From men below that status it is demanded that there shall be a reticence, and the junior officer is expected to say his prayers privily. If he did not say his prayers and openly boasted of his heathenism, he would be regarded askance, for an officer should be a gentleman, and a gentleman has, as an indispensable part of his equipment, a wholesome belief in the existence and mercy of God.

“I’ll tell you why I say this,” Burleigh went on. “You sent me out this morning to hunt the red Taube?”

Grey and the Colonel nodded together.

“Very good—I hunted him. I went twenty miles inland to a place well behind Roulers, and I spotted him outside the hangars outside Roulers. You can’t mistake ‘Reddy,’ and there he was. I was dodging in and out of the clouds, but they saw me, and opened up with ‘archies’—bracketed fire. I was flying the little Morane and they misjudged the distance—all the shells burst short, and presently I dived into a nice fat cloud and went for a little joy-ride till the trouble blew over.

“I got into the black of it, and I couldn’t see the tip of my nose, and if it hadn’t been for the stabiliser I shouldn’t have known whether I was upside-down or side-slipping to glory. I started climbing, for I pretty well knew the depth of the cloud, and presently I got into the sun. I messed about for ten minutes, circling round in the hope of something turning up, and then I decided to come back.

“There wasn’t any sign of the earth immediately underneath, but I could see our lines, and I started streaking for home. I’d hardly got going when suddenly from right under me came Reddy!

“He was barging up out of the mist before I realised what was happening, but I brought the Morane round on a hairpin-turn, got above him, and slipped a bomb. It couldn’t have missed him by more than a yard. He was quick to see what was wrong, and up went his tail and down he dived into the cloud, with me after him. He flattened out and swerved, and I just shot past him—so close that I could see the Bosche as plainly as I see you, sir.”

He paused again and laughed quietly.

“And then?”

“Then I chased him. Round and round we went in that damnable mist, and I can assure you, sir, I knew that I had him. He had either to nose-dive to earth or take what was coming. And he knew it—but he was dead game. He turned to the left and shot sideways, and his bullet just missed me.

“I turned the Lewis-gun on to him, and I felt that certainty which comes to a man just when he is dead sure he has got his bird before he fires his shot. My hand was on the trigger and I’d got him covered so that I couldn’t miss him . . . straight in the centre of his back.”

Burleigh stopped once more, but this time his laugh held amusement and wonder.

“What happened?” asked the Colonel.

“We were in the cloud—not the thickest part but the grey edge of it—and as my finger closed on the trigger the mist between him and me took shape—the shape of a woman—a young girl—and she was praying. . . . I saw it as plainly as—as—I see Grey. She was kneeling, and she was in her nightdress . . . rather a pretty girl with long hair. . . .”

There was a deep silence broken by the Colonel.

“And so you . . .?”

“I didn’t shoot, sir,” said Burleigh simply, “that is the reason I came back—he dived out of sight and I didn’t follow. You may call it nerves,” he went on in his deliberate way, “but I never felt better in my life.”

“H’m!” said the Colonel again, and shot a significant glance at Grey.

Burleigh interpreted the glance, and his eyes danced.

“Well—um—Burleigh”—the Commander was obviously ill at ease—“I think, anyway, you’re entitled to a rest—I’ve thought so for quite a time. A few weeks at Brooklands will pull—I mean will——”

He tailed off lamely, for even a hard-faced Colonel, devoid of tact, and conscious of the deficiency, finds it difficult to tell a man to his face that he has betrayed all the symptoms of incipient mania.

“Excuse me, sir,” said Burleigh suddenly, as a thought occurred to him, “who is the man flying Reddy?”

The Colonel opened a drawer of his desk and took out a locked book, which he opened.

“It is curious that you should ask me that—I have had a batch of information about these fellows this morning from Intelligence G.H.Q., and Reddy’s man was amongst it.”

He turned the leaves of the book, fixed his pince-nez, and came to the page he sought.

“Here we are!” he said, and read aloud:

“No. 872, Taube (‘Reddy’), Pilot Lieutenant Gustav von Sedlitz-Telymaun. Age 25. Native of Saxony. Married since the war, Maria Fedora Klesser at the Minster Freiburg. Wife lives in that town at Essenbahn Strasse 971.

“There’s detail there that would be creditable to the German Intelligence!” said the Colonel triumphantly.

“Married since the war?” mused Burleigh—“certainly she looked young,” stood for a moment, saluted, and turned on his heel.

They waited until he was out of earshot before the two men spoke.

“A few days’ rest here might put him right,” said Grey, and the Colonel agreed readily enough, for Burleigh was too excellent a man to spare, and the reconnaissance work was very heavy.

Grey went to the mess-room for lunch, and found, to his relief, that Burleigh was not there. He beckoned a youth, who, at the moment Grey arrived, was demonstrating the impossibility of capsizing with the aid of a paper aeroplane, and the young man came to the door with the half-reproachful, half-embarrassed air of one who expected a carpeting.

“Bascombe, I want you to go out and look for Reddy,” said Grey; “go by yourself and take Boyd’s Morane. You’ve got to find Reddy and bring him down.”

He related briefly Burleigh’s experience.

“A little nerve-strain—you needn’t mention the matter to anybody. See what you can do.”

Bascombe’s face was serious. “He seemed all right—Burleigh, I mean,” he said; “he was in here only a few minutes ago.”

“He’s gone, I tell you,” said Grey; “we shall not be able to send him up for weeks yet—go along and see what you can do.”

Half an hour later Bascombe's Morane was sweeping upward in great circles above the aerodrome, six deadly little bombs on a tray beneath the frame, the Lewis-gun well ready for any emergency which might arise. The Morane disappeared in the sky, moving eastward rapidly, and two hours passed before it was again signalled returning to the lines. Bascombe brought his machine to the ground in a gentle volplane, and the Flight-Commander ran across the ground to meet him.

"Well?" he asked eagerly. Bascombe was peering down at him from the pilot seat.

"Well," said Grey again, "did you see Reddy?"

Bascombe nodded.

"Did you get him?"

The man shook his head.

"What happened?" asked Grey.

Bascombe got to the ground before he replied.

"I saw the praying lady," he said simply, and Grey gasped.

"You saw——" he began incredulously.

"The praying lady," said Bascombe calmly.

He told the story in half a dozen sentences, and it was almost word for word the story which Burleigh had already told.

"And if you think I'm mad, sir," said Bascombe, "you're entitled to your opinions. In point of fact, I'm as sane as any man in France. I saw a woman quite clearly. She appeared just as I had got the line on Reddy and at the moment when I was already making up a suitable reply to your congratulations. There she was, on her knees, her hands clasped over her breast, and her head raised upwards . . . it was uncanny. I had a horrible fear, too, that if I shot I should come down myself. Anyway, before I could recover, Reddy was gone."

At the mess that night, Reddy and the praying lady formed the main topic of conversation. "The only thing to do," said Gibson, the youngest of the flyers, "is to send a wire through Holland to Mrs. Reddy, something like this:

"The Members of the Royal Flying Corps present their compliments to Mrs. Reddy, and request that she will be good

enough to stop praying for her husband.”

“Of course, the whole thing is an illusion,” said Boyd, who was in charge of the archies; “poor old Burleigh got a little ragged, and Bascombe, who has been flying over guns for the last three months, was influenced by what Grey told him. It’s preposterous. These things don’t happen in the twentieth century, and anyway, it is positively indecent that a Bosche should have a guardian angel.”

A week passed, and the grim business of war went on unchecked. There was a counter-attack north of Arras, and a concentration of German troops behind Ypres, two new Zeppelins had come to Flanders and must be watched. All together the Flying Corps had its time fully occupied. The Reddy mystery had disappeared from mess discussion even as the Reddy disappeared from the sky. It was reported that she was having a new tractor fixed. With Reddy’s absence there was a diminution of interest, until one day Burleigh, engaged in the hack-work of their craft—he was spotting the effect of howitzer fire—was attacked in mid-air by a Taube and an Albatross. The Albatross he brought down with a lucky shot, which pierced her petrol tank, and then, by dint of manœuvring, he placed himself between the Taube and the German line. The Taube manœuvred desperately, climbing and dipping, in an endeavour to get directly ahead of the British and to “take his air.” But all the time he was being pushed farther and farther into the British line. He was in such a position now that he dared not dive for fear of the British guns, he could not climb without losing the lead he had.

“Now,” said Burleigh, “I think I’ve got you, my lad.”

He left the aeroplane to take care of itself, and glanced along the sights of the Lewis, his finger was increasing its pressure upon the trigger and the man in the Taube was as good as dead. The day was clear, there was not a cloud in the sky, and the view Burleigh obtained of his quarry was perfect. Yet something stayed the pressure. It seemed as though a power greater than he arrested his actions, momentarily paralysing his nerve centres. Between him and the Taube floated a grey diaphanous mist of no greater substance than the drifting smoke of a cigarette.

“Huh!” growled Burleigh, and throwing over the control-lever dropped like a stone for a thousand metres. He flattened at the exact moment and came swiftly to earth behind the British lines.

An officer ran from his shelter.

“Hit?” he asked.

“Not materially,” said Burleigh.

He glanced up at the sky. The Taube was shrieking back to the German lines, and Burleigh shook his fist to the south-east, “Stop praying, confound you!” he snarled, and then burst out in an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

THE CUSTODY OF THE CHILD

There were times when Mrs. Harvey, despite her fifty-seven years, was as gay of heart and as amusingly epigrammatic as she had been in those far-off days when her movements had appeared with unfailing regularity in the society columns of the daily newspapers.

Women (and men too, for the matter of that) who have centred brilliant circles and have heard their well-turned comments repeated from tongue to tongue, fight hard against the brain-sloth which the years bring, and either hold fast to their old quips and so become boring, or find excuses for their dullness and acquire the reputation of being hypochondriac.

Mrs. Harvey called art to her aid, with disastrous consequences to her moral qualities.

Jack Mayne, her one son, and the child of her first marriage, worshipped his mother, and would sit at the dinner-table and gurgle with delight and pride at her humour and good spirit. There were other times, and this his young wife observed more keenly than he, when Mrs. Harvey would go through the days heavy-eyed and irritable, jumping at the slightest noise and strangely sensitive to the lightest touch.

Gwen Mayne was not a worshipper of her mother-in-law, though she got on well enough with her, and at times shared her confidences. It is true that she was never sufficiently intimate to be admitted to Mrs. Harvey's locked boudoir, but then, neither Jack nor any of the servants were allowed to inspect "Bluebeard's room."

Had some inquisitive member of the household opened that locked door in time, Gwen Mayne would have been spared one month of hell and eleven months of despair, and the powder of grey in Jack Mayne's hair would probably have made a later appearance. The circumstances leading to the opening of the door may be briefly stated.

It was three days before the New Year, and Gwen was sitting in the nursery superintending the toilet of Marie Marion. Her life had been a happy one, and this tiny atom of humanity which had come to the young people had done much to compensate for the wisps—they were hardly clouds—upon her bright horizon.

She lifted her pretty face to Jack as he came into the nursery.

“Mother is planning a day’s shopping, dear,” he said; “I wish you would go along with her. She is quite her cheerful self to-day.”

The girl nodded without enthusiasm.

“I wish you were keener on dear mumsie, Gwen,” he said, a little irritably.

She laughed.

“Don’t be silly; I’m awfully fond of her. You can’t expect me to feel quite as you do, you who know her so well.”

He waited a little while as though there was something else he had to say, then as he was leaving he asked carelessly:

“Did you have any letters this morning?”

She shot a suspicious glance at him.

“Yes,” she said.

She had expected this question and had dreaded it.

“And how is the doctor?” he asked, and this time his carelessness was obviously assumed.

She rose from her chair and took gentle hold of his hands.

“Jack,” she asked, “you don’t really object to my knowing Dr. Brinton? Why do you worry about other men? Jealousy doesn’t belong to your nature.”

He made a little grimace.

“I don’t like these sudden friendships, Gwen, and that is the truth. Brinton is a very amiable, good-looking fellow with a record of adventure—an irresponsible bachelor—the sort of man that might fascinate——”

She looked him straight in the eyes.

“Fascinate me?” she asked.

He avoided her glance.

“Well, yes,” he said uncomfortably. “It seems absurd to you, Gwen, but _____”

He saw the pain in her eyes, and stopped.

“I won’t let him see me any more, Jack,” she said quietly. “I could have told you something about Dr. Brinton which would have—but what is the

use?"

She turned abruptly from him, and after waiting a moment he left the room.

She watched him pass down the carriage-drive out of sight, and then, with a shrug of her shoulders, she went into her room and dressed.

Jack Mayne did not see his wife again for a year and a day. Again it was the eve of the New Year, and such a going out of the Old had not been experienced for twenty years. A north-easterly blizzard swept through the city streets, and the countryside lay buried in snow so deep that the very landmarks were obliterated and the high roads were but shallow depressions in a white waste.

A woman descended from the train at the little station which served the residential quarter where Jack Mayne had his house, and declining the services of the one heroic cabman who had braved the weather, she plunged through the snow toward the familiar broad avenue which she had once known so well.

The blizzard enveloped and blinded her, but she struggled on, sometimes knee-deep, slipping and stumbling forward, stopping now and again to take breath, and to set down the parcel she carried.

In her slow progress she stopped occasionally and flashed an electric lamp upon a gate-post, rubbing off the snow that she might discern the number, and at last paused before the entrance of Jack Mayne's home.

She seemed to be summoning resolution, and presently she turned into the drive and walked cautiously toward the house.

In the comfortable dining-room a glum dinner-party was in progress. Jack Mayne sat on the right of his mother, and opposite him, his friend and one time school-fellow, George Gresham. This was one of Mrs. Harvey's dull days, and she took no part in the conversation, but sat with downcast eyes, lost, apparently, in her thoughts.

"It is good of you to come down, George," said Jack for the tenth time.

"Rubbish!" protested the other. "I am quite alone in London, and you have no idea how joyous it is to get back to a cold winter. You must not forget that until last December I have been spending my Christmases under a punkah sipping iced lemonade. Police-work in India and the colonies isn't all it is cracked up to be, Jack."

He looked again at the heavy-lidded Mrs. Harvey, and Jack smiled.

“You still think you have met my mother before?”

The other laughed.

“No, my memory plays queer tricks—it is one of those puzzling recollections of people due to the irregular action of the brain rather than memory.”

“Perhaps you met her in the old days?”

“I think it is unlikely,” the other shook his head. “When I knew you years ago, your mother was not living with you. Since I came back to England to take up my duties at Scotland Yard, I certainly have not visited your house.”

He shook his head.

“No, I don’t think it is possible. I have been nowhere I could have met Mrs. Harvey—in fact, I wasn’t able to look up my old friends until this summer.”

There was a long silence, which Jack Mayne broke.

“By the way, when you were in South Africa, did you ever meet”—he hesitated—“Brinton?”

George Gresham nodded.

“Yes,” he said quietly; “I knew him rather well. He was in the prison service in Johannesburg, and I was brought into contact with him whilst I was reorganising their finger-print system.”

Again silence.

“Did he strike you as being that kind of man?” asked Mayne, fiddling with his wine-glass.

“To be perfectly honest, he did not,” replied the other frankly. “I always regarded him as a white citizen, and I confess that I liked him!”

“Did you ever meet my wife—my late wife?” corrected Jack Mayne.

Gresham shook his head, and for the first time during the meal the old woman spoke.

“Jack,” she said in a strangely strained voice, “why do you talk about this?”

Her son smiled.

“What does it matter now?” he asked, with a lift of his shoulders; “it is all over, and the smart of it is beginning to wear off. You don’t mind if I talk about this, do you, George?”

The Police Commissioner shook his head.

“But for the Lord’s sake don’t discuss it if it pains you at all,” he said.

“Not a bit,” replied Mayne. “I suppose you know the circumstances?”

“No, I know practically nothing about it, except that you are divorced,” George answered.

“Curiously enough it happened twelve months ago yesterday,” mused Mayne, leaning back in his chair. “I had had a few words with her in the morning about this fellow, Brinton, who I thought was corresponding a little too frequently—you know she met him at a tennis-party; he is a crack player.”

George nodded.

“There was nothing particularly bitter in our little encounter,” Mayne went on, “and I thought no more of it. She went out that morning with my mother on a shopping expedition, and in the midst of it all she made some excuse and left mother. Mother came back very upset; something had happened, or my wife had said something—what it was I do not know, and I have never pressed mother to tell me. At any rate my wife did not return home that night, and I had no message from her for three weeks. Then I received this letter.”

The old woman was looking at him with pleading eyes, but he did not see her. He took from his pocket a note-case and extracted a sheet of paper, which he threw across the table to the other. George looked at the letter, which was evidently written on the fly-leaf of a book:

“DEAR JACK,—I have gone away with a friend. I hope you won’t think badly of me, but I cannot explain.”

“Where was this posted?” asked George, passing the letter back over the table.

“It was posted at Trenton, a little town twenty miles from here, and this is the damning thing,”—he emphasised his words—“it was enclosed in an envelope bearing the crest of one of the hotels in the place, and the envelope was addressed to me in Brinton’s handwriting!”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely certain. A handwriting expert was able to establish this and to leave no doubt about the matter. When detectives were put upon the track, it was established that a Mr. and Mrs. Brinton had stayed in the hotel a few days—and Brinton is a single man. The shock nearly killed me. I filed a petition for divorce and, by a curious coincidence, when the process-server called at the hotel in Trenton—that being the only address I knew—he found my wife there.”

“How long after you made your discovery did you file your petition?”

“Immediately. Do you think I would wait a moment?” He struck the table with his clenched fist and his eyes blazed with anger. “No, no; if she wanted to be rid of me I gave her the earliest opportunity. The petition was filed, the case was undefended, and the divorce was granted last October.”

The old woman at the head of the table sat with lowered head, weeping silently, and Jack jumped up with an exclamation of regret, and went to her.

“I’m so sorry, mother; I am a brute.”

She rose from the table shaking her head.

“I’ll go to my room,” she said, and he walked with her to the door, his arm about her shoulders.

“I never thought mother would take it so badly,” he said, coming back to the table and pushing the cigarettes up to his companion. “She and Gwen were not the best of friends, and yet ever since this thing happened, mother has been a wreck.”

“Do you think I ought to go?” asked the other.

“Not a bit,” replied Jack; “she gets like that at times. I suppose she’s gone up to her Bluebeard room.”

“Her Bluebeard room?” repeated the other, and Jack laughed.

“That was the name Gw—, my wife gave to mother’s sitting-room. Mother never allows us through the door. I suspect some tender romance of her youth.” Then, “Well, what do you think of the case?” he asked, carrying the conversation back to its original groove.

“Didn’t Brinton put in any kind of defence?”

Jack shook his head.

“He went back to Africa a week before the papers were served.”

“Didn’t he communicate?”

Jack hesitated.

“Yes, he sent me a letter, rather a lengthy epistle, judging by the size of it.”

Gresham looked at him in astonishment.

“Didn’t you read it?”

“No,” admitted his host; “I was so enraged that, like a fool, I chucked it into the fire. My lawyers were very sore about this, because the letter undoubtedly would have supplied the proof and saved them a lot of bother when the case came on.”

Suddenly he stopped, and bent his head, listening.

“Is that mother coming down again?” he said wonderingly, walked to the door and opened it.

The darkness of the passage was illuminated by one small electric lamp, and by its light he saw that the stairs were empty.

“I thought I heard somebody walking about in the room overhead,” said Gresham; “my hearing is rather sensitive.”

“Overhead!” repeated Mayne in astonishment, “why, that is the nursery. Nurse is away, and unless it was mother, I don’t know who would go in to her. Wait a moment.”

He ran up the stairs and entered the big nursery at the front of the house, and the room was empty save for the white cot against the wall. After a look round, with such assistance as the burning night-light afforded, he was leaving, when something by the child’s bed attracted his attention. He tiptoed across and, with a smile, took up a big doll.

“Here is the intruder,” he said, as he came back to his guest; “probably mother has been leaving Marie Marion her New Year present. Hullo! Here’s the label!”

He lifted a tag that was tied to one of the doll’s ankles, and George Gresham saw his face turn white.

“‘From mother,’ ” he read mechanically, “‘to her little daughter.’ ”

He stared across to Gresham.

“It did not come by post,” he said; “she wouldn’t dare—she wouldn’t dare . . .!”

The door opened slowly and Gwen walked in. She was still wearing her heavy coat, which glistened with moisture, and the sodden and shapeless hat testified to the violence of the storm which was raging without. Her face was whiter than her husband’s and her lips were tremulous.

“What do you want?” he asked hoarsely.

George Gresham was standing by the table staring at the girl.

“I want my child,” she said, with a sob in her voice, “my child that I brought into this world and suffered for.”

Jack made a helpless gesture.

“You know you cannot have her, Gwen,” he said gently, “the court has given me its custody.”

She did not meet his eyes.

“I want my child,” she said doggedly, “though I break your heart to get her. I can’t go on any longer—I can’t, I can’t!”

There was a distant ring of a bell, and outside came the soft footfall of a servant. Jack turned his head to the door with a puzzled frown. He did not expect visitors, and they were most unwelcome at this hour of crisis. There was a murmur of voices in the hall and a tap at the door.

“I can see nobody, Jane,” said Jack. “Who is it?”

“Dr. Brinton.”

Mayne took a step back and his breath came quickly.

“Show him in,” he said, and turned his steely eyes upon his wife.

It needed all his self-possession, all his courage to hold her so aloof when his very heart was aching for her. As for Gwen, she had given a little start of surprise at the name, and had turned slowly to meet the newcomer.

The man who came in shaking the snow from his coat was tall, slim, and good-looking. Him Jack Mayne expected, but not the pretty girl who followed. It was Brinton’s attitude which took his breath away. The doctor was friendly, and without hesitation offered his hand to Mayne. So astounded was Jack Mayne that he took the hand mechanically.

“You don’t mind my calling,” said the visitor. “I’ve been terribly anxious to discover how that matter went, and although I only landed at Southampton yesterday, I came straight along to see you all.”

“How that matter went?” repeated Mayne huskily. “Well, it is no news to you to learn that my wife was divorced!”

“Divorced! Good God, what do you mean?”

Dr. Brinton stared at the other.

“I don’t know why you should be surprised,” said Mayne coldly. “You took my wife away from me, you were with her in a Trenton hotel, from whence you wrote your letter, and we have traced the fact that you stayed there with a ‘Mrs. Brinton’ on three dates in January of last year.”

Brinton took a long breath.

“Oh, indeed,” he said softly; “well, I’m going to astonish *you*, my friend!”

“Stop!”

It was Gwen who spoke.

“I forbid your speaking!”

“It is too late to forbid my speaking. I have already told your secret by letter to this lunatic, and that doesn’t seem to have convinced him. You had my letter?”

“I burnt it,” said Jack Mayne.

Dr. Brinton sank back into a chair and looked at the other with something which was half-anger and half-amusement in his eyes.

“Well, I am going to tell it to you again,” he said. “It is true I stayed at the Royal Hotel, Trenton, with a lady who called herself, with excellent reason, Mrs. Brinton. This is the lady,” he pointed to the girl who had come in with him.

“You were married?”

“Yes, I was married in January, the very day I sent your wife’s letter to you.”

“How came my wife to give you a letter?”

“Please, please, doctor!” Gwen Mayne had come to Brinton’s side. “Don’t tell! I was a fool to come. Only I want to say this, Jack—Dr. Brinton

was a good friend of mine and yours—and no more.”

“I am going to tell,” said the doctor quietly. “I think there has been enough tragedy in this business—and as my name seems to have been mixed up in the case I cannot be silent to save your husband’s feelings.

“I met Mrs. Mayne in prison,” he turned to Jack abruptly.

“In prison!” gasped Jack. “You’re lying!”

Interruption came from an unexpected quarter.

George Gresham, watching the scene, caught Mayne’s eye and nodded.

“It is true,” he said. “I was in court when she was first charged—that is where I saw your mother.”

“Go on,” said Jack hoarsely.

“On the day before my wedding, a friend of mine, a prison doctor at Trenton, telegraphed to me asking if I could take his duties for one day as he, also, curiously enough, wanted to go to a wedding. I hadn’t the heart to refuse him, and went up to Trenton on the day I was married, taking my wife with me. Trenton Jail is an institution for women only, as you probably know,” he went on. “I was making a visitation to three or four of the prisoners who had reported sick, and you can imagine my feelings when I walked into one of the cells and found the prisoner to be your wife and my good friend.”

“Go on,” said Jack, as he paused.

“She told me the whole story, and begged me to smuggle a note out of the prison that would allay your suspicion. The only stationery she had was prison notepaper, which obviously she could not send, so she tore a leaf out of her Bible and wrote the message with my fountain-pen. What that message was I never read. I said good-bye to her, arranged that I would take a room for her at the hotel, so that she would have somewhere to go on her release, and went back to Trenton from where I posted the letter. I had a talk about the matter with my wife, and she told me that I ought to write to you, whoever’s feelings might be hurt, and tell you the whole story.”

There was a deep silence, broken only by the girl’s sobs.

“Why was my wife in prison?” asked Jack.

“For shop-lifting,” said Brinton calmly. “She was shopping with a woman who is a morphia fiend and, in consequence, has become a kleptomaniac. The woman stole a few paltry things and put them in your

wife's bag. They were both arrested as they were going out of the shop, having been watched by a shop detective. They were taken to the manager's office, and in that time the elder woman begged your wife to take the blame, saying that she would explain to her son and would secure her immediate release. Your wife quixotically followed this advice. She gave the name of Mary Smith at the police court, and was remanded. At the end of a week she was brought up again, and expected to find her mother-in-law present to fulfil her promise. Mrs. Harvey was not there. Your wife went to prison with hard labour for one month. I explained all that in my letter."

Jack Mayne sat with bowed head.

Presently he got up, walked out of the room and slowly up the stairs. He knocked at his mother's door, and her voice bade him come in.

Something in his face must have told her that all was not well, for she shrank back.

"What do you want, sonny?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"Mother," he said, "are you in the habit of taking morphia?"

She hesitated a moment.

"Yes, sonny," she said.

He looked round.

"I want the key of your room."

"What room?"

"Bluebeard's room," he said, with a grim smile, and she took a key from under her pillow and gave it to him with a hand that shook.

He passed across the bedroom, fitted the key in the lock, opened the door and went in, switching on the light.

He did not go far, for the room was littered with a thousand pitiful evidences of his mother's weakness. Scores of lace collars, handbags—all the little things that can be picked up at a big store, and shoved out of sight in a muff, lay in dust and confusion, a mute testimonial to Mrs. Harvey's activities.

He came out of the room, locking it behind him, and pushed the key back under his mother's pillow.

"Mother," he said, and it was the only word of reproach he uttered, "you allowed Gwen to suffer, to go through that hell!"

The old lady turned her face to the wall and did not speak as he left the room.

He came back to the dining-room and crossed to his wife.

“Gwen,” he said penitently, and she looked up and smiled.

“Who is coming my way?” asked Dr. Brinton loudly.

“I, for one,” said George Gresham, and they made for the hall.

Brinton was the last out, and closed the door gently.

“A happy New Year!” he cried through the crack, and somebody threw a kiss at him.

At least it sounded like that.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some pages of advertising from the publisher were excluded from the ebook edition.

[The end of *The Lady of Little Hell* by Edgar Wallace]