FROM THE FOUR WINDS

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BY

JOHN SINJOHN

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THE RUNNING AMOK OF SYNGE SAHIB

A yellow stain is a yellow stain,
Though the heart is white and the brain is white;
And a lonely man is a lonely man,
That's reason eno' for me.

—Doggerel Meditations of John Hay.

'You lucky beggars Oh! You lucky beggars!'

The speaker rose, and stood stretching a languid length against the railing of the verandah, his tall figure outlined in its white clothes against the overhanging foliage.

'Well, I don't know,' said Clemenson, 'you fellows don't seem to have such a bad time out here; only wish I were going to stay, instead of toddling back to the beautiful and salubrious climate of the British Isles which you seem to covet so much; what d'you say, Taplin?'

He waved the end of his cigarette, glowing in the dark, towards another recumbent figure.

'Um—um,' the second globe-trotter lay back, looking curiously at the face of the man standing, and offered no further reply.

'I can't stay up to see you off,' said the first

speaker—'I should go cracked. "You can 'ear their paddles chunkin!"'—he broke into the air of 'Mandalay,' and shook his hand with an almost menacing gesture towards the lagoon.

'Well! *Saiandra,* you fellows, you've cheered us up amazingly; don't forget to look in on me if you're ever fools enough to come back to this forsaken paradise. Send me that new magazine if you can get it in Sydney, Clemenson. Good-night, Mrs Hay; I know you won't think me rude for making tracks. Look after them, Hay; see you up in court to-morrow afternoon, I suppose? Got to go round the coolie quarters in the morning. *Bon soir, la compagnie.*' He shook hands with the globe-trotters, swung himself over the verandah rails, and walked uncertainly down the narrow path that threaded the grove of shadowy palms. For a minute nobody spoke; then Clemenson said with a sigh:

'Poor old Synge, how down he is to-night. He *is* a good chap. I wish he'd stayed to see us off. I hate saying good-bye before it's necessary.' He flicked off a mosquito, and bent down to adjust the bath-towel wrapped round his feet and ankles.

'Barring mosquitoes and flies, this is

heaven, I believe,' he went on, lying back to look up at the sky gleaming with stars through the fern-like tracery of the flamboyante trees.

'Pardon me, under certain circumstances it's hell,' said a fourth voice.

'Hay, you're an unsentimental brute, you've no poetry in your carcase; ask Taplin and Mrs Hay what they think. Wake up, Taplin, old chap; hanged if you're not sleeping away the last chance of heaven you'll ever get.'

'Am I?' grunted the latter. He was gazing intently from under the broad brim of his hat at Mrs Hay. Sitting forward in her chair, her face ashy white, she was looking with an intent, scared expression at her husband.

'I must go, too, I'm afraid,' she said, 'the infant will want me; little wretch, she always cries on hot nights if she's left long. Good-bye, Mr Clemenson; good-bye, Mr Taplin; *bon voyage;* come and see me in England when I come home next year.'

Her manner was nervous and hurried, and her face, still turned towards her husband, had not lost its scared expression.

'You won't be long, Jack, will you?' With a wave of her hand she disappeared

into the house. The men had all risen, their bath-towel armour, dislodged, lay in heaps on the verandah floor, and the increasing 'Ping! Ping!' announced a winged attack along the line.

'I say, this *is* a sell. I thought you and Mrs Hay were coming out to see us off; it was to have been an all-night sitting for the last, you know, and now here you are one by one deserting, and leaving us to face this abominable melancholy departure alone.' Thus Clemenson, ruefully. Taplin lit a cigarette.

'What's wrong, Hay?' he said, and pointed with it down the path.

'Oh! It's all right. Nothing, nothing; my wife's tired, and the infant's not well; that's all.'

'Nonsense, man, I saw Synge's face, and I saw your wife's, that's enough; I say again, what's wrong?'

Hay leant silently against the rail, a cloud gathering upon his face.

'Upon my honour I believe there's nothing wrong,' he said slowly, as though weighing a thought within himself, 'only my wife's rather given to nervous fits, you know.' This apologetically.

'Ummm. . . . . Well, if you won't tell us you won't—beg your pardon for asking; are we keeping you up?'

Again a silence, then Hay said to himself:

'Oh! D——n it, it can't be.'

He turned to the other two.

'Look here, you fellows,' he said, 'you're gentlemen, and you're both of you fond of old Synge; what I say to you now, whatever you may think of it, goes no further?'

'Certainly not,' from Clemenson. Taplin shook his head; he was nothing if not brief.

'Well! It's a longish yarn, and I think I'll just go in and speak to my wife before I begin.'

He turned and went into the house.

The two globe-trotters, left to themselves on the verandah, looked at each other without a word. Through the darkness and stillness of the tropical night the humming of mosquitoes was waning, and the silence was only broken by an occasional cry, or the barking of a dog from the coolie quarters. A table covered with drinks and packs of cards was pushed aside, and the dying lamp cast a flickering glow on the two recumbent figures. The fragrance of lime and pepper trees came floating gently in

on the warm night air. Clemenson sat flicking restlessly and distractedly at the now sleepy mosquitoes with his handkerchief, and Taplin, smoking quietly, looked down the path where Synge had disappeared. Both were relieved when Hay reappeared from the house, and sinking into a long chair, took up the word.

'I'm going to tell you chaps one of the most extraordinary yarns you'll ever hear. I don't attempt to explain it—I don't know anything about heredity—thank heaven *I'm* not a doctor —but I've been in the Strait Settlements, and I've seen things there that—Still I *don't* understand, and I don't care to,—all I know is, the thing happened.'

He paused a minute to concoct himself a drink, and then went on:

'You fellows have been here three weeks—jolly glad we've been to have you—and you've seen a lot of Synge. I suppose you've both noticed that somewhere or other about him there's blood that isn't white?' Nods from his listeners.

'Yes; there's not much of it, it hardly shows, but there's no doubt it's there. What it is I've never asked him, of course. I believe he's very sensitive about it,—why, I don't know,

I'm sure—I only mention this, you know, because it hits off my theory of the why of what I'm going to tell you; besides,' he muttered half to himself, 'one mustn't talk to him about the Strait Settlements. Well,' he lighted a cigar, and pulled deeply at it for some minutes before going on, 'when I first came to the Fijis they sent me up as Commissioner to a small island about a hundred miles north of this, called Luma. Why in heaven's name they wanted a Commissioner there, the Colonial Office only knows. I went up with the wife and the infant, and for six months we were the only white people on the island; then the measles came, and they sent up a doctor—for his sins, poor old Synge. That place was a paradise for beauty, but a regular hell for loneliness. We had Judy (whom you know we brought over from Singapore with us), and another coolie, for servants, and Synge abode in a large native hut about a quarter of a mile away. Barring a ship's calling, perhaps once in three months, with mails, not a soul ever came near that blessed place; solitary confinement was a joke to it.'

He paused, and drew a long whiff from his cigar; a breeze growing amongst the palm

leaves sighed thro' the verandah and blew the smoke into a wreath around his head. Clemenson shivered; the spirit of desolation seemed to have got into the tone of Hay's voice.

'Those beastly measles! Synge worked like a horse; the unfortunate devils of natives did their level best to die, and it was the work of two average men and a boy to save the life of any one of them—stupid beggars—but he pulled a lot of 'em through somehow. Then my infant got 'em, only a year old, and had a roughish time; there again Synge did the trick, and then—hanged if, to put the finishing touch, he didn't go and get 'em himself—and badly too. Measles in a climate like this aren't any kind of a joke, and the poor old chap nearly turned up his toes: but he came round at last—mainly thanks to Judy's cooking. They left him awfully weak and depressed; I used to go and sit with him a lot, and he was fearfully down, always talking about the misery of dying in a dog's hole of a prison, as he called the place, and pining for home. He had a fox-terrier called Wasp, that he was awfully fond of, and when we weren't with him he used to lie and talk to her by the hour about his people at home and a certain girl, and

Cambridge, and the cursedness of things generally, and the poor little beggar would sit up at the end of the bed, catching flies, and blink her eyes at him, and let on to understand the whole caboodle. I often heard him yarning away when I was coming in; you can hear anything in those native houses. He had a sort of double one—one for a bedroom and one for a sitting-room. Well, he got better by degrees, but the stronger he got physically, the more gloomy and depressed he seemed to grow; it was like having a funeral in your coat-tail pocket to be with him; it didn't cheer matters up for us, and to make things worse, the mail missed—through a hurricane or some misbegotten reason—and we didn't see a ship, except at a distance, for nearly six months.'

Hay paused and shook himself, as if to free his mind from the recollection. Clemenson muttered, 'Lively!' Taplin bit his forefinger sympathetically.

'Well,' Hay went on rapidly, 'one morning Synge came down to us at breakfast, and said in his sarcastic way, "Something's gone wrong with the works of Providence; there's actually a ship in." So there was; she brought the

mails; Synge had some letters; and she went away that afternoon. I remember Judy saying to me at tiffin, "Wasp hab had five chickens, in honour ob de ship. Synge Sahib dip dem in de big punch-bowl and call dem names—say he chrisey dem. Will de Sahib hab gravy wid de blue man?" Judy's information is always dished up with some cookery—he meant blanc-mange—but good Lord! How infernally long-winded I am! In the afternoon I went over to see Synge; he'd gone asleep in his chair—it was beastly hot weather. His letters and papers were all strewn about the place, and a big Malay kriss that he'd been cutting papers with was lying beside him. Wasp, licking those five blessed puppies, was sitting at his feet. He looked so tired that I went away without waking him; perhaps if I had, things would have been different.'

Hay paused again, and turned with a shiver to look over his shoulder down the path, listening intently; the other two noticed for the first time that the butt of a revolver was sticking out of his coat pocket.

'Well, my boys, I expect I've bored you so far, but I shan't with the rest of my yarn.'

He turned to them again, speaking hurriedly and low.

'That night I was sitting in the dining-room pretty late, writing up my Commissioner's log. The wife had gone to bed; it was a mighty hot night, and the infant had been making herself felt. I was smoking, and not over and above busy—the Luma Commissioner isn't given that way. There was a bright moon, and it was very still and peaceful, much the same as this. It happened I was just thinking what rummy noises one hears at night, when I heard quite the rummiest noise I've ever heard or ever want to; it was the cry as of a creature that had lost it's soul and "couldn't tell whe—ere to find it." He broke into the old tune, which came on the top of the intense solemnity of the last few words with a weird effect that sent a shudder through his listeners.

'By George! You fellows may just "lift up your hearts" that you've never heard a sound like that; it sent the blue creeps through *me* —I sat there wondering what the deuce it was, till, looking through the window, I saw in a bright patch of moonlight in front of the house a naked figure, dancing a kind of fantastic dance, and brandishing a streak of silver

above its head; then I heard that awful cry again, and the figure darted forward and disappeared. I sat there rubbing my eyes, and wishing for a drink, when the door opened with a crash, and Judy almost fell into the room, his eyes starting out of his head with fright, and his teeth chattering. "Sahib! quick! quick! Synge Sahib kill Wasp, and kill de chickens; Synge Sahib run amok! Synge Sahib run amok!" and the beggar fell on the floor, and grovelled underneath the table. "What the devil!" I began—then suddenly came that cry again, quite close this time. I dashed out of the room, and made down the landing for my wife's room. My God! What do you think I saw?'

In his intensity he leaned forward, staring straight at the opposite wall, with his hand gripping the butt of the pistol, and in his eyes they could almost read the words that followed.

'Over the child's cot stood that naked figure, with that devilish streak in its hand. My wife, in her nightdress, stood shrieking and clutching at the figure's arm with both hands. I reeled back, then I picked up the first thing that came handy, a knob of sorts, or a

boot-jack—I don't know—and threw it with all my force. Praise the Lord! I hit it; it turned, and by all the great and awful powers, it was Synge—Synge transfigured—a Malay,—you chaps make no mistake—a Malay, if ever there was one, in every line of his face and figure. Barring a towel wound round him, he was stark naked, and his flesh was yellow, not white; and whether my eyes went wrong or not I don't know, but his hair seemed to hang down his naked back, instead of being cropped short, as it always is. His eyes were blazing and glaring with a sort of green light like a wild cat's. That devilish silver streak was his Malay kriss, and he brandished it like one possessed. I've seen Malays run amok twice—once in Bangkok, and once in Sumatra—and if Synge wasn't at that moment a Malay, and a Malay amok, I'm a German Jew. He didn't look mad, only mad murderous. But there wasn't much time for psychological speculation, I can tell you; I just had that one look from him, and then he came for me. It flashed through me, there was only one chance, and that was tracks away from the house. I took that chance, and went through the window—which I concluded afterwards must have

been shut—and made those tracks. There was a straight path from the house through the native village, leading out beyond on to a long stretch of hard white sand. We went through the village—what a funk the natives were in! They scattered on each side for us—the cry had drawn them, as it had me. I remember thinking—just shows how little the mind is in hand—how amusing it must have been for them to see their revered Commissioner hunted by their respected doctor in a state of nature, and wondering if they had humour enough to appreciate the situation; we were the only white men in the island, you know. I used to be a bit of a sprinter at school, and in the ordinary course of things could give Synge about 30 yards in the 100, but that night I could only just keep away, if it can be called keeping away from a man whose breath you can feel on your neck, and whose hand you can see coming over your shoulder. It wasn't the sort of seclusion I could have wished for. Twice he grabbed at me and missed, and then we got on to the sand, and, for some reason or other, I drew away a yard or two—perhaps my wind was better than his, though for that matter I don't

believe he had a wind, or legs either, that night.' Hay spoke in a meditative voice that was half comic.

'But altogether,' he went on, 'it was a rum business. Well, I knew that what I had to do was to hold on ahead till we got to a creek about 100 yards wide that ran from the lagoon, inland. If I could get there first I was safe; I was a good swimmer, and in those days old Synge couldn't swim more than a few strokes. Still, if murder-madness could make a man run half as fast again, it could probably make him swim. However, it was the only chance. That was a ghastly run, and a ghostly one, too. The moon was full, and the sea gleamed in silver and black ridges, and that blessed sand shone in the bright moonlight like burnished plate, and we two white figures fled over it like disembodied spirits, with the whole of Nature — sea, sky, and land—looking on and mocking at what was meant to be as grim a tragedy as ever came about. And yet all the time, you know, I couldn't help seeing the comic side—the only two white men on the island—sworn pals, you beggars! sworn pals — and the one chasing the other for dear life, and no mortal

reason—it appealed to me very much, that is, as much as the discomfort of the blamed thing would allow. All things come to an end, and so did that run. I must have made record time, but it seemed like a couple of hours. I never got more than about two yards away —it varied from that to about two inches—and I can tell you I was all out at the end of that half mile, when we came to the creek. There wasn't time or space to dive, and I went in plum bang—anyhow. I could see or feel the whirr of the kriss in the air as he came after me. When I came up and struck out, he was a yard or so behind, swimming desperately for me, with the kriss still in his hand. "Good Lord!" I thought, "it's all over now; the beggar can swim, and I'm about done." Quick as lightning I turned on my back and kicked out with all my might, and, as luck would have it, I caught him on the head with my foot, and down he went. I twisted round and drew myself out on to the bank—phew! I *was* done. In a minute or so he came to the surface panting and gasping, and turned himself round and round, looking for me, with that wolfish glare still in his eyes, and the kriss still grasped firm.

When he saw me, I sang out from the bank, "Drop it, old man, the game's up." He gave that hideous cry again, and tried to swim ashore, but in a stroke or two he threw up his hands and went down. I lay still, trying to get my wind, and watching for him to come up again. In a minute he did, almost black in the face, but still with that murderous light in his eyes and the kriss in his hand. I called out—"Synge, dear old chap, easy on, that'll do," but just as I sang out he went down the third time, and this time he stayed there.'

Hay stopped short with a shiver. The dawn was breaking in a long grey streak over the distant reef, and with it came a wave of chill air. The faces of all three men looked almost haggard in the growing light, and Taplin said, 'Go on, man,' in a voice that sounded harsh and strange.

'There was only one thing to be done,' continued Hay, slowly, 'and I can tell you I didn't care about doing it one little bit. Diving for a madman with a kriss in his hand in twelve feet of water, even if he *has* gone down three times, is no sort of a pastime. Well, I found him at the second

go, quite motionless at the bottom, and pulled him up ashore. He was unconscious all right, but I had the devil's own trouble to get that silver streak out of his paw. Then I sat on my haunches, and rubbed him, and prayed the gods to send me help. Presently they did, in the shape of my wife and Judy, on horseback, with brandy and pistols. Judy wouldn't come anywhere near, though he could see him lying like a log; but my wife, who, like most women where there's illness, is an angel, helped me to get him on to a horse. Poor old chap, he was mighty limp and light, and the madness had clean gone out of him; his skin was white again, and his hair shorn — I suppose I must have been a bit mixed there. We held him on, and got him back somehow, and gave him brandy, and gradually he came back to life; but he had brain fever and was delirious for days. Then I got to know how fearfully the loneliness had weighed on him, and bitten into his marrow. At last he came round, and got all right again by degrees. He's never had the faintest idea of what happened that night; the fever seemed to have wiped it clean out of his memory, and of course we've

never told him. We got shifted here soon afterwards, and this place is chalks better than Luma, if it isn't exactly the vortex of society. The saddest thing, as it turned out, over that business, was poor little Wasp. After we got back with him I went over to his quarters to fetch away his things, and there, lying on his bed, was that poor little beggar and four of the pups dead as door-nails, with kriss stabs right through them. The fifth pup was alive and whining piteously; we took her home and dragged her up somehow, and here she is.'

Hay touched a sleepy fox-terrier with his foot.

'We had to tell Synge a yarn about Wasp's death. I've forgotten how it went now, but I remember it was very artistic and untrue, and the whitest sort of a lie. Well, I'm tired of yarning, and that's the whole show, and now perhaps you understand why my wife looked so queer to-night, and why'—he broke off, and tapped the butt end of the revolver. There was a long silence, which Clemenson broke with :

'You don't mean to say that you can go on living here with the possibility of that happening again?'

'Oh! This is different; Luma was specially designed by a beneficent Providence for lone madness. Personally I don't admit the possibility—wouldn't do, you know,' he shuddered,—'and forewarned is forearmed; besides, these things are with the Fates, and if it *should* come about, it's better with *us* than with people who don't know and wouldn't understand, and —we're fond of Synge.'

Clemenson lay back and whistled softly, and the three sat on in silence and watched the grey turn to red, and the glow steal from over the lagoon, flecking the green growing things with light, and chasing the sentinel stars back into their boxes; and they listened to the murmurs of the wakening island world, till the splash of oars in the narrow winding river hard by warned the globe-trotters that the time for departure was come.

'Time's up,' said Hay, 'there's Missa Tanner and his boat,' and he pointed through the red clusters of the flamboyante trees to the tall figure of a Fijian coming up the bank of the stream towards the house. Taplin rose and stretched himself, then he walked over to Hay and shook him hard by the hand.

'You're a good chap,' he said, 'a thundering

good chap; and your wife's a brick—tell her so.'

'Thanks,' said Hay.

Half an hour later, the boat, held in the stream by the oars of the convict crew, waited, while from the stern-sheets the two globe-trotters said good-bye to their host.

'Remember, you fellows, nobody's ever heard a word of that yarn—you won't forget that?'

'All right, old chap,' said Clemenson; 'but I say, just one thing: how do you account for it? Wasn't it temporary insanity, pure and simple?'

'Certainly not; that I'll take my solemn Dick—but I don't account for it, and I don't try to; all I know is, as Judy says: "Synge Sahib run amok."'

* * * * * *

The boat drifted away down the stream to join the steamer lying out beyond the line of white reef. The globe-trotters lay back in the stern silently, and from across the lagoon as they watched, the group of houses grew smaller and smaller through the palm-groves, and the sugar plantations, beginning to teem with

working life and labour, faded into a blurr.

Presently Clemenson, still looking backward, said, with a sigh, 'By gum!'

Taplin nodded.

DICK DENVER'S IDEA

'A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree,
The more you beat 'em the better they be.'

This was always a good lie; there is such an amount of truth in it.

SCENE I

'You are quite mistaken, I didn't speak to him.'

'That's a lie! I saw you myself,—and I tell you, if you can't behave yourself better than to go talking to a blackguard adventurer like that, you stay down here till this d——d voyage is over.'

The brutal voice, raised in anger, subsided into a sort of growl; the first, a woman's, was silent.

'Why don't you answer? Curse it, d'you think it's your "duty,"' with a sneer, 'to stand there like a mummy? By God, a mummy's a fool to you!' The man's voice rose again in a harsh crescendo.

Dick Denver, leaning against the ship's side, involuntarily took his cigar from his lips, and ground his teeth.

'I judge domestic felicity has its shady side,' he muttered, with a soul-satisfying drawl; 'thank the Almighty for His infinite mercies!' —presumably referring to his own unencumbered condition.

'Poor little woman, she looked very sweet at dinner. Gosh! *I* was the blackguard adventurer!' He laughed softly, and shrugged his shoulders.

'What an everlasting brute the fellow is; that unfortunate woman must have considerable of a bad time. Ah! Well,—no affair of yours, Dick, my son.'

He turned, and from over the ship's side watched the rings of smoke curling away from his cigar. A rustle as of silken garments caught his ear, and over his shoulder he saw a woman's figure coming from the hatchway. Standing back in shadow, he watched her move listlessly towards a long deck chair, halfway between him and the hatch. He could catch a long-drawn sigh, half a sob, and see the shiver of the slight form as she sank into it. A whisper came floating along the deck to where he stood. 'God! How I hate him! How I hate him! How long? How long?'

Dick Denver, vagabond, adventurer, gambler

—what you will—was a man with a soft heart, and a curious hardened inability to witness distress without a desire to offer his help, which, owing to his manner of life, was generally found to be worse than useless. Watching her as she lay with profile half-turned from him, her chin resting dejectedly in her hand, the fair hair clustering low on her white forehead, and a pitiful droop in the corner of the little mouth,—he was conscious of a desire, gradually concentrating in the toe of his boot, to kick the criginator of so much unhappiness. As he leant forward for a better look, a puff of wind caught the brim of his large felt hat, and blew it along the deck to the chair where she was sitting. Glad of the excuse, he moved towards her. She turned her head, and a gleam from the moon, half-hidden in the hurrying clouds, lit up a sweet pale face with deep grey eyes. A word of apology, and he bent forward to pick up his hat, catching a glimpse, as he did so, of a tear on her cheek. A great compassion smote his vagabond heart. He straightened himself and said:

'Aren't you cold, sitting up here so late?'

A soft musical voice was one of Mr Denver's

chief accomplishments; it was useful at poker, and was found attractive even by victims.

'Oh! no, thank you; see, I have this shawl,' pointing to a flimsy concoction of silk and lace that hung over the arm of the chair in a sufficiently useless way. Without a word he took it up, and with the deftest fingers—was not Mr Denver a dealer of the first water?—wrapped it round the shoulders and slender throat. A little smile, half surprise, half thanks, was his reward.

'The dew's very heavy in these seas. Guess my cigar'll bother you?'

'Oh, no, not in the least, thank you. Don't throw it away,' as Dick made a motion in that direction. Thankfully retaining it, he stretched his length on the next chair, and emitted silent but contented puffs.

An attractive length, sinewy but slight; under the shady hat a drawn, clean-cut, clean-shaven face, bronzed from original fairness to a deep tan; lazily veiled grey eyes, rather deep-set, and a firm mouth—all these things Dick turned to his companion, and spake in his most musical and least nasal voice. She listened with pleasure, but with an apparent and growing uneasiness, and with ear strained to catch

the least sound of an approach from the cabin; and, in spite of the nonchalance of his voice and attitude, Mr Denver was no less on the strain than she; 'for,' thought he, 'the powers forbid that I cause her to have more abuse from my friend below.'

The moon had burst through the clouds and was flooding the deck with silver light, and Dick improved the shining hour. The ship was bound for the West Indies; he discoursed of the islands and his own experiences there, and she listened, with an evident interest in spite of her fears. Never yet was woman (or man either, for the matter of that) uninterested when Dick Denver talked, which he did but seldom; his voice, as he might have phrased it himself, was 'kind of seductive.' Presently, however, he rose, and hat in hand, said:

'You'll pardon me, but I guess you'd better go down; your shawl's quite wet.'

She rose with a little shiver, held out her hand without a word, and turning, went down the hatchway with the same listless, dejected step as before. Dick watched her go, pushed his hat high up on his head, and whistled softly and expressively; then he stooped suddenly, raising himself again with a handkerchief in

his hand, the corners of which he examined with unscrupulous care till he read a name. Holding it softly in his hand, he pitched away the end of his cigar. Presently he began whistling again. Nobody ever heard Mr Denver whistle, except in moments of profound thought; evidently he was cogitating deeply. After a minute or two he took a pack of cards out of his pocket, and caressing them with his unoccupied hand, raised his head and voice, and spake to the moon with a meditative drawl:

''Pears I can feel kind of a sorrow for the animal!' He then put the handkerchief in his breast-pocket and idled down the hatch. Dick Denver was always solitary in his habits, and made a point of a cabin to himself, otherwise his conduct that night with a small lace pocket-handkerchief might have been considered somewhat out of keeping with the character of a professional black sheep. It is impossible to disguise the fact that Mr Denver, in spite of his notorious insouciance, was an impressionable man.

SCENE II

The ship's saloon, fitfully lighted by the swinging lamp with a green shade, furnished a picturesque framing for the two figures it contained. Mr Dick Denver, in loose garments of spotless white, sat leaning carelessly back in one chair, with his legs resting on another; a cigar in his mouth, his hands, with the cards in them, from habit well held up, and the usual indifferent look upon his face. A great contrast was the man sitting on the other side of the long, narrow saloon table. Major Massinger, late of Her Majesty's Service, a large, bull-necked man with eyes like a cod fish, in a white mess jacket and scarlet cummerbund, was sitting forward, burying a somewhat red face in a beaker of brandy and soda. A box of cigars and picquet markers testified to a long evening's play, the last indeed of a series. To those who knew him, the gallant Major's boisterous joviality would have betokened a winning night. His luck was 'in,' even to and beyond Dick's bottom dollar, but

this beyondness, which might have been somewhat disquieting to his opponent, was not to be gathered from Dick's impassive face.

'Eleven o'clock—shall we conclude?' said the latter.

'Not a bit of it, unless you're afraid of the luck?'

Dick answered by an amused look and a shrug of his shoulders, but he said:

'Won't you disturb your wife if you stay here much longer?'

'D——n my wife; you've evidently never been spliced, or you wouldn't be so beastly particular.'

Massinger turned as he said this to open another bottle of soda, and missed the ugly look in Dick's half-shut eyes.

'All serene, then,' said the latter—'guess I owe you twelve hundred and fifty dollars; well, now, I'll play you double or quits, the best of three games.'

'What's that in pounds? Two fifty, isn't it? Very good! Go ahead, my sportsman; double or quits, five hundred or nothing.'

Dick shuffled the cards and cut them; a breeze stole in at the open skylight, and sighed fitfully through the saloon, and as it

died away, his sharp ears caught the 'frou frou' of a silk dress descending the hatch.

'One moment,' he said—'reckon I'll just shut that door; there's kind of a hurricane playing around here;' and, rising quickly, he moved to the saloon door and stood there a moment, hat in hand, as a slender white figure passed down the stairs. Her hand rested a moment in his as she glided by, and Mr Denver shut the door and returned to his seat. Massinger, manufacturing his fourth drink, saw nothing of this by-play, and the game was resumed. But the tide had turned, and Massinger was 'rubiconed' twice running.

'As you was before you was! Look here, Denver, can't end up like this, you know—it's too infernal slow;' his voice was getting thick and his hand shook somewhat.

'Mussh't see the luck through, y'know, somehow'n other—no craning.'

Dick, a covert sneer on his face, was far too considerate to disappoint him, and once again the cards were shuffled and dealt; the Major more boisterous, Dick more impassive than ever. With the end of the partie came the transference of £200 in notes from Massinger's pocket-book to Mr Denver's. Un-

daunted, the Major slapped the latter on the back, declaring him thickly to be a jolly good sportsman.

'Have my revenge to-morrow night,—too tight now,' said he.

'Yes,' assented Dick, cheerfully, 'but I guess we get to St Martin to-morrow, and I leave the ship.'

'Oh, hang it! Never mind; I suppose we stay there a bit, eh?

'Two days,' said Dick.

'All right! I'll play you on shore. Is there any solitary thing to see in the d—— d hole? My wife always wants to see everything, confound her!'

Mr Denver apparently paid no heed to this remark; he was sitting tilted back in his chair, his hat slouched over his brows, and only the slight twitching of the hand holding the pocket-book, and a curious smouldering fire in his half-closed eyes, showed that a struggle was going on in his mind. Presently, with a sudden jerk, he returned to a right-angled position, and stared straight at Massinger. The man looked particularly like a cod-fish at that moment, and breathed heavily. Dick shivered slightly and disgustedly.

Through the open skylight above the wind could be heard sighing in the sails, 'God! How I hate him! How long? How long?' That was the refrain it took. A cold look of purpose and resolution settled in Dick's eyes —the crystallisation of a vague idea.

'Why, certainly no, not the smallest use! 'Pears to me as if there might be a chance,' he muttered unintelligibly to himself; and fingering the pocket-book in his hand, he looked at the man opposite with a calculating eye.

'What's the matter with you? You're drunker than I am,' said the latter. 'I ask you simply if there's anything to see in the island, and, begad, you're jibbering like a boiled owl.' He stooped unsteadily to reach his glass under the table.

Mr Denver's look was that of one who measures the distance for a spring.

'Malūa! Malūa!' (which is by interpretation 'Go easy'). 'I guess it can be done,' he drawled softly to himself. 'Anything to see? No—o. Stop, though,'—to the intelligent eye, as he drew himself together in his chair, the spring was very near now—'I guess I'm wrong all the time, there *is* something al-

mighty curious to see, for those who have the sand.'

'What's that?'

'We—ell, it mightn't interest *you*, but it's a place they call "La boîte du diable"—kind of a cavern in the side of a hill. Considerable few people have been to see it, and none stayed very long. Reckon *you* won't care about it.'

An indescribable sneer was in Mr Denver's voice, and the Major, though far gone, was not *too* far gone to seize upon it as an insult.

'You mean, I wouldn't dare,' he said, huskily. 'Confound you, sir, d'you think I've not got as much pluck as you?'

'Guess not,' said Dick, drily.

'D——n you, sir!' said Massinger, furiously; 'I'll bet you that £200 I've just paid you, I go to that hole, whatever it is, and stay there as long or longer than you do.'

For answer, Mr Denver rose slowly.

'Put it in writing,' he said, and, producing pen and paper out of his pocket, he reached down the saloon ink-bottle, and pushed them over to Massinger. The latter, quite sobered, stared a minute at his nonchalant companion, then sat down, and without saying a word penned the following lines in a shaky hand:

'"I bet Mr Dick Denver the sum of £200 that I visit with him a condemned hole called 'La boîte du diable,' and stay there as long or longer than he does."

'Will that do?'

'Play or pay,' added Mr Denver, calmly.

'"Play or pay."

'"Albert Massinger, October 9th, 188-"—he signed his name, and threw it across to Dick, who signed his own, and pocketed the document.

'Guess I'll call for you after dinner at your hotel,' he said; 'might be happier with pistols, it's kind of a skeery place. Good-night,' he nodded, and without another word, lounged up on to the silent deck, the suspicion of an unholy smile flickering on his impassive features.

SCENE III

The night was dark, and the two figures taking a winding way up the narrow hillside path had much ado to keep from going astray. The leader, ploughing along, head down, with eyes diligently on the move to save his pre-

cious shins, was betrayed by a running accompaniment of his favourite language. He was volubly cursing his folly in having made 'such a d——d silly bet,' and Mr Denver for having inveigled him into a fool's errand. The latter, sauntering along a few steps behind, apparently quite oblivious of his companion, was humming a favourite little tune, and turning from time to time to look down on the twinkling lights of the little town scattered here and there amid the tall stems of the palms outlined against the further sky. The faint murmur of the surf breaking on the reef seemed to chime in with his mood better than the tune, for he stopped humming, and bent forward to listen. Massinger had exhausted his vocabulary for the present, and was silent also; only the fitful chirping of a cicala and the occasional bark of a dog from below broke the stillness of the tropical night. The moon was just rising over the sea, throwing a long silvery line of light, which gradually spread, as if eager to embrace the land, awaiting it in silent expectancy. The solemnity and stillness of the scene, however, only served to increase the Major's irritation.

'Come on,' he said, impatiently; 'don't stand

moonstruck there; let's get this infernal foolishness over as soon as possible. How much further have we got to go up this beastly path? If it's far I'd sooner pay £500 than go on.'

'We're almost there,' said Dick, and passing his companion, he swung along up the track. In about ten minutes he came to a halt, and said in his soft drawling voice, 'We turn down here, and in a minute or so we'll be right there. Then look to your shooting-iron, and harden your heart, and in we go. Malūa, my son,' he added to himself, 'it's no part of the game to "show" a while yet—mustn't skeer the gentleman;' he chuckled grimly and audibly.

'What the devil's wrong with the infernal place, and why do we want pistols?' said Massinger, testily; but even as he spoke he drew a revolver from his side pocket. For all answer, Mr Denver led on down a zig-zag path to the left, until brought up sharp by the face of a rocky cliff, grown over with bushes and creepers. After standing there a minute to see that his companion had followed him, he stooped suddenly, raising with his hand a huge, hanging creeper, and dived as it were

into the face of the rock. Astonished at his sudden disappearance, Massinger stood a minute before the rock irresolute, but a mocking voice, with that peculiar high drawl, came from within.

'Reckon you're going back, Major; is that so?'

With a muttered oath, Massinger raised the creeper, and, imitating his companion, crawled through a hidden opening in the rock, till he found himself standing upright beside Dick in an open space. When his eyes had become somewhat accustomed to the gloom, he saw that they were in a natural vault or chamber, formed in the rock of the hillside, nearly square, and about forty feet from side to side. In the centre was a huge jagged hole of cavernous depth, and above it, a large cleft in the rock ceiling of the vault, letting in a glimpse of the starry heavens. The sides of the walls, of a reddish-grey stone, were damp and clammy, and the air hot and steamy. In the far corner of the cavern, opposite the entrance, was a natural stone seat. When by degrees and uncertain glances he had taken in his surroundings, Massinger looked round for his companion. Mr Denver

was seated in a *degagé* attitude on a stone, with his back to the entrance, carefully selecting a weed from his cigar-case. This he lighted, and got well under weigh, before he said, with the drawl that had become hateful to the other:

'Nice place, a'nt it, Major? Take a seat; there's a tolerable spry pew opposite.'

He waved with his cigar to the stone seat. Massinger, though secretly far from comfortable, was not to be outdone in coolness by this Yankee blackguard. Taking a cigarette, he lit it from the other's cigar, and strolled, with a fine assumption of indifference, to the seat indicated. A long silence followed; the moon was gradually creeping up in the sky, and long ghostly shadows were cast on the floor and walls of the 'Devil's Box.' Massinger's feelings during this night had been far from enviable; starting after a good dinner, he had looked upon the affair as an amusing freak by which he would save himself the payment of £200. The steep, difficult ascent had thoroughly disillusioned him, and the eerie look of the cavern was fast completing his discomfiture. He was conscious, too, of a vague feeling of distrust as to his companion's con-

duct. Why had he brought him to this unearthly hole,—where apparently there was nothing to prevent their staying till Doomsday to decide this fool of a bet. There was something sinister about the entertainment.

As if reading the thoughts that were pressing on his companion's brain, Mr Denver broke the silence,—

'Guess you're feeling up a considerable high tree, Major; this is going to be an interesting occasion for you.' There was a look as of a cat playing with a mouse about the speaker, and Massinger was not slow to read a menace into the suave tones of the high-pitched voice.

'What in God's name is the meanin' of this foolery?' he broke out, harshly; 'why have you brought me here? There's something behind all this d——d skittlin', and I'll trouble you to tell me what it is.' He rose as he spoke, and took a step with clenched hands towards Dick. The latter did not move.

'I should mind that little orifice if I were you,' he said, pointing to the yawning chasm that separated them in the centre, and from the murky depths of which ascended a faintly hissing, bubbling sound as of boiling water.

Massinger, who in his excitement had advanced almost to its edge, started back again with an alacrity that showed the unstrung state of his nerves. When he had again dropped into his seat, and was playing nervously with the butt of the revolver in his coat pocket, Mr Denver took up the word.

'Major,' he said, 'I'm going to have some talk with you, and you'll pardon me if I deliver a little exordi*um*'—he pronounced it with an ominous emphasis on the 'um.' 'I reckon the moon won't be full up for another half hour, so we've considerable time.'

'What's the moon got to do with it, and what the devil is it you want? Fire away and come to the point,' said Massinger, twisting the ends of his moustache, and endeavouring to conceal his now genuine alarm under a boisterous bluffness. Mr Denver smiled a quaint little smile, as though his spirits were rising.

'Things will begin to move right along about the time the moon's overhead,' he said, consulting his watch. 'Now, see here, Major, I don't want to bore you, but I've got to say you're kind of the worst specimen of a man I've had the luck to meet'—a

smothered curse from Massinger. 'Keep cool, Major; you'll want all your language before I'm through; guess I've brought you here,—at your own request, you know,'—he smiled,—'just to explain to you a little idea of mine, which I reckon you'll appreciate.' Mr Denver's resemblance to a cat at this moment was not reassuring to the mouse. For a moment he paused, changing his attitude, and leaning back against the wall with his hands in his pockets and his legs crossed. Massinger had taken out his revolver, and fingered it nervously.

'Nice little iron,' said Mr Denver, approvingly; 'you're a good shot, too, Major, I know.'

'Pretty fair,' said the latter, grimly.

'So much the better. We—ell now, I've been thinking a good deal 'bout you since I've had the honour of making your acquaintance, and—now don't be wild, Major—you really are—as you Britishers say—a great cad.'

A furious oath and a sudden movement forward from Massinger was as suddenly checked by the appearance of a little shining tube held straight at his head, and the imperturbable drawl resumed,—

'Guess I see you, and go one better;

presently, my dear sir, you'll have *your* chance, but just now I must beg you to sit still and hear my little exordi*um*.' A pause.

'Four years ago you married the present Mrs Massinger.'

'You blackguard, how dare you mention my wife's name?'

For the first time Dick Denver's face betrayed emotion; his mouth twitched, and a sullen fire burned slowly up into his deep-set eyes, but his voice was none the less impassive as he continued:

'I guess I've as much show; I'm a good bit fitter to talk of your wife than you are, you—you hound.' The words in the slow drawl were maddening, and this time it was Massinger's revolver that was levelled, but Mr Denver sat idly as ever, looking full at his companion, and presently the latter dropped his arm.

'Malūa, Major, Malūa! even *you* won't commit murder, you see.'—A longer hiss from the inky depth in the centre, and a thin jet of water spurted up a foot or two above the level of the ground. Mr Denver took out his watch and looked at the opening above.

'The show's beginning,' he said. Massinger

was wiping some drops of water off his trousers.

'I say,' he said excitedly, 'that water was boilin'; will it come any higher?'

'Don't alarm yourself, Major, the moon'll be up before the next demonstration.'

'What in the fiend's name has the moon got to do with it? If you think I'm goin' to stay here to be boiled for you or any other madman, I'm not takin' any, I can tell you.'

'No? Well, I guess you're *going* to stay here some, while I finish what I've got to say.—Four years ago you married the present Mrs Massinger; and I guess you've led her the life of a dog.'

'You're a liar! a d——d liar! I've never ill-used her.'

'You've never struck or kicked her, you mean, but by God, in every other way you've been a brute to her, and I reckon you've spoilt her life.'

He held the other with his look, and went on rapidly.

'I know you, Major; you're a mean, sullen, sordid cur, not fit to live with any woman, much less with *her*. We—ell! so—o I guess I've fixed up a little idea which I'm going

to explain to you right along.' Another low, soft hiss from the bottomless pit. The rays from the moon were now striking almost vertically into the cavern, on Massinger sitting motionless in an angry but half-cowed amazement, on Mr Denver again consulting his watch. He returned it to his pocket and said:

'In ten minutes from that first jet, there'll be a geyser, and if we're here I calculate we'll be boiled and carried down that hole,—I know its little ways. There's just upon six minutes left, but in three the moon'll be right above, and there'll be considerable light in the shooting gallery.'

Massinger opened his mouth, but Mr Denver went on sharply and distinctly:

'You see, Major, my idea's just this, *one* of us has got to stay right here. Now its likely you'll prefer being shot to being boiled; when I say the words "one, two, *three,*" we shall both of us fire, and if you pass out over my body you are to be congratul*a*ted. I shall shoot you if I can, because'—he paused, then very slowly, 'I guess Mrs Massinger has no kind of use for you. It's a fair and square business, Major, and you bet'—he pointed with his pistol to the bubbling,

hissing chasm—'the devil'll take the hindmost.'

Dick Denver smiled grimly as he finished his exordium—his composure was devilish; he rose, looked once up at the opening above, through which the moon was now visible directly overhead, and then stood immovable, watching his companion. The full horror of his position had at last dawned on Massinger; he was on his feet now, leaning irresolutely against the wall, with staring eyes fixed alternately upon the awful chasm between them and his opponent's set face.

'My God!' he said; 'you must be mad,—for heaven's sake, let's end this fooling.' But his ashen face showed that he knew it was no fooling, but a grim reality.

'Time's up. I shall say "one, two, *three*"; at three we fire.'

The words acted like a cold douche on Massinger; he shivered all over, then braced himself against the rock and set his teeth.

'D——n you,' he muttered, 'I'll pass out over your body yet.' Turning to bay with a wolfish glare in his eyes, he lifted his pistol.

The angry water, greedy of its prey, was hissing louder and louder between them.

'One—two—*three!*—' a double report and a hoarse, stifled cry. Mr Denver staggered back, and his hat, pierced through and through, fell from his head. Recovering himself, he threw one look over the pit to where Massinger lay motionless on his face, shot through the heart; the devil's water creeping up and brimming over the edge, nearly touched his rigid body.

'Wonder if the cuss is dead? Can't leave him to be boiled alive.' Dick sprang over the brimming, hissing gulf, and lifted the head.

'As mutton,' he said, dropping the lifeless mass. With a leap backwards, he gained the entrance, and, passing through, dashed down the hill. Once he paused, and looking back, saw a smoking jet shoot high into the moonlit sky. Some drops of boiling spray fell with a hiss on his face and hands,—Dick shivered and went on his way.

AN AFTERTHOUGHT

The first streaks of dawn were showing in the east. The long, low, white-verandahed hotel surrounded by a group of palms that

wavered unsteadily in the half-light, like a group of ghostly sentinels, was still undisturbed by the coming day. A man standing back in the shadow muttered to himself, as, glancing over his shoulder, he caught the first glow of light on the horizon. Advancing softly, with a spring, he grasped the roof of the verandah, and swung himself up lightly and noiselessly. Climbing the balcony rails, he looked for a moment along the line of French windows opening outwards, then, creeping forward, he passed through one of them into a small empty room, with a larger one adjoining it. Pausing inside, he glanced through the open door into the other room. The night had been stiflingly hot, the windows were open, and from the bed standing in the far corner the mosquito-curtains were thrown back. As his eyes fell upon the bed, Dick Denver shivered, and stood thinking.

'Better not,' he said to himself; 'it's kind of a skeery tale.' He took a piece of paper from his pocket. 'No one saw us go up,' he muttered, and grimly, 'I guess no one saw us come down.' He ran his eye over the paper.

'"I bet Mr Dick Denver the sum of £200

that I visit with him a condemned hole called 'La boîte du diable,' and stay there as long or longer than he does.

'"Play or pay.

'"Albert Massinger, October 9th, 188-.

'"Dick Denver."'

So it ran. With a pencil he scribbled a line underneath:

'Lost and paid. A. M. stays there for ever. Burn this.—D. D.'

He took out of his pocket a bundle of notes, then stole gently forward and pinned them both to the pillow of the bed where a white figure lay sleeping. Then he stood back and gazed with a wistful, yearning look in his eyes. The white-robed figure moved restlessly in its sleep, and a sigh that went straight to Dick's heart came stealing across the room. The window faced east, and the dawning light fell softly on the sweet face resting on a bare white arm, and on the fair hair trailing across the pillow. A tiny puff of sea-air floated in, and ruffled the lace falling back from the delicate throat. A mad longing seized upon Dick; he took two steps forward, then stopped irresolutely and staggered back against the wall, as a far-off mountain cry of

beast or bird was wafted in at the window, sounding in his ears like that other cry heard not long ago. It steadied him, and with a noiseless step he moved swiftly to the bed, and stooping, pressed his lips lightly to one fair tress that fell softly over neck and bosom; then he raised himself as swiftly. Without another look he passed through the window, and swinging himself over the rail, walked hurriedly through the morning mist in the direction of the pier.

Two hours afterwards, Mr Dick Denver leant against the side of the French packet 'Belle Ile' as she made steady way from the port of St Martin. His eyes were fixed on a fast-vanishing white building.

'I'm best with a new hand; there was nothing *to* that racket. But it just licks creation how I made tracks; it wasn't in the programme, anyway. Why did I? Dick, my son, why did you? . . . We—ell, 'pears to me somehow I remembered a saying: "Ye cannot get figs from thistles"; I guess that's right so,—and,' exceeding bitterly, 'who am I that I should lift my face to hers?'

ASHES

To the Inexorable, what need of incense-burning, when from the ashes of human life is ever rising a measured stream of smoke?

I, Paul Marylski, outcast and rolling stone, am sitting in my old arm-chair on this accursed English day of yours, the year of little grace 189-. Forty years have I rolled, and have gathered no moss. Body and soul am I like unto the battered old friend I sit in. In sooth, I think as I crouch here over my fire, that I am but as the dead, man without hope, without desire, without a future, without a present—can he live? Yes; for he is sitting here to-night like an old dog, with the same folds in the cheeks, and the same yearning in the eyes. A thousand curses on the Congo and its deathly fever!—but for that might I still be man with future before me, but who can stand against this devil's gnawing that never ceases?—not I, for one. I have some friends, a sweet country family, such as you have in England; they interest themselves in

me, in *me*. I am grateful. The 'mother' tells me—'Cheer up; this life is but a stage; it will soon pass—then, think of the future, the glorious after-life.' She believes in this firmly—why not? Temperament, dear lady, all temperament! I can no more believe it than I can still this clawing at my vitals. Why do I live? *Pardieu,* I know not, having had my day—and what a day! Do they not say, 'Every dog must have his day'? *Tiens,* this dog has had his, and it is that, and that alone, which keeps him alive. Even now, as I sit watching the dying embers, what pictures can I not see through the smoke that wreathes from my cigarette.

Hark! What's that? 'Carmen!' as I live, a battered hulk; 'Carmen,' and on a barrel-organ! Ah, ha! Good, for your dingy London streets—they help the picture for once.

* * * * *

I see a room, warm and light; the green blinds are drawn, the polished floor reflects the softly-shaded lights; in the centre a table loaded with things loved of the soul, and—is it the same thing, perhaps?—the palate; empty bottles—ay, even an *empty* bottle was

lovely then — betoken the end of a feast. Round the table, men, only men; but look well—ay, and look again, ye callow youths, and livers of the life of every day—not one but has his *future* or his *past*—most have both. Look at him well who rises, glass in hand, to address the company. Did ye ever see such a born leader of men, a giant, slim and tall, with eye that flashes, and drooping black moustache? He waves his hand to the waiters to leave the room, and speaks:—'*Messieurs,*' he says—in French, for is he not Christophe de Barsac, first smuggler in Marseille (or out of it, for that matter)?—'*Messieurs, le jeu est fait,*' and he drains his glass to the dregs, everyone following suit. 'It now only remains, *Messieurs,* to reckon the cost,' and he sits down. A groan goes up from around the table. There rises a tall, fat—ah! fat—man, with the invincible smile of a Russian of the Russians. As such, I, the Pole, sitting opposite, hate him—but also, you know, I love him as a brother.

'*Monsieur le President,* and gentlemen,' he goes on in English, which his soul loves as only does the soul of the man who speaks it as badly. 'We 'ave 'ad ze good time, ze

time of ze own devil, as says our good friend Kerr—r;' he rolls the r's indefinitely, and indicates with his cigar a lean, sunburnt man on his left. 'I ver' moch regret 'zat I 'ave no more money to 'ave anoyzer time of ze own devil, and zat also you 'ave none to lend me, *mais, que voulez vous, vive Monte Carlo!'* and he, too, sits down, with a supremely fatalistic shrug of those vast shoulders, and the still invincible smile. Only three men out of those nine understand English, yet a murmur of applause shows the appreciation felt for the speaker, and the sentiments conveyed in that vast and comprehensive shrug. When the applause has subsided, his neighbour, the sunburnt southerner and knight-errant, rises abruptly and says:

'That's all very well, but I guess this dinner's got to be toted up and paid for. Le'ssee how this pans out,' and he turns the contents of his pockets on to the table,—one franc twenty-five centimes. He drops them into a wine-glass, and passes it to his neighbour. Then follows a scene curious—nine men of good presence in evening dress, turning out the innermost recesses of their apparel into a wine-glass—and see, the result

is handed to the President, who counts it anxiously, after adding his own mite of two sous—'Six francs seventy-five centimes.'

At the least the dinner has cost fifteen louis. Another groan from the table.

'Tenez,' says the President, *'J'ai une idée: le petit n'a jamais joué; eh bien! Je donnerai les cinq francs au petit, et il jouera.'* Evidently *bonne idée,* for the room resounds as *le petit* is surrounded and forced forward with many an encouraging pat.

Bon Dieu! That was I! That beardless youth with the bright eyes and black hair, enjoying life as none but a Pole can enjoy, before his country has laid her curse of melancholy upon him. Twenty years is a good span of time, but it seems more than twenty hundred since De Barsac pressed those five francs into my indifferent hand, and bade me go forth and seek the price of that feast, eaten not wisely but too well. Yet even now is Gortchakow's pat heavy upon my back.

Ah, well, there he goes! passing dreamily out of the busy café, with its garish lights and constant hum, into the 'Place'—the immortal 'Place.' How well I remember it!

Did not *her* windows look on it? Every feature, graven on my brain, rises now before me. The living stream ever flowing from its four sides into those inexorable doors, the sweet scents wafted from the gardens on the left, the fantastic shadows of the palms, the strains of 'Carmen' from the band playing in the verandah, the feverish throb of humanity under those quiet and starry heavens. Who does not know the 'Place'? and, once knowing, who forgets?

There he goes, dreamily threading his solitary way across to the rooms; yet are his thoughts not with those five poor francs; they are, with his eyes, fixed on a certain window in the hotel opposite, and wondering what is the earliest hour *she* can be '*de retour.*'

But, heigh-ho! the portals are reached, and lo! one must think of that dinner. What is one five-franc piece? Truly not much, yet something in maiden hands. The rooms are full; it is the gambler's noon. *Le petit* finds himself wedged in between a swarthy Roumanian Jew, who is sowing louis broadcast '*en plein*' and '*à cheval,*' and an English lady, of undetermined age but determined spirit, who is shedding her weekly bill in five-franc

pieces. The Roumanian soweth, but he reapeth not, and he rises with a scowl and a shrug, and *le petit* slips into his seat.

He is *sitting* down with one five-franc piece. *Mon petit!* truly thou art—what one calls—very green. Yet he has watched the game before, this young bantling.

'*Quatre premier,*' he cries, and manfully throws down the fateful piece. The little white ball is already spinning with its merry rattle of life and death — it stops. '*Deux, noir, paire et manque.*' The ever-busy rake pushes over to him two louis. And now

'*Trente-quatre, trente-six, deux louis, sil vous plait.*'

The obliging croupier places them — once again the merry rattle.

'*Trente-six,*' says the sing-song voice.

'Bravo, *mon petit,* here is the price of the dinner with interest.' Prudence personified, he places fifteen louis out of the twenty-four in an inner pocket and prepares to do or die with the rest. Yes, yes, how well I remember the tall Englishman behind saying to his friend, 'Sportsman, that young beggar! I shall follow him.'

Le petit's English has been picked up on

a Straits Settlements trader, but the tall Englishman he understands and appreciates. He is playing on *rouge* now. A run of four; already by his side are piled the louis mountains high.

'*Messieurs, faites le jeu.*'

'*Cent louis, rouge.*'

'*Le jeu est fait—rouge;*' again and again, and yet again comes red, and each time *le petit* wins.

Now he is staking the limit, and winning still, the multitude wondering, with that rising murmur of praise and plaint that ever attends a big winner's fortunes. Suddenly he looks up. Standing opposite to him is a tall woman with dark eyes, lovely to behold, and she is watching him with a curious look, not of pity, not of contempt, not of passion, yet with something of all three. He starts, half rising, and makes a motion to leave the table.

'*Messieurs, faites le jeu,*'—the murmur grows.

'Follow the run up; play your luck out, sir,' says the big Englishman. *Le petit* hurriedly counts out the limit and pushes it on to *rouge*—the ball stops. '*Noir,*' drawls the croupier, in a triumphant sing-song; the run

is broken, but *le petit*, sweeping the remains of his winnings into his pocket, is no longer in his seat.

Between two goddesses can no man stand, not even the maiden wooer of the great goddess Chance, when a greater than she has claimed him.

The woman with the dark eyes moved away, but *le petit* is beside her.

''Léna, how long the day has been! But the night comes, ah, the night comes—at twelve?' She gives him one look from unfathomable eyes, that provoke, yet answer, and passes on to a seat at the next table. *Le petit*, with bowed head and unsteady step, but with a flame in his eyes, passes out into the air to render an account of his stewardship.

* * * * *

Once more the softly-lighted room. The ghost of the feast has his clutches now upon the band of revellers; yea, a gloom is upon them; even wanes the smile of Gortchakow, prince of Russian philosophers.

'*Enfin!*' says the President, and at his voice all turn, to see *le petit* come in at a side door,

and stand silent in the shadow. All eyes are upon him—surely he looks depressed.

'Zey 'ave plucked 'im, my children, zey 'ave plucked 'is one leetle feazer,' is Gortchakow's sorrowful but smiling comment.

'What luck, my son?' says the President, gravely. For answer, *le petit* opens his coat, and before nine pairs of hungry eyes he pours forth what seems a never-ending stream of gold and notes on to the table. A howl of amaze and delight bursts forth, and *le petit* is enveloped in several pairs of arms, until he wriggles out, and dives under the table, where he sits in comparative security, while the President pays the bill, divides the spoil, and delivers a homily upon '*le chance*,' rendered palatable by bumpers of champagne.

Great God! And is it only twenty years since I sat under that table?—only twenty!!

* * * * *

Once more the 'Place,' but now the hum and throb has given place to the passion-fraught stillness of the Southern night. Closed are the rooms and the cafés; the last strains of the band have died away; the croak of belated frogs, an occasional laugh, and the snatch of a

song from belated humans, are the only sounds that come to the ears of *le petit* as he wends his cautious way to the longed-for meeting. A French window opening on to a balcony, ten feet from the ground,—what is this to a sailor, under cover of the night? Now he is up, and gazing with all his eyes through the half-open window into a dimly-lighted room.

Sights fair and horrible, many, have I seen in my tempest-driven life, ay, many, but never, by the gods, have I seen sight fairer, and yet more horrible, than that which met *le petit's* fascinated gaze through those half-drawn blinds.

The figure of the loved one is stretched on the couch, dreaming, with look of expectation and delight in the half-closed eyes.

Dark with all the passions, scowling malignant, a face glares from a shrouded corner of the room upon that white-robed form. Passionate love, passionate hate, passionate jealousy—who shall say what is in that face? Enough surely to bind *le petit* with the spell of a nameless terror.

The figure moves forward noiselessly out of the shadow. Ah! One knows him now! This is he whom most she dreads; he who,

not husband, nor lover accepted, pursues her with vows, with threats, with all that there is of jealous passion; to whom, despite of fear, repulsion, dread, some mysterious tie binds her. *Le petit* gazes—so he is there, that ogre, ah! And certainly he knows, that monster, of the expected visitor—he has read it in the passion of her eyes, upon her dumb but parted lips.

It is destiny—so much the better; once for all we will end all this.

The figure creeps forward, with raised hand clenched.

Le petit steps in from the balcony.

''Léna,' he says, and with his finger points.

She rises at the sound of his voice, and turning sees; then with a little cry of terror she comes to his arms for protection. That was like her. Afterwards, when *le petit* wanted those white arms that hung around his neck —wanted them sorely in his sick estate, nigh unto death,—did she bring them then? Bah! All women are alike! and yet not all—not all.

Is that a devil that rages before one, foaming at the mouth?—Ah! no, only Juan Costello, a very evil-looking person!

'My compliments to you, Monsieur, but this lady and myself wish to talk *affaires;* will Monsieur have the kindness to withdraw?'

Truly he is *canaille*, with his villainous tongue and his villainous eyes—also he makes a great noise, until they come and take him away; altogether it is a very stupid and common affair, pah!—Well, well, it is a long time ago, and a little noise more or less doesn't matter to me now.

Also *le petit* goes forth; and there is rage—a bitter, black rage—in his heart.

How slowly wing the hours away till the morning light—those hours of disappointment and burning hate. That dog! One will kill him with the first light. -- The little bay near Cabbé Roquebrune—that little bay that recalls so greatly the far-away lagoons of the blessed South Seas.

Too good a resting-place for such a hound —far too good—yet it will serve.

Up and down, up and down, never still through the long night hours, head awhirl, eyes aflame. Bad training, my child, for the morning's meeting.

Who cares? It is fate—his death at my hands is written in those stars that shine so

steadily, so inexorably, above, in that dome of destiny.

Ah! There it is at last, that streak of light—omen of wrath and blood, dull, and red, and angry streak. '*Tant mieux!*' Certainly there will be sport.

At last the little bay—and at the water's edge the little tideless waves are whispering joyfully, and they are as glad as *le petit*, for this is a scene they love.

There he comes! he is glad, too—good—everything goes well.

'You know these things, my friend; tell me where shall I hit him to kill?'

'I reckon you're a kind of a spitfire. Take the cuss under the arm, as he stands sideways, and keep your own elbow low.'

Ah! My friend, thou art an artist, and valued as such, but, when the blood surges and sings in the head, words count for little.

So I can see his hated face glaring at me above his pistol, the flames from our eyes are meeting. Ah, me! goodness and strength are gone out of me with that glance—pity to spend so much good hatred on a cur like that.

Yet 'tis not for long! and now . . . 'tis all over, and they are carrying *le petit* back from the regretful waters. And some time—when was it? who knows?—he drags himself to sea again, and the page is closed. And what of the other, that hound? And of her? Again, who knows?—Ah, yes, I have still the pain of that wound, but not greatly.

Well! well! a long time ago,—and it was but a page. Come, turn over.

Nay, not even the strength for that; thou hast had thy dose of life for the day, and the barrel-organ is gone, and thou art tired, and the fire is low, and the cigarette—pouf—it is but ashes.

Two figures stood on the edge of the stream of traffic which flows unceasingly along Piccadilly in the dusty forenoons of the season. They stood with their eyes blinking watchfully in the sun that glared with a friendly and altogether satisfying glare upon the stone pavement. The one was the figure of a small boy; his legs were planted firmly apart, and a wide-brimmed straw hat was set sturdily on the very back of his head. A very small, very brown-faced boy was he, with round blue eyes, and hair fair almost to whiteness; rising a stout five, and his name—for the purposes of this chronicle—was 'Tally Ho.' The other was the presentment of a silent and melancholy Hindu, with a black beard, and turbaned head of a dusky mahogany; lean, and white-clothed, he stood slightly behind, in an attitude of respectful protection.

They gazed curiously at the changing, throbbing flow of Western energy, and ever and again the flow glanced over its shoulder in its ceaseless, and apparently objectless, quest, to wonder in its turn at those two strange figures from an unknown and far-off land, washed up high and dry on the edge of the stream.

'De big fire is velly hot,'—Tally Ho always called the sun the big fire—'as hot as Inja, doesn't 'oo tink, Kotah Lal?'

'If Tally Ho Sahib say, then so it is; yet it is in his servant's mind that in India there were even days when Tally Ho Sahib called that they should put the big fire out, and greatly pull the punkah, and, as the Sahib knows, there be no punkahs this side of the big water.'

'My mislemembers,' said Tally Ho. 'What do 'ose memsahibs goin' lound on de wheels, dey're velly ugly, dey makle my's head ache—tell dem to 'top, Kotah Lal,' and he indicated with a stumpy brown forefinger two dashing young females on the inevitable bicycle.

'They go thus because after them comes a big bad god, and so perchance they will escape,' said Kotah Lal, with a glimmer of a smile on his impassive features.

'For why are deir leggies one on each side?' said the irrepressible Tally Ho loudly, as another dame flew by; 'it is not so in my country; are de wheels alive, Kotah Lal?'

'It may be so; thy servant is a stranger in this land, Sahib, where all men seem possessed of devils, so fast they run to do naught all the day long. But the Doctor Sahib on the big ship did tell me that in this country there be a great and bad spirit called Indi-Gesti-Un, who pursues men to their undoing, so that they run ever faster to escape.'

'Where does he live, Kotah Lal?' said Tally Ho, concernedly.

Kotah Lal placed his hand upon the regions of his middle, and smiled mournfully. This seemed to supply Tally Ho with a fresh idea.

'Kotah Lal,' he said suddenly, thrusting his small brown fists deeply into the pockets of his holland knickers, 'what is dere for my's tiffin? Is dere cully and lice, allee samee as on de big ship?'

'The Sahib commanded and the order has gone forth; without doubt there be these things for the Sahib's lunch.'

'Velly dood, my tinks my's empty.' Tally

Ho withdrew one hand from his pocket, and passed it meditatively over his small stomach. 'Which is de way, Kotah Lal?'

'It will be necessary to walk down the market of the dried grasses, and through the square where are the four great lions that the Sahib looked upon with favour yesterday, to where the trains run in the smokey black hole under the ground. So said the Sahib in the blue clothes of whom I asked anon.'

'Tum on,' said Tally Ho; 'my's *velly* empty, my wiss Foo Ching was in Ingeliland; he made exkullent dood chow-chow; my loves Foo Ching, Kotah Lal.'

Foo Ching, the Chinese cook of the steamer which had two days before achieved the honour of safely bearing from India, and landing one 'Tally Ho,' baptismally known as Geoffrey Standing Blount, was that young man's latest bosom friend, and at that time mainly responsible for the eccentricities of his speech.

'My wiss my was corpington (corpulent), like Foo Ching; Foo Ching was velly nice and corpington, and my's *velly* empty.'

Tally Ho, who usually carried his head loftily, drooped it to contemplate mournfully his small person, and in so doing butted it

into the stomach of an elderly commercial hurrying to his mid-day meal.

'My begs 'oor pardon,' said Tally Ho, pained but polite, raising his hat and rubbing his snub nose. The commercial, with soul intent on the undercut, paid no attention, but hurried on. 'Oos a lude man,' said Tally Ho, indignantly; 'a velly lude man.' He stared reproachfully after him up the street till the stream had swallowed him up.

In time, and by dint of much circuitous marching and counter-marching, escaping with many a dodge and device the rumbling onslaught of 'busses, and the 'scorching' attack of bicycles, they reached the black hole known to the Westerns as Charing Cross Station. The interview between Kotah Lal and the ticket clerk ended satisfactorily in his obtaining tickets for not more than two stations further than their destination. Armed with these, the Hindu secured Tally Ho by the arm, and descended gravely to the platform.

'Dlefful 'tuffy,' commented Tally Ho, with a sniff of disgust; 'my wantee tum scent on my's hankeychoo.'

'Let the Sahib abide but a moment in patience

—here cometh the panting one with the fiery eye.'

A train drew up, they got into an empty carriage, and, as Tally Ho remarked, 'de Injun blewed its nose,' and 'shaking its head,' went on its way towards the west. Now it is not to be peculiarly remembered against Kotah Lal that upon this stifling afternoon he was inclined to doze, bearing in mind that for two nights, being cumbered with the duties of arrival, he had not slept,—moreover, the fact that within two minutes of entering the train he fell into a deep and dreamless slumber, he himself has since been heard to explain as a particular and malicious visitation of the Evil One.

Before Westminster Bridge was reached Tally Ho had exhausted the fascinations of the carriage, and was become unfeignedly bored.

'My will wait till de tlain 'tops,' he thought, 'and ask Kotah Lal if my may det down and 'peak to Blown.'

Brown, a particular friend of his, was an engine-driver on the little one-horse line that ran past his home in the North-West Provinces. The train pulled up with a jerk at the station, and Tally Ho turned to proffer

his request, but a gently ecstatic snore from the turbaned head in the opposite corner warned him that his protector was far away in the Land of Nod.

'Poo'ah Kotah Lal,' said Tally Ho compassionately, 'he's velly sleepy, my will not wakle him up.' This he said consideringly, having in his small mind the semi-conviction that it might be better *not* to ask for his protector's leave in this matter. 'My tinks,' pursued Tally Ho, 'Blown will be wanting my.'

He moved towards the door, but at this moment the train resumed its grimy way, and burrowed once more into the bowels of the city. Tally Ho paused, his small fist on the handle.

'My will wait,' he said, 'till de silly tlain 'tops again.'

He amused himself by turning and re-turning the handle, putting his whole soul into the operation, and missing being projected into a murky space by the dispensation of a merciful Providence, and the skin of his tiny white teeth. The train emerged into the light, and pulled up again in the open space just eastward of St James's Park Station. Kotah Lal snored peacefully.

'My's velly good not to wakle him,' mused Tally Ho, as he slid out of the carriage and bumped on his little seat to the ground. 'My will 'peak clossly to Blown—dis is a baddy tlain.'

He frowned as he picked himself up, and, shaking himself, took his grubby way almost under the train towards the engine. The engine-driver was looking ahead and turning on steam as Tally Ho caught him in profile.

'*It's not Blown*,' he gasped, astonished, and the train moved on past a gaping atom of humanity.

''Top, 'top, you baddy tlain, my says 'top!' But the train stopped not, and went on its way rejoicing into the cleaner parts of the city, bearing with it an unconsciously slumbering Hindu.

Now the word 'tears' had not been in Tally Ho's vocabulary this many a day.

'Baddy tlain,' he said, ''t has runned away wid my's Kotah Lal,' forgetting, perchance, that it was Tally Ho that had first deserted the train, and not the train Tally Ho. 'My will catchee it!'

His small legs twinkled rapidly down the line of the train. But the train had the start, and was flourishing out of St James's Park

Station at the one end as Tally Ho trotted into it at the other. He laboured up the steep incline on to the platform as the tail light was swallowed up in the opposite blackness. Tally Ho stopped, at a loss what to do.

'Velly baddy tlain,' he panted, 'my—' here a small mustard Dandie Dinmont sniffed at his legs. 'Oh! *what* a nice doggie!' said Tally Ho, with characteristic irrelevance, and stooped to pat it. A whistle sounded, the Dandie trotted away obediently, and Tally Ho trotted after in hot pursuit. The platform was disgorging a stream of passengers, and Tally Ho, his mind and eye fixed on the dog, passed the ticket collector, unchecked, at the skirt of a stout middle-aged female.

'Hi,' said the collector, 'hi, lydy,—ticket for the youngster, please.'

'What youngster?' said the indignant lady.

'That there youngster of yourn, in the holland breeks.'

The owner thereof was now well up the staircase, and twinkling over the bridge in pursuit of the Dandie.

'You impident person!' said the choleric dame, 'holland breeks indeed!'

'Now then, ma'am, don't you give me none

of your bluff—holland breeks it is, and a smudgy seat at that,—py up please, if you y'nt got no ticket.'

'But I tell you I haven't got any children; I'm a single woman; you must be intoxicated, collector.'

'Go it, breeks!' came a voice from the half-amused and half-impatient crowd.

'That'll do, ma'am, that'll do,' said the collector, majestically; 'your name and address, if *you* please.'

'Certainly,' bellowed the now infuriated female, 'certainly. Maria James, 4 Smith Square; and I'll take good care you're not a collector of this company for long. Holland breeks indeed!'

'You see,' mused the collector to the crowd, as he took the remaining tickets, 'it tykes 'em this w'y sometimes—these 'ere *single* femyles.'

Now in the meantime the 'disturber of traffic,' having said to himself, 'my wants to pat that doggie,' had to his great disgust only arrived at seeing the object of his desires lifted into a cab, and whirled from before his eyes, at the gates of St James's Park. This was enough to damp the spirits of a hero. Tally Ho entered the park with a momentarily dejected

step, and wandered on to the bridge; but there his dejection ceased, for below him, swimming in circles, in semi-circles, in parabolas, in zig-zags, were ducks—ducks more sleek and beautiful than any he had ever beheld, and fat—words could not describe the nature of their fatness. Tally Ho sank on his knees, stuck his head through the girders, and gazed. His affections particularly rivetted themselves on two small bronze-green ducks taking first lessons in diving from an attentive parent.

'My wantles *dem*,' said Tally Ho, joyfully and loudly, through the girders, to the intense astonishment of a military-looking old gentleman, from between whose legs the words arose.

'Gawd bless me! What's that?'

'My wantles 'oo for each of my's tlowser's pottets,' bellowed Tally Ho across the water to the ducks.

'Gawd bless me! It's the ducks the boy wants,' commented the ancient warrior, stepping with much care clear of Tally Ho, and noting the direction of his gestures. At this precise instant Tally Ho withdrew his head from between the girders and scrambled on to his feet, and as he did so his eye lighted on

the stranger whose elderly but martial form he had been doing his level best to upset.

'Salaam, Genelal Sahib,' he said, saluting affably and without embarrassment, 'my is Tally Ho—my wantles dose ducks.'

The General saluted in turn, screwed a gold-rimmed eyeglass carefully into his eye, stroked his grizzled moustache, and gazed curiously at his interlocutor.

'Tan my have dose two nickle gleeny-blown ducks?' said Tally Ho, pointing into the water, and pulling abstractedly at the General's grey frock coat.

''Tenshun,' said the latter, and Tally Ho dropped his hands mechanically to his side, and drew himself up with his feet at a correct 45 degrees. 'Now, then, what d'ye want the ducks for, heh?'

The 'heh' was rather alarming, but Tally Ho passed it by unconcernedly.

'Oos velly like my Daddy,' he remarked with condescension; 'but my wantles dose ducks to takle home in my's pottets,' he continued, reverting to business.

'Bless the boy! But you can't have those ducks; they belong to the Queen!'

'Dod bless her!' said Tally Ho, raising his

hat abstractedly, for his attention had wandered to the stick with the skull handle in the General's hand. 'Velly plitty 'tick,' he murmured to himself, 'my will walkle wid 'oo, if 'oos not tired,' he added aloud considerately to the stranger.

'Gawd bless me!' said the dumfoundered General. 'He'd take command of a division for two pins! Gentleman though—Indian—know the breed. Wonder who he is—seems lost—never mind, take him along—pump him—no fool. Come along Mr--Tally Ho, Sir; eyes front, quick march.'

Tally Ho made one manful endeavour to compass the General's stride, and then relapsed philosophically into a regular two for one. He had quite forgotten the ducks, he wanted that stick so badly to carry over his shoulder like a rifle. After completing the length of the bridge, side by side with the General, and cogitating silently, Tally Ho saluted, and said:

'*Ettafakhan* de Genelal Sahib finds de 'tick velly heavy.'

'Gawd bless me! Persian! Very talented boy, great diplomatist—*Ettafakhan,*" he continued aloud to Tally Ho (the which is the

Persian for 'peradventure'), and without another word transferred the stick to his small and grubby fist. The latter, too well bred to show the transports of joy swelling in his small bosom, halted, salaamed profoundly, and after hugging the stick, which was at least as tall as himself, heaved it over his shoulder, and marched manfully on. The General was an old man; he stooped slightly and walked slowly, and his eyes, that looked like those of an old dog, gazed curiously ever and anon from under his shaggy eyebrows at the small brown urchin tramping at his side. They reached the gates of the park before he had in the least made up his mind what course to pursue with this strange little mortal. As they were crossing the Mall towards St James's Palace, a new idea struck Tally Ho; he halted suddenly, stuck the stick into the ground, and leaning on it, looked around him with a self-satisfied air.

'My's losted,' he announced.

The General, in rapt amazement at the calmness of this remark, halted also, and a hansom, sweeping by, nearly ran over his toes, and knocked off Tally Ho's hat with the edge of its wheel.

'Damned scoundrels!' muttered the exasperated warrior below his breath, 'plucky boy, though—near thing. . . . All right, heh?'—this to Tally Ho, who was contemplating a large splash of mud on the crown of his hat.

'My's noo 'at!' he said, ruefully.

'Never mind your hat s'long's *you're* all right, heh? That's it! Come along.' A bright idea struck him. 'Are you hungry? Course he is, all boys hungry. Gawd bless me! what was I thinking of? Come and have some tiffin at my club, Mr—Tally Ho, sir.'

'Tank'oo, my will be *dee*lighted, my's *velly* empty,' said Tally Ho, frankly and cheerfully.

'Course you are. Come along, sir, come along.'

As the oddly assorted couple took their way down Pall Mall, the passers-by turned to stare. The sentries at Marlborough House saluted—Tally Ho appropriated and returned the salutes with a pre-occupied air—he was thinking now of the General's white hat, and of how he desired it greatly to keep his mongoose 'Bengy' in—he was sure he had seen little windows in the top of it. 'Perhaps the Genelal Sahib will takle it off again, and

sclatchle his head as Blown does sometimes, den my will see,' he reflected.

Now they had arrived at the corner of St James's Square, and the sweet-faced old sweeper at the crossing had made her double-barrelled bob to the sunburnt, white-haired veteran and the sun-browned, white-haired child. At the steps of a great service club the General halted, and took off his hat to mop his brow, for the day was hot, and his mind was perplexed.

'Yes, sir,' he said aloud to himself, 'boy's hungry—tiffin first, pump afterwards. Gawd bless me! What's that?' For Tally Ho, swelling with joy of verification, was threading his thumbs through the vent-holes of the white hat, and saying to himself with subdued emphasis:

'My will makle two mores, *eke oper eke*' (one upon the top of the other).

'Devil you will!' said the General, and feeling from the absorption of his guest's eye that no time was to be lost, he hastily replaced his hat, and extended two fingers to assist Tally Ho up the steps.

'No t'ank 'oo,' said the latter; 'my will runle up.' He proceeded to mount the stairs

on all-fours, and sat on the top step at the feet of the hall porter, awaiting the arrival of his distinguished but disconcerted host.

'Gawd bless me! regular young budmâsh (rogue)—fine fellow, though—very fine fellow! Heh! Wilkins!' he said, with a perplexed twirl of his moustache, to the unmoved janitor.

'New member, General, or friend of yours only, sir? What name shall I enter, General?'

'This gentleman will tiffin with me, Wilkins. Name, heh! what?—Quite so. Mr—Tally Ho, sir,' he said, turning to Tally Ho, who with his hat off was examining the tape machine in the hall with an interested eye, 'the servant wishes to know your name, so that he may put it in the visitors' book. What shall I tell him?'

'Geoffley Standin' Blount,' returned Tally Ho. His knees were grubby, his hat was torn, his seat was dusty, but he looked very much of a gentleman.

'Mr Geoffrey Standing Blount, Wilkins,' said the General with dignity. The smile flickering into Wilkins' eye flickered out again, and he turned to the visitors' book. The General led the way to the lavatory past a

group of younger men in the hall, who greeted him with respectful if amused recognition. Tally Ho, smiling affably, followed him. Arrived at the lavatory, he looked with a pleased anticipation at the row of basins, for though of tender years, soap and water were after his heart. He was feeling hot and dusty, the taps ran so nicely, and—that was all, alas!—impossible to reach those basins, those nicely flowing taps —so he stood in the middle and waited while the General washed, politely silent, but feeling his inches, or want of inches, keenly. At last he said, 'My's nickle, but my's growin'!' An apology for his host's want of thought was in the last words.

'Gawd bless me—boy's too small—can't reach —never thought of that—dear, dear!' He tugged at his moustache in great concern. 'Hi! you boot-boy,' he shouted, 'bring a chair, two chairs, help the gentleman up, hi! you fool, hold the slack of the gentleman's trousers, can't you, while he washes;' for Tally Ho in a transport of joy was taking a header into the basin. The remainder of his toilet was carefully attended to by the boot-boy, under the General's anxious supervision.

When it was completed, and Tally Ho was

once more presentable, they ascended to the dining-room—Tally Ho for once on his two feet, and conducting himself with a vast propriety. It was a little after the ordinary luncheon hour when the General finally anchored his guest, contrary to all laws and precedents, in the club dining-room. An old crony of his was finishing his lunch in one of the windows; next to him the General, greatly in want of support, took his stand, and having caused his guest to be lifted into his seat, abstractedly handed him a menu card. Tally Ho perused it gravely after the manner of a man accustomed to these things, and handing it to the waiter, remarked:

'My will have cully and lice,'—he paused, debating gravely, 'and plummers,' he added, with a note of triumph in his voice.

The General twirled his moustache.

'Curry and rice for this gentleman, plums afterwards—fried sole for me. Boy of decision,' he continued, approvingly to himself. 'Knows his own mind.' He looked at the card. 'Gawd bless me! not on the menu, either of them—'course, can't read—how should he?—never mind, finer fellow than I thought—man of resource.' He turned to the crony. 'How do,

Morant?' he said—'married man, just the man I want—stand by to support me, heh?' He nodded imperceptibly in the direction of Tally Ho.

'Certainly, my dear fellow,' said the intelligent crony, 'make me known.'

'Colonel Morant — Mr Geoffrey Standing Blount.'

Tally Ho, whose round blue eyes were fixed immovably on the face of the waiter, greatly to the discomfiture of that youthful but solemn personage, turned and twinkled friendlily at his new acquaintance, but his mind was too agitated by the question then troubling it for more than a passing attention to other matters.

'For why isn't he black?' he said in a loudly audible but awestricken whisper to the General, pointing with his chin at the unfortunate. 'My foughted all club waiters was black.'

'This is England, sir, not India; here they're red, you know,' said the General, blandly, with a chuckle. 'It's like lobsters, red in hot water; ain't it, Morant?'

His eyes followed the vanishing form of the young waiter flying to hide the blushes spreading over his disconcerted countenance.

'Oh!' said Tally Ho, polite but unconvinced.

'The point,' said the General, after a pause, turning to his supporter. 'The point is this —given small boy—gentleman—lost—name Geoffrey Standing Blount—new to England.'

'Dat's my,' said Tally Ho to himself softly in parenthesis.

'Guest of mine,' continued the General, 'don't want to pump him—point is, how to find his belongings, heh?' He wound up abruptly.

'Where was he met with?' said the crony. He was head of a county constabulary, and great on detective detail. 'The time and place?' Mechanically he took out a pocket-book.

'Ducks—St James's Park—one thirty.'

Tally Ho stared from one to the other; were they talking of him? He inclined to think so.

'My's losted,' he said to the crony; 'my's Daddy's Number One mud-and-water soldier in de Deyra Dhun.'

At this precise moment his curry arrived, and no further information did he volunteer, for, as he had remarked, he was 'velly empty.'

'I have it,' said the crony, 'waiter! fetch me an Army List. Number One mud-and-water soldier is pigeon-English for commanding engineer. Here you are,' he continued, triumphantly, 'R.E. Majors, Blount, F. Standing. India.'

'India,' said the General, 'hum. Large place—and this is England.'

'His bankers,' said the crony, 'probably Cox's; waiter, fetch me a commissionaire, we'll send him round and find out.'

'Bravo,' said the General, 'invaluable fellow, brilliant idea—that's it, young man,' he turned approvingly to Tally Ho, 'wire in.'

'Exkullent dood chow-chow, nearly as dood as Foo Ching's,' responded Tally Ho. He was again oblivious of the fact that he was in process of being found, and was devoting himself in the intervals of luncheon to smiling sweetly at the waiter, whose feelings he was innocently conscious had been in some sort wounded. 'Are 'oo feelin' all light again?' he said sympathetically, ''oo 'tant help not bein' black, tan 'oo?'

The waiter cast one beseeching look around him, and fled precipitately, leaving a trail of blushes behind.

'Poor mans,' said Tally Ho, 'perwaps de big fire has strokled him; he *is* velly led, isn't he, Genelal Sahib?'

'All right, my boy, all right,' said the General, choking. He turned to the crony, who was smiling gravely. 'Wonderful boy,' he said, *sotto voce*, 'make fine soldier—splendid touch—considers feelings of his men.'

'Rather a curious way of doing so,' said the crony, glancing with a twinkle in his eye at the door through which the waiter had disappeared.

'All same—good intention,' said the General.

But Tally Ho had entirely forgotten waiter, lunch, and hosts, in the contemplation of a new problem connected with the giant fireplace, which was crammed with plants.

'It's all tommy lot,' he said abruptly to himself, climbing down from his chair and walking straight up to the fireplace. 'Kotah Lal said dere was allerways fires in Ingeliland, but dere isn't, and dere never wasn't, 'cos dese would be burntled.'

'Gawd bless me!' said the General, 'wonderful!—splendid soldier he'll make—good reasonin' power—fine forcible vocabulary.'

'I should apply for a commission for him

to-morrow if I were you,' said the crony, drily.

'So I will,' said the General, 'hum—well—not quite yet—but keep my eye on him.'

Tally Ho came back to the table, and stood waiting at attention. The two men rose.

'Has 'oo finished?' said Tally Ho, 'tum along, my wantles my's cigar.'

'It seems that your protégé has his vices as well,' said the crony, as they went downstairs. In the hall the commissionaire handed him an address. He looked at it triumphantly. 'Major Blount's London reference,' he said.

'Capital,' said the General, 'I'll send round at once—sure to know all about him there.'

He did so, then ordered coffee and cigars, and settled himself and his guest in armchairs. Tally Ho's feet, when he sat back, just reached the edge of the chair.

'My's daddy,' he said, 'dives my one puffle of his cigars—Kotah Lal, my's *sais,* 'mokes, but my doesn't takle puffles from a *sais*,' he added, proudly.

The General twinkled all over his war-worn face, took his cigar from his mouth and handed it to Tally Ho. The latter grasped it gingerly between his small brown finger and thumb, and

applied it to his mouth, which it completely filled. Holding it firmly, and sitting well back, with his chair tilted up, he took one long diligent draw, then with his cheeks puffed out he gave it solemnly back to the General. Slowly and rapturously he let the smoke escape, and watched it curl up to the ceiling in little puffs and rings. When it was all expended, he snuggled his small fair head back amongst the cushions.

'It allerways makles my sleepy,' he said apologetically, and his head was nodding already. 'Dood night, 'tank de Number One up aloft Sahib for my's goody day—but my wantled dose gleeny-blown ducks baddy.' Here he heaved a serene little sigh, and snuggled still further into the recesses of the chair. 'My's lost-ed,' he murmured contentedly, as his chin fell on to his chest, and he slept. A sunbeam flitted in through the blinds on to his dusty flaxen pate. The General leant forward.

'All serene, my young friend,' he said softly, 'before you wake again we'll have that careless beggar of a *sais* of yours by the heels, and you'll be "losted" no more. And mark my words, Morant,' he went on, flicking the ash off his cigar, 'when we're done for, and stacked

with the majority, that tow-headed young bud-mâsh 'll be as great, ay, a greater soldier than either of us ; we shan't know it—stacked, heh ?—but the country will. One of us goes, but there's always another fellow ready to take his place, thank the Lord.'

'*Eke oper eke*,' muttered Tally Ho in his dreams.

THE DOLDRUMS

'The breeze would have saved him, you know,' said the mate.

Out of a cloudless sky,
Into a sapphire sea,
To the tune of a windless sigh,
That is drawn in the tops'les three,
The sun sinks fast thro' a burning haze
To the heart of the sapphire sea.

Over the shadowed deep,
Topped with an oily swell,
To the hours of the night asleep
In the chime of her muffled bell
The spent ship prays—and her spirit fails,
On the heave of the sullen swell.

. . . .

Fanning the crimson flare
Lit by the coming dawn,
Thro' the hush in the breathless air
Of the night that is past and gone,
The wind speeds swift to the weary sails,
In a song of the coming morn.

But away from the stifled ship,
Fleeter than any wind,
With a kiss on the twisted lip
Of the face that she leaves behind,
A breath steals forth—and the wind but plays
On a mask that is left behind.

Six bells clanged the dawning of the last hour in the midnight watch. I dropped my cards, for it was the peculiar custom to stop whist just as the bell sounded.

'Time up!' said the Captain regretfully, mopping his brow, 'How do we stand, Jenny?'

His wife's voice—'Eight and three eleven, and four'—rose in a vinegary triumph of addition from across the saloon table, to culminate in an emphatic 'Fifteen points.'

'Good! I rather think that's the best night yet, sir.—Bed, Jenny. Good-night, gentlemen. A hot night, an't it?'

'Good-night, Captain!' Good-night, Mrs Cape! Coming on deck, Jaques?'

'No!' said my partner, 'bed for this child, g'night;' and murmuring a disgusted 'Fifteen points—and the vinegar—and the heat—phew!' he shut his cabin door with a jerk.

I climbed the stern hatchway, and joined the three men lounging against the skylight on the poop. The moon hung hazily between the softly flapping sails of the idling ship. Out of the deadly calm waters a little purposeless heave rocked her ever and anon to this side and that, and the old shellback at the useless wheel whistled softly to himself, as he looked vainly for the ship's wake in the oily tropical ocean.

The Southern Cross dipped afar on the port quarter, and innumerable stars spangled the stilly depths of the dark heavens. The curiously dissonant miaul of the focs'le cat hit the ear, through the sultry stifling air, with a sense of the relieved ridiculous.

'Dosé fallows you know' (he pronounced it 'gnau'), said the mate in his slightly nasal, foreign accent, evidently resuming, 'its very curious you know, dey rrāally haven't anny feelings.'

'Do you mean, they feel no emotions, as we understand the word?' said young Raymond impatiently, his intolerance of human beings so constituted ringing in the high-pitched tones of his clear voice.

'Not a blessed one!' said a third voice from

the ship's side, shrill and worn, 'Yellow devils! Yellow devils! they've only one virtue.'

'And that, Doctor?'

'Opium, sirree. They're tolerable, when they're opium drunk.'

The mate looked up sharply, and with his brown, almond-shaped Slav eyes scrutinized keenly the dim figure of the speaker, and his mouth, between the close-trimmed pointed beard and drooping moustaches, took a more than usually cynical and mournful curve.

'You are severe, Doctor,' he said; but the other, without answering, turned away, and leaned over the bulwark wearily.

'Ah! that is bad, you know,' I heard the mate say to himself under his breath.

'Yes,' said the shrill voice presently from the darkness, 'you may have seen 'em and you may talk about 'em, but you don't *know* them. You've not worked in China Town amongst John Chinaman, as I've worked. I guess you've not seen 'em born, and die, and marry, as I've seen them. Ugh! devils—devils—hog-skinned, slit-eyed devils!'

'It is all tempérrament, you know,' said the mate, 'dosé fallows, you know, they are different all through, it is not a question of

degree. A white man will never understand how their minds wōrrk. Will you have a cigarette, Doctor?' He watched the thin face and trembling hand closely, and shook his head, as the Doctor turned back with his lighted cigarette to the ship's side.

'It is bad, you know,' he muttered again to himself. Young Raymond had strolled to the wheel, and was standing talking cheerily to the helmsman; the heat seemed to have no effect on his buoyant spirits. I, stretched on a locker, fanned myself lazily with the mate's cap, and the mate himself sat in his favourite attitude with his hands clasping his knees, his chin sunk on his chest.

Presently the Doctor began to talk again, more to himself than to us.

'What a night!' he said. 'What a ghastly, hellish, stifling night! Look at that oily pond, can't you feel the heat lifting out of it into your face. I used to think nothing could lick the Queensland bush, but, Great Lordy! this is worse, many points worse; there was always a kind of a breeze there and some stir of life, but this flat, oily waste—Oh! for a breath of air. I can't breathe; I tell you, Armand, I can't breathe.' He turned round

blooming monopoly.' The sunny ring of his voice through the jaded night was as refreshing as a breeze, but the Doctor only said moodily:

'Yes, my friend, but I guess you weren't fried to start with, there was still some English juice in you; *you* haven't been spread-eagled on a gridiron for seven years till everything's been sucked out of you,—even sleep.'

'Thank the Lord,' said young Raymond in fervent tones, as he threw his head back, and snuffed at an imaginary breeze, 'I can always sleep.'

'Sleep!' echoed the Doctor shrilly, and his thin scarecrow of a figure writhed against the railing of the bulwark, 'I havn't slept for *weeks,* —I'm going home, *home,* I tell you, after seven God-forsaken years, but I'd give it all, and chuck in the rest of my life, for twenty-four hours of natural sleep.'

At the word 'natural' the mate shifted uneasily in his seat, and his foot beat a tatoo incessantly on the deck.

'There will be trouble,' he said softly, 'big trouble, unless we get the wind, you know. Come, my dear fallow,' he went on to the Doctor, 'what is the matter with you to-night, you were not even amuséd with the Wray baby—oh!' he

laughed with a sudden unrestrained merriment curious to listen to in that sultry, joyless air, 'that is an interésting little ānimal. Did you see Cotter fill it with plum-duff at dinner, and Mrs Wray opposite laughing all the time, you know, and little Wray looking 'orrifiéd,—ah-ha! and the little ānimal likéd it, you know,' his laughter died out as suddenly, and he gazed at the Doctor with his mournful eyes,—the eyes of a man who has been to the edge of the world many times, and looking over—come back again.

'You are hipped to-night, you are quite dull you know. Tell us a yarn of John Chinaman; he has a most curious individuāility, annyway.'

There was silence a moment, then the spanker boom creaked slightly from pure inaction, as floors creak in houses at the dead of night, and a spark from the mate's cigarette floated straight upwards in the dead air; then came a weird, droning sing-song whisper from the bulwarks.

'Once upon a time,' it said, 'there was a poor devil of a doctor, whose lot it became after many wanderings to minister for his living, in an oven, to the extremities of John Chinaman, whereby he learnt many things,—for instance, that it was good to eat puppy-dog and go un-

shaven, that there was no such thing as right or wrong, beauty or ugliness, cleanliness or dirt, heaven or hell,—that there was no end to the miseries of the white man, and neither end nor beginning to the miseries of the yellow man. But also,'—the whisper almost died away, 'he learnt one supreme good, '*το καλὸν*,' that without which man withers—life has no taste, no colour, no scent,—the great, the glorious—My God! O my God!!' The voice from the faintest whisper rose suddenly to a scream. With a spring young Raymond's lithe white-clothed figure was by the Doctor's side, his arm round his neck.

'Steady, dear old boy!' he said.

The meaning of those muttered sayings had suddenly been rendered plain, and the mate stood leaning forward with his long arms half stretched towards the Doctor. The melancholy fatalism of his face, that outcome of his Slav blood, was veiled by a look of sorrowful concern.

'Ohé!' he said, 'Ohé! tck tck——'

As for me, I moved swiftly to the wheel, and stood between the group of men and the helmsman, speaking to him at random, in the instinctive dread of what was coming next on the shrill tones that lifted themselves behind me.

'Yes!' said the worn voice, 'look at me!—look at me!—what am I? What have I sunk to? I, who was even as you,—public school—'Varsity—Bart's—What's the use of it all? Look at us, I say, look'—he clutched with one hand the arm thrown about him; and as if answering the hysterical cry, the moonlight streamed from behind the main tops'le, with a cruel suddenness, full on to the two men. It lit up the bright, fresh face and yellow hair of the one,—tall and lithe and radiantly white—and threw into a ghastly relief the other,—long, shrunken and shambling, with his twisted yellow face and sunken hunted eyes, with the little brown streak at the corner of the thin distorted mouth, the lank discoloured hair, the writhing, skeleton hands. He cowered as the light fell upon him, and buried his head like a child on young Raymond's shoulder.

When I turned again, old Carey, the Shellback, was looking steadily at the deck, and, contrary to all orders, spitting vigourously upon it.

'Fact is we'm tu fur tu the East; yu zee, zurr, these y'er ca'ms is all along o' that.'

What answer I made to the soft West-country drawl I know not, because it is be-

wildering to hear a man's sobs drawn under hard pressure against a linen coat. Then the mate was speaking.

'Come down to your bunk, my dear fallow, it will be āll right, you know; I will give you some things to make you sleep.'

'Sleep!' came out of the sobs, as a voice might come out of a grave, on to which the earth was being shovelled, 'My God!—if I could sleep *without* . . . Armand, for pity's sake make me sleep—'

'There! there!' young Raymond spoke as to a child.

As swiftly as it had streamed forth, the moonlight hid itself behind a kindly sail, and the three soft footsteps, moving along the deck, slowly died away out of my hearing.

'Might yu 'appen to 'ave zum baccy, zurr, the mate's gone down, yu zee, an' it du be rale 'ot tu-night, that's zartain.'

I gave the understanding Carey out of my pouch, and we smoked in a sympathetic silence.

* * * * *

I woke with a start; a faint light was showing through the open port hole, and the half-drawn curtain of the bunk wavered unsteadily.

'She's moving,' I thought, feeling with a vast sense of relief the fluttering pulse beginning to beat at last in the wind-logged ship.

'Yes, there's a breeze from the South-East; get up!' Young Raymond was standing by the side of the bunk, his white clothes unchanged, but with a face unknown to me, so grave, drawn, and sunless was it.

'What's wrong?'

'The Doctor!' he said, 'Come!'

We crossed the dark saloon, unswept and ungarnished, just as it had been left the evening before. Raymond silently drew aside the green baize curtain of a cabin on the starboard side. Within it stood the mate, stooping over a figure stretched limply on the lower bunk; he looked up as we came in, and withdrew his hand, with something in it, from under the pillow.

'Look!' he said, holding up a little inlaid box. 'I was afrayd of it; I lookéd for it last night, you know,'— there was a curious note of appeal in his voice,—'but dosé fallows are so cunning, you know.'

I looked at the face lying upturned to the growing light. It was no longer twisted; the

eyes stared quietly at the roof of the bunk, the hands were crossed peacefully on the sunken chest. In that face, which had writhed the night before in hunted agony, there remained only the little brown stain at the corner of the mouth to mark it as the same.

'Dead?'

'Quite.' The mate knelt, and reverently drew the lids over the quiet eyes.

Young Raymond was leaning silently apart against the side of the cabin, his head framed in the open port-hole, and his face was ever grey and drawn. I turned from him to the mate.

'How?'

He answered the double question of my glances hurriedly.

'No,—it was an accident, see—' he unscrewed the lid of the little box, and counted the tiny black-brown pills in it. 'Six—seven—āyt—there are manny happy hours, you see; while desé were here, he would not have done it, you know. No, it was an accident,—perrhaps he took one too manny,—but it was the heat, you know, and that'—he laid his hand gently over the dead man's heart. 'Poor fallow! I likéd him greatly.'

There was a long silence in the little cabin; the faint 'lip-lip' of the rising waves against the ship's side seemed very far away somehow, and the measured tramp of the second mate on the poop above sounded in muffled harmony to our thoughts—then six bells rang out clear and full.

'It is Cotter's watch still,' said the mate, 'I am free for an hour yet. We must talk, you know.'

He moved over and shut the door, then seated himself on the side of the dead man's bunk with a reverent callousness, born of an intimate familiarity with many kinds of death.

The ends of the Doctor's dusky crimson sash hanging over the upper bunk quivered slightly, with the faint rolling of the ship, against the mate's smoothly dark head, as he crouched forward with his back hunched, and his bearded chin thrust out. His hands were clasped round one knee, the thin leg below them working incessantly with a quick, nervous movement. All the time he was speaking, he looked straight at young Raymond with his mournful eyes, and the latter, who had never moved from his leaning attitude against the cabin side, gazed abstractedly in front of him from out of a grow-

ing halo of flame-coloured light. The ship's cat purring softly was rubbing itself slowly against the white trousered leg.

'Dis thing had to hāppen, you know,' said the mate at last. 'It was written, you see, there'—he raised a hand and pointed to the still face. '*I* knew it a long time. I think I knew it when he first came on board at Adelayde; he walkéd down the quay, you know, with that fatiguéd walk he had, poor fallow, and it was written in his eyes—they were quite hunted, you know. *I've* rrāally been the doctor on the old galley this journey, you know, *he* wasn't fit for it. Hāng it all, I have been doseing the shellbacks, you know, poor devils—ah—ha!' he laughed that sudden spontaneous laugh that must have come from his lips even in death, if an idea had commended itself to his sardonic humour.

'The skipper should never have taken him on board, you know; but the old fallow was in a hole, he had to get off, and he had to have a doctor. The old galley is an invalid ship, you know, and so she has to have a doctor and a cow,—that blessed cow hasn't given anny milk, still she hās four legs, you know—and *I* am the doctor.' He gnawed at

his moustache and muttered some words under his breath.

Then young Raymond spoke for the first time.

'Did you know that?' he said, pointing with a shrinking gesture to the opium box in the mate's hand.

'After Cape Town, I knew it. Guessed it when he came on board, you know, and shut himself into his cabin for two days. I got in once, and then I saw what the trouble was, you know. I lookéd for that'—he held up the box—'but dosé fallows are so cunning. *He* knew it too, he knew he was going to hand in his checks, you know. He uséd to talk to me, and he often said, "*If* I get home."' The mate paused. 'Well! that is āll over, it had to hāppen, you know.' His voice and face and the resigned dejection of his whole figure embodied the word 'Kismet'; the threads of the situation, for the moment, had slipped through his fingers. He sat quite quiet, staring mournfully in front of him, but the leg beneath his clasped hands never ceased a second in its nervous movement.

The tramp above, and the 'lip-lip' of the little green waves against the ship's side, were still

the only sounds that broke in on the early silence.

'For the sake of his people,' said young Raymond suddenly, taking the little box from the mate's hand.

'Yes, he had an ayged father, you know, a parson in Yorkshire, he was going home to him — after seven years — that is harrd, you know,' the mate said dreamily.

'Well?' said Raymond impatiently, and he put the hand that held the box through the open port-hole.

'No—no—look here,' said the mate, holding out his hand for the box, 'I must tell the skipper, you know,' and he put the box away in his pocket. 'But you will see, it will be āll right, he will leave the whole rācket in my hands; he hates a fuss, you know, that old fallow. Besides, it wasn't rrāally the opium at the end, you know, it was the heat—his hāart was so weakenéd, you see.' He got up and looked earnestly, with narrowed eyes, at the dead man's wasted figure.

'Yes,' he said at last, 'it was a little joke, the breeze would have savéd him, you know, . . . but it will be āll right, — failure of the hāart from the heat . . . and then we shall put

him over the side; annyway there will be no post-mortem. Nobody will come in here, you see, except the skipper, and the box will be in my pocket,—the wind will take away the smell in time.' There was a faint, sweet, sickly smell as of drugs in the close air of the confined space.

'So be it!' said young Raymond, moving from his station against the cabin wall.

'Let us put him to rest, though; his face haunts me, even when I don't look at it,' and he shuddered; 'the light is too cruel.' Keeping his head averted, he took a handkerchief from a drawer, and covered the dead man's face. The flaming East was sending a shaft of orange light through the open port-hole full upon it, and the effect was not pretty.

'When did he go?' I said, breaking the silence that followed.

'I don't know,' said the mate, 'but it could not have been long before the breeze came, annyway—he was hardly cold, you know.'

Young Raymond faced round to the light with strained eyes.

'*I* know,' he said suddenly, '*I* know, I saw him go, I saw it all. I shall never get it out of my head—never! never!'

The mate looked at him half cynically, half concernedly.

'Hāng it all, my dear fallow,' he said, 'death is not an aymiable joker, when you are not uséd to him, you know; but you musn't let him play with your narves.'

'Nerves!' said young Raymond hoarsely, 'you shall tell me if it *is* nerves, Armand, for, by George! I should like to know.'

'Well?' said the mate; he had seated himself again in his favourite attitude.

The world seemed suddenly enclosed within the walls of this wooden crib, time was annihilated, everything stood still, there was no longer anything outside—just the cabin—we three—and the dead man. I felt giddy and stifled, but the moment young Raymond began to speak, all that feeling merged in wonder at the intense earnestness in his face and the tones of his voice.

'After we left *him*, last night,' he said, 'I slung my hammock on the main deck, starboard side, just where the gymnastic bars are rigged by the main mast; it seemed cooler there than on the poop. Cotter came out on watch just after I turned in, so it was about midnight, I suppose. I couldn't get the idea

of *him* out of my head;' he avoided looking at the dead man always, and stared straight in front of him.

'I could see him tossing and twisting in that bunk, and I couldn't get to sleep for ages; I suppose I must have dropped off at last, though, because I didn't hear two bells go. I woke suddenly out of an awfully jolly dream about home and my people. The moon was down, but it wasn't very dark; there was just that light that comes before the dawn, you know. Oh! yes, I could see all right; I could see pretty clearly right to the starboard hatchway leading up to the poop—that was just facing me as my hammock was slung. It was frightfully hot, suffocating—there wasn't a breath of air, not a breath. I lay awake a few minutes, and then I suppose I dozed off again; but though my eyes were shut, I seemed to have the feeling that something was coming towards me. It grew upon me, so that I must have half raised myself in my hammock, because when I woke again I was sitting up. There *was* something—a figure; it came from under the starboard hatch out of the saloon. I could hardly see it in that horrible, misty, unreal light, but it came slowly

along the deck close to the bulwark without making any noise. I don't know why I was in a ghastly funk, but it seemed somehow uncanny—I wasn't properly awake, you see. I waited for it—it seemed hours coming. When it was almost within touch, I saw what—it was —it was—*him*. His head was bent back and his hands thrown up; he was like a shot bird that's towering for air, you know, but there was no sound, no choke or gasp—I listened for it, but there was none, not even a sigh' —he paused. 'There ought, there must have been a gasp, if it *was* he,' he muttered to himself; 'he couldn't have stood like that without a sound. Oh! Armand, the face!'

He spoke in short broken sentences, and his hands twisted here and there in the full agony of recollection.

'The eyes were staring open, as they were before you—and nothing moved in it—it was a *dead* face . . . and then it went away again, you know,—I don't know *how* it went. I shall never get that look out of my head—never!' He drew his hands across his eyes.

'It was far worse than *that* dead face,' he said solemnly, pointing to the bunk; 'it was the dead face of a *living* man.'

'Then?' said the mate.

'Then I lay back in my hammock, not more than a minute, I think,—and then I got out and came here, and as I crossed the deck the first of the breeze crossed it too—too late! —he died for want of air, I *know* he did—just too late, you see.'

'Too late!' echoed the mate softly, nodding his head. '*That* is the joke.'

'He was lying here as you found him. I didn't touch him before I came and told you. And, look here! Armand, what have I seen? It scared me.'

An infinite and sombre gentleness was in the look the mate bent to meet the trouble in the young face turned to him, but he only said, 'That is most interésting. You are not to be pitied, you know, you are to be envied; a man does not often see these things, you know.'

'But *what* did I see? *What?* I tell you it scared me.'

'I *think*,' said the mate slowly—'I don't know, of course,—but I think you have seen what very few people have seen. I think there is a time, you know, which comes between life and death. It is perhaps the twilight of the body

you know, and the dawning of the soul,—it is that breathless space which these old crāfts of our bodies have to go through, you know, where there is no life, and not yet death,—the Doldrums of our individuālities hanging in the wind.' There was a long silence.

'Thanks,' said young Raymond at last, and the old sunny look seemed to creep back into his face through the haunting shadow of fear cast there by the thing he had seen.

'Thanks, old fellow! The dawning of the soul! I like that.'

He had caught, like a child, at the one idea in the mate's words which appealed to his narrow, sanguine optimism; and only *I* saw the look of wearily gentle cynicism in the mate's face, and heard his words as he turned away out of the cabin, 'Yes? if there *is* such a thing, you know.'

So I turned away too from the 'valley of the shadow,' but young Raymond knelt softly by the bunk and drew the handkerchief from the dead man's face. He could bear to look on him now. The breeze stole in and stirred the hair on the two heads close together.

The words came to me at the door.

'You're all right now, old fellow, aren't you? You've gone home.' Then through a choke in the voice, 'but, oh! my God! your luck was hard.'

THE CAPITULATION OF JEAN JACQUES

S.S. Wapiti. *May 16th*, 188 .

. . . . To-day, fine again, gorgeous, but mighty hot. Left Suva at daybreak. Very one-horse place, with a lovely harbour. We got a lot of bananas and pines from a Fijian's canoe as we went out—they ought to last till we get to Sydney. . . .

A rum thing happened about five o'clock; some 150 miles sou'-west of Suva we sighted a small cutter with two men in her. They were making signals with a pair of breeches. The Captain stopped for them, and lowered a boat to see what was up. I got leave to go. The poor beggars were burnt up—I never saw men so completely frizzled; Frenchmen—one a very big man, one a very little—awfully plucky little chap, said he was 'all ar-right,' only wanted water, and was trying to make Suva from Tahiti! 'm! *In a ten-ton cutter!* Double 'mm!!

He asked his course,—we gave it him, and a cask of water. I was the last to go over the side of the cutter, and he said to me: 'Monsieur, you gentlemens, is it not?' 'Hope so,' said I. 'Going to Noumea, is it not?' 'Yes,' said I. 'Will it 'ave ze *extrêmement* kindness to inform *ce cher Gouverneur* zat "Jean Jacques" made to 'im ze compliments?' With that he put his finger to his lips, and smiled sweetly upon me.

I don't think any nigger could have given him points for brownness, but I liked the looks of him hugely.

As we were pulling back, the second officer said to me: 'Scaped convicts, you bet, poor devils—no business of mine.'

I thought of that smile and forbore to wink. . . . .

(Extract from the Diary of a Passenger.)

'*Sacré!* these walls are high! lift me, Pierre.'

A very small lean man raised himself with the agility of a cat from his perch in the uplifted grasp of the giant below, and was through a window twelve feet from the ground, and crouching in the shadow of the white curtains without a sound stirring the silence of the night air.

Jean Jacques, Frenchman, man of genius, man of diminutive stature, man of sun-baked countenance, political convict, crouched in the shadow of the curtains and reflected. His reflections were the résumé of a carefully matured plan,—in fine, his reflections were these:

'I, Jean Jacques, am at large; I have not been at large for some time; certainly, then, I wish to remain at large; I wish also my friend Pierre below to remain at large. *Que faire?*'

The reasoning unconsciously took the form of Ollendorf.

'I am in the room of the four-year-old daughter of the Governor. How do I know this? Because I can see her little socks hanging over the end of the bed. Is not the four-year-old daughter of the Governor the apple of the Governor's eye? Certainly, she is the apple of the eye of the Governor. Given, then, Jean Jacques, the apple of the eye of the Governor, and the desire to remain at large, what happens? P—s—s—t, it is apparent, any child can see what *must* happen!'

Jean Jacques rose to the height of his five feet two, his lean, dark face glowing, and his crisp black hair curling with the greatness of his ideas, and advancing, drew aside the curtains of the little bed.

A small figure in a wisp of a nightgown stretched her limbs thereon in childish abandon, and turned her elf's face up to her nocturnal visitor in the unconscious serenity of sleep. That Jean Jacques was a humane man was evidenced by the thoughtful way in which he bestowed dress, socks, slippers, dolls, and sun-bonnet within the capacious folds of his convict's blouse; that he was

a man of energy and action, by the manner in which he enveloped the child's head in a soft shawl, and her little body in a discarded blanket, and, before she had time or breath to wake and scream, passed himself and her into the upstretched arms of Pierre, and regained the ground.

Then two dim figures, with a hostage to liberty, flitted through the deserted streets, and the night swallowed them up.

* * * * *

Noumea was looking its best; what that means one must have been there to know. Not yet astir with the day, the town and harbour were pretending an innocence of the twin spirits of despair and misery throbbing and raging within their boundaries. Out of the blue Pacific, also pretending a non-existent innocence, the sun was rising, and causing the ruddy copper tints of the island rocks to shine with a morning glory, the foam of the reefs to sparkle, and the green and red of leaf and flower to glint and glow with a tender and dewy freshness. The native market was already beginning to stir with the busy sellers of most conceivable, and some inconceivable, fruits and vegetables.

Soon, above the everyday droning hum of the vending of merchandise, rose and swelled an ever-increasing buzz, like the tuning of an orchestra, in dozens of discordant quirks and twitters, till, hushing every sound, as does the uplifting of the conductor's bâton, there boomed forth once and twice over the stillness of the harbour the deep angry tone of the convict escape-gun. Then the buzz broke out again, but this time with the unanimity of knowledge and conviction. Not that a convict's escape was any rare occurrence in a community boasting the possession of some nine thousand such, in a greater or less degree of captivity; the buzz had a deeper and a wider meaning; there were nine thousand convicts; there was but one Governor, and to that Governor was but one daughter. The 'buzz,' with an intelligence which did it credit, connected the two disappearances, it was even whispered—that is to say, it was bewailed and lamented at the top of the shrill native voice—that there was a third disappearance, of knives and ropes, and good food-stuff, to wit; this formed a tail to the comet in the opinion of the buzz. The buzz was immensely tickled and interested,

it was even compelled to open its mouth—which was bad for it—when from the barracks issued patrols armed to the teeth, and from the quay departed snowily-breeched officials to the various ships lying at anchor. Grievously agape was the mouth of the buzz when from Government House marched the Governor, grey-headed and of soldierly bearing. The Governor was a widowed man, and had but one child; it amused the buzz and affected it to tears to see what he had suffered. In spite of his soldier's pride, suffering had lined his face during the last hour, and the furrows deepened as he marched on with head up into the middle of the Place, and spoke to the buzz with wingéd words, that hushed it completely, distending its mouth and stimulating its stomach by the liberality of the promised reward.

There was a scattering and a hurrying, such as the official methodism of the town had not known since the French and English blue-jacket fight—a tussle of unquenchable memory and much friendly shedding of gore.

The hours rolled on, the sun blazed, the world forgot its siesta, while the shadow on the Governor's face deepened with the waning

of the day. He sat in the Place and waited—round him a staff of messengers coming and going, as fresh thoughts and possibilities thronged his anxious mind. Presently, as hope faded and grew wan, he said—

'I can bear it no more here, I will go up and wait in the Cathedral—perchance God will send me inspiration,' and he took his way thither. . . .

Now, if one desires to see the most perfect picture in the world, one may look upon it—if one goes in the evening to the Cathedral at Noumea, and, standing at the eastern end, looks down the aisle to the west. There, framed in the grey walls, hangs a picture as of heaven—not, indeed, of canvas and paint, but of the sea and the air and the earth, as a man sees them when the glow of a setting sun is flooding and filling all with an unearthly glory of light. So the Governor, even in his great grief, saw the vision of heaven, and bowing his head upon his hands, sat gazing thereon—silent and alone. As the sun dipped he fell, worn out, into a sort of trance, rousing himself with a start as the rim of the fiery globe rested lightly on the horizon, seeming to poise itself before sinking

to rest, while the grey shadows of the twilight crept out, as if eager before their time to whelm the last hopes of the day in a filmy maze. Out of the West, before the eyes of the Governor—far away in a reverie of pain—floated a white cloud, and dimly his mind became conscious of it. 'Very odd cloud,' he thought abstractedly, 'that comes so suddenly and close;' then he sprang up as though he had been shot. 'Was it a cloud? No, assuredly it was not.' It floated, it quivered, it waggled with the breeze, it was—bathos—it was a nightgown.

Suspended between sky and earth in the middle of that picture of heaven, fading already with the growing darkness, waved a child's nightgown. Instinctively the answer to the whole problem of the day's disappearance flashed before the Governor's mind, and what he saw when he had hurried through the door under the folds of that flag of truce came as no surprise. He stood and gazed upwards. Down below in the streets of the town, in all the country round, the buzz was still actively engaged in pursuing the promised satisfaction of its stomach.

Now this was what the Governor saw on the

roof of the Cathedral, thirty feet above him. Over the stone parapet a lean, dark face surmounting a bare brown arm and hand, from which hung the rope of the flag of truce; behind, what seemed to him a vast blue statue, astride the neck of which sat a little figure in a cotton blouse, dangling two bare legs, and patting the statue's head with one hand, while with the other it blew kisses to the amazed and horrified Governor. His hand caught the butt of his revolver. Escaped convicts were wild beasts — and his child sat on the shoulders of one and played with what was left of its hair! The Governor's aristocratic and sporting instincts were aroused.

Jean Jacques, leaning over the parapet, smiled genially, and his other hand, in which glistened the long blade of a knife, rested for a moment on the parapet. Only for a second, but the Governor let fall the pistol, and covered his face in his hands with a shrinking gesture of physical pain and fear.

'Bien! Monsieur,' — Jean Jacques took the word in courteous tones, and with a caressing upward wave of the hand that no longer held the knife to the little white atom on his

comrade's shoulders. '*Bien!* decidedly Monsieur and I shall understand one another. I have the honour of addressing Monsieur le Gouverneur? Good.' Jean Jacques made a polite bow with what could be seen of him in response to the Governor's sign of assent.

'Monsieur, I will be brief. I am Jean Jacques. My friend Monsieur Pierre Legros —Monsieur le Gouverneur!'

He indicated the silent Pierre with a backward and airy wave.

'My friend and I were bored—it was not your fault, Monsieur, do not be distressed—we were in want of distraction, we were also in want of being free—ah! Free——'

Jean Jacques looked up with a sigh that spoke volumes even to the Governor, preoccupied as he was with dread anxiety.

'*Nous voila!* distracted and free—do you think we will again return to the other state?' An accent of menace crept into his voice, but passed as quickly as it came.

'No, we shall remain free; it rests with Monsieur to decide how and on what terms. Providence has kindly sent Monsieur to us alone; my friend and I do not wish that anyone should see Monsieur talking with us—

it might compromise him as affairs will turn out. Therefore, if Monsieur will give to us his ears, my friend and I will briefly explain to him how things stand, and what we have the honour to desire at the hands of Monsieur.'

He paused for a moment, and turned to Pierre, standing in the shadow behind him; the latter made a sign of acquiescence, and Jacques went on:

'Mademoiselle Cecile is very happy with us; it is a new game we are playing,'—he turned again and smiled at the child, who waved her hand and laughed back at him,—'and we are very fond of Mademoiselle. But we have thought it may be best for everyone that we should continue to be free in another land—across the seas. Monsieur le Gouverneur will therefore cause to be prepared for us, in the little bay of Pontet to the east, a good seaworthy cutter of not less than ten tons, with provisions and water for twenty days; also he will in his kindness see that the road is clear for us to embark at midnight to-morrow, and he will give us—will he not?—his word of honour that he will not cause us to be pursued. Monsieur's word of honour

is his bond. If Monsieur will come to the little bay of Pontet at twelve on that night he will find Mademoiselle in the little cave close by the bay. Should Monsieur not see his way to accept these terms, he will do as he pleases, always remembering that Mademoiselle is with us, and that what happens to Jean Jacques or his friend Pierre, happens, unfortunately, to Mademoiselle also.'

So ending, Jean Jacques bared his teeth again in a genial smile.

The Governor groaned—his situation dawned slowly on him in the fulness of its horror—he clenched his teeth and groaned. His duty drew him one way, his feelings (and he was conscious then how overpoweringly) dragged him the other. He bowed his head, and pondered painfully. Jean Jacques waited some time in silent politeness, then he said:

'Monsieur will understand that to my friend and myself our liberty is as dear as to Monsieur is Monsieur's daughter: also Monsieur shall, if he pleases, have the night and the day in which to reflect and prepare; and in order that there may be no mistake as to the preparations, it will be best if Monsieur will return himself and give us his

answer at two hours before midnight to-morrow.'

The Governor was conscious, with a feeling of rage and shame, that the convict knew only too surely that the game was in his hands; he raised his head with a jerk, and said, sharply and sternly:

'It shall be so—at ten to-morrow night you shall have my answer.'

Then with one look at his little daughter calling merrily, and blowing kisses to him, and a muttered 'Good-night, my darling, be a good brave child,' he stepped firmly away, turning for a moment to say fiercely, 'Be careful of her, men; if but one hair of her head be harmed, woe betide you.' Then he marched heroically down the hill, and hastened to his home to hide his deadly agony of doubt and fear.

* * * * *

The buzz was hushed—hushed until the day should come again to lend it zeal and courage. It was one thing to hunt for escaped convicts, in packs, under the smiling sun, it was another to seek desperate men in the blue-black of the Southern night. The buzz was of opinion that its stomach might wait a little.

Inland among the hills tired parties of soldiery still pursued their weary search, but to no purpose. That buttress on the Cathedral was a full fifteen feet from the ground—its combination with a giant, a man of genius, and a rope had occurred to no one's mind; furthermore, the side of the Cathedral roof overlooked by the coastguard station was protected by a parapet, and this fact had also been unobserved.

Underneath the parapet the child lay tossing between her two captors. Even in her restlessness she seemed to have complete faith in them; one hand lay in Pierre's monstrous paw, with the other she kept throwing off the clothing that Jean Jacques carefully replaced. Neither man slept; they watched their little prisoner anxiously, and every now and then Jacques spoke a word or two of soothing to the restless little mortal. In the middle watches of the night, Cecile waked suddenly from her dreams, and sat up, shaking her dark straight locks back from her hot little head, and looking wildly about her. Then she screamed, a child's scream of terror, and the look of fright that the two men had been waiting for so painfully and anxiously shone

in her black eyes. That, which only Jacques' wonderful, almost mesmeric, power with children and the giant Pierre's gentleness had restrained so far, was come at last.

'*Bon Dieu*, but this is terrible,' said Jacques; 'gently, *ma chérie*, it is all play; see, here are thy two good friends, here is thy horse, the big Pierre who gave thee that good ride on his shoulders; gently, *ma chérie*, gently.'

He stroked the soft head, and with the tenderness of a mother kissed the hot little cheek. Pierre turned his head away, with the dumb and blind confidence in his comrade in all moments of danger and difficulty that possessed his faithful soul. But scream after scream broke from the child; it was not all play, she was in the dark, where was her little bed and her nurse? and she wanted her daddy. Jean Jacques was the father of children, a man of genius, and kindly, but he was unequal to this situation, perhaps from that very kindliness which forbade him to use the shawl to smother the child's cries.

Now the Cathedral was high above the town, and the buzz in the nearest houses was tired, and only turned in its heavy sleep to say, 'Listen to the wild cats in the moun-

tains—to-morrow we will go and hunt them and the other wild beasts with dogs.' So the paroxysm passed, and the child lay still again in Pierre's arms, but with a dull fever burning in her cheeks and eyes. The night grew old, and the chill air smote the exhausted babe in spite of all the men's care, and morning brought the raging fever that, if it be not stayed, means death to the white child. The men looked at each other with dismay in faces haggard with the strain of sleepless nights and dread anxiety.

'Must we then fail after all?' said Jacques, more to himself than to his comrade. He turned his eyes, gloomy with a bitter resentment at the rising sun.

'Twenty hours—only twenty hours—and three lives hanging in the balance. I *will* not fail; the child *shall* live, and so shall we.'

'Water,' said Pierre, and without another word took off his hat and fitted the rope through the brim to make a bucket.

'Yes, water before the people are stirring,' said Jacques.

By the aid of the rope he descended with his extemporised bucket and stole down the hill under shelter of a wall to the nearest

cottage—a laundry, as luck would have it—then, filling his bucket, he got back without being seen. Cecile was delirious, and as she raved and tossed, the tears stole down the cheeks of the big convict, and gently he stroked back the dark hair and carefully arranged the blanket so that no ray of the fast rising sun should fall on her. Jacques tore the flag of truce into shreds meet for bandages, and they bound them wet round the fevered head and laid the little frame in Pierre's arms. They had no food left now except a few bananas, which they kept for the child. The fever seemed to abate somewhat, and presently she slept.

The two men sat hour after hour gazing at each other, and at the sun creeping up in the heavens. Now and then Jacques looked away at the sea gleaming brilliant and free, with a yearning look in his eyes that told more than a thousand words, and from it he looked back again at the flushed cheek of the babe in his comrade's arms, weighing and weighing all that the sea meant to him against the pangs of that helpless innocent. Pierre sat immovable; cramp had possession of his limbs, but he sat still for his life; if the child slept through the

heat of the day they were saved—what was dearer than life was theirs—if she waked, he dared not think.

Noon came and passed, and the two men sat on—sat on with the same yearning look in their eyes, and the same speechless constraint, and the child still slept. A change seemed to be stealing over the heated face. Jacques watched it anxiously.

'The fever is leaving her,' he said; 'what will come after?'

Hope and despair alternated in his face.

Two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock, they counted the chimes with desperate eagerness—never were hours more leaden-footed—and still the child slept. A wan white look had come into her face, and she looked very ethereal and transparent.

'*Bon dieu!*' thought Jacques, in agony, 'will she fade away before our very eyes?'

Involuntarily Pierre stirred; a spasm of cramp had shaken him to the soul, and Cecile awoke. Contrition and consternation stilled the cramp in Pierre's vast frame, and he rocked her gently to and fro.

'Give her to me, my friend,' said Jean Jacques, quietly, but the look he bent on the child and

the tone of his voice showed that despair had entered into him.

Truly it was pitiful—the babe was strengthless and voiceless, she only made a little imploring gesture, and looked with eyes big and dark-shadowed in helpless appeal. The two men gazed at each other in silent accord, then Jacques said:

'She will die, if she meets again the chill night air—it is all over, my friend; with the first shadows we must take her back.'

He gave one burning look at the sea that mocked him in long blue ripples of laughter, then turned to the babe in his arms with a smile in his eyes and soothing words.

Pierre groaned, and turning over lay on his face motionless. Jacques' watch had begun. How terrible those next three hours were—waiting for the pitiless sun to go down and the ending, ah!—such an ending of the Day of Hope. If they took her back at sunset, the child would live—yes, he knew that, he was sure of it—but at what a cost! Freedom to him was the all of life, the air he breathed; in the cause of freedom, or what he deemed such, had he not already endured two years of torment—must he go back to heaven knew

how many more? Stay, could he not harden his heart? After all, who knows, the child might live anyway; it was only to keep her another four hours. A silent and bitter rage filled his heart, his own brilliant idea had cut from them their last chance; so near to freedom and yet how far; not even a run for their money, as the English say. Then his glance fell again on those appealing eyes that seemed to ask so much and yet so little—only to be taken back to her own little bed. A terrible dread and horror welled up in the convict's heart, and quenched the flames of rage; the shame of his deed was casting its shadow before, and with anxious, desperate eyes, he watched the sun's departure from the heavens with an agonising hope that the remorse of the murderer of an innocent might be spared him.

Slowly, slowly, the sun went down. With the lengthening of the shadows Jacques made his preparations for the return. He formed a cradle of the blanket by passing a piece of the rope through the four corners, and then made the end of the rope fast to the roof. When the lights began to twinkle from the town through the fast gathering dusk, and the strains of the convict band playing in the Place came

to their ears, they journeyed—and it was time indeed.

Pierre went first down the rope, then Jacques lowered the child in her blanket cradle into his arms and followed, flinging the rope back again on to the roof, that no sign of their hiding should be left for the buzz to make mock of. They took a narrow upper path that led above the town to the back of the Governor's house.

A sneering fate kept that procession as secret as the former one—not a creature came nigh them. The buzz was recruiting its disappointed energies with gossip to the strains of Faust. Jean Jacques, a former distinguished member of that orchestra, even now, as he walked in Pierre's wake, jaded with hunger and fatigue, and racked with the pangs of despair, cursed his successor under his breath for a wrong note in the solo of the Devil's serenade, the strains of which were wafted to him on an unfriendly breeze.

'Hurry, Pierre,' he said between his teeth.

Rapidly and noiselessly they skirted the outer wall, passed through a wicket gate, and crossed the garden to the long white house. It seemed deserted, save for a light streaming

into the outside darkness from a window on the ground floor. Creeping quietly forward, Jacques saw through the open casement the figure of the Governor seated at a table in a long low room that did duty as a library. His head was bowed upon his two outstretched arms, a hat, cloak, and pistol were laid on the table in front of him.

So the preparations had been made! . . .

Jean Jacques withdrew, and making a sign to Pierre they moved back along the verandah until once again they were below the window of their little prisoner's room. Noiselessly as she had been taken from it Cecile was restored to the little bed that lay ready for her. With a deep sigh she turned her eyes gratefully on Jacques as he placed her softly amongst the pillows, and then closed them in an exhaustion, deep as the grave. After listening a moment to make certain from her breathing that all was well, he drew the clothes gently over her, closed the mosquito-curtains, and slid to the ground.

'*Allons!*' said he to Pierre, and linked his arm in his comrade's.

So they passed through the open window and stood before the Governor. He raised his

grey head slowly from his arms, and sat staring in amaze at the two figures in front of him.

'Monsieur le Gouverneur,' said Jean Jacques, simply, 'we are here, my friend and I, to render ourselves; you may do to us what you please—we have failed.'

He raised his head, and confronted the Governor, with calm and haggard face. The latter sprang to his feet with the cry:

'My child! my child! Cowards, miscreants, what have you done to my child?'

'Pardon, Monsieur, we are not cowards—we should not be here else. Go and look for your child in her own bed; we wait for your return.'

The Governor, without a word, turned and fled out of the room and up the stairs.

The two stood immovable and waited; Pierre indeed made a gesture towards the pistol, but Jacques, into whose eyes had crept a look almost of hope, shook his head, and the giant, faithful in his confidence to the last, left it untouched. The Governor returned, grave and stern, but his eye was bright and he walked with a firm step.

'My child is ill,' he said.

'Monsieur,' said Jacques, with dignity, 'we were afraid for her, so we brought her home; had we kept her till midnight she would have died; but have no fear—I know the fever; she will be well again in a short time.'

The Governor shivered—the shock and strain of the last two days had unnerved him. He sat down again, and leant back, thinking. A flame shot into his eyes.

'And you would have killed my child!' he said, with a menacing gesture at the two figures in front of him.

'No, Monsieur, we would not, and the proof is in that we have brought her back rather than that she should be harmed.' Jacques looked fearlessly back into the searching and resentful eyes. The Governor fell back in his chair, and it seemed to them an eternity before he spoke again. When he did it was slowly and measuredly, and his words were those of a judge:

'Men, I, the Governor of this great island, and a French gentleman, had sacrificed my duty and my honour to my love. What you required has been done—the boat is provisioned and ready, the way will be clear from eleven o'clock till twelve. At your bidding,

yours, had I done this; *you* had put me to this shame, but Fate has delivered you into my hands, and saved me what, as God be my witness, was necessity. Why should I spare you? Yet,' he paused, and the sombre calm of Jacques' face was pierced again for an instant by that gleam of hope, 'you have made a sacrifice. I know that to such as you, liberty is sweeter than life,—I cannot doubt the sacrifice,—and I will grant you one chance. If that chance favour you, you will find in that chest what I have prepared for you—disguises and some papers, signed by me, assuring you a passport; hide in this room till eleven o'clock, then go, and may fortune speed you—the boat is at the little bay; but if the chance favour you not—look for no mercy from me, for by heaven, you shall have none. Wait for me here.'

Again he left the room and ascended the stairs.

'Go, go!' said Pierre, 'there is still time.'

'No,' said Jacques, and they waited—for nearly an hour they waited, so worn that they no longer felt the strain,—there is a limit to suffering, bodily and mental, beyond which feeling is not.

The Governor returned; his eyes softened somewhat when he saw them, and he took the pistol in his hand.

'Mademoiselle is awake; *this* is your chance. Follow me upstairs and into her room. If, when her eyes fall upon you, there pass but a shadow over her beloved face, there is no mercy for you.'

So saying, he went out. Jean Jacques turned to Pierre and gripped his hand.

'*Courage,*' he said, '*jouons bon jeu,*' and the indomitable spirit shone out of his black eyes into his comrade's.

The Governor mounted the stairs. Jean Jacques whistled under his breath, Pierre wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and they followed. The Governor passed into the room through the open door; as they paused for one second, they could see Cecile's eyes turned lovingly on him and her hands stretched out; her old nurse was sitting at the head of the bed on one side, and a doctor was on the other. A lamp, turned low, gave a fitful light; the Governor reached forward and turned it up.

'*Dieu merci, nous avons de la chance,*' thought Jacques, 'at all events she will not take us

for ghosts or bogies;' then, with head up, and a smile on his lips and in his eyes, he marched boldly into the room, Pierre following like a dog.

The Governor, standing back in the shadow, his head bowed, stood watching his little daughter with eyes that burned like coals of fire in the hollows of his wasted cheeks.

No one spoke.

As Jacques moved forward, the child turned her eyes from her father towards him; when they lighted upon him, a look of curiosity, but not of fear, dwelt in them for a moment, then a smile dimpled up in the brave little face, her hand moved, and her lips parted as if to blow a kiss to her guests.

Jacques advanced to the bed and stroked the little head—Pierre stood at the foot and grinned with sympathy.

'It is enough,' said the Governor, 'you are *men;* go, and God save you.'

THE SPIRIT OF THE KARROO.

'Oh! the trail is hot, and the heart is black,
Sleuth, and stealth, and a hard-gripped blade!
Over the shimmering sage-green brush,
Under the lea of the kopje's rise,
Winding the skein of the narrow track,
Sleuth, and stealth, till the debt is paid!'

Greed, Hate, Jealousy, these three, and the greatest of these is Jealousy.

Now this is true according to Euclid, who says that the greater contains the less: it is also true that in 1891—was it? Pietris Vanhiever—

* * * * *

'My—ahh—my a—a a,' yawned a—large gaunt silver-backed jackal out of the long grass by the side of a little stone *kopje*. Anon he raised his head and licked his gums in a slow and appreciative manner, as if a pleasant thought had occurred to him. The night was drawing in over the sandy plain, Namaqua partridges were flitting to the half-dried waterhole, the spring-bok were drawing together, and forming serried squadrons against the possible attack of such as Silverback of the stealthy foot and hungry fang; and from the Englishman's camp hard by came the

smothered grunt and squeal of the mules beginning with rapture their evening feed out of the leather trough slung to the waggon pole.

The stones of the *kopje* moved, and an aged one-eyed hyæna slunk out into the grey-green growth that surrounded his home. He sidled deprecatingly till within speaking distance of the jackal, and said in a whisper, the huskiness of which was born of much midnight prowling and many an unholy meal:

'Is there meat in the wind, friend, that thou lickest so thy good red gums and white teeth? If perchance it be so, I pray thee remember thy old comrade, the widower and one-eyed.'

'Meat,' snarled the jackal, 'ay, ay, but meat is for those who can see;' and casting a sneering glance at the bleared face of his visitor, he resumed his careful watch on the camp.

'Peradventure it is mule, O crafty one?' said the old reprobate, leering covetously towards the newly-lighted fire that threw the encampment into sharp relief against the fast gathering darkness.

'Bah!' said Silverback, 'mule! mule is good enough for prowling one-eyed vagabonds, but not for me. I would sooner chase a young buck through the long night than eat a plaguey salt beast like mule.'

'Ow—ah,' sighed the hyæna, 'your Swiftness may indeed speak so, having legs of steel and jaws like cast-iron traps; but to one who has fasted these many days, being old and forsaken, mule and meer-cat 'tis all the same, it goes into the stomach — what more can I expect, who am old, and nigh to my end?' and he rolled his eye imploringly at Silverback.

'Well, well,' said the latter somewhat mollified, 'I say nothing; for two nights have I watched and hunted, and what I have seen, I have seen.' With this enigmatical remark he sat up, and regarded his aged companion with a critical glance. 'Truly he *is* old,' he said to himself; 'he cannot count greatly on a division, and having a certain experience of graves, perchance he may be of service, the hoary old sinner. Watch with me if you will,' he snarled aloud.

So bidden, the one-eye joined the two eyes, and with them glared on steadily

and patiently through the dark at the white man's camp.

'When you've finished supper, Dan, saddle me Hopper's horse; I'm going to have a try in the dark at that last lot of buck we saw this afternoon.'

The speaker, a long, careless-looking Englishman, with blue eyes and a fair beard, sat kicking his legs over the side of the waggon and smoking a short pipe with much contentment after his supper.

Dan Vanhiever, a swarthy half-caste, part Kaffir, part Boer, with a slight limp, rose at once from his recumbent posture with his feet to the fire, and assisted by a Hottentot boy, with many a hoarse '*Yuip, Schelm!*' detached and saddled the much-resenting grey, who, with his companion Waltong, was taking alternate bites at the fodder and the mules from either side of the leather trough.

'Good-night, boys! keep the fire going, so that I can find my way back; so long!' The Englishman swung himself into the saddle, and taking his rifle, rode away on the back track of the waggon.

Early to sleep is the rule on the *veldt*, and two

of the three followers left in the camp turne their toes to the fire and slumbered noisily.

The third, Pietris Vanhiever, sat forward, his hands on his knees, his swarthy, black-browed face flushed and scowling, a smouldering light in his eyes;—or was it only the reflection from the blazing fire, on to which he heaped plentifully the gathered brushwood?

Presently he stood up, glancing stealthily at his companions, his hand on a long knife in his belt,—a picturesque figure, in red shirt, blue jean trousers, widening and opening in the seam towards the foot, and sewn with hair, and the wide-brimmed felt hat of South Africa.

'Ah, Boss! two nights have I watched, and two days have I fasted, and now I will make an end,' he muttered in Dutch between his teeth, and bent down to see if both men were asleep. Then he crept noiselessly out of the camp circle, and stooping almost double, ran swiftly as a man runs who knows the end and purpose of his going.

Silverback turned his sardonic mug towards his ghoul-like neighbour, and with a twirl of his brush, as much as to say, 'I told you so,' stole out of the shadow of the little *kopje* and

followed silently on the trail. With every hair on his bristly back standing up in unholy eagerness, with his one eye and his few remaining teeth staring with greed, the ancient reprobate grunted the magic word 'Man,' and hobbled cautiously after the jackal. . . .

The long Englishman, glancing from side to side, rode carelessly and slowly along the track left by the broad wheels of the waggon. Once he unslung the Winchester he carried on his right arm, and fired two or three shots, but seemingly at random. The track took a sudden turn to the left, round a slight rise in the ground; once past, this he urged the grey into a canter, turning round in his saddle to see that he was not followed.

'Can't be seen from the waggon here,' he said to himself; 'not that it matters much, though — their manners are disgusting, and assuredly morals they have none. Covering my trail is much the same as going to church in the old country for the benefit of the servants,' he added with a laugh.

The light from the risen moon was fairly strong, and the track, luckily free from meer-cat holes, lay straight over the *veldt* towards

a large broken group of sandy red rocks of curious formation. Their irregular outlines took weird and mysterious shapes in the half light, and their happening in the vast flat desolation of the *Karroo* gave them the appearance of being the creation of some saturninely fantastic spirit. The track ran so narrowly between two of the biggest rocks that a driver could touch them on either side of him with his whip. Out of the red soil of the rock on the one side grew a giant Cokerbôm tree, old as the world itself, projected in a stiff uncompromising rigidity over the track. The Englishman, riding rapidly beneath, reached up and plucked a spiky, inhospitable leaf.

'Tough old beggar!' he soliloquised, sucking his finger, 'you'll be growing here when *I'm* dead and gone, and all's blue; in a couple of thousand years you *may* be a foot or so taller if you have luck; rum things, trees — wonder if they have souls?'

He emerged into the open *veldt* again, and another half hour's canter brought him within sight of an isolated piece of civilisation; the lengthy, low, white buildings of an outlying Boer ostrich-farm, in a square enclosure,

dotted with carefully fostered and unwilling plane and eucalyptus trees.

'Steady!' he muttered, 'she said last night she'd be at this end—yes, and that's the tree. He reined in his horse. 'There she is, by heaven! What a blessing to find a woman punctual; but then she isn't a woman, only a girl—poor child!'

With a half sigh he swung himself from the saddle, and, leading his horse, stepped forward to where, shrinking in the shadow of a couple of trees just on the outside of the enclosure, stood a slip of a girl in a white dress with a dark cloak thrown over it. Her grey eyes lost their look of fright, and devoured him, as he fastened his horse to a branch; with a low cry, almost a moan, of delight, she straightened herself and sprang into his arms.

'How long have you been here, *Liebchen mein?*' He spoke in Africander, with an occasional German word.

'O my King, I came as soon as the house was quiet and I could steal out. I came like a mouse, with my heart in my mouth, and two hours I have waited and suffered, but now—now—O my Lord and King, I live, and the darkness is overpast—see, I have brought all

that I have, as thou badest me.' She lifted a slight bundle wrapped in a light rug, and placed her other hand timidly, with oh! so light a touch, upon his beard. 'Is my Lord' (she used a word that in Africander means also husband) 'pleased with his servant?'

Her face flushed painfully and anxiously. Truth to tell, he did not look over-pleased—he stood looking pitifully first at the bundle, then at the slight figure that leaned so lovingly, and yet so timidly, against him, and the shadow of an almost seriousness came over the careless blue eyes. He put his hand on the long fair hair, and said gently:

'All that my pretty does is good, and shall she not be rewarded?' He raised her chin, and kissed her eyes and lips. 'Yet I am sorry too, for I have been thinking, and it cannot be to-night—I can't take you away to-night, child.'

Her head drooped and she shivered. 'Not to-night—not to-night? But my Lord *promised* me.'

'Yes, child, I know, but there are many things I didn't think of that I *must* do before we go away. I must go back to Cape Town and put things straight. Cheer up, sweet-

heart, 'tis only for a fortnight, or three weeks at most, and then I will come and take you away for good and all.'

'I'm afraid—so afraid. If my Lord leaves me, he may forget, he will see other women, and I am so poor and little—let me come now, my King, only to be near thee—I won't ask more, just to be near thee—*let* me come.'

'Dear child, be reasonable—think a minute, think of the waggon. I can't leave that, and we should be followed and overtaken at once, and there'd be the devil to pay. Then think of my men—I don't want my little flower amongst rough swine like the Vanhievers.'

'Vanhiever!' The girl shrank out of his arms, and stood staring wildly at him. 'What Vanhiever? not Pietris—not Pietris?'

'Ay, Pietris and Dan—what ails you, child?'

'My God! O my God!' She sprang back to him, and threw her arms round his neck, and drew his head down to hers with a gesture of protection.

'He doesn't know, does he? Tell me, he doesn't know?'

'What *is* the matter, you funny child? You're shaking all over! *Who* doesn't know, *what?*'

'He, Pietris. Don't you know? Didn't you hear? He was my lover. I was betrothed to him,—*him* that I hated, and he swore to kill any one that came between. Did not my Lord know?'

Her voice fell again, and she spoke in a terrified whisper.

He flung his head back. 'Not I,' he said, with a laugh.

'The hog, to raise his eyes to you! Well, dear, it's all right, he knows nothing;'—then, as a thought struck him, he went on with a sort of relief, 'but don't you see, that settles it, it can't be while he's with me—won't do at all.'

'No, no, and O, my Love, be careful—don't come here again. You don't know him; he is a devil, and the child of devils.'

She clung to him despairingly.

'All right, my darling, trust me. I'll make tracks for Cape Town to-morrow, and you must promise me to be a good child and keep a brave heart, and then—think, only two weeks —three at the longest—there, there.'

She lay resting in his arms, her face buried against his shoulder, stifling the sobs that

would come; then, raising her head, she said quickly and passionately:

'Go, my Lord, go, and quickly; thou may'st be missed, and remember, he is a devil—yes, a *devil.* In three weeks thou wilt return.' She looked full in his face. 'Go, and by this—and this—do not forget thy servant.'

She put her lips to his and kissed him passionately twice.

'No, my darling, no.' There was a husk in his throat, and the careless gaiety of his voice was shaken. He mounted and rode away, looking back at the slight figure leaning against the tree, with hands clasped to her breast in a dumb agony.

After he lost sight of her, he rode for some time silently, his head drooping; then, as a man will who has been much on the *veldt,* he began talking to himself disjointedly:

'Poor little thing!—I don't know—I don't know—am I a most awful brute, or what am I? What am I going to do? Devil only knows—this is a mess, my boy, whichever way you look at it. She's a sweet child, but—my God, for always, and then—my people—and then—the world—and then—her people, umm—Boers, bah! Brutes! Too many "and then's"

—Strikes me I've been a fool—a dashed fool. Well, can't be helped; what's to be done now, that's the point?'

The grey tossed up his head and neighed—they were fast nearing the rocky island in the desert of sand and scrub.

'What's to be done? cut and run? My Gad, it's blackguardly, but *que voulez vous?* it's wise.—Go back to her? Poor little thing! I'd like to, fast enough, I'm fond enough of her now, *but*—always a d——d "but," and this time a devil of a d——d "but."' The grey stumbled, and his thoughts were jerked into another train. 'That swine Pietris! The impudence of the brute! Leave her—that means—to him—By gum! I can't stand that—it's not on the cards at all—to him, the blackguard! By George, no! I shall *have* to go back to her, oh! decidedly I shall have to go back, and the sooner the better, and, d——n it, I'm glad of it.'

He urged the tired horse forward with voice and heel, and entered the narrow passage between the giant rocks.

* * * *

There was silence where the venerable Cokerbôm tree, from under its grim red-grey protectors through unnumbered centuries, laid

a gnarled and fantastic shadow across the moonlit track. That little world of rocks and sand, of scanty brush and tree, held its breath. In the death-like stillness the spirit of the Pass seemed to be straining to catch an approaching sound.

A long, deep-drawn, hissing breath, and again that brooding silence, while the moonlight played for an instant on the silver tongue waiting in the mesmerised space for its brief repast. Along a knotted, spikey branch Pietris Vanhiever crouched, grasping in his hand a naked, long-bladed knife; his sinewy arm, on which the dark swollen veins stood out like cords, was stretched so as to give full play to a swift and sudden blow. His teeth bared in hungry expectation, every nerve strained in eager listening, he waited for the fulfilment of his vow, and the satisfaction of that passion of jealousy, which, after his two days of absolute bodily starvation, dominated his half-caste being to the extinction of every other feeling.

Presently there came within the ken of his hungry spirit a muffled regular sound drawing rapidly nearer—without doubt the foot-fall of a horse on the soft sand. His black eyes gleamed under their heavy brows with

a sombre fire, and gripping the branch more closely, he swung his arm once, twice, backwards and downwards, then drew it close to the branch again and waited.

'Loppety, loppety, loppety' came the swing of that peculiar three-legged canter that was steadily and virtuously making for the Englishman the first stage of that route that should put his little girl—his own property—for ever out of the reach of such swine as Pietris Vanhiever.

'That *he*, forsooth — *he* — good Lord! it's almost comic—certainly quite impossible!—Yes, this big *Kopje's* the first landmark—shall see the camp fire from the other side—unless the lazy hogs have let it out—hallo' . . .

The silent scream of the thirsty knife backwards and downwards, the hollow groan, the soft thump of the body on the sand, the frightened snort and sudden wheeling of the riderless horse, the hiss and dart of the destroyer on his prey—these things are written in the dumb records of the giant and changeless tree.

The sound of the grey's hoofs fleeing back in the direction from whence he had come had faded away before Pietris raised himself from the body of his enemy.

Dead, oh! undoubtedly dead; the good knife had gone home just below the left shoulder—no need of a second blow—a famous place, that. Yet he was sorry too—it would have been good to have struck again, and yet again, and—ah! that hated face! should he crush it shapeless with his heel, staring up at him careless and proud even in death? Should he? Should he? The Kaffir blood in him surged in waves to his heart, the desire to mutilate and mangle his enemy smote him sore. Not with his boot, though—no—no—leave signs—besides, too soft; only *Veldt schoens;* no—the knife again, blade or handle—all the same. He leant over and strained at the handle; as he strove to draw it from the wound, the eyes of the dead man seemed to roll and fix themselves on his. With a cry of superstitious terror he recoiled, and to his vision, maddened by passion, weakened by physical exhaustion and starvation, the blanched lips of the corpse moved in the old smile of cynical mockery.

A nameless dread seized upon him—the white man in him, that had given the nerve and passionate resolution for the steadfast fulfilment of his vow, gave place in a moment to the unreasoning, superstitious savage.

The man's body was dead—he knew that assuredly—but his spirit was alive and *there*—that proud and sneering spirit that he could not slay. He shrank back and crouched in a huddled heap against the rock, watching with fascinated gaze the movements of his enemy.

Now, to a diseased and distorted vision moonlight plays queer tricks with things. The tortures of the damned came upon Pietris Vanhiever, and, greatest torture of all, he was deprived of the power of flight. It seemed to his terror-ridden brain that the spirit through those eyes was drawing him slowly—slowly—to the body of his victim, there to hold him to eternity. Then a fresh horror came upon him, and the devil of superstition turned his thoughts to the tales crooned to him by his Kaffir mother, in the half light of the evenings, at the door of the native hut. The tales of the spirit of the Karroo, the Great Spirit, that comes to the souls of men whose lives and blood are spent upon the Karroo's breast, and gathers them to itself; the legends of the woe and ruth that befall the living man who looks upon the gathering of that harvest; and he shook with the cold fear that seized upon, and paralysed, his limbs and knees. So minutes and hours went by,

and the moon dropped low behind the great rocks, and a black darkness came over the pass of death, and ever the white upturned face held him through the blackness in a stupor of terror, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, save only, in those staring, shining eyes, the spirit of his enemy.

Ah—h—h, what was *that?*—at the end of the Pass, what was that?—white, silent through the darkness—what was it? *Lieber Gott,* what was it? Coming, white and terrible, yes, coming to the harvest.

'*Ah!*'—and screaming aloud in superstitious horror, 'The spirit of the Karroo! the spirit of the Karroo!' he fell back heavily in a dead swoon . . . .

Hopper's horse, stumbling in the blackness against something soft lying athwart the narrow track, bent down his head and sniffed, then with a snort of terror and disgust wheeled round and vanished for the second time riderless into the night.

* * * * * *

The breath that stirs over the Karroo before the first streak of dawn, straying into the heart of the great *Kopje,* stirred the soft down on

the tips of Silverback's ears, and played faintly with the beard on the dead man's face.

'The dawn is at hand, O Lord of the far-smelling nostrils and steel-like jaws, would it not be well to bite and sup, if but just a little, for surely this be dead also, he has not moved these two hours.'

'Try and see,' snarled the jackal.

The hyæna drew back his grizzled snout with a grunt of disgust and alarm.

'The Mother of all hyænas forbid! *I* touch a whole man, *fresh,* that also might yet be living! Nay, nay, but do thou, who knowest not fear, make trial and see if he be really good corpse, and no longer two-legged demon, and I will withdraw a while and keep good watch at the hinder end.'

'Coward!' grumbled the jackal, watching him shrink to the outside of the *Kopje.* 'But as for me,' he grunted to himself, 'the day is at hand, and my stomach calls loudly.'

Licking his long red gums, he stole forward from his lurking place in the crumbled sand, and set his white fangs in the fleshy part of Pietris' leg, not omitting to beat a rapid retreat, in case of unexpected developments.

The murderer's death-like swoon was not

proof against the meeting of those steel-like jaws. He groaned uneasily, and rolling round, raised himself stiffly and slowly to a sitting posture.

'A thousand devils!' he muttered, rubbing his leg, from which the blood flowed freely, 'what fool's game is this?'

Then his bewildered eyes in the fitful grey glimmer, that before the coming of the dawn forced itself into the recesses of the *Kopje*, fell on the upturned face of the Englishman. With a start Pietris sprang to his feet, recollection of the events and the horror of the night coming with a rush to his awakening mind. He staggered, then shrinkingly crept forward, and, bending over the body of his victim, looked long and fearfully into the glazed eyes.

'It is gone!' he muttered, 'gone, gathered—and I—woe is me!—ruin and death—I have seen the harvest;—well, there is no more fear in that trash,'—he spurned the prostrate body,—'except for this'—and stooping, with a great effort he wrenched the knife from the wound. He plunged it into the ground, and, wiping it carefully, replaced it in his belt. His eye in stooping caught the fresh spoor of Silverback and his companion.

'Gott sei dank!' he muttered, 'there needs no burial here,' and his eye followed the spoor into a cave at the rock base. Once again he looked at the helpless corpse, and a thought came into his mind. He rolled from the side of the rocks a large stone, rubbed on it some of the blood still dripping from his own leg, and placed it close to the head of the dead man—then: 'It will be thought he fell, and struck his head, for soon there will be but bones,' he said with a grin; then with a muttered oath, and a hurried look around and back, half of fear and half of hate, he fled painfully and wearily, but with noiseless steps, towards where in the far distance the embers of the camp fire still cast a red glow, and whence an occasional grunt from a half-slumbering mule was borne towards him on the breath of the dawn. Rapidly and wearily he fled, in the misty half light, and behind him in the darkness rose and fell the unearthly yowl—the jackal's grace before meat.

'The feast begins,' he muttered, and as answering cries came from the scrub to the right and left of him, 'Good eating, all of you!—this was he born for.'

* * * * * *

'Not guilty' was the verdict; 'guilty, but not enough evidence,' the comment of the Court, for Hopper's horse, a gaunt silverbacked jackal, and a Cokerbôm tree were not asked to give testimony.

To this day, if you should chance to take Pietris Vanhiever with you on a shooting trip, do not over your camp fire discourse on native superstitions pertaining to the *Karroo*—it is calculated to upset an otherwise good hunter.

A PRAIRIE OYSTER

'I drink my love at the fall of night,
As the glow dies out of the Western sky;
I drink to the whirr of the widgeon's flight,
And the coyote's yowl, as we drundle by.

'I drink my love in the prairie morn,
With a "Hey! farewell!" to the falling moon,
To the stars a-point at the flush of dawn,
And the waking cry of the watchful loon.

'I drink my love in the heat and glare,
With the sun a-flame on the silent lake;
I drink to the hum of the quivering air,
To the beat and throb of the world awake.

'Here's a toast to them all! And it's sung refrain
Is the clink and jar of a westward train.'

We droned along in one of those fits of despondency peculiar to trains that have an immensity of flat ground in which to pick up their lost time.

The night was a lovely one, hot, with a bright moon silvering the prairie, and trying vainly to throw shadows in a shadowless space. In a meditative mood, I lounged on the platform against the open door of the smoking car, and it seemed to me that I was taking a lesson in the comprehension of infinity. A rolling plain as far as the eye could reach—not a tree—not a house—as limitless and as empty as the sky itself.

A peculiar feeling of rest and freedom at first possessed me; I was, or thought I was, beginning to understand many things hitherto unrevealed, to have a sympathy with Simon Stylites, and an appreciation of Mahatmaism;

but soon a wild desire to project myself indefinitely into space seized upon me. The moonlight and the vastness were getting into my brain—a little more, and I might have leapt from the train, and run until nature or prairie dog holes should assert their influence upon me;—and then with a saving grace, a couple of coyotes appeared from behind a hillock, and played with their tails in the moonlight—and the spell was broken.

I became conscious that my cigar was out, that the mosquitoes were annoyingly attentive. Better to be a limited being in a smoking car and not itch, than to be an unlimited being outside it and itch most 'demnibly.' I went back into the smoking-room.

Empty, thank heaven—no professionals from the Golden City to talk faro and rowdyism; no commercials to bombard one with down Eastern brag, the decline of Winnipeg, or the future of Vancouver and the C. P. R.; no globe-trotting sportsman to bewail his luck in the Rockies, or abuse the British Columbian for a liar.

'Empty, thank God.'

'Take a light, sir?' said a soft, rather high pitched, drawling voice under my left elbow. I

jumped, and, to disguise it, smote my cheek, where a mosquito might have been, but was not.

A man of about forty, a long figure in a sleeping suit, with a lean, brown, clean-shaven face, courteously bending forward, held towards me the lighted end of a cigar.

'Thanks very much, sir; delighted to find I'm not alone.'

'*Not* empty, thank God;' said Mr Dick Denver, in an unmoved voice.

'My dear sir,' said I, sitting down next to him, 'I should'nt have dreamed of that remark, if I'd seen *you;* but you were so completely tucked away in that corner, that I'd no idea you were here, and I must confess I *was* uncommonly glad not to see our 'Frisco friends, or the bummers' (*Anglice* commercial travellers).

'Guess you're right; they are kind of tiring.'

'What beats me,' I went on, 'is the way people like that, who really have nothing to say, insist upon saying it, and, by Gad, enjoy saying it, and are certain you enjoy hearing them say it, and set you down as a condemned fool if you don't say it yourselves.'

'Right,' said Mr Denver; 'for a man that

spreads himself around to be dull, give me a woman first, and then a bummer. And yet,' he went on meditatively, 'there are some profoundly interesting beetles amongst that last tribe; and—amongst the other too.' He sighed, and relapsed into the silent puffing of his cigar. I had not travelled from Montreal nearly to Calgary with Mr Denver without discovering that he was a silent man on all subjects, and on the subject of women a dumb, and apparently a deaf image. Try him upon the subject of 'bummers' the oyster might open for once, I thought, but without much hope.

'Did you ever have anything to do with any curious specimen?' I said carelessly.

'Some,' he said; 'one mainly—Irishman—he travelled in wine; I guess he was the smartest coon I ever struck, but no head—or rather too much head, like a glass of stout.'

'All Irishmen are like that,' I said, sententiously and untruthfully; then, with a cautious insertion of the opener, 'what was his name?'

'Kinahan; we called him Kinjan,' and—more to himself than to me—'Jupiter! I was in the tightest kind of a hole with that cuss and one other.'

'Really tight?' said I.

'Never tighter, except about three times, and those I don't take much stock in talking of.'

'Women?' I said hardily. He nodded.

'And others,' he added, as if he had thereby over-committed himself.

'It seems to me,' said I, feeling the opener deepening in the shell, 'you don't "take much stock" in talking of anything, considering that you really have got something to say; tell me this yarn of Kinjan, and be a benefactor to a poor sleep-forsaken devil.'

Mr Denver chewed the end of his cigar.

'Bore you world without end,' he said.

'Try me,' I besought.

'We must have drinks, then.' He heaved himself up, and called melodiously over the car platforms.

When the materials had been brought, Mr Denver constructed himself his favourite pick-me-up, in which raw egg and cayenne pepper formed the chief ingredients.

'Let me mix you one,' he said; 'guess you won't weaken on it; it's short, but it's breezy.'

We drank together, and our hearts were opened within us, and we became as brothers. Through the open door and window the wonderful silver prairie night came in, and the lamp of

the smoking-room flickered and went out before its breath. We swallowed another prairie oyster each, and the strings of Mr Dick Denver's tongue were unloosed, and he spake plain, if a little through his nose.

And as he spake, the snoring from the sleeping-saloon and the snorting of the engine became to me as the roaring of the surf upon the sea-shore, and the rolling prairie as the sands of the desert, and afar off a lone clump of trees shining white under the moon as the minarets of a distant Moorish city.

'Well,' he said, 'I was moving around one time on a cargo steamer, calculating to go to Madeira or Teneriffe, and see what I could strike out of those parts. Well, you know, I don't cotton to "tramps;" they're a pretty ordinary lot, and the one I was on that trip was tough, just tough; from the skipper down to the bacon the whole show was tough. There were only three passengers on board: myself, this Kinjan, and a long Britisher, by name Torin—the Hon. Christopher Torin was his full label.' Mr Denver paused, and tilted his head back in his seat, and in this attitude, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, resumed, through a cloud of smoke.

'Yes,' he said, 'I guess I am of opinion *that* Mr Torin was by a considerable way the coolest and the silentest cuss I ever struck, and I've had experience; but with it, mind you, he was the most reckless devil that ever let in to make the universe hum. He wasn't long out of some mess or other—woman, I heard—and likely enough—poor beggar!'—and Mr Denver heaved a sigh of smoke that brought a stupefied mosquito down from the ceiling. Presently he resumed.

'He was a long, good-looking chap, with a don't-care look, and one of those short, fair beards that grow on so many of you Britishers—going a bit grey—and an extraordinary strong man, thick through, and long in the limb. He was going down to Madeira, to fetch one of the South African boats for a shooting trip. We three used to mess together, you know, and got pretty thick,—Kinjan blowing around and spreading himself, Torin smoking and drinking, and now and then nodding his head, and I laying up and figuring them out—not for professional reasons, but because it's kind of got to be a habit of mine, and they were two of the queerest bugs.

"Not alone in their glory," I thought to myself, but, beyond a grunt of appreciation, said nothing; the oyster was fairly open now.

'Well, one evening about four bells,—while we were making down pretty near in to the Morocco coast, and about a hundred miles top side of Mogador,—I was leaning over the port rail aft, snuffing up the phosphorus, and admiring at the right down smartness of the skipper, shoving in shore on a real reefy coast, when there came an everlasting jolt, and before I could get in the thin end of a cuss, I guess I was treading water, and blowing like a grampus, forty yards from a fast-sinking ship. It wasn't any good going back —that was clear—she wouldn't be above water another five minutes, so I lit out and shoved for the shore,—a long white streaky line about a quarter of a mile off, with a blamed current setting me off it. I had to get there, or bust, and I *got,* but it was stiff going, and when I had made the sand I was as badly roasted as a leg of pork.

'I easied a bit, and lay up with my legs in the water, though the tide running out soon left them high and dry. By and bye, I came round, and concluded to prospect along that

shore, and see if any other wreckage had come to hand. It was pretty dark, but the sands were easy going, and there was a moon just getting up. I guess I hadn't gone above a few hundred yards when I saw something white, about the height of a man's figure, rising out of the sand a short way off. When I got nearer I saw it *was* a man, Torin himself, leaning on an oar and looking down at his legs, which were quite bare.

'I fetched out a howl of joy, and ran for him. I remember he just turned his head, and all he said was: "Haven't got a pair of breeches to lend a chap, have you?" Seems he'd been in his berth when the ship struck, and the lower end of his pyjamas had sprung and cut adrift in swimming, and left him in pale pink above, and another kind of a pale pink below. Being a tidy sort of a cuss, he was a good piece annoyed, so I reckoned we had better get right along with the prospecting, and it might be we should run on that nether end. However, we didn't, and presently, as we were a good bit stretched with swimming against the tide, we lay up under a sand hillock and had considerable sleep. I guess it might have been an hour or so after dawn, when I was

woke by a curious screechy sort of a noise. As soon as I got my ears under weigh, I found it panned out something like, "Bedad! ye divils, begorra, be aisy, bejabbers!"—seemed kind of Irish. I rolled over from sleeping inland, and, by the holy poker, within fifty yards of where we had slept, washed up high and dry by the tide, which had turned in the night and was then about full, was a barr'l with a head on it, and out of that head was just pouring the thickest kind of Irish. A man could see that the inside of that barr'l was yearning to have some sort of consideration paid to it. I roused up Torin, and we went down quietly, and inspected the cask from behind. It was a very nice barr'l—a butter barr'l—and I judge about a third full of butter, and may be two-thirds full of Kinjan; and the funny thing was that the poor coon had been washed up stuck fast in that barr'l with his head turned out to sea, so as he couldn't suspicion we were around, and he was waltzing into creation with the finest language, and the air was real stiff with cussing. Well, I guess we laughed some, though we were tarnation glad to see him,—that is, I laughed, and Torin stood there stroking his beard,

with the nearest approach to a grin I ever saw on him. The laughing just drove Kinjan mad, and he wrenched round with a mighty wriggle, and when he saw us he fairly surpassed himself, cussing us up and down, beginning with our boot laces—which were mighty scarce, by the way. His remarks were not worth repeating.

'When he had dried up, owing to a trickle of butter dripping from his head into his mouth,—he was buttery all over,—Torin said, "Got any bread with you?" That set him off again, but he toned down mighty quick, and ended up by saying quite quietly:

'"Take me out of this, and be d——d to ye, ye leather-headed sons of bottle-washers!" and then he fainted. So we took him out, and hung him over the cask, and sluiced water over him, and presently he came to, ca'm, but pretty yallow.

''Pears when the ship struck, he'd been jerked off the poop right into this butter barr'l, which was standing open and most empty on the lower deck. When he felt the ship disappearing under him, being an Irishman, and a genius, with a turn for expurriment,—but I guess mainly because he couldn't swim,—he calculated to stay

where he was. He grabbed a bit of wood that came along, and by means of this managed to keep the barr'l top side up, the sea luckily being as ca'm as a mill-pond. He said he was first taken out maybe hundred of miles till he could most smell the Canaries, and then brought in again on the turning tide and washed up. In his struggles near shore, he'd kicked clean through the bottom of the cask, and, getting his leg jammed tight through the hole, was as fast as a tick when we found him. He had a down on butter afterwards; he never 'peared to go much on it, 'slong as I knew him.'

Over Mr Denver's face, which had hitherto been as unmoved and expressionless as carved mahogany, twinkled a fleeting look of joy, which disappeared with the next puff of his cigar.

'That was not the most amusing day I *have* spent,' he went on, meditatively; 'we kept mighty busy looking for fixings and finding none to speak of; I guess the current must have appropriated all that was useful in the old tub,—only the most or'nery articles came along—empty hencoops, and barr'ls, and such like—not a single tarnation thing to eat or drink. I judge the skipper and most of the crew turned up their toes, though I heard afterwards that four

of them were saved out of a small boat by a passing vessel. Torin got a piece of sail-cloth, and made himself a pinafore, which comforted him some. Kinjan slept most of the day, and when he woke up, he told us we were fools, and that what we wanted instead of mooning around for things from the sea, was to go inland and find out if there weren't any houses or cities in the vicinity; and then he rolled himself up tight in the shade of that sand-heap like a darned yellow dormouse, and went to sleep again; I guess he must have had a most amazing wide-awake time in that barr'l, I never saw a man sleep so. Torin and I were most powerfully hungry and thirsty by this, so we went inland a piece and looked about us for the highest ground we could find,—the country was as blamed flat, mind you, as this prairie. We found a sand hillock that rose a bit above the rest of the ground, and Torin made a back and said "get up;" so I got, and stood on his shoulders, and looked; and presently out of the distance away to the south-east, it might have been five or six miles, I could see some white spikey things seeming to stick up out of the yallow horizon. I told Torin, and he got up on me, and when he came down—which he did

pretty smart, owing to my balance going wrong —he cursed gently, with his mouth full of sand, and said, "Minarets, city!"

'Well, we went back to Kinjan, who was awake, for a wonder, and told him; and then he said he'd just remembered the whole country round those parts was in the hands of the rebels, and that if we were seen we should be killed, so he recommended us to go on hunting along shore, till we ran across a boat, and get away in that, and he recommended us particularly to look out for a barr'l of whisky; then he went to sleep again. Well, we just sat down, and waited for him to get thirsty, calculating that when that was so, being an Irishman, he would find us a way out of the fix. And presently he got, and it woke him up, and after cursing a bit, he sat up quite spry—but a piece yallow still—and figured out the most beautiful plan of how we would go and take that city if necessary, and make them provide us with an escort down to Mogador. Then he said it was no good doing anything till it was cool and dark. So he lay down again and went to sleep; and after one more look along shore we lay down alongside and did the same, meaning to start with the dawn next morning for the city. I

reckon we were played out that evening, and felt real rocky and dispurited.'

Dick Denver's memories of that thirsty day were here too much for him; he rose and called again for drinks across the platform. When they had come, in the hands of a sleepy and coloured individual, he finished a whisky and soda at a single draught, and resumed.

'That fellow was infectious, I guess; anyway I slept until a heavy sort of feeling about my chest woke me, and I found a great hairy nigger cuss had taken me for an arm-chair. All around us in the moonlight were a lot of ferocious-looking devils in long robes and turbans, armed to the teeth. Torin was lying spread-eagled on my right—he didn't 'pear to be discommoded—but he spat out a broken tooth, and I heard him mutter to himself, "You fools, much better have killed me, and have done with it;" and I judged he was powerfully divided between two sorts of wish.

'There was a nigger holding on to each of my arms and legs, so I took it quietly, and they bound me up like an eternal mummy. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Kinjan's face shining round and red in the middle of a mass of niggers. He rolled his

eye at me, and began, "Be aisy, Dick—Begad! I'll take tay with ye prisintly, ye hairy haythens!" Just then one of the niggers stuffed his mouth with sand, so he shut his head kind of sudden. Then they picketed their horses round us, and sat on their haunches, and pow-wowed everlastingly.

'I judged we were in the hands of a band of rebel Moors loafing along shore in search of wreckage; and a man could see with half an eye it was a tight place. I wasn't more than six feet from Kinjan, and I could tell by the prick of his ears he was understanding the pow-wow; living as he did at "Gib," he'd been a lot in the country and *sabed* the lingo well. Lie low was the only game, and I lay and thunk a lot, but all the time I felt kind of certain that if we were coming out of that place, it was Kinjan's show—and the more so because I knew he was almighty dry. Their chief seemed a venerable kind of a bug, with a long white beard and turban, and he did most of the pow-wowing. Presently they easied off, and after looking us over well, and giving us a kick or two, set two sentinels, and turned in for sleep. The sentries stood out about twenty yards; and when the others seemed

fixed pretty quiet, Kinjan gave a gentle roll of his fat carcase towards me, and said, out of his back teeth (I can't give his accent, but it was real rich): "Thanks be to Jasus, one of me knots is a granny. Praise the pigs, I'll be out of ut in ten minutes. Tell Torin; and when I give ye the wink, stand by, and I'll cut ye loose—then grab what ye can and clear the camp; whist!" One of the sentries faced round right there and came towards us; he prodded at me with the butt end of his lance to see that I couldn't move when he tickled me, and he rolled Kinjan over with his foot; we neither of us budged, so he concluded we were fixed, and mouched back again.

'I counted the gang; there were fifteen of them. Torin was laying very low about three yards away, but I judged from a sign he made when the sentry vamoosed, that he knew things were about to progress. After what seemed a 'nation long time, Kinjan raised his head, and I saw from his movements he'd succeeded in freeing his hands; presently he came rolling gently on to me, and I felt the point of his blamed knife going in as he cut the thongs; then he handed me the knife, and I rolled on to Torin and hacked him loose;

and just as I got through, one of the sentries tumbled to it, and came for us like greased lightning. I saw Kinjan throw out his arm from the ground, and the cuss tripped right over it on to us, and his spear went into the ground through my coat.

'Kinjan raised a whoop, and got that spear and ran it through the man next him—he was a bloodthirsty little cuss. I laid for the sentry's pistols—he had two—and drew a very neat bead on the other sentry.

'Torin he just sat up and purred, and then when the devils began to come on, he took that fallen sentry by the legs, and got a wiggle on him, and went for them into the thick; and he swung the poor devil round and round and cleared that crowd like fury —'peared they didn't understand the game. He laid out three of them, and then they scattered and drew back; I dropped another with the other pistol, and Kinjan charged right down on the old chief, and bowled him over with the butt-end of his spear. "'Tis all over, bhoys," he said, and sat on the old gentleman; and so it was. When they saw the tail-ends of their boss waving in the air, the rest of them made tracks. In the

intervals of sticking the business end of his spear into things, Kinjan had cut loose all their horses but four or five, and there was a beautiful scrimmage over those sand hillocks, men and horses all mixed, and travelling in most directions like fury. That was a vūrry tidy dodge of Torin's,—maybe it was rough on the sentry, but it was vūrry impressive—some of the impressions might have been a foot long, I should judge.' He paused; the train had stopped with a jerk at a station, and the engine was blowing off steam with a disturbing energy.

'Durn the durned thing,' said Mr Denver; but presently he resumed, as we droned on again.

'We—ell,' and there was an alarming touch of boredom in his tone, 'after we'd tied the old boy, we had a quiet time, doctoring up those we'd stretched, as best we could, and figuring out what was to be done. Kinjan and I palavered over the chances, but Torin didn't seem to care what we did, and seemed sort of disgusted with the whole affair. He stood leaning on a spear by the horses, and once I heard him mutter, "Damn! shan't get such a chance again." I judged he would

have let himself be killed like a sheep, but the fighting instinct was too strong for him; he was as sulky as he could be, but he did what he was told, which was the main thing. I was for riding along the coast and trying to make Mogador, but Kinjan over-persuaded me that a bold course was the best thing; he wanted to go right there for the city. "We've got the weapons, clothes, horses, and a goide, but we've got nothing to dhrink," he said, "and ut would be unbecomin' of us if we lift the neighbourhood without dhroppin' a cyard." He took great pleasure in dressing us up in clothes taken from the deceased, and fussed around like a seven-year-old going to a party—the little devil had lots of sand; he said the great thing was to get *into* the city, and to do that we must throw in plenty of style.

'At last we got rigged out and mounted; I guess we made pretty fair heathens, all except Kinjan—he was too red and fat. He tied the old chief's hands and his feet under his horse, and make him go first. I came next with a shooting-iron handy, and the other two brought up the rear. After a stretch, Kinjan rode up alongside the old gentleman, and

began to blandhander to him in his own tongue, and presently he made me a sign, and then cut the ropes that bound his feet, and the old boy perked up, and began to spread himself; and by the time we came within sight of the town, those two were as thick as thieves. I judge Kinjan would have made a fine poker-player,' said Mr Denver in parentheses, with a sigh of regret.

'It was a light kind of a night, and we could see the walls around the institution from quite a way off. The old boy was heading us for the principal gate, and Kinjan turned to me: "The town's in the hands of the ribils," he said; "but, praises to the Almighty! the ould gintleman's a big pot amongst thim, and he's promised to take us to the Sheikh—or whativer his misbegotten name may be—and git us a pass and an iscort." "Bluff!" I said; "'ware snakes." "Faith! no," said he, "'tis a swate old baboo, and ut's truth he's telling." I wasn't taking any, but it wouldn't have done to interfere then, so I shut my head, and we rode on along the walls. Presently we struck what I judge was the front door; considerable of a high gate, fortified with iron spikes, and vūrry strong. There were no signs of hospitality.

"I guess I'll knock," I said, and butted the end of my lance against the gate. A voice cried out from one of the little towers on the walls on each side in a kind of a sing-song; the old chief sung out something in answer, and then they had a palaver. I reckon they spoke some strange lingo, for Kinjan called out to me excitedly, "Can ye understand thim? May me sowl rust if oi can." Before I could answer, we heard a sound of horses tramping, the gate's hinges turned and it swung open, and there in front of us, drawn up in line, with spears in rest, was a troop of most a dozen mounted niggers. "Euchred, be Jasus! The ould schoundhrel! and the drinks oi promused 'um!" said Kinjan, mournfully; I guess I was thinking it was about time to throw up the cards and leave, when Torin trotted his horse past me. "Good-bye, boys," he said, "*I'm* going into the city." He just waved his hand, clapped his heels into his horse's side, and went like a catamount for the troop. They slashed and speared at him right and left, but they were taken by surprise; and I guess his release hadn't been signed, for he went through them like so much paper. 'Well, *sir*,'—Mr Denver rolled a cigarette and

drew his breath in with a sharp hiss—'how it came about I can't say, but Kinjan and I, with the old gentleman between us, went through after him—they were kind of discommoded, I suppose—Torin was a big man, and he left an aperture. The moment we cleared them, Kinjan put a pistol to the chief's head. "Ye son of a herring," he said, quite forgetting to speak Moorish, "take us straight to the Sheikh's palace, or I'll schatter yer dhirty brains." The only words of Moorish were Sheikh and palace, but they were enough for the old boy; he was as skeered an old cuss as I ever saw; he ducked from the pistol, touched his forehead, and muttered something, and we all vamoosed down the rattling stone-paved streets, like the job lot of horse-thieves we were.

'The old gentleman was profoundly interested in the business-end of that shooting-iron, and so we got right there without any more hanky-panky; you see the streets were just as empty as a nigger's head, and we had more than a street's start of the guard. When we pulled up sharp in front of a large detached location, we could hear the guard coming, hell for leather. Kinjan explained to the chief that

he had got to take us to the Sheikh right along, or he would investigate his interior. Now that old heathen was as swift a man at trapping an idea as ever I saw; he signed to us to get off our horses, and, with the end of the pistol working into the small of his back, he called out loudly in Moorish, and the gate was thrown open for us. 'Then,' said Mr Denver, flipping petulantly at his cigarette ash, 'occurred a most annoying little affair. We were just passing quietly through the doorway, and the guard not more than a hundred yards away, coming like Jerusalem, when Torin pushed me aside, and stepped back to his horse. "Go on," he said, "I've got another word to say to those fellows." He was swinging himself into the saddle, when Kinjan drew a bead on the horse and brought the whole show to the ground. "Not so fast, ye suicidin' divil," he said, "bear ahand, Dick," and before Torin could get his balance we lugged him through the door and shut it. 'I've often regretted it since; 'twasn't a neighbourly thing to do,' said Mr Denver, thoughtfully, 'for when a man wants his release real bad, why in thunder shouldn't he have it?' He lounged back in his seat with a far-away

look in his sunken eyes, and I had to jog him with questions once or twice before he took up the word again.

'Well, sir, the old chief had vamoosed down the street in the shindy, and there was only the porter, looking tolerably parti-coloured. When Torin found himself inside, instead of out, as he'd reckoned to be, he just folded his arms and shut his head, and I guess neither of us ever felt like alluding to that incident. Whether the porter took us for devils or not, I can't say, but he was tarnation civil, specially when he felt the end of Kinjan's pistol. As we passed through a stone archway into a courtyard, the house began to hum, and we could hear the guard behind us hammering at the gate we'd just come through. Kinjan pointed out to the porter in Moorish, and shooting-iron, that we were going right up to the Sheikh's bedroom. The unfortunate coon said he reckoned his head was feeling loose, and kind of wobbly on his shoulders, but if we would ascend the steps he pointed to, we would find the Sheikh's private apartments at the top; we thanked him, and he said his head felt real loose; but we took him along and went right there. He played us

honest Injun, did that porter, and may be his woolly top's on his shoulders yet; but I'm not betting on that,' drawled Mr Denver, compassionately; and he stopped, turning his head to gaze out of the window.

'Look,' he said, 'there's the dawn.' And sure enough, far away behind us on the eastern horizon, a pale salmon streak slowly lengthened and spread; between us and it on the dim prairie lay a still, murky sheet of water. In front of the train, in its western wayfaring, the young slopes of the Rockies rose shadowy and faint in the growing light. As we stepped out on to the car platform the shrill tragic cry of the loon came floating to us, through the wreathing mist, from across the reedy pools. We watched the sun rise—and those who are watching the sun rise on the prairie and the flushing of the early mountain slopes in the reflected light, are not greatly given to talk. But when it was over, I turned to Dick Denver. His brown, lean face looked drawn and haggard, and he shaded his eyes with his hand. Presently he raised his hand to his hat, and taking it off, stood looking long and steadily at the now risen sun, and his lips moved. If I hadn't known him for a

hardened and notorious sinner, I should have said he was muttering a prayer. The impression was so strong upon me that I waited to speak until he had replaced his hat.

'Well?' I said.

'Well?' he replied absently, his eyes still on the far horizon.

'And then? What happened next? Did you see the Sheikh?' I lamely jogged him.

'What!' his mind returned unwillingly. 'You can't in thunder want to hear any more after that?' and he pointed eastwards.

'I'm very sorry,' I said, 'but I most certainly do. I want to hear the rest of your yarn badly.'

'Oh! well,' he said, resignedly, 'I guess there's mighty little left to tell.'

'The Sheikh,' I jogged.

'Oh, yes, the Sheikh,' he went on in a hopelessly bored tone; 'we saw him—he was a vūrry civil cuss, said it was all a mistake, and we were his dearest friends, and the English were his fathers and his brothers and all his relations, and I guess—oh, yes, I guess he sent us down to Mogador with a troop of cavalry, and—that's all.' He turned and went

back into the smoking car. The oyster was closing fast.

'Just one question,' I hazarded; 'what became of the other two men afterwards?' He drew out a pack of cards, and began shuffling them, and I had to repeat the question.

'Oh! I guess Kinjan would be alive,—why certainly he would be; unless he might have been caught up in a flame of fire, there wouldn't be any other kind of a death for him,' he said with the ghost of a smile.

'And Torin?'

'Gone out, I reckon,' he said impassively.

The curt grimness of this remark jarred upon me, though why it should have, I don't know; why expect sentiment from Dick Denver, who lived from day's end to day's end with his life in his hands?

'In heaven's name, why indeed?' I said aloud to myself, as I turned once again before going through the door to my berth—Dick Denver was dealing a set of poker hands, and humming softly to himself. It was broad daylight, and the train still droned along. I was dead tired; and as I shut the door softly, and turned into my bunk, instead of

an intelligent moral deduction from the story and its teller, all I could think of was the children's grace, 'Thank God for a good dinner.'

ACCORDING TO HIS LIGHTS

'Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone;
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own.'

—Adam Lindsay Gordon.

'Prevention is better than cure,' they say. Quite probably; anyway that must be the reason why our system of imprisonment is so popular, for whoever knew anyone cured by it?

What the exact state of Eugene Rattray's moral sentiments were upon the day that he was released from Rochester Gaol, it would be difficult to say.

Judging from the following record, I very much doubt whether the term of his imprisonment had materially affected his view of things.

What was his offence? The law called it by an awkward name having consequences; these consequences the law applied to a man who had come back of his own accord from Australia to 'face the music,' as he phrased it. I myself could never see that the offence

was more than a chance effect of circumstances upon a formed character. It seemed to me futile to punish a chance effect, seeing that it was the formed character you wanted to get at; but anyway, 'they done it,' as Huck Finn has it.

When I went to see him in Pentonville, where he was known as 'that there tall /talian with the strong beard, wot carries 'is 'ead so 'igh' (certainly Eugene's origin was half Greek, but then it was *all* Greek to the warders—hence the /talian), he talked cheerfully enough, poor chap, and without any bitterness as to the past. As to the future, he put it away; he had to 'face the music,' and in doing that he was hard enough put to it to 'carry 'is 'ead 'igh' in the present, without thinking of the future. I suppose he realised to a certain degree what it would be like to 'come out,' but not greatly, for he told me that he felt exactly like a wrecked man flung on a desert island, when, on a February morning, with his certificate of discharge in his pocket, he walked out of Rochester Gaol into the world.

So feeling, he strolled to the end of the street, and there the sense of having lived his life

pressed so strongly upon him that he stood debating dazedly whether he would not go back, and ask to be taken in again. He even took some steps in the direction of the prison, till the absurdity of the idea presented itself to his mind. He shook himself like a dog, and, pulling up before a shop window, looked long and critically at his image in the plate-glass. It was a presentable reflection, tall, straight, well-clothed; he took off his hat, and replaced it quickly with a shudder; he registered a mental vow not to remove his gloves for some days; he gazed at his upper lip blankly, it did not seem to fit in with his surroundings; finally he turned out his pockets—one pound fifteen shillings and sixpence.

This pantomime he went through mechanically, with the feeling that he must do something rational, something practical, however trifling, to save him from thought; and the next moment, the black waves of despair came rolling in over his flimsy breakwater one after the other, driving him with head down and huge strides anywhere away from his fellows. *This* was the tug; anything that had gone before was child's play to *this*. Oue into a world that could look, and point and

whisper the words 'Convicted felon!' to which there was no answer. It had been different in there; what were the words but the common property of all? It was easy enough to hold one's head up in that dim world; but outside it, where everything was so clear and bright, where the light was strong—he cursed the sun; where everyone could and would read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest his shame; where he was branded like any poor devil of a sheep on a bush run. He flung himself down in a field, and—well, there are some things that are best left alone, and the full tide of a strong man's humiliation is one of them.

Two hours later, Eugene walked into Rochester Station, his brow knit and his head thrown back, and cursing his fate silently in his heart. He took a first single to London.

'As long as I have a sou,' he thought, 'I'll give it for the only luxury left me—solitude;' and he jingled the few remaining coins in his pocket.

They say an habitual criminal turned loose again upon society goes back to the scene of his offence—there is also a saying about a dog. Eugene was not an habitual criminal, he was only a victim of circumstances, playing on a

formed character, yet he experienced a vague desire to return to the circumstances. He has told me that on that short but divinely lonely journey he was able to think his position over rationally. Item—he had no money, but many relations and friends, possibly, nay probably, willing to help him. Item—he was of the leisured class, unfitted for, *and*—a large *and*—disqualified for anything, except the merest manual labour. Item—he was physically strong, but happily, so he had been told, not unlikely to die at any minute. Item—he loved the best of everything. Finally, item—he had no reputation, and therefore no self-respect. He cast about in agony for any foundation on which to base a self-respect, and he found one, whether good or bad, who knows? In the circumstances, to the man, the only one. 'Face the music; keep your head up; society has dealt you hard measure, treat it with the contempt with which it will undoubtedly treat you; if you let go the plank of your pride for but a minute, you drown.'

Nobody knew that he was free; his discharge had come a month earlier than expected, for some reason connected with certain services to the internal economy of the dim world. So

far, good. The practical sum of his reflections came to this: '*Let* no one know, avoid acquaintances, work in the docks till you have earned a passage to the diggings, and then'—he thought almost cheerfully of the 'then.'

He stepped out of the carriage serenely; after all it was only his friends and acquaintances that mattered, a tiny eddy in the huge whirlpool of existence; easy enough to keep out of that eddy. He was always of a sanguine disposition; it had been very hard, I remember, at school to persuade him that he would infallibly miss his remove. It is the sanguine people upon whom circumstances play their pranks; luckily the payment of the piper is not to them so severe a tax as it is to the others—the pendulum swings very evenly. He lunched, to fortify the reaction; he lunched well; it was the first meal he had had for fourteen months—those in the dim world did not count. A cup of coffee and a cigar completing the fortification, he walked out of the station and along the crowded streets, enjoying the stir and bustle around him.

Mechanically he moved westwards. Presently he found himself opposite one of his favourite haunts—he would go in and read the papers.

He stopped at the steps with a jerk, the waves came rolling back on him again, he gripped his plank and strode on. Some vague idea of seeking the docks directed his steps eastwards again through the heart and centre of the hum. He caught himself gazing with an indifferent, almost a callous eye at places and objects which were as the very pivot upon which had turned the whirling wheel of circumstances that now forced him to walk among his fellows a branded outcast. As he passed the London and Westminster Bank in Lothbury, a grey-haired man, hurrying from the door, ran against him, and without apology hastened past westwards. Eugene, in no mood to be jostled, turned angrily, but something familiar in the man's back arrested his attention; the close, humping set of the shoulders, the head set stiffly forward, the walk of a man who goes straight to his object, and that object, money. Eugene looked after him undecided, then crossed the street, and hurrying on, took up a position that enabled him to see the face.

As he thought—his Uncle Stephen; no mistaking the shark's mouth between the close-cut white moustache and beard, the light grey eyes under thick lids, looking neither to the

right nor left, mechanically summing up the price of the man's coat in front of him.

'Not a day older, the same amiable Uncle Stephen; you old beast!' muttered Eugene between his clenched teeth. He followed him, at first mechanically, then with a steadily growing resolve.

The one man who had had it in his power in the first place to check, in the second to annul circumstances — and yet not a hand raised, not even the kink of the crooked, grasping little finger unbent. The words, in the saw-like voice, dinned in his ears:

'You're a black sheep, sir, I'll do nothing for you.'

To-day he was bidding farewell to his identity and to his former life, but he meant to have a word with that man first; merely an expression of opinion. How he hated that back threading the mazes of Cheapside and Ludgate Hill, stopping every now and then before a picture or a china shop, 'bargain' in its every line.

'Four miles a day, and seventy,' thought Eugene disgustedly; 'he'll live to be a hundred.' The back threaded its way unwearyingly through the Strand and Charing Cross, and

down the now gas-lighted Piccadilly, towards the Park, unconscious of the tall shadow that, dogging it grimly, waited for a less crowded thoroughfare. So journeying, they neared Hyde Park corner, and the back wavered; a slight drizzling rain had begun to fall.

'It's a cab fare against the gloss of that hat,' thought Eugene; 'um! thought so; the fare has it,' for the back had turned into the Park, and was being borne swiftly along under an umbrella in the direction of Kensington. Eugene turned up his coat collar, and crossing over to the opposite side, drew slightly nearer to the chase. As he intended the opinion to be a strong one, he preferred to have a fair field and no favour, and waited his chance quietly, knowing his Uncle's usual route would lead him through a sufficiently deserted region.

To speak his mind!—A very empty satisfaction, but still, some sort of salve to the bitterness of his feelings.

A nursemaid and her charge pressing homewards in the dim distance were now the only people in sight, and Eugene was on the point of ranging alongside, when something white lying in the pathway where his Uncle had just

passed caught his eye. Stooping, he picked it up, and stopped mechanically to examine the contents of the packet. The light was dim, and he read the heading words on the covering with difficulty: 'Seabright Trust.'

He rubbed his eyes, and read it again. No mistake about the words: 'Seabright Trust,' the Trust of which himself and his respected Uncle were, or rather had been, the co-trustees; he tore open the covering.

Quite so; documents of importance, notes, gold, dropped, undoubtedly dropped by his Uncle. A fierce joy leapt up in his heart; he took one look at the fast disappearing figure, then drew quickly back into the shelter of some trees, and turned again to the contents of the packet.

His *co*-trustee—well, not exactly, now—possibly it might have been better for that gentleman, he thought with a bitter sneer, if he were still so. Over this Trust he had come to grief, over this Trust that man—his co-trustee—had shown him no mercy, no saving grace, not even the grace of a two days' silence. Hard measure, hardly dealt, 'black sheep—black sheep'—that was all. Well, things square themselves: over this Trust the black sheep

would be quits; the documents were *most* important; the bottom of the Serpentine was quite an admirable place for them.

What construction the law would put upon their disappearance, really—he reflected with a grim smile—he couldn't say; his Uncle would doubtless know; he knew the consequences of everything so accurately. The memory of that fourteen months in the dim world pressed like lead upon his brain; the revengeful Southern blood leaped in his veins, and he ground his teeth and laughed aloud. He hoped it might be held *criminal* negligence, the documents were *so* important; it was, moreover, quite unfortunate for his co-trustee that it was at all events indirectly to the latter's interest that they should cease to exist. This would be better than speaking his mind. He leapt a paling and looked about him for stones suitable to weld the canvas covering and its contents to their new abode. Let him think; there were also notes and gold, *these* most certainly, whatever else happened, *that man* would have to restore, therefore by taking them he robbed nobody.

'By God! What I take from him is my due; he has taken everything from me; shall there be no exchange?'

'The notes may go,' he thought, 'they're risky. I'll give society no more chances, but the gold will give me a fresh start. Uncle Stephen! Uncle Stephen! this isn't your day out, it's mine, and by heaven I'll make the most of it.'

Now, in this matter, as he said when he told me of it afterwards, he acted with conviction; there was no struggle in him as to the right or the wrong of the thing—it was so plain—no single qualm of hesitation or regret tempered the seething delight in the coming revenge, only he was forced to stamp his feet and grind his teeth to get back a clear power of thinking to his whirling brain.

He filled the bag with scientific care, first taking out the roll of gold; then tying the strings, he leapt back across the paling. The nearest way to the Serpentine led him across the path where the packet had been dropped. As he crossed it he saw a figure approaching slowly through the dusk, from the direction in which his Uncle had disappeared; he shrank behind a tree and watched. If it should be that old shark, and he were seen—well—a blow neatly given secured the necessary amount of silence, and did no great harm.

'He's an old man, and I don't want to hurt him, but by heaven I won't be stopped—.'

The figure advanced very slowly, and Eugene watched it anxiously in the fast waning light. It seemed to move forwards down the path a few feet with a jerk, and then to stop suddenly. It was bent almost double, so that no glimpse of the face could be seen, but a curious, indistinct, shrill murmur like the 'goo-gooing' of a dumb man came down to Eugene's ears.

'What the devil is it?' he thought, and as if for answer, one intelligible word 'Trust' came in a half-scream through the chill evening air, and then the 'goo-gooing' began again. Suddenly, when only some few yards away, the figure straightened itself as if animated by a spring, and Eugene saw his Uncle.

The right arm hung stiffened at his side, the left gesticulated wildly, pointing down the path and then to his mouth, out of one side of which came that weird and curious mumbling. Eugene shuddered; whatever else, there could be no *fear* of this pitiable being—he stepped from behind the tree and moved forward.

The figure continued to advance, dragging

itself painfully along—as it seemed the left leg alone moving—and the eyes fixed on Eugene's advancing form had an intense look of agonised appeal. There was no recognition in them, only an unasked question; the mouth mumbled, the man's left hand alternately pointed down the path, and clutched the breast of his overcoat. It seemed to Eugene that the piteous searching in the eyes must pierce the covering which his buttoned coat formed over the lost bag, and with an involuntary movement he threw it open. The figure staggered, and with an inarticulate cry thrust out its hand for the bag. Eugene drew back—he must have time to think. His Uncle, a dim look of recognition struggling through the film of agonised entreaty, crouched almost double again before him. The drizzling mist shrouded the rest of the world, and these two figures stood alone.

A thousand thoughts and feelings surged in the nephew's mind. Gratified revenge, reluctant pity, and a growing railing at the fates. In a whirl of disgust he found that the thing he had in his heart to do was no longer in his power. Why had he lingered that minute to gloat over his revenge? Why turned his

head as he was taking his road *to* that revenge? A minute sooner, this miserable, crouching, smitten figure, with its dumb, despairing look, and its dumb, despairing voice, would not have been cringing in supplication before him. What had befallen the man, hale a few minutes before, did not trouble him; he was bitterly raging at the failure of his revenge, and disgusted with the stroke of fate which had caused it, tearing from him his fresh start in life.

'If I could,'—he swung the bag doubtfully in his hand, and felt the gold in his pocket; '*if* I only could,—but I can't, and there's an end of it. The old brute—he's down, and I *can't* kick him.' All feeling of pity for the miserable object before him was swallowed up in an amazing regret. He even cursed the training which caused him to feel the impossibility of that kick.

'A good many of my late friends would have been on in this piece,' he thought bitterly, 'and glad of the chance.'

He plucked the bag from under his coat, and opening it, dropped the stones out one by one.

'I suppose this'll have to go back too,' he

muttered, and replaced the gold, with a sigh of disgust. The stricken man's eyes gleamed, and he put out his left hand feebly. Eugene put the bag into it, but the grasp was uncertain, and it fell again to the ground. The shock of seemingly losing it a second time was too much for the disordered intellect, and in a dead swoon, Stephen Rattray fell stiffly forward on to his nephew's shoulder.

Eugene laid him on the ground, carefully buttoned the packet into the inner pocket of his Uncle's coat, and then drew himself away to think. He couldn't get a clear grasp of things with that hated figure touching his. Leaning apart against a tree, and looking down at the helpless form, he dealt grimly and despitefully in his heart with the feeling that troubled him; let it stand for want of better phrasing at 'common humanity.' He railed at it; he even took some steps of retreat; he reasoned with himself.

This man, when a nod of the head might have saved, had reduced him to the level of the brute beasts—what duty then lay upon him to act but upon that level? This man lay there, dependent on him for a chance perhaps of further life. Yes, but there had been a bitter

hour, when their positions had been reversed, and the closing of that hour, with its depths of horror and degradation, its blotting out of all hope and life, was vividly before him. This, too, was an old man, at the end of things, and he had been a young man at the beginning—that was but an aggravation. As things now were he had done him no wrong, taken no revenge; the packet was found; it was even himself that had restored it: the stroke had come through a visitation of the fates, through no dealing of his.

He searched, and he failed to see any reason why he should lift a finger to give back life to this hulk. It was adding insult to injury indeed to expect him to carry his enemy perhaps a mile in search of help. Leave him here?—and get help?—he would certainly die before it came. No, either all or nothing; and it should be, by heaven, *nothing!*

He turned on his heel,—and straightway it came upon him that these things were not done. Just as impossible as kicking a fellow on the ground, or shooting an unarmed man.

'By Gad! the other thing's got to be done! When I've lived a few years in Borneo or some such place, I shall know better how to

deal with you, my friend; in the meantime—' he lifted him, and with wearily slow steps bore him disgustedly in the direction of the Alexandria Gate.

Now that he had begun, he meant to see it through; and with many a halt, for his Uncle was a heavy man, he got him through the fast closing fog to the crossing of Rotten Row.

'I don't want any fuss,' he thought, as he put his burden down and paused for breath; 'can't afford to have it advertised that I played the good Samaritan. Evening paper paragraphs—"The Admirable Convict," "Rattray Repents," "Remarkable occurrence in connection with a scandal in high life, showing the beneficial influences of our prison system—Nephew and Uncle"—Good Lord!'

He wiped his brow, and propping his Uncle's motionless form against a rail, went in search of a cab. He found a four-wheeler at the gate of the Park, and drove back in it.

'Now, my friend, bear a hand,' he said to the driver; 'this gentleman's had a stroke; we must get him home at once. Double fare, and look sharp—it's the only chance.' He gave the astonished man the address, and between them they lifted the helpless form into the cab.

When they drew up at the house, Eugene leapt out and rang the bell.

'Hope it's Ashton,' he thought. The old butler, a man who had known him from his youth up, opened the door, and recoiled in blank astonishment when he saw who was there.

'Master Eugene!' he said.

'All right, Ashton, don't make a row. Look here, my Uncle's had a stroke; he's in that cab; I came across him in the Park walking home; better get him in-doors at once. And look here, Ashton,' he lifted his hat significantly, and said grimly, 'you know all about me, I suppose; well, see that my name doesn't come out in this business.'

He held out his hand to the old man.

'Thank you, sir,' said the butler, taking it, 'always proud to take your hand, sir, believe me. I'll make it all right,—say I picked him up myself, if necessary; you can depend on me, sir.'

'Thank you, Ashton,' said Eugene; 'and look here, give that chap a sovereign,' he pointed to the cabman waiting at the door, 'and lend me another, there's a good fellow.'

The butler pulled two sovereigns out of his pocket.

'Proud to be of any use to you, sir,' he said.

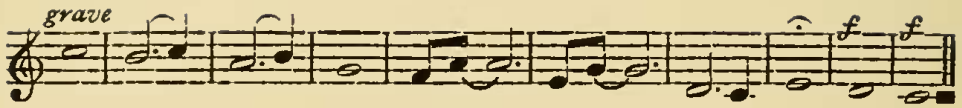
Eugene, with a choke in his throat, helped them carry his Uncle into the house; and as the door closed, turned to the cabman.

'You haven't earned that sovereign yet,' he said, handing him one, 'it's all right, but you've got to shut your head—d'ye see? Now go on to the docks, and drive like Hell.'

He sat back in the cab that rattled eastwards through the fog, and he ground his teeth.

'That's over; and the Lord do so to me, and more also, if I'd do it again,' he said between them; and with those words, Eugene Rattray disappeared from among his fellows, and the place thereof knew him no more.

THE DEMI-GODS



PROLOGUE

Into the garden of rest had come trouble and pain, for the end was at hand.

HE sat in the sun, on the stone wall that divided the garden from the great lake, and swung his legs, silently gazing with his soul in his eyes, and SHE, in a long wicker chair, sideways to him, shaded her face with her hand and looked down. The soul went out of him, and hovering over the waving hair, and the dimple at the corner of the drooping mouth, peeped through the fingers of the dear hand at its true and only resting places—those brown pools over whose depths lay the clouding shadow of the morrow.

But another twenty-four hours, and then back to prison—to prison—to prison. The thought beat through both hearts, with the level

monotony of a tolling for the dead, for the glorious dead, for the month past of a sweet and lovely life together in the garden of rest.

To-morrow was the ending of all life and light, bringing with it for her a separation from the true self, a return behind the triumphant car of a mocking and over-riding fate, to a caged existence, a loathed companionship, a weary, weary beating of the breast against the bars; for him—a legion of mind-devils, torturing, twisting, lying in wait at every turn and corner of life, ever alert and ever cruel, and a dreary, craving ache.

To-morrow was the farewell of their love, perhaps till the grave—who knows? their great and burning love, that had given all and taken all, that had cared with an exceeding tenderness for every thought and movement, that was old, yet had not tired, that had known and understood, having no depths left to sound, no heights to win; that tree which, planted in the moist, cool earth of comradeship, had grown steadily and grandly till it rejoiced in the sweet foliage of a perfect trust, and the glorious flowers of passion. The day looked on, and laughed in slanting

rays of heat and light, and presently on a snow-cooled breeze wafted between two towering heights came a chime of far-off Italian bells.

She looked up into his face, and smiled.

'Shall I sing my Love a little song?' she said. And as he knelt beside her, she held his head in her two hands, and sang shyly into his ear, in time to the drifting cadence.

Out of his eyes fled hunger and pain, and he leaned his forehead on her breast, and so they drank of the merciful well of peace. The chime floated faintly past them with a note of invitation.

'The bells have got into my head, darling. I'm mad, I think,—I can't feel anything—Child of mine, come for a drive, and find the bells; we'll get drunk on sun, and air, and sky, and mountains, and—kisses, and forget there is a to-morrow and an ending.'

He stood up straight and strong, and drew her to him.

So they waited, and the chime floated once more past, while they looked life again into each other's eyes.

Then, with his arm around her shoulder, and hers drawn round his waist, they walked through the garden of rest to the gate where the angel of Publicity threatened such proceeding with a flaming and respectable sword.

* * * * *

The Meditations of Pietro.

'The sun is very yellow and hot here by the side of the water, and the flies are like to a hundred devils on my good Nicolas—Ugh! Pighead, what good to shake thy bell! It is not good sitting here, for I have only money for one—two—three—yes, for four drinkings, in my pouch, and the last a little one, and the day is hot. Eleven of the clock, for there begins the morning tolling from San Felice. Where be these fools of strangers? There be many things to see, also my chariot is very strong, and beautiful exceedingly, and my good grey Nicolas, is he not a most willing puller, being still young and lusty? Yet, forsooth, because it is the Sabbath, they will not stir forth—these fools—but sit at

home in sad garments, and eat, thinking to make the day holy.

'Ai! What are these? Can it be they are coming? Ai—Ai—*si signore, si, si, signora, si, si, si. . . . This* is several drinkings; moreover they appear to be English. A very curious peoples, the English—for some reason known only of God they speak to me in French, as if I, Pietro, understood French, forsooth. However, it is all the same thing; the *he* waves his hat to the West, and says—*"San Felice;"*—now San Felice is in the South; —the *she* says *"Campenella,"* and does not wave anythings,—decidedly she is the more intelligent; and I, Pietro, the most intelligent of all, for I nod my top once, twice, three times strongly, and say "San Felice, si, si," and beat my grey, and lo! we are off, and they have forgotten to bargain. Ho! A very curious peoples!

'And yet, now that I regard, perhaps I have done to the English an injustice. *These* are no doubt mad, they have a very queer look, their eyes are all shiny, and they sit very close together, though even I, Pietro, am hot, sitting up here alone on the head of my chariot.

'Ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling, sighs my old

friend the bell, as Nicolas shakes his ears at the road; *si, si, amico,* it is long, and it is white, and—pouff—dusty, and in places even steep.

'Yes, now I know for a certainty they are mad; it is not for them the road either too long or too steep or too dusty; they only sit like coo-doves, and the *he* sighs, and every now and then he starts upon his feet, greatly endangering his neck, and points with his fist, and says, "Look, Carissima, how grand, how *beaut*iful!"

'I think he talks foolishness, for it is always the same whether we come to a pool or a mountain, or even where the trees grow thickly, or there are flowers on the ground. And then what does the *she* but uprise also, ah! She is "bella," the *she!* And puts her hand on his shoulder, ah! The lucky shoulder! and before she has looked, Nicolas gives a big pull so that both sit down on a sudden, upon their ends, and laugh greatly.

'They laugh always, these—when they do not sigh, and when they sigh sometimes there comes also to my ears another sound, very gentle, like the end of a good drinking. Can they already, then, be thirsty? Why, even I, Pietro, am not yet thirsty, but soon shall be.

'Yet no, when I turn, saying *"Il Signore—ha parlato?"* is he not always tying on his boot —very curious must be the boots of the English — and she hooking her glove, and both laughing, yes, always laughing? nor can I see any bottle.

'Overhead the sky is quite blue, and the sun very yellow, and there be no shade, but the *he* throws off his hat, and says, "Grand, glorious, 'twill make to grow the hair, Carissima;" this he says many times, so that I learn it by stomach, and the *she* strokes his top, where the hairs did no longer kiss one another, and purrs—all these things I know through the back of my hat where the brim is broad, and a man half-turning can see with the corner of his eyeball.

'Now, in a good time we come to where the valley runs away down from the road, and Nicolas, as is the habit of this pighead, when the sun is hot even to the winking of his master's eye, walks over till he hangs above the valley by the hairs of his tail and the strength of my right arms, and presently with much thanking of God and cursings of that pighead, I pull him up again; at the which what does the *he* but cast himself back

laughing, and say, "Do it again, do it again," which I am supposing is of great wit, for the *she* laughs also greatly.

'Do they think, perchance, that I, Pietro, cannot drive? Chickenheads! it is now of a surety they are mad—I, Pietro, who am a celebration! I too laugh, and so we laugh all three, until we come to where there is good drinking.

'"*Goutez un petit peu,*" I speak to them in that fool's tongue—this much knowing, and that quite enough.

'"*Si, si,*" they say, and nod their tops, yet do not descend. Certainly they have drunk upon the voyage, for the day is hot. Well, well, I, Pietro, am thirsty and so inwards; Nicolas also will drink, but not of the Asti that bubbles sweet and yellow. Ai! Good! Very good drinking; is it not so, my pighead? And what of these? they have not drunk, yet are their eyes shinier than even before, and surely they are *very* near together.

'So we go down into the valley from whence on both hands the big hills roll up their limbs, and I, coming to that place where it is of the custom to show where the man from the market was bereft of his goods, and where

his body was cut off, turn on my head, and tell them in usual words the story.

'Chickenheads! never yet did any understand, and my Italian is very pure, very—always in great estimation.

'These only say, "*Si, si!*" and presently many times: "How far San Felice? How far? How far?" What shall this mean? I know not, yet surely I must to tell them—being of great intelligence, so I stop my Nicolas and speak of the country and how many peoples live in the town, and the name of the mayor; and then, for greater satisfaction of these, because they will pay largely—turning a little to think the better, and outspit once, twice, very skilfully on two hairs of Nicolas' back-tail—again to them, concerning the other road, and the number of horses my master has, and how I, Pietro, have a wife (whom God plant!) and several offsprings.

'But these only laugh, and point in many ways, having no intelligence, and say, "How far, how far? More?"

'Chickenheads! and do? What to do? But nod my top, and on again where the brown water runs swiftly down from the hills towards its Mother, the great blue lake. Ai

—so it runs busily from the hills where the snow cloak lies shining in the sun. And now these are quiet, quiet as the deep Mother herself, or as the tall Father with his white head. Perhaps they are frightened; well, *I* was frightened once; that was many years ago, being but a whipperling; for the Mother is very blue and still and deep, and the Father is of a giantness strong as the death itself.

'So the little brown Son runs over between them, and carries messages and greeting.

'Yet not always, for in the great heat comes the Fiery One and licks him up for a space, and tears off the Father's white hairs that get thinner and thinner with every golden dawning. Surely the *he* with the hat, upon which he sits, should regard and understand of this, taking warning lest the same befall; yet perchance there is a difference, his hair being of a fair mud, as is that of all the English.

'Now the *she* is "bella," with many hairs running in billows like waves on the shore of the lake, only not white-topped, and her face is like unto a violet and a star. Yet also is she like unto something that springs swiftly and far, or unto that which waves its wings

in the sunlight, making many colours, and floats past like the twinkling of an eyebrow. Also have I seen in shops figures of porcelain of a delicate transparence, so that a man can look at things through them, that are greatly like her; so it seems also the *he* finds her, for whenever she points and bids him to be looking at the things around, he regards straightly and without winking at her eye-balls, or—so often as *I* am observing at her *eyelashes,* which she then, it seems, wears long upon her cheeks.

'Ai! I have seen one or two fairer amongst my own race; but never amongst these strangers, wearing nets on their faces, with blue looking-glasses for their eyes, and very thick garments of a sad colour.

'And so on and on past the great Mother, Nicolas drawing with a good stomach to where rises the long hill to San Felice, and ever comes clearer the great chime, it being now the second pulling of it.

'Then the *he*—mad, as I have said—descends and marches with me, patting my Nicolas and saying, "Good, good, how old?" With that he regards his teeth. Now I know well what I must be saying, when one of these regards

where once were Nicolas' teeth, and says, "How old?" For I am of great intelligence and have learnt it by stomach,—so *"Eightee"* I say. "What?" says the *he*, and his eyes grow of a roundness, then he laughs and wheels his toes to the she, and says something of a great wit, and both laugh again. Then a curious thing passes, for the she says, "Ah! Eight*ine!* but *impossible!*" and like to a shot gun rolls from the chariot moving, and both run and look at Nicolas' knees, and again at his teeth. Do they think then that he eats his knees?

'Then again both say Eightine! but *impossible!* and I say Eightine, *si, si!* and nod myself so that they shall not think small of Nicolas, or that he is too young a horse and fiery, as I was of a fear they might. Yet they wag their tops very often and as I think, sadly, and the *she* looks at Nicolas softly and timidly, and smites him very gently, and they walk up all that great hill—both—even *"la bella."*

'But then it is all same thing, they are English and mad; who knows what is in them?

'Now am I thirsty again; but at the end we have become in San Felice, and after much questioning of the peoples walking in the streets—who know nothing—I find at the end

the place where they wish to drink, the bells being quite at hand, and very full of noise.

'So I leave them for mine own drinking. Yet they do not hurry to their drinking, but go slowly, and as it were without eagerness, looking at each other, and the "bella's" eyes shine like two stars in a heaven of violets.

'What did they, while for three hours I and Nicolas ate bravely and drank much, is of a supposition. But now we are again to returning ready, and see! they come, the "bella" with many flowers in her hands; and still their eyes shine, and their noses smell the flowers, and they say, "*Allez, Pietro, allez!*"

'So, with a crackling of the whip-stick, we roll through the streets, and down to the other road leading through the valley of the fair view to the bridge that cuts in two the great Mother, and so home again. Now I have a liking for this road, and so has Nicolas; it is of a gentle sloping, with many spots where he that is intelligent can '*goutez un peu*,' and so we go pleasantly.

'The Fiery One is hiding him behind the tall Father and his brethren, and there comes over the earth a great sweet colour as of the sparkling Asti in this my glass, and all things drink

deeply of the flushing light—even those lying back with eyes very serene, and arms invisible cunningly—and I, Pietro, even more deeply, for have I not also of the light inside me?

'Only Nicolas goes like the pighead he is, without reason, now on one side, now on the other, and jumps as does the flea when you catch his tail.

'Well—well—he is a sure beast, and the way is very long—and safe—and aww—drowsy, and the light has got into my eyes, and also, I think a little into my top—aw—w—w—well, I *will* perchance sleep a little—'tis a sure—beast—and the way—a—w—w. . . .'

EPILOGUE.

The champagne light faded slowly from the snow-crowned tops, and from the green and grey sides of the hills, and the violet shadows crept on over the great blue lake below; the shining in *her* eyes was fading too, giving place to a look of great rest and faith, and *his* face turned to hers was the face of a man gazing at the Holy Grail.

So, obliviously, unconsciously onwards, the cup of a perfect joy full to overflowing.

The carriage rolled slowly along the white and dusty road by the lake-side, the tired horse picking his own way, the pleasantly drunken Pietro heavily asleep on his box.

In the fast gathering dusk they came to the iron railway bridge that carved the lake into two halves. The carriage road and railway track lay parallel across the bridge, divided only by a high partition of iron-work running its entire length. The gates of each lay open, and a level crossing tempted the unguided horse past the gate of the road on to the lines of the railway.

Perhaps some sting of a dormant yet uneasy conscience, or the jolt of the wheel, caused his slumbering driver to awaken suddenly; the reins, jerked sharply and mechanically to the left, brought the horse's head round into and through the wrong gate. In a minute the carriage was being dragged along the single railway track with no room to turn.

A frightened cry from the driver, and the grey, terrified by the jerking at his mouth, and the unwonted nature of the road, plunged forward wildly. Losing his balance, Pietro fell over to the side of the line with a groan of terror, and crawled, shrinking, to an iron girder

at the side, to which he clung with trembling arms.

'Sit still, my darling, it's a fair course and no favour; can't go wrong, Sweet, there isn't room to upset; we shall be all right at the end.'

She gave a little shiver and clasped her hands tightly round his neck.

'Courage, sweetheart; we've laughed the day through, and we'll laugh it through to the finish; is it not so, O my love?'

The darkness closed in, the horse plunged and snorted in his mad career, the carriage rocked and rattled fearfully. He strained her close to him with a laugh, looking with eyes of love into her face,—and the same sweet look of rest and faith was upon it.

'Hast thou been happy all this long day, child?' he said.

'Ay—ah! How happy!! There is no telling.'

Then suddenly her face changed; over it closed the grim shadow of the morning, and even in that moment of fear and excitement a black reaction was upon her. With a low moan she whispered:

'My own, I want to die now, *now*, with thee in my arms, thy face to me, thy lips to mine,

and no one to see but the sky and the lake; I can't face to-morrow and the ending — I can't—I can't!'

The passionate whisper rose into a cry, the breathing choked in a sob, and the calm of her face broke, and vanished suddenly, as the calm of the great lake breaks and vanishes before the icy blast sweeping down the mountain gully.

For answer he held her closer and closer in his arms.

'Gold help me! neither can I, thy wish is mine.' . . .

From out of the darkness in front, swelling gradually above the rattling of the carriage and the snorting of the horse, came a muttering sound.

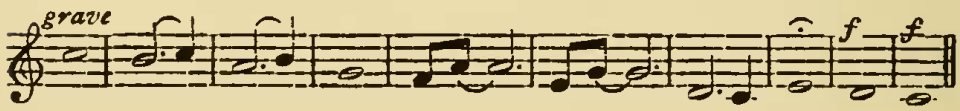
'The gods are merciful,' he said; 'a train's on us; it's all over—there will be *no* ending.'

Nearer and nearer came the terrible roar, stunning all the faculties of heart and brain, and still the maddened horse sprang forward to his doom.

With a supreme effort HE tore himself free from the bond of numbness and cried to HER fast in his arms; and through her eyes in that one last look her soul crept to his.

'Demi-gods to-day! better this ending than to-morrow's;—if there be a future life, darling, it is ours together—body to body, soul to soul. . . . One kiss, my darling—closer, closer—ah—–'

With a stagger the greedy roar fled past into the purple night, its hungering stilled—and from over the shadowy lake under the watchful and silent stars a requiem chime came floating:



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