

# The Tragedy Behind the Curtain

**and Other Stories**

**Bayldon, Arthur Albert (1865-1958)**

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**The Tragedy Behind the Curtain  
and Other Stories  
Sydney  
S. D. Townsend and Co.  
1910**

TO  
DR. C. W. MCCARTHY,  
of Sydney,  
AND  
JAMES WEBB,  
late of Sydney and now in London,  
*Whose friendship has meant so much to me:*  
THE AUTHOR.

## **Prefatory Note.**

*These stories were first printed in the Red Funnel, Adelaide Observer, The Sydney Mail, The Bulletin, The Sydney Sunday Times, Freeman's Journal, Sydney Worker, Steele Rudd's Magazine, Australian Country Life.*

*The Fantasies appeared, the first in the Sydney Mail; the second on Page 21 of the Sydney Worker. The third has not hitherto been printed.*

*A.A.B.*

# The Tragedy Behind the Curtain and Other Stories.

## **The Tragedy Behind the Curtain.**

This is the tragedy my friend, a Nihilist, travelling under an assumed name, related to me on the Brisbane School of Arts' verandah one afternoon a few days before he left for Russia to participate in the recent revolutionary movement.

“It was the works of Stepniak that first opened my eyes to the wrongs of my countrymen. A subsequent study of Tarde, Henry George, Comte, Herbert Spencer, Marks, deepened my conviction regarding their rights. I am a Russian to the fingertips and worship my country. I would sacrifice my soul if I possess one for the emancipation of my countrymen. I have already lopped off the only personal strand that tethered me to earth in her service. You will condemn me for what I shall relate, but that matters nothing. You have read of fanatics and their inhuman actions for their souls' salvation. When I have finished you will think me a fanatic for my country's salvation.”

“To one of my temperament an insult is intolerable. My hereditary position as a landowner with a rent-roll of 2000 roubles a month had fostered my pride of race. When General Kortchakoff, therefore, slighted me in the hunting-field I had personal as well as humanitarian ground to execrate the power he represented. I little thought my settlement with him would demand the greatest sacrifice of my life.”

“I was forty years of age when I became an active revolutionist. I need not mention the immediate causes that led me to become a member of one of the ‘subsections.’ My life up to that time had been spent on my estates, hunting and shooting the elk and bear, ameliorating the condition of my peasants, and hard study. I rarely visited the capital. My brother Mark was at the university. I had no desire to marry. An old housekeeper, who had been a sort of family nurse in my father's time, tended my physical requirements.”

“After I became revolutionist I began to secretly forward large sums of money to a London banker under an assumed name. I thought it my duty towards my brother, since, as perhaps you are aware, my detection would lead to a confiscation of the family estates. My caution, seclusion, and position, however, combined to ward off suspicion. Besides, I had not yet advanced to the extreme views of many revolutionists and entered their intimidating societies.”

“When my brother returned home I at once perceived a change in his

demeanour. From a frank, emotional stripling he had become an abstracted young man. He was fifteen years my junior and no two brothers could be more dissimilar. He had the flaxen locks and light blue eyes of our mother, and, like her, was of a highly devotional, almost hysterically poetic temperament. Indeed, when a mere boy he wrote verses. Slim and willowy, he offered a sharp contrast with myself. Our father was as dark as a gypsy and herculean. Like him in appearance I even surpassed him in strength, being, in fact, double-jointed. Of a docile, lovable nature, like our mother, Mark had ever been my favorite. The attraction of the unlike, I suppose. He was the youngest. Three sisters — whom I barely tolerated and was thankful when they married — descended in line of birth from me, the eldest of the family. He was, moreover, subject to epileptic fits when a boy that added weight to his call on my sympathy.”

“For some weeks Mark's abstracted air perplexed me. I first fancied it arose from some silly love affair moving amiss, but a random glance at the books he had brought with him and greatly favored undeceived me. The spiritual writings of Honmyakof, and such thinkers as Hegel, were not for a lover. It was with some astonishment I came across works on political administration that could not have passed the censor. The finding by chance an interdicted pamphlet deeply scored in its inflammatory passages of a revolutionary character led to my interrogating him. In brief, my brother, throwing all restraint aside when he detected my own revolutionary sympathies, confessed he was enrolled in the ‘Disorganising group’ of the ‘Navodovolstvo,’ whose object was to remove the heads of the Government and intimidate it into submission by acts of violence. Ere I had recovered from my surprise I had also learned he had drawn the scarlet lot in a ballot that deputed him to assassinate an obnoxious government official — no other, in truth, than General Kortchakoff. It was some days before I was composed enough to enter into details. My savage joy that the revolutionary forces were bent against my hated enemy was mingled with mortified pride, and an uneasy wonder that destiny should entrust such a commission to so delicately-souled an agent as my brother. My affection for him, and deep-rooted conviction that his lack of practical knowledge of the world, and his innate horror of everything antagonistical to his spiritual nature, would hurl him into an ignominious death, combined to awaken a trepidation I had never before experienced. Meanwhile, I began to be struck by the shrewd way he had already prepared his plans, that suggested unsuspected elements of business acumen lay beneath his devotional emotions that had carried him into the vortex of revolutionary reform. Inspired by his own effeminate appearance he had developed a feasible scheme of action to accomplish his object. Disguised as a woman, he would await at one of the convict halting stations, among the

peasant saleswomen of provender to the convicts, in which Kortchakoff would pass the night on his official round of inspection, and assassinate him. To illustrate his artless sincerity of motive and lack of self-interest, even of self-preservation, I might mention he had left his subsequent means of escape to chance, or, as he put it, to the miraculous intervention of the Blessed Virgin. Such improvidence and reckless enthusiasm in a stranger would have received my contempt. It is evidence to you, however, of the martyr-like unselfishness of some members of the revolutionary movement. My brother Mark was by no means an exception.”

“When after much pondering I determined to accompany and abet him in his design you will at once see complicated motives actuated me. Had I not known the serious misdemeanor in the eyes of the revolutionary party of infringing on their decree I should have insisted on having the final role all to myself. The pleasure of destroying my enemy would be unique. Moreover, I had doubts as to Mark's capacity for dealing the clean death stroke. There must be no bungling at least in that. However, the exalted mood in which Mark contemplated ridding Russia of a tyrant partly reassured me. All through the preparations for the journey he was in a state of enthusiasm akin to that experienced by a fanatic heaven-inspired as he assents to some holy deed. His effervescence was contagious. I was conscious of a seethe in my blood. Nevertheless, my habitual caution and tact did not desert me — was rather increased at the rapidly defining perils we had to face.”

“Our plans completed, we set out for one of the convict halting stations on the route to Siberia. Disguised as a peasant, in a homespun coat and long strips of linen wound round the legs, I munched sunflower seeds in the railway car in moody silence, warily watchful of my companion. His indefatigable rehearsing of his part in his bed-chamber at the University had made him a consummate actor. Little thought that medley of Jews, working men, and factory hands in the car that the curly-headed, round-faced passenger in her sleeveless velveteen jacket, turkey-red shirt sleeves, and dark blue skirt, with her thick boots, was, in truth, a deadly emissary of the famous ‘Navodovolstvo.’ I had congratulated myself at starting that no women were in the car. At one of the stations, however, just as the third bell had rung, a young woman entered and seated herself opposite Mark and began to study him carefully. I was getting uneasy, since any suspicion might have led to fatal consequences. Besides, could an unsuspecting woman detect his disguise we should have little chance of eluding the scrutiny of lynx-eyed spies later on. However, my mind was set at ease when she smiled pleasantly, doubtlessly favorably impressed by my brother's prepossessing features and demure expression. Mark smiled back, and glanced at me, counterfeiting the apprehensive pride of a peasant maiden with her guardian. It was well

done and my doubts vanished. Nevertheless, I was relieved when the woman alighted at the next station, from fear she might enter into conversation with my brother. His voice was musically-soft; I had yet to learn he could control its cultivated inflections and speak the peasant patois."

"I need not relate further particulars of our journey. It was spring-time and therefore we had no inconvenience through bad weather. On our reaching our destination fortune favored us the first day. A gang of prisoners had just arrived, and moving among the saleswomen in the courtyard I noticed a lean, intelligent-looking young peasant, who accosted me. After some parries on either side I was emboldened to risk giving a secret sign of the revolutionists, which was immediately responded to. The movement has members in the most unsuspecting places who help each other without comment or curiosity. Their only fear is of spies, hence their reticence as to themselves. Through this man's assistance Mark was installed among the saleswomen with some buckwheat, porridge, and beef for sale. I was well furnished with money and would have thrust on the man a liberal sum. He refused, however, to accept payment beyond the value of the commodities. He was a native of the district and contrived to escort me into the courtyard. The halting station was on the outskirts of a village, and consisted of two single-storied houses and one double-storied building, surrounded by a courtyard, with an outer fence of tall stakes. The house with barred windows was for prisoners, the other for the convoy, and the building for the officers, its upper chambers, in this instance, reserved for Kortchakoff, expected at any moment. I had no time to lose. One glance around sufficed. I returned to Mark, who had, meanwhile, disposed of most of his goods to the prisoners, who are permitted to purchase what they require of the vendors at each halting station, and in a low voice communicated to him my plan of campaign. I had at starting wound round my body a rope ladder. We had revolvers secreted about our persons; a keen-edged dagger in the folds of Mark's garments was for Kortchakoff. I made close enquiries of the man as to the whereabouts of his habitation. He demurred answering till I swore on his cross that I would bring no disaster on his head — I merely asked for accommodation for my sister if required. After hesitating, he pointed to a track in the forest, that conducted, he said, to his hut, but it was some miles away. I pushed up his cross and he kissed it, crossing himself at the same time nervously. Fearing I might have been noticed, since the yard was thronged with soldiers, I motioned him to accompany me, and we strode into the forest. I glanced back, and saw Mark had edged away from the women, and was following with apparent carelessness. At irregular distances along the track were piles of fuel, one of which was on a sleigh used for conveying such to their destination. Unperceived by

my companion, I dropped my handkerchief against it, and hastened on a little till a curve of the track cut off the sleigh from sight. After some minutes' further tramp in silence, I abruptly turned on the man, and in the name of the revolutionists commanded him to convey a pile of fuel into the station yard. To my surprise, he made no objections, and we retraced our steps. One glance at the sleigh of fuel told me all was right. The handkerchief was gone. You, of course, guess what had occurred. Mark had secreted himself in the pile of fuel. The peasant's practised eye must have detected that the timber had been disturbed, since he stepped around it as though to investigate, when I peremptorily commanded him to at once drag the sleigh and I would push it from behind."

"The sun was setting and soldiers were hanging about the courtyard. The prisoners had been bolted up in their house. As we entered a dandified officer hastened towards us and sharply demanded the meaning of bringing fuel at that hour of the day. 'And this fellow, who is he?' he exclaimed, pointing rudely in my direction. The peasant's wits must have been edged by so much friction, for he replied readily enough, 'My brother, your honor. The wood is for his Excellency.'

'But there's any amount inside. You only brought some yesterday.'

'Ah, your honor, this is for his Excellency.'

'You've become damned well thoughtful all at once, Ivan. Take it in, but you don't need that fellow with you.'

"At that moment another officer came running up and whispered hurriedly something about the General's near approach. Our interrogator hastened away, with the parting shot —

'If you're not smart, I'll give you the whip.'

"We dragged the sleigh to the stack."

'Enough!' I said sternly. 'Get away at once. If you're caught without me you know your fate,' and without further notice of him I concealed myself in the stack. The courtyard was not yet clear of soldiers, and how he managed to elude observation and get away I did not see. But our peasants are as cunning as foxes to avoid the whip."

"Our plan of operation was simple in the extreme. To ascend under cover of darkness to Kortchakoff's room by means of the ladder, conceal ourselves, assassinate him when he entered, descend to the courtyard and remove the sentinel on guard at the entrance of the palisade, which would be easy enough, since he would have no suspicion of danger from the courtyard. It seemed as though fate were working with us, for the gate had been temporarily disabled. To disguise ourselves, I as a gypsy, a character my dark-skinned countenance would well support, and Mark as a Government clerk, from our thoughtfully-equipped baggage concealed in the forest, and then separate, each taking a different route to the railway station with a portion of the baggage. To then burn everything foreign to our position as gentlemen and attire ourselves as

such before entering the station to catch the first train to the capital, completed the programme.”

“About an hour after Kortchakoff's arrival with his guard of soldiers the station simmered down. Darkness set in and the windows of the houses lighted up. We should have to act as soon as moving lights in the courtyard warned me that Kortchakoff was inspecting the prisoners' quarters. After a whispered consultation with Mark in the fuel-heap I lay waiting in silence. When I again peeped from my concealment lamps were burning before the doors of the houses and along the walls of the courtyard that was now deserted. There was a continuous clatter of manacles from the prisoners' house, broken once by loud screams of a woman who was probably getting whipped. Now and again an officer would hurry across the courtyard, his gold-tasselled uniform momentarily kindling, as it seemed, when he passed the gleam of the lamps, his boots crunching the ground stubbornly. It was a lovely starry night, without a moon, the air sharply nipping and as bracing as champagne. Unlike fictitious characters one reads about, I didn't begin to ruminate and dive into my soul and flounder among memories. If I remember rightly, I was like a smouldering ember ere it burst to flame. I strained on the leashes, as it were, on a savage glow from head to foot. Suddenly Kortchakoff's window dimmed. The lamp-light had been partly shut off. Immediately the clatter of scabbards and tramp of feet sounded. A squad of troopers with lights marched off with Kortchakoff in their midst. I leaped to the fuel, noiselessly helped Mark, affixed the ladder, and in double quick time we were in Kortchakoff's room, that contained a table on which were a samovar and some sandwiches; a bed and two chairs; and was lighted by a hanging lamp. Without a moment's hesitation we slipped behind the heavy bed-curtains.”

‘Brother, art thou ready?’ I whispered.

“He gave no reply, but his hands moved, and the dagger pricked my thigh. It was like the spur touch to a fiery steed. With a great effort I crushed back a cry of exultation. In a few minutes I heard voices in the room below.”

‘Wait for his back and strike with all thy strength, brother. My hand will be on his throat to stop his squeals. Isn't it glorious!’

“I half turned to glance at him ere I moved into a favorable position to carry out my part in our little drama, and was startled. My brother was quivering like a reed. I drew aside the curtain; his face was livid and streaming with sweat. At the same moment the tramp of feet and then the grounding of arms sounded in the courtyard below the window. An officer's voice rang out, and I heard soldiers marching to positions. A cordon of sentinels was being put on guard around the building, doubtlessly on account of the disabled gate. We were trapped like rats!”

‘The Blessed Virgin intercede for us — we are murderers. Brother, it

must not be done!’

“Mark was clutching me, and his voice seemed to ring through my brain.”

‘Give me the blade.’ I caught his hand, but he held me tight.”

‘No! no! God help us no!’

“He reeled to and fro. I wrenched the dagger from him. There seemed a sulphurous smell in my nostrils. My brother a coward!”

‘Silence! brat. He's coming.’

“The voices had ceased in the chamber below, and footsteps were on the stairs. My brother whipped up his hands, froth ran from his lips, his eyes had an insane glare. He was on the edge of a fit. Capture was certain. And then — God Almighty! My brother put to the torture would confess all. The leaders of the ‘Navodovolstvo’ would be seized, priceless lives sacrificed, Russia hurled back a century at least. All lost! lost! The steps were drawing nearer. My brother was now struggling to escape my clutch. My bitten hand was being dragged from his mouth. Another second — his mother's face came before me as with shut eyes I pushed the blade home and the hot blood spurted against my throat. Conceive a tiger soul with the cold, bloodless cunning of a snake in a human body — that was I! I actually panted for Kortchakoff. With the dripping dagger I crawled from the curtains and crouched behind the door. I'd have one delirium of joy, and then — no torture would wring a murmur from me. It was all done in an instant. My blade smote and shivered on Kortchakoff's chest as he entered. The coward wore a concealed shirt of dagger-proof steel. A cry of horror escaped him ere I buried the jagged splinter of the blade into his face with such force that he fell with a crash and lay twitching. With foot trodden into his gullet I exulted at his writhing and waited for the next. There was a bounding of feet up the stairs, and one hand was on the throat of a gayly-dressed officer ere he could shout an alarm, while the other tore out his sword, lunged through my shoulder, and snapped it like a needle. He was a big man, but several such as he could not have worsted me at that moment. My brain was like ice, yet my blood seemed to hiss with heat. My fingers strained on his throat. A part of my mind must have worked without my guidance, for whilst slowly strangling the dog, my other hand must have turned up the lamp-light, since I next remember the blood blackening in his face and the stare of his jelly-like eyes. I even fancy I grimaced at him mockingly. Again the instinct of self-preservation must have moved, for I redoubled my grip to finish him. With a jerk back his neck gave a sharp crack. Still holding him at arms' length, I listened intently. In a little while I heard a sentinel on patrol. No suspicion had yet been awakened. There was a deep hush. With a final squeeze that dropped his jaw, I quickly stretched him on the bed, his mouth yawning like a cod's. Each incident had followed the other as though pre-arranged. Something

within me seemed to guide my actions. Apart from the fervid heat of my blood, that kept me at a pitch of hilarious excitement, I was an actor playing a part automatically. One glance told me Kortchakoff was dead. His hand was fastened on the Order of the White Cross as though in death he prized the bauble. Had he been dying I would have dragged it from him. I bent over the choked officer and stripped him of his uniform and slipped into it. Throwing a cloak around me, I blew out the lamp and descended the stairs. The room below was empty. I scarce troubled to glance about me, and strode into the courtyard. I must have answered the challenge of the sentinel satisfactorily. Everything seemed afar off and unreal, except the fierce glow of triumph. I recollect turning on my heel and gazing at the red lights of the station as I entered the forest. The rest is very misty. I stripped off the uniform and hastened to the baggage. I knew the whole district would be scoured as soon as Kortchakoff's body was discovered. Though the uniform would have offered numerous facilities for escape had I continued to wear it, I had become heedless of danger. I held to my original plan."

"I need not trouble you with trivialities. The societies have means of smuggling away their valuable workers beyond reach of the Government. I, of course, never again saw my estates. My act is chronicled in the annals of Russian revolutionary history. Since that night I've travelled in many countries. Why I came to Australia you need not ask. Our members are everywhere — for an object. In a few months an explosion will shatter the Russian dynasty for ever or destroy Russia's patriots. Mark died in her service. I desire no nobler privilege than to die for her also."

## **Document Found in a Mirror.**

The document is in French. I was first disposed to the idea that the narrative was fictitious. On reflection, however, I rejected this impression since in places the personal note was too poignant, the omission of data relative to the biography of the narrator too significant — even his birthplace is not mentioned, and his surname substituted by asterisks. There was, too, a general air of impulsion, of the story having been written at different times and immediately after the events chronicled; sometimes in long breathless sentences, highly poetic, impeding, and without context with, the progress of the main motif; sometimes with dates and with diary-like brevity; sometimes with curt, critical precision — the writer's jottings down, as it were, of his opinions on current events in Sydney. All these were too much opposed to a novelist's methods to support the belief that the story was invented. Moreover, my inquiries in certain directions elicited substantial evidence against it to be presented later on. If, therefore, the manuscript be a human document, the faithful outpouring of a man's soul, this much relative to his personality can be gleaned and surmised from its pages. The writer was a Frenchman, and his Christian name was Jean: he was probably a native of Noumea, resided several months in Sydney, was young, emotional, and bitterly contemptuous of the English race generally. Indeed, so highly offensive are some of the criticisms on my countrymen, so deplorable is the lack of continuity of the thread of the story, that I had to subject my first version to severe revision without compunction. The narrative as now told represents only a quarter of the material in the manuscript — is, in fact, the nucleus of the original stripped of all extraneous matter.

Evidences of the writer's eccentric character abound everywhere. His reticence as to his private affairs on the one hand and his lack of it as regards Verona's on the other, are startling. The suggestion to the reader is, of course, that Jean never dreamed any eye but his own would peruse what he had written — that fate should have so worked as to commit his manuscript into the hands of a literary man, is, indeed, ironical.

A word as to how the document came into my possession. I had reason to move into a boarding-house in Darlinghurst, Sydney. My bed-chamber contained, amongst the usual appurtenances of a furnished room, a mirror that was a veritable curio. Its framework was fantastically decorated with

sea shells of various tint and shape such as are found only on tropic coasts. Their arrangement was grotesque in their general effect, yet a closer inspection revealed deft workmanship in detail. The mirror gleamed out of a labyrinth of pearl reflecting a subdued sheen of colour in the gaslight. My landlady, noticing how the mirror attracted my attention when she was showing me the room, remarked on its peculiarity, and said that her son, a sailor, had purchased it in a second hand shop in the city — he was such a man for out-of-the-way odds and ends! In his few weeks at home, betwixt voyages lasting over twelve months at a time, he always occupied this bedroom. Examining this curio more intently a few days thereafter I noticed some of the shells were blurred and the wooden framework blistered, that led me to think the mirror had been bought by the second-hand dealer at an auction sale of goods damaged by fire. Probably it was one of the waifs of furniture rescued from some burnt residence. In an unavailing search one night in the darkness for a box of lucifers I thought I had previously deposited on the dressing table I accidentally stumbled with so much force against that piece of furniture as to overtopple the mirror. The next morning I saw much of its shell had broken away, disclosing a layer of fine steel. Curiosity pricked me to investigate further. Between the back of the mirror sheathed in metal and the steel plate was this document in a single fold. Doubtless the secret receptacle was connected with a spring to open and shut it that had become loosened. I patiently scrutinized and fingered the body of the mirror but could not localise it. Why the document had been deposited in so singular a place and never removed supposing a fire had really threatened its safety, and how the mirror came to be parted from its eccentric owner, I know no more than the reader. Since I wish to print nothing but the facts I shall not hazard even an opinion.

Save for a bronzy tint on its edges the document was unblemished, and its sheets were tastefully connected with pink ribbon. The originality in the shape of its letters particularly struck me. There was a dash and yet artistic neatness about them, especially as regards the capitals. The punctuation was, however, very arbitrary, adding to the difficulty of deciphering the quaint characters. The document was unsigned.

With this preamble I copy out my second revision, asterisks indicating wherever I have omitted extraneous matter that is in the original. I may add the full name and address of Verona are withheld for obvious reasons.

#### *The Document.*

“Is it possible, after years of intense yearning for Love and of despondency that he should pass me by, that he has at last entered into my heart? I have ever wished to surrender to his omnipotence and yet dreaded lest he should be a tyrant. Is it in this foreign city and under such forbidding circumstances I have met my fate? O radiant shape of woman,

divine unknown, in what waste places art thou treading? What tragic shadows investing thee are these I dimly divine?"

"It happened all at once. I had paused on the post office steps to admire the blooms of the flower vendors: innocent radiances — touches of materialised poetry, creating a little Eden all to themselves in the sordid centre of trade. Methought the faded faces of the passers-by turned towards them caught reflections from their own memory of beautiful, far-off scenes connected with blossoms and sweet odour. I was ever a dreamer! I turned — my heart leaped and stood still. I felt a quiver in my spine similar to that I always experience in the presence of great passages of music. She was moving towards me, half-floating as it seemed in a cloud of white raiment. I felt rather than saw she was tall and held herself erect, buoyantly swaying like a sunflower. Passing from the corridor shadow into the sunset light she descended the steps; her large blue eyes fixed as in thought; her face, of the ample proportions of Minerva's yet unlike hers humanised by unfathomable tenderness, expressive of some subduing grief; her head-dress circled as with an aureole by an escaping tress catching the sunlight gold to its auburn. Women, suddenly aware of their own dinginess, paused to gaze at her as she passed them. Men drew aside involuntarily, their souls' homage in their eyes. I stood spell-bound, dazed, almost befooled by the impression that one of my dreams of the Olympian divinities had been projected into an ocular illusion, that I suffered from a passing mental mirage. In another minute I was wide awake and hurrying to recover sight of her. I saw her entering a tram and reached King-street corner just too late to be her fellow passenger. Hailing a passing hansom I sprang into it, enjoining the driver to keep the tram ahead in view till I bade him stop. I had but one thought: to follow that beautiful being. Now, even as I write to ease my soul of its perilous agitation I cannot analyse myself. I'm only aware of a strange electric quiver from head to foot, a fierce uncontrollable passion to be near her for ever and for ever. I awoke this morning sane, self-contained. To-night every nerve is on a white strain — my heart heaves with some mysterious and voluminous force. And yet this dull deadening agony of doubt, suspicion."

"I saw her alight from the tram, cross the road, and enter a chemist's shop. Dismissing the hansom I sauntered to and fro on the further pavement, awaiting her appearance. As time passed I grew impatient, uneasy. The street gradually put up its lights. Dusk deepened for night. What detains her? Is that her home? These questions quickened my perceptions and I glanced about me. This part of the city was unknown to me. An hotel at the corner of a side street was an index of its character. Through its door, passing each the other to and fro, were two trickles of human wrecks. On the pavement about it lounged groups of brute-faced, shabbily-garbed individuals of either sex. Sprinkles of foul language

reached me that made me shudder. There was an air of drabness, of squalor, an absence of a law-abiding tone about the locality very distasteful. At last! She moved leisurely towards the hotel and turned into the side street. Slowly crossing the road, I did likewise. I saw her tall figure ahead under the gas jets. With some wonder I noticed the street was degraded in the extreme — seemingly a hot-bed of Chinese. Bloated women ogled and flung invitations from doorways. Shrivelled human shapes peeped out from dark corners. Wherever I gazed Chinese inscriptions over doors, lighted windows with red blinds, squat figures shuffling in loose slippers on the pavement, struck across my vision. A muffled babel of oriental voices pierced by English oaths and exclamations and a faint foetid fog hung over the whole street. A horror seized me that she, the ineffable one of my soul, should even approach such naked infamy. Suddenly I felt bewildered. A moment ago her white garments had fluttered past a lighted window, and now — I ran forward, retraced my steps, glanced hither and thither; all in vain: she had vanished. I cautiously examined every house up to the spot I had last seen her, and then beyond to the street's end. Not a sign of her. My God! She must have entered one of the houses — all of them tenanted by Chinese. This thought was as a spark to gunpowder. With a shock my unpent emotions swept over me carrying away every atom of propriety. From hammering at doors and not waiting for responses, to interrogating first one and then another of the squalid Chinese loafing about as to who tenanted the houses into one of which she must have entered, I was rudely thrust back to a sense of my folly by a hubbub arising from a heathen crowd jostling about me with distracting gestures and excited faces. With a recoil of revulsion I fled from the street and entering the first hotel hastily drained a tumblerful of brandy, and recovered my self-control in a private parlour. Whilst divided by two desires — one urging me to hang about the street on the chance of again seeing her, the other to prosecute inquiries from a constable regarding the occupants of the houses near which she seemed to have vanished — my reason suddenly reasserted itself and drove me home. And now with thoughts more collected I am ashamed of my recent unmanly abandonment. I now see it in its true light my officious behaviour. I shudder at what might have happened had a constable been present. What defence could I have raised for creating a disturbance? Heavens! I should have been arrested. And even if I had explained — but how could I have explained? What right had I to interfere with a lady's movements, to demand entrance to the house she had of her own wish passed into, even if I had known the which? But, oh! what does it mean? My heart aches. Why should she enter that den? What mystery is this? But perhaps it is her home. Banish the thought. It is impossible she would reside amid such infamy. What! that radiant shape, whose every movement seemed tuned to music, with

the Minerva face and more than human tenderness suffused through its every lineament — my heart thunders against blasphemy! Yea, so long as this frame endures, divine unknown, my soul shall reach towards thee wherever thou art.”

“It is now some months since I eased my soul by writing. What is it an inspiration that guided me or only the remembrance of the crucifix she wore that set me on right deductions?

“Since that eventful night much has taken place. I speak not of my wanderings about the city seeking for her, of my sleepless nights dedicated to picturing her beautiful personality, of all I have suffered and dreamed till that thought — surely — heaven-inspired — flashed on me. I waited feverishly for the following Sunday and attended Divine service. Verily, some kindly angel is guiding me. Or did my artistic sense of fitness prompt me to the road of fact? For where but in a cathedral could so imperial a form be in harmony? The nobler the edifice the more would she grace it. No sooner had I entered than I knew she was there. I had purposely entered late to select a pew near hers should she be present. I slipped into one commanding full view of her. It was some time ere I dared lift my eyes in her direction. My heart beat so violently that I was surprised my neighbor, an old portly lady, did not hear it. At last I mustered courage during a hymn to let my glance fall on my beloved. The morning sunshine slanted like a shaft of gold under which she stood waiting, as it seemed to me, to be transfigured. She was all in white. An azure flame seemed to play around her temples. Gradually the blue light retired and abashed at such a noble vision of feminine perfection I bent my head. Meanwhile my ears, glutted with melodious voices lifted on waves of harmony, were usurped by one sovereign sound, as though an invisible angel were singing also. I shut my eyes lulled by its ineffable sweetness. It penetrated every fibre of my frame distilling an inexplicable essence, the sensuous suggestion of something overhead in Heaven. It drew my eyes again towards her, opening to be fed on splendour. Her head was now a little lifted, her eyes entranced as though gazing on Paradise, her lips parted, her bosom heaving tumultuously. She was the embodiment of ecstasy pouring out melody.”

“The hours seemed minutes. As we passed down the aisle our eyes met, something flashed to me and returned. Ere I recovered from its lightning-like quiver she was gone. Instantly I hurried into the street. In the distance her tall figure moved slowly along. Determined to know whither she would go I followed her a little way behind.”

“Returning to my room I pencilled down the name and address: ‘Signorita Verona . . . teacher of the mandolin and violin.’

\* \* \* \* \*

“To-night I'm almost too happy to write. But in narrating all that has happened since I last withdrew these sheets from their hiding-place I shall re-live through a multitude of joys. I will not continue from where I last paused but from where I first spoke to Verona. Little did she think when I seated myself beside her on a chair in the Botanical Garden that for weeks I had been on the watch for an opportunity to be near her. She lifted her eyes from a book on my approach with a look that at first disconcerted me. They were moist as though touched with tears. When her eyes sank I stole a glance at the book. She was reading Dante in the original. It was then that I knew for certain she was an Italian. Here was another call on my shrewdness. With Italian literature and art I am as familiar as with our own. After many resolutions I at length ventured to speak.”

‘Pardon me for my interruption, Mademoiselle, but you are reading my favorite poet. It's the first time I've seen the Divine Comedy in the hands of a Sydney person. But, perhaps, I am rude; I couldn't resist speaking, however.’

“Her large eyes were lifted to mine like wells of blue light.”

‘Yes,’ she murmured after a pause, her eyes again sinking.

“Now I had begun I was not to be balked, however.”

‘Had Dante seen this picture he would have embodied it in a sonnet. Is it not beautiful?’ And I indicated with a gesture the spread of blue water, the banks of foliage, the villas perched on the heights and nestling in the crevices of the cliffs, the ferry boats gliding to and fro among the shipping, with the afternoon sunshine thrown like a sacerdotal vestment of gold over all.”

‘Yes, it is — very beautiful!’ she exclaimed earnestly.

“Overjoyed at having touched her emotions I determined not to let them flag.”

‘And you read Dante in the original?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, as though surprised at the question.

‘What a boon! He cannot be translated. His spiritual light is quenched in the passage. The last of the poets to be meddled with for alien readers.’

‘You are — ’ and she hesitated, and then remarked quietly: ‘That is true.’

‘Even in the French language he is shorn of half his beauty.’

‘You are a Frenchman, then?’ she asked quickly.

‘I am; and you an Italian, I think?’

‘Yes,’ and a suffusing sadness went over her face and she added: ‘In spirit, but only partly otherwise.’

“Immediately I responded in Italian, quoting a passage from Petrarch. Oh! the glory of our conversation. We talked the sun down. Then we parted.”

‘Should you be here at the same hour to-morrow, Signorita, I will bring some of Italia's latest singers for your perusal.’

‘To-morrow,’ she murmured, with a touch of sadness in her voice.”

“What tragic mystery envelops my Verona? At all our meetings I am aware of sudden intrusions of languor, sighs, and far-off haunted expressions in her eyes. I feel she is not indifferent to me as a man, yet she always addresses me as though it were some kindred spirit her spirit had met for a season. Only once has she betrayed her hidden depths of sympathy for me. We were standing near the water's edge as the dark came on, watching the lighted ferry boats gliding past like golden butterflies with ruddy eyes, and I remarked:

‘How my poor mother would have admired them!’

‘Your mother!’ There was a sharp cry in her voice. Then with an aching sympathy in a subdued tone:

‘Yes, the dead are far away, yet happy, I trust.’

\* \* \* \* \*

“I pant to pour out a confession of love to Verona, yet I dare not. The more I see of her the more aloof does she seem above all mundane desires. Her voice can vibrate with tenderness when reading to me one of her favorite poets. In scores of little ways is her sympathy betrayed for all that suffer. I verily believe much of her earnings goes in charity. She perplexes me. Sincerity to the core and evidently considering me a dear friend, yet she never touches on her position. Relative to everything connected with her personal affairs I'm kept unobtrusively at arm's length. I can see she is poor, and my heart yearns to benefit her. I suppose the lean, swarthy invalid I have seen basking in the sunlight on her verandah is her father. I suspect she is the only child and supports him with her teaching. But what is the cause of this indefinable sorrow that invests her? When shall I have the courage to burst through this atmosphere of awe and declare the passion that is consuming me? O, Verona little dost thou suspect what a sacred part of my life thou hast become! Without thy presence this world to me would be as ashes.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“The bolt has fallen! The letter from my father bidding me return home was a blow, yet not unexpected. The other terrible stroke has prostrated me. Under this awful revelation my heart's jubilation has sunk into a smothered cry of anguish.”

“I curse the hour that brought her figure under my notice that night, and despise myself for acting on the impulse to follow her. Why should I wish to pry into her secret, her mystery? Am I not convinced of her

innocence? But, ah! that scene, that monstrous scene. I almost hesitate to describe it. Perhaps the picture presented in cold writing will suggest some plan of action, will deaden this excruciating doubt, suspicion.”

“I saw she had not seen me as she moved swiftly through the rain. Her black garments under the light of the shops touched me to despondency. I felt something was about to happen full of dire issues for me. Something warned me to turn back, for I rightly guessed whither she was going when she branched into the road that leads to that squalid locality and is its main artery. But my curiosity — no, no! it was my love, my jealous passion for her demanding attention to these clandestine visits to that house of infamy. And yet I was uneasy at my action. Had Verona pledged her troth to me grounds for it might be yielded. But though ever wistful on my behalf, ever considerate of my opinion, gentle and patiently thoughtful, never did she permit my soul a chance of confession.”

“That ill-fated street was deserted. With a tingle of shame at my act I stole silently into view of her as she neared the houses into one of which she had entered that other night. Without a glance aside she opened a door, there was a beam of light on the wet pavement, and the door shut silently behind her. On the spur of the moment I rapidly crossed the street and examined the house. Yes, the scrofulous walls, the sullenness of its sealed-up windows, the oriental pungency of the atmospheric taint that reeked from its crevices, proclaimed the nationality of its tenants. Other than for an edge of light under the door the house was in speechless gloom. Listening attentively, however, I heard a drone of voices, broken all at once by sharp sibilant sounds, as of someone in a violent rage. There was a shuffle of chairs and what seemed an altercation in an Asiatic tongue. My easily inflamed imagination was at once fired. Heedless of everything but the one impression — my Verona is in danger! — I flung the door open and bounded through. For a moment a leap of light blinded me. Then, oh, God! There was my angel on her knees beside what looked like a bench, on which lay a woman on a mattress, with a face like a corpse's for whiteness shrunken into wrinkles, with big, staring, blue eyes glittering with unearthly brilliancy in the glare of a suspended slush lamp. Through an open door to the left was a vision of a gambling table surrounded by fever-eyed Asiatics, danced over by wild lamp flares. The choked-up air was as a miasma. Squalor was rampant everywhere.”

‘Verona!’

“My cry must have rung through the room, though to me it seemed muffled. A tension snapped within and the scalding tears found vent. I scarce remember what happened. I only know I felt stifled with repressed sobs, my arms outstretched towards her. I heeded not the corpse-like horror sitting suddenly bolt upright, her hair like white ashes, with

craning head and eyes blazing as with madness; nor the clatter of chairs and crunch of feet around me. Even the sinewy arms flung around my waist and bearing me to the floor were scarcely felt. Wild noises and scuffles with villainous faces on a spin, as in a delirium, and then vehemently piercing me to the soul came her cry:

‘Jean!’

“Towering above my captors, slinking aside at her approach, her face awful to look on in its tragic agony, her figure seeming to dilate as with sacred wrath, she advanced to where I lay gasping in the dust. A cloth was dabbed on my face, blotting out everything. I seemed sinking, sinking. A bubble of lights — darkness.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“The more I think of that frightful scene the more am I convinced Verona must have protected me from dire calamity. Though everything was blurred as in a phantasmal twilight when I emerged from unconsciousness, I knew her guardian arms were around me supporting me to a cab. Though she spoke not I heard her sobs in its darkness. I felt her warm breath on my cheek, saw as in a dream her eyes gazing earnestly into my face in the flitting lamp gleams. Tired unto death, I cared not whither I journeyed for she was with me. I clung to her as she helped me to alight, pleading to her not to desert me. But with averted eyes she gently released herself, whispering, ‘You are safe now,’ turned, and was gone. Too weak, my brain yet too overwrought to apprehend more than that I was alone opposite my boarding house, I crawled to its door, hearing the rattle of the cab fade in the distance.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Though I haunt our accustomed meeting-place, patrol nightly before her residence, have written to her daily pouring out my love, yet she gives no sign she desires our relationship to continue. It is now over a week since that fatal night when I last saw her. And yet I feel she loves me. O, Verona, O, Verona! hast thou such little faith in thy Jean? Beautiful angel, encompassed about by the tribes of hell and treading in dissolute places, thou art pictured in my soul in the hues of Paradise. Unshrinkingly thy steps will I pursue even into the inner circle of the fires.” \* \* \*

“She has written. Though coldly curt the words are a benediction:

‘Please meet me at the tramway terminus, Bondi, next Wednesday afternoon at 2.30.

‘V.’

\* \* \* \* \*

“The day was doleful under a pall of cloud stretched painfully across the sky, with hearse-like plumes in places. Dressed in deep black she was awaiting me on the beach that was otherwise without a soul in sight. A picture of my father's home summoned by the seascape flashed upon me as I approached her. Though my soul sickened with evil omens, yet the absence in the scene around of gangs of convicts at work on the foreshore was acutely felt.”

“She kept her back towards me till I was within a few feet of her, then turned suddenly, her large eyes fixed on my face almost threateningly, so alarmingly wild was their scrutiny. Her face was as the face of a statue, colourless and emotionless. Only her eyes betrayed her pent-up feelings. Overcome for some moments by a rush of mingled joy and grief at her presence, I gazed at her speechless. Her eyes intensified their scrutiny, searching my very soul.”

‘My Verona!’

“A flush fled across her face, leaving it ghastly white, even to the lips. A strange, hunted, far-off expression slowly gathered to her eyes, subduing their scrutiny. Then abruptly she turned, saying sharply:

‘Let us walk,’ baulking my fierce passionate desire to clasp her in my arms.

‘These are yours,’ she remarked coldly.

“I unfolded the packet she handed me. She watched me slip the jewellery I had missed since that dreadful night into my pocket as though she were thinking deeply. Then, half speaking to herself:

‘However much I deplore your rough treatment in that house, I could not help it. God knows I have suffered.’ Then, with a clear glance into my face: ‘Jean, I am to blame for all this trouble brought on your head, and I ask your forgiveness.’ I would have interrupted her, but she went on speaking, indifferent to my gesture, almost sternly, as though rebuking herself: ‘I allowed myself to forget the cross I bore, to seek forgetfulness of my misfortune in your company. It is too late to undo what I have done. For days and nights I have unflinchingly fought with my selfish desires, and can now calmly see my duty. Jean!’ — and her voice lifted to a note of decision — ‘everything you may have conceived connected with me and your future is out of the question. Let us sit.’

“We had been moving towards the cliffs, and now seated ourselves on a splinter of rock in a kind of vault fashioned by fallen boulders, from which only a spread of foam like a shroud and the moody sky could be seen. Our withdrawal from the outer beach had reduced the soliloquy of the sea to a listless moaning. Chilled to the very heart by Verona's coldness, and as yet too dazed to apprehend more than that some crushing fatality had fallen on my life, it was some minutes before I was

aware she was again speaking:

‘It is just you should know all. Though my reason advises me to be silent, my heart cries to be heard. Besides, I would not willingly be cruel to you; I would not add to my sorrow at having innocently misled to regret when you are gone that I did not remove from your mind a wrong construction regarding me. Perhaps I crave you should remember me kindly; you should have no bitterness towards me for my deficiency of faith in you, that I could not trust you — the only man ...’ She paused abruptly and, turning her face away, continued in thick tones of suppressed emotion: ‘That woman you saw is my mother!’ The words had scarce left her lips when she leaned heavily on one side and would have fallen but for the support of her hand on the rock and her extended arm suddenly grown rigid. Tremblingly I clasped her round the waist, heart-broken, and uttered endearing words of consolation. But the outbreak of feeling was only momentary. In accents of contempt for herself she muttered: ‘This is weakness,’ and, slowly straightening her back, sat like a carved image, with eyes fixed intently on that waif of foam now fluttering like a ghostly thing under the lowering leaden sky and slants of rain. I marvel now, as I write, at what resources of strength were at that moment made manifest. Punctured and parcelled out of her soul seemed her next words:

‘I must remain unresponsive to your love, Jean, till my work be done. Return home as your father wishes. Write to me if you desire. Remember, however, I promise nothing further than this: you need fear no rivals for my affection. You think me cold, impassive, but I am sincere and steadfast. Let us go.’ ”

*End of the Document.*

\* \* \* \* \*

I made inquiries of the residents of the street in which Verona had resided in Sydney. An old woman, a storekeeper, remembered her well, and greatly regretted she had lost sight of her since her father's death. It is not for me to pry into Verona's whereabouts. I like, however, to think she is now with Jean.

## **Dr. Grahame's Great Experiments:**

### **Part I. — In the Haunted House.**

With all my high respect and admiration for the doctor as a gentleman and a searcher after Truth, I felt loth to comply with his desire that I should assist him in what he termed the scientific revelation of so-called spiritualistic phenomena. I fingered his letter uneasily. Though well-tutored in the doctor's philosophy that fear is a confession of deficiency of self-knowledge and self-reverence; that man is delivered to pain and sorrow by what is false within himself; yet I shrank from submitting to conditions that might be fraught with appalling contingencies. However, on receiving a second letter, urging me, on behalf of my fellow-creatures, to at once call and see him, and containing sentences of mysterious import deeply underscored, my curiosity was aroused. I found the doctor as usual in his study, surrounded by instruments other than those of his profession, with the gruesome skeleton grinning from its corner behind the half-drawn curtain. After a cordial greeting he removed his skull cap and seating himself in an easy chair studied me thoughtfully. His keen grey eyes, without losing their steady coldness, scintillated with pellets of steely light, betraying a suppressed excitement such as I had never imagined possible to his sternly intellectual character. But for his expressed disapproval I should make public his remarkable disclosure. The pith of it, however, will be found in his forthcoming work, "Experiments of a Physician," that will fall like a bomb in scientific circles. I'm only permitted to introduce this story with such material as it requires, lightly touching, if I desire, on the fringe of his great discovery.

For some months the doctor had been investigating the phenomena of spiritualism as are manifested in haunted houses. He had built up a theory to explain them and required my services to demonstrate it.

"Just because you supply those factors required in an experiment of this kind. You are sensitive, imaginative, possess a picturesque vocabulary, and are easily inflamed — my antithesis, in short, as a scientific man," he explained.

"The sounds heard in what are termed haunted houses have been explained in many ways — some foolish and some pseudo-scientific. I was led to my theory by my own great discovery of the reduction of matter to intangibility. But I must not digress on the cohesion and

repulsion of molecules. I am speaking to you as a layman that knows nothing of scientific formulae. Briefly, then, these so-called haunted houses have gained their appellation by the belief that spirits are in possession. That is the vulgar notion not unshared by even notable men in the scientific world. As I am utterly opposed to such an opinion, I shall not further touch on it. There is little doubt, however, that these sounds are governed by forces with some characteristics of intelligence. In the particular house in which I have been investigating, this is markedly the case. I shall not describe the phenomena, nor relate the story I have heard concerning this house, since I wish no objective stimulus to suggest subjective impressions in you. It has been conjectured that since thought is indestructible, we must be surrounded by a sea, as it were, of thoughts more or less potent in proportion to their projected intensity. It may be reasoned, therefore, that minds of certain strata attract by chemical law from this universal sea thoughts akin to them. A thought passing into a poet's mind may have gravitated to it from the sea of thoughts into which it was first projected by another poet. Some thoughts are more vehement than others. A man in a death agony would project thoughts more intense than a man in a normal mood. The greater the personality behind the thought, the greater, of course, the vital force of the thought. You don't follow me, perhaps. Well, my theory of haunted houses is this: the sounds heard therein are mind emanations that have been projected by persons in them at some time or other under excruciating pressure, and affect our minds when brought under their influence. If my theory be correct, a person of creative instinct, offering only his subjective receptivity to these emanations should receive a full picture of the events from which they originated. I'm not yet sure whether a memory would retain it to enable one to present it objectively. We shall see. I have found the means to achieve the desired condition, and you are the man to receive these vital emanations confined in this haunted house in a series of pictures."

The doctor paused and moistened his lips. I was too perplexed to speak for some minutes. The characteristic obscurity of the doctor's diction was, in this instance, thickened by my ignorance of the subject. Surely the belief in ghosts and haunted houses arose from ignorance and superstition. The doctor, with steady eyes fixed on mine, repeated slowly, and in curious language, the greater portion of his explanation.

"In other words, doctor," I exclaimed, "if a murder had been committed in a house, I should, under a certain condition, see it?"

"Not exactly — how could you? A reflection of it, as in a dream. Let me explain."

I could not, however, follow the doctor; I could only grasp something of his theory. Should I comply with his desire — that was the question to me. I had complete faith in his power, but there was something so

uncanny about the experiment, especially so when he would not divulge what he knew concerning this particular haunted house, that, I'm not ashamed to confess, I didn't relish the business at all.

“Fear nothing,” said the doctor quietly, watching me gravely. “Nothing can hurt you but yourself. This is no idle investigation, but in the cause of Truth. You are the type of man I want. Your duty to your fellowmen demands abnegation of your physical self. Your soul is beyond every power but its own to do good or evil. We punish or reward ourselves. Our thoughts and acts are our shadows or lights, are the seeds sown that will bear crops of either pain or joy in this our life we know; of any other I know nothing. I would gladly undergo this ordeal — if such it seems to you — for experience in a new channel. How much more so when undertaken in the service of science, and, therefore, Truth.”

“You know, doctor, though recognising all science has done for man, I have no interest in it.”

“Exactly! The poetic temperament seldom has. Well?”

“But since you wish me, and I have confidence in you, as a man of high character and——”

“Tush! That's right. To-morrow night we shall be in the haunted house.”

\* \* \* \* \*

From the moment the doctor removed the rusty chain and padlock from the iron gate in the prison-like wall of weather-beaten brick, and pushed it, screeching on its stubborn hinges, and we advanced cautiously into the darkness of the court-yard, I felt a chill settle on my nerves. Apart from the weirdness of the coming work, there was something repellant about the ancient, square double-storeyed building, looming in the cold starlight amid its cordon of shadowy cypresses, their attenuated shapes ragged with age, their breasts of leaves heaving with long sighs in the bleak airs. A huge bat flapped heavily away from an ambush of branches as our boots trod on cracking twigs and little pebbles. Skirting a dried-up well we proceeded to the massive front door, the frameless windows on its either side agape as though stricken with amazement at our intrusion. Evidently no human creature had invaded the withering enclosure for some time.

“Excepting myself no one has entered this mansion for many years, I'm now its legal tenant,” remarked the doctor, as though divining my thoughts, as he struck a match and inserted the key into the lock, and with a twist that made the latch snap, threw open the door. “Be careful, the staircase is a man-trap; tread after me.” A scuttling under my feet, and a squeal, with numerous sparks flitting away into gaps, made me wary of my foothold. The creaking of our boots awoke a shudder of

echoes in far-off chambers and along winding passages. Once my foot plugged into a hole and pitched me forward, sending out a volley of cracks from the stairs. A match spluttered, and with "Here we are," the doctor entered a chamber and lighted a lamp.

"Mind the wires!" he exclaimed anxiously, as I stepped quickly after him, brushing with my foot something that twanged metallicly.

The room was spacious, lofty, with embossed ceiling stamped with a design of the fable, "The Fox and the Stork," that bore evidence, in spite of its tarnish, of the craft of a master. Under the lamp-gleam fading outlines of the design of the massive walls showed that it had been repeated by an artist's hand in rich autumnal tints. The hearth, heaped with cinders of a recent fire, was paved and walled in with polished tiles, continuing the same design, burnt into their surface. The cornices represented clusters of grapes escaping from curled leaves, now cracked, and also besmirched with sluttish time. The oaken floor dumb with dust, the long-shuttered window, the ponderous door of antique panels, the breadth and height of the room, its abject loneliness and melancholy aspect of decayed grandeur, all co-operated to produce a pathetic feeling in one's mind, sobered with memories of a dead past. Strangely out of place seemed the bare, plain, workman's table, with its shining instruments and litter of papers, the two cheap chairs, the camp-bed, the couch imported from the doctor's studio, the photographic camera, and the upstanding machines with mirrors and suspended chains and dangling wires, for what object I was quite ignorant, having never before seen their like. I was called to the business in hand by the doctor's voice as he examined the dial plate of one of the strange machines.

"Nothing has been recorded since my last visit. Every objective sound beyond human hearing is registered here. Science is prepared for everything — ghosts, spooks, spirits, visitors from other planets. I give them a cordial invitation. Now, when you are ready, I am. It's after midnight, and our disembodied guests, as the world thinks them, usually manifest their presence betwixt this time and dawn."

I sat in a chair and stared blankly at him. What on earth was I to undergo? I felt my nerves slowly giving way. Were there really such things as ghosts? I glanced helplessly at the array of machines, of diabolical appearance, in the shadows, with much the same heart-sinking as a victim of the Inquisition must have had when surrounded by instruments of fiendish torture. The doctor strode up to me and bent his keen eyes on my face.

"Suffering from the hereditary instincts of the race You must be above that. It's purely phantasy and therefore a weakness. The laboratory is the hatching nest of truths, not the windy emptiness of old women's minds. There are no ghosts, spirits, or wandering unfleshed identities. But there are thoughts of dead people in this chamber as vital as our own. Why

these should manifest themselves at one time and not at another is yet beyond me. Much there is yet to learn, and I have patience and persistency to remove mountains. I envy you your opportunity to approach the altar of what is called occultism by a vaporent cult. Would that I could hob-nob to-night with a company of spirits, double-dyed murderers all of them. But there are no spirits, I repeat. Are you ready?" And he slipped his fingers on my pulse. His cool nonchalance and brisk business air somewhat reassured me.

"I wish you to be as composed as possible," he went on, with the professional tone of a photographer to his sitter. "Lie on the couch and concentrate your mind on this," and he passed into my hand a copper disc polished as a new penny. "Remember," he continued, as I stretched myself on the couch and glanced up at his face, "whatever happens, you are in my charge, and, therefore, safe. You are the pioneer into unknown regions of knowledge, and the success of this experiment will revolutionise metaphysics. Kant's disposal of the bugbears of time and space is but a stride into the outer darkness in which you will journey. This is a monumental moment in the history of science. Disabuse your mind of old, exploded myths. Bend your attention on the disc with a determination to preclude every other impression. Hold it still," and, shifting the lamp so that a gleam fell on my palm, he stroked my head lightly a few minutes till satisfied my mind was focussed on the copper sheen. I have a dreamy idea of what followed that must not, however, be related. I may say, without trespassing on the doctor's private ground, that several of the machines were wheeled towards the couch and their coils unwound ready to be manipulated. Meanwhile the disc seemed to flatten into a target of glittering bronze, and then bulge up, swelling towards my eyes. I have an hazy idea of endeavoring to shift my glance, and, being alarmed at my inability to do so, when, with a sharp click, a sudden curtain of dark crimson fell over my vision and deepened — then a blank.

I have no recollection of what happened till I emerged into the consciousness of what appeared a most vivid dream, with, however, most novel features. There was the aloofness such as one feels when a drama is being unfolded before the footlights, and yet a life-like representation, despite its unnatural accompaniment, beyond theatrical artifice. I suffer from lack of precise language to convey even an idea of what I mean. I must confine myself to a loose, haphazard method of bringing before the reader's mind some random notion of what I gazed upon.

Firstly, then, I felt I was not within the chamber, and yet I saw nothing else. Yes; despite its pristine splendour, its sumptuous furniture, the huge, old-fashioned, heavily-curtained bed, and the medley of nicknacks, I recognised the same chamber. And yet, strange to say, my own identity and every recollection regarding the doctor, the experiment, and, in short,

everything connected with my past life up to that moment, were obliterated. To eliminate the inconsistencies involved in what I have just written, is beyond me. Moreover, I knew it was night, and felt no shock of surprise when my eyes, attuned to the neutral light, beheld a young woman of ravishing beauty, in a dressing gown, clinging imploringly to a man attired in riding costume, whose black moustache, swarthy skin, and negligent ringlets betokened him of foreign extraction. But, most curious to relate, the two figures were self-illuminated, the woman with a frosty silver light, the man with a bluish haze that every now and again flushed redly. Though I heard no voices, I knew the woman was expostulating with the man, entreating him to depart. Her finger once pointed to the open window through which I seemed to know he had entered, and the more vehement her desire, expressed with wringing hands, the more unwilling he seemed to comply with it. It was now I became aware that their self-illuminations underwent changes as though in harmony with their feelings — the woman's dimmed and shaded into faint yellow, and the man's deepened into purple. Suddenly there was a blaze of light that dazzled me, during which I knew some approaching danger had warned the man to conceal himself behind the tapestry. In a little while I observed that an old man had entered the room, also self-illuminated with a wanish light, and felt he was rebuking the woman for disturbing him in his sleep, and impatient at her recital of some dreadful dream she had had. The frosty clear light about her was quenched in a dusky twilight. It was at this moment my attention was drawn to a vividly red light, peculiarly depressing, beyond the door, emanating from a red-headed man, with savage eyes, who crouched listening. It seemed as though the secret of the house was known to me. The old man was in the power of the listener, a relative, who demanded his daughter, the woman, in marriage, whose lover was behind the tapestry. Nevertheless, I had no sympathy or interest in the drama. It was being played before me without my volition. I began to notice the woman was frequently pressing her hand to her bosom with catching breath. The old man was sternly insisting on her consent to something abhorrent to her. A vaporish haze gradually enveloped everything. When it lifted the old man was gone, the woman dressed for a journey, and her lover waiting for her outside the window on a ladder, his head protruding into the room. There was a red, flaring discharge, in which I saw the late listener dash into the room with a dagger and stab the lover in the face that worked horribly. The woman fell — her light extinct. I knew she was dead. For a moment I saw the red-headed man on his knees beside the body, beating the floor with his hands as though demented. The window was void. Then everything vanished.

The doctor admits the condition in which I found myself on recovering consciousness was not deceptive. I was to all intents and purposes as

much awake as ever I was in my life, with an accumulation of energy beyond expression. I was buoyant as air; my senses had increased their capacity a thousandfold; my sensations were being every moment multiplied and heightened to exaltation. As the dazzlement gradually became familiar, and I could take cognisance of details, I felt no surprise at what really was a very amazing spectacle. There was the room as I had entered it: the camp bed, the two chairs, the table with its lamp now just alight, the doctor seated on the couch, his head bent forward with scrutinising eyes, and white beard almost touching what appeared to be a replica of my face. But what first struck me as novel and deserving of attention was the thin, attenuated, unsubstantiality of everything but myself. It was some little time before it dawned on me that I was not on the sofa at all — that I was, in fact, suspended, as it were, in mid-air over the couch. Then came the first touch of surprise — the figure lying on the couch, so vague and shadowy, was not my thinking self, but merely a shell, a soulless body. And yet my body, the exact duplicate of the one on the couch, felt vividly real, and, I repeat, the only substantial object in the room. Desirous of removing this apparent illusion, I stretched out my hand to touch the doctor's arm and draw his attention. It was with a quick shock of alarm that I realised my hand had passed through his arm as through mist without his appearing to know it. Meanwhile such a glorious sense of freedom was in me, such an exuberant buoyancy, that without consciousness of the act, I was moving towards the ceiling when a jarring drag enlightened me that I was tethered to the shell on the sofa by numerous cords of brilliantly blue light, like currents of electricity. By this time I had also discovered my sense of vision was unimpeded by matter. Every object seemed limned on the atmosphere, a mere portraiture, only held from dissolving by a rapid interplay of conflicting forces that, however, hardly affected myself. The whole scene, indeed, was as baseless and bodyless as a noon-day dream. Nothing existed but my thoughts; even their investiture suggested latent impermanency, that forces at the moment unknown to me were capable of wilting it to nothingness. In every part of me tingled such divine energy that I was possessed with the sublime egotism of conviction that the more I was relieved of my embodiment the more substantial I should become, the more uncircumscribed would be my innate potencies, the more ideal my aspirations. And I yearned with a great passion for the sundering of the trammels of the flesh, for a beatific vision of perfection beyond time and space and being. I had no fear, no doubt, no hesitation. Then bulking in the expanse of self with a depressing weight of deliberate descension to the baseless stuff of matter all my animal instincts were gradually exposed, awakening memories of evil thoughts and deeds that had ministered to their gratification and the first premonitory pains of that agony, self-inflicted, assuredly mine after death. I suffered too acutely to

descant on it here.

All at once, an impression was created that two terrible eyes were fixed on me with piercing scrutiny. A hush deepened like lowering deepened intolerably with freezing stagnation. Every sense was stiffened in the presence of some dreadful invisible mystery. The suspense was frightful. Though a train of figures was now passing through the chamber, yet there was not the faintest relief of the oppression of those staring, invisible eyes. Visions of crowded human faces, more or less sorrowful, some with light in their eyes, and others as though blind, and all vitally instinct with divine energy; visions of beings as substantial as myself wafting through the walls as through air, never for one moment relaxed the horror of those mysterious eyes. The more I cowered beneath that scrutiny, the more distant appeared the procession of figures, the throng of sorrowful faces. It seemed as though the ever-moving population in that unearthly medium shunned that mysterious presence. Then I saw it! At the same moment the doctor lifted his head and appeared to be listening in the darkened chamber. Draped in funereal gloom the gigantic presence loomed, his countenance contorted with lurid passions. To and fro he paced, wringing his hands, and seemed to live over again that dreadful night when he thrust the dagger into his victim's face. Never shall I forget the wild frenzy in those eyes, the doom of remorse on that implacable brow, the writhing misery of that sullen mouth. Several times I was sure the doctor had seen the appalling figure striding about the room when he darted to examine his dial-plates. Well I knew the presence could see him, and when in one of the doctor's rushes to a machine the furious eyes were turned on his face, and the funereal shape deliberately strode across his path and confronted him, I quailed. There was no obstruction, however — a passage of a body through air; nothing more. I knew then the doctor was quite unaware of his awful visitor, who strode through him unconcernedly. Bound to the locality of his own crime by abnormal physical desires and sleepless memory, driven by the inexorable law of destiny to expiate to the uttermost fraction the misery he had wrought when in the flesh, with intermittent cravings of the immortal essence within him, that would increase with the disintegration of the brute nature through exhausting and unavailing efforts to appease itself, the hapless wretch was probably too self-conscious of his own doom to entertain the slightest interest in the investigations of a man of science. Insignificantly trivial and infinitesimal must appear the experiments of inquisitive minds behind the barrier of matter to a spirit steeped in tragic anguish, earth-bound and self-condemned. Even as I gazed on that striding, self-torturing figure, encompassed about with awe and overwhelming loneliness, the horror of the spectacle inspired pity and compassion. Had it not been for my conviction that only by a process such as this could he issue to higher

stages of spiritual evolution, I could not have borne the ordeal. When at last faint quivers played through my frame, and a drowsiness confused my vision of the doctor manipulating several of the machines, of the figure still engaged in its punishing tasks, and I knew unconsciousness was stealing over me, a feeling of gratitude for a lesson deeply felt mingled in my mind with a craving that others should feel it also.

## **Part II. — Between Two Worlds.**

My mind was as yet too cloudy to realise other than something extraordinary had happened. I was certainly awake, and yet seemed plunged in an awful hush and crushing stagnation. Gradually the oppression lifted a little, and a far-off roar, as of billows breaking at intervals, entered into my consciousness. A blaze of light smote on my eyelids, and with a violent effort I unclosed them. The relief at seeing my bedroom's familiar ceiling and the sunshine streaming across my face was speedily removed by an anxiety to know what had happened. I was not in bed, and yet — it was with a shock of alarm I found myself unable to move a muscle of my body. I frantically endeavoured to lift my hand. I might as well have tried to move a huge rock. My physical functioning had suddenly ceased. My faculties, now thoroughly aroused, quivered with a multitude of impressions, of which the most poignant was an apprehension of my impotent condition, and a terrible desire to know where I was, since not in bed. My fierce mental struggles had no effect on my body, not even to a corresponding tremor of a nerve. My eyelids had also become fixed. The loss of this last vestige of physical control filled me with grief. I knew I was weeping, yet no tears evidenced it. And yet, strange to say, my senses had become peculiarly acute. The buzz and beat of an imprisoned bee against the window-pane sounded with loud insistence. The sound somehow reminded me of the billow roar I had at first heard. The knowledge of the truth burst on me all at once. My senses must have individually been gathering in impressions unnoticed by me through my agitation, and the sum total flared into a hideous fact. The white garment, the odour of lavender water, the narrow receptacle in which I lay: all gave evidence. I was in a coffin! Ere I had hardly grasped this terrible fact, my mind with one leap had seized another: I was in a trance. All else was blank. A peculiar mental change immediately occurred. My anxiety vanished now the mystery was solved. I became cool and collected, even expectant. My condition would be at once detected when the undertaker came to adjust the coffin lid. I crushed back a horrible thought that perhaps — I dared not think of that, although stories I had heard and read of people buried alive were working on me against my will. Impossible! Why, he will feel my heart beating. Why frighten myself? He will soon be here. No need to imagine

such an appalling contingency. People are never — I would not permit my mind to finish the sentence. The thought came with a rush and nearly tore away my mental fastenings: the doctor must have already examined me, and given a certificate of death. Yes! But why think of this? The undertaker will know. He is accustomed to such cases. When he comes — if ever a man was mentally staggered by the unexpected I was when she gazed down on me. The stern old soul was weeping. “Mrs. James!” I shouted, as I thought, yet my tongue never so much as stirred. I listened eagerly as her head bowed nearer. “Poor fellow!” she murmured.

At that moment I believe I felt a kinder feeling towards that stern, grey-headed woman than I had felt towards any living creature for years. How I had misjudged her. Behind her rough manner, behind her bitter remarks, behind her peevish annoyances that had made me curse and determine not to stay in her boarding-house another day; behind these repellent appearances had been a womanly heart and sympathising soul. I felt ashamed, and yet, somehow, less selfish when she moved away. Then I wondered why she had not perceived my condition. Surely she must have noticed my eyes were open. How strange. However, the incident tended to foster my hopes and remove the mass of horror ready to fall and crush me. In order to occupy my attention till the undertaker came (and here I lay stress on the peculiar impression that the undertaker was the one person presented to my mind who would at once perceive my condition and liberate me) I began scrutinising the cracks in the ceiling, and then counting them. Once the bee that had for some time been silent buzzed across my line of vision, and I watched it circle, noting how the beam of sunlight through which it wheeled displayed the glitter of its quivering wings. It alighted somewhere out of view, and I again concentrated my attention on the ceiling.

I must have fallen into a reverie, since I remember nothing till a heavy footstep aroused me into the keenest sensibility. At last he had come — had come. I fought desperately to shout, move, under the leaning forward of that black-bearded countenance, of which every line and wrinkle is stamped indelibly on my memory. It was as night rushing on day. An immense darkness, sudden, indescribable; a tangible silence. Thought ceased, every impression was blotted out. My mind sank into merciful oblivion. Yet so subtle is the working of the inner self that I absolutely knew when my consciousness returned that I had been carried out, and was in the hearse. The strong smell of the fresh-planed coffin planks bit on my sense with pungent vitality. All sense of space and time was extinguished. My inner self was shot to the surface. Years of accumulated superficialities fell away. Memory emptied itself — a great self-pity burst on me, and yet, strive as I did to shirk it, an awful self-condemnation. I seemed to be gazing on a panorama of which I was the main actor. Could it be possible my life had contained so much. Was I, in

truth, the wretch that could act thus, and thus. Is there no end to the crowded procession of despicable tableaux. Yes; I wronged her, and her. But the provocation, the temptation; there is no heed taken. The scenes swept past and others streamed before me. Faces hardly recognisable, and faces familiar — some sad, some in tears, some even in laughter, but all accusing me with eyes that burned with indignation, flashed and faded. A face I had seen so often wet with tears for me suddenly was thrust forward with eyes of pity. She did not accuse, condemn, but smiled with moving lips. I quaked more in her presence than before my accusers. I yearned, but she drifted past, still gazing sadly with a smile on her lips and pity in her eyes. Heavens! What a miserably mean life mine had been. I had been vain of tinsel and toys, had sacrificed my friends for the flattery of poor human mites like myself. And who heeds me now? Who has as much as even turned his head at my leisurely-moving hearse? Perhaps a friend is now passing me, and learns whose funeral it is. He will remember my good acts. Self-flatterer! Good acts — my inner self shudders at the motive of them. I am alone with the reality of things. I cannot shirk it now. The arguments, the doubts with which I had bolstered up my trivial egotism before the applauding world have no power here. Oh! that I could have felt, could have known, the realities before. I would have eagerly sought to redress those I had wronged. The sudden tilting of the coffin startled me. I became aware of an oppressive heat. The darkness was scintillating with myriads of sparks. Thump! Thud! God! They are burying me. The clods are tumbling on the coffin-lid. Globes of red fire are rolling, swinging, dancing about me. A hush, a solemnity, then a faint, subdued hiss in my ears. A buoyancy and moving through water. And then ——

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“The power of the ego to attribute to a person expressions of feelings at variance with observation, as instanced in your little interview with Mrs. James, is very remarkable. I can only account for it by the theory that in some subtle, indefinable manner our subself can perceive, or rather become en rapport with characteristics of persons with whom we are in close relationship without the register of consciousness. A severe shock, or, as in your case, a combination of alarming circumstances, may spring these secret subsidiary inreapings (if I may so introduce the word) into definite images. Or, it may arise — is your head no better?”

I again swallowed a mouthful of the fluid handed me in the goblet. Slowly but surely the familiar objects were fastening on my mind with realistic vividness, and my recent mental illusions receding into dreamlike aloofness. Dr. Graham's tall black-robed figure at the table, with his keen, grey eyes, his long white beard, his silver locks topped

with a velvet skull cap, fascinated my gaze. His cool, deliberate tones almost repelled me.

“I wouldn't go through it again, doctor, for a fortune. It was frightful, and will affect my life. We are immortal, doctor.”

“Perhaps so, my good friend — perhaps so. But when we determined to make this experiment with the view of increasing our data regarding the complexity of the mind under hypnotic suggestion you were an ardent materialist, you know. However, you've given me the main facts, I fancy, though incoherently, as could scarce be avoided in your present condition. I should have very much liked to have extended the experiment had not your pulse and certain unmistakable symptoms of syncope warned me to resuscitate you at once. Why do you gaze at me so fixedly?”

“I wonder what your experiences would be, doctor?” I replied, slowly. The doctor laughed softly.

“Not much different from yours, my friend, I'm afraid. Curious, though, about the water. Pity the experiment hadn't been prolonged a little. How long do you think it lasted?”

“It seemed hours on hours.”

“My watch-hands pointed at eight exactly when I transmitted to you the suggestion you were in a coffin in your bedroom, and in a trance. It is eight-twenty, and you have been resuscitated ten minutes. So you have had an eternity crowded into a few minutes. Your mind has been galloping through some interesting phenomena. Do you feel better now? You appear normal.”

I glanced curiously round the doctor's private study. The loaded bookshelves, the curious instruments on the side-board, the skeleton behind its half-drawn maroon curtain in the corner, the bare workman's table with its half-open book and bottle of water and tumbler, the fire blazing merrily in the grate, the straps behind me on the couch with which my limbs had been secured; each and all were distinctly observed and impressed on my memory. Nevertheless, those fearful imaginary scenes hung like gigantic cloud-shapes on the background of my inner self. I shuddered with a sudden thought.

“That experience, doctor, won't haunt me?”

“No, no! Don't fancy such nonsense. Remember, it's only as a nightmare, and, like such, will fade. Indeed, it's a great provision of Nature that abnormal incidents of life become faint in the memory with time, whilst every-day scenes often retain their freshness. In a few days you will be able to describe minutely without a tremor the very details of which I've had difficulty to elicit a hint. Now try a cigar.”

## **Benson's Flutter for a Fortune.**

“I was in Townsville when a letter addressed to Cairns was forwarded on to me containing only one sentence — ‘Dear Benson — If you have any capital you are willing to risk in a flutter for a fortune, wire, and I will be with you in less than a week. — Yours, etc., Abe Stanson, P.O., Port Douglas.’

“Now I had just sold my sugar plantation near Cairns, disgusted with the deportation of my kanaka boys, pretty well assured I should come a cropper with white labour under the present conditions, and was on the look out for some investment of the money at the bankers.’ Moreover, the severance from the monotony of a planter's life had acted like a tonic. My old craving for adventures, for excitement, had rebounded into new activity. Stanson's letter opened prospects for a surfeit of them. He was essentially a man of new ideas — always poking about unexplored parts, loving desperate ventures for their own sake. I first met him some 15 years ago in the Johnsonian Club, Brisbane, and accompanied him on his Bellinder Ker expedition, during the trials of which a firm friendship sprang up between us. In conventual parlance Stanson was a ‘white man.’ When I went in for canegrowing near Cairns I seemed to drift out of his hail. His letter, therefore, in every sense was an exhilarating surprise. Without hesitation I wired to him, ‘Yes; waiting you here. Benson, Great Northern Hotel, Townsville.’

“I pass over our meeting and the subsequent confab incidental to the coming together of confidential friends after a gap of years. Beyond a further thinning down of his long, lean, fibrous figure, a grizzling of his short-cropped hair, a skin more tightly drawn and coloured like old parchment, and the scissored trimness of his once luxuriant blonde moustache, beyond these changes and a certain reflective expression in his eyes subduing their peculiarly bright blueness, Stanson's appearance was the same as when I last saw him. He wasted no time, but got down to business immediately after dinner on the day he arrived. At that time I knew nothing of the pearl fisheries, and his plunging headlong into the subject confused me. He checked my questions as to why and when he had become a shelldiver with ‘No time for that now, Jim, old man. Listen!’ And I listened.”

“There was a Jap diver named Dhu in Port Kennedy, for whom I once did a little service in a gambling saloon. Dhu had a withered arm, and

was helpless against a knuckleduster and a knife. I cross-buttocked the Manila man, and punched the other, a Malay, through the window, and snapping the blade tossed his knife after him. Though Dhu never so much as thanked me at the time his heart must have been strangely touched, for when he died a few months after, his son, called Jhin, or some such name, brought me a pile of papers carefully sealed up, which he said his father had put aside for me. After several days' wrestle with an atrocious handwriting and the worst English I ever came across I felt a bit hazy. The sudden prospect of wealth to a man dead broke has a queer effect. He wonders at first if he has gone daft, or is the victim of a hoax. After all the facts have filtered down into his mind, and are knocked into ship-shape, he either flies off at a tangent or recoils into a shell of wariness and caution. In my case there was no room for doubt. There was the chart, and everything regarding the treasure painfully detailed in watery ink. I had the joker and couldn't play it. I needed a little money. I had no friends up there, and fell back on you.'

'And the treasure?'

'Is heaped up in a cul-de-sac within reach. Dhu had discovered a quartz reef outcropping from the seabed, having a blind channel rich in shell, workable at certain seasons. There's a fortune screaming for an owner.'

'But why didn't Dhu snap it?'

'Ask me something easy. That's where the mystery comes in. And why hasn't Jhin collared it, for he knows all about it? I've pondered it over, and made enquiries about Dhu. He had tried and he failed. Why? Don't know. No one knows but Jhin, and he won't speak. There's a provision for him, by the way. A certain commission on the output has to go to him. Dhu paid me the compliment of trusting me to comply with that request. Dhu made two trips and returned each time with a son a corpse. Jhin was his last child, and the old man shut down on the venture, leaving it to me. He spread the report his sons went off in paralysis, which is a lie, for the shell is only in 15 fathoms. I thought at first it might have been a knifing business, for two divers on a lugger are like cat and dog. But when Jhin, before whom I placed the whole matter, and about which he seemed to know everything, having accompanied his father on both trips, when he closed up, refusing to have anything to do with it, I saw I was wrong. A few words scrawled on the back of the chart in Dhu's handwriting then set me thinking. They ran: — 'Death for me and mine, saith Fate.' Now, these little Japs. are fatalists to the finger tips. What is to be will be, and you can't help it. The shell is not for him and his kin — 'twas Fate. But it may be for me and mine. Who knows? Fate. Try and see. Thus a Jap will argue.'

'Perhaps sharks ——' I hazarded, as Abe paused reflectively.

'Sharks only attack machine divers in story books. Reef-eels, snakes, and ox rays are more to be feared. There's some danger that has spelt

death for Dhu's sons, and perhaps others. Something that's frightened Jhin from the work. But look, Jim, this won't affect you. I take all personal risks. At the worst, you may lose a little in the turnover with the lugger and equipment when you sell it. It's a chance in a man's lifetime. The shell is there all right. I stake my davey on that.'

'Haven't you any idea then what kind of danger this is?'

"Any other man than Abe would have come under my stern suspicion. I couldn't help fancying that perhaps even he might be withholding some conjecture for obvious reasons."

'None other than the trouble is below surface, I think.'

'And where is this shell, Abe? Enlighten me a little. I know nothing about this diving business.'

"Whereupon he entered into a description of the pearlfishery at some length. I learned that the divers followed the course of the current-borne spat from south-east to north-west for the beds of shell; that it depended on the density of water how deep they could go; that at 25 fathoms and below they were liable to paralysis; that here and there on the seabed were reefs containing straights, where the sucked in spat formed valuable banks, unworkable through cross tides; and that, finally, this treasure of shell was accumulated in one of these, a veritable cul-de-sac, under comparatively still water at certain seasons — a rare phenomenon."

"Long before he finished I had made up my mind: 'I'm on, Abe. Let's get to figures.'

"Before many days we were in Port Kennedy — that hive of pubs, stores, and gambling saloons — and were the owners of a lugger and at sea with a colored crew. As the season was not yet quite favorable for our venture, we put in time on the grounds diving for shell. I say we, meaning Abe. I was merely a spectator."

"I had determined, however, to take my full share of the work when we settled in earnest, and was only waiting to get into touch with my surroundings before donning the dress. But the slow drifting over the beds and the beating back in that warm blue sea with its shallow patches of vivid green, domed by a sky of bluish haze, soon grows wearisome. Fortunately on board was an old diver, whom Abe addressed as Uncle, who seemed anxious I should know everything connected with the work, otherwise the time would have hung heavily. There is a deadly monotony about this pearling business, exasperating to a man accustomed to the free and varied life of the bush. Ever the same expanse of ruffled sea, with perhaps a bob and splash of a shark and the sprint over the waves of escaping flying fish, or may-be an inquisitive sea bird wheeling around the lugger with a dreary cry at intervals; ever the same persistent sun with burning feelers on your hands and neck; ever the same roll of the lugger, with a splug and spatter of water at the gunwales, the snore of wind in the cordage, the clatter of blocks in the sheaves, the jabber of

Japs on the deck, and the pants of the pump. And at night ever the same stuffy heat in the bunk that swarmed with cockroaches, the same sickening effluvium of decayed shellfish, the same swing like a cradle to the rattle of pots in the rack, the banging of doors, the squeaking of straining planks. And yet (such is one's dread of the unknown) the monotony of those days, the annoyances of those nights, became suddenly very dear to me when Abe adjusted the tackle and screwed on the glass front of the helmet, and I sat astride on the gunwale ready for my first descent to the seabed. The feeling of utter loneliness is indescribable. I shall never forget the chill of horror shooting through the spine when I let go of the ladder, and opened the valve, and sank, closing it again almost immediately with a nausea at the suffocating smell of indiarubber, and the thump in my ears of the air through the tube, and the wonder of that rapid slide as through a curtain of satin, with the white sand sailing up to meet me. I felt a pinching at the wrists, heard a buzzing, saw a dance of clots that gradually ceased under the now muffled pulsation of the pump. Then I journeyed across black chasms, gliding as though on air; across what appeared like white perforated cliffs that made me scramble; through coral forests, smashing their branches like icicles; with visions of beds of sponges green as grass or red as poppies, of jungles of weed swaying as to a constant wind, of stretches of glistening sand lonely as a desert, of avenues upon avenues of coral more delicately carved than a Greek statue and streaming with hues more gorgeous than a sunbow's, of grotesque fish with eyes like shining carbuncles staring in thousands, of sand tunnels hard as cement that seemed to smoke when my feet touched them — all swathed in solemnity and sealed with a deathlike stillness vitally emphasized by the measured throb of the air pump in the helmet. Even now the memory of that journey on the seabed is vivid. Though I frequently afterwards went down with the net after shell, familiarity with the marvels of the sea never dimmed the glow of my first trip.”

“The south-west monsoon had been now succeeded by beautiful calm weather, for which we had waited. We shipped a week's stores from the tender in attendance of the fleet of luggers, to which we delivered our shell, and proceeded to the site of our treasure trove, marked on Dhu's chart. None of our crew really knew the object of our trip. Not that it would have mattered much if they had. They seemed a harmless set, were very picturesque with their warm, brown bodies scantily attired, indolent of movement, only exhibiting interest when playing cribbage. I fancy Uncle was aware we had some definite object in view other than prospecting for chance tracks of spat. He glanced curiously at me when he heard that I should accompany Abe to the bottom, leaving him in charge. I had taken a liking to the old saturnine Jap, having learned much from him about the dangers below. He was proud of the depths to which

he had been that had caused his swollenness of throat. He feared nothing but paralysis, resulting through rapid changes of pressure, the twist or snap of the air tube. I must confess, however, my uneasiness regarding the unknown danger we had to encounter was increased by his yarns. It had become more mysterious than ever.”

“As Abe had said, Dhu's sons could not have met their death through paralysis. And it was not likely Dhu abandoned a fortune through fear of the common enemies of the divers after shell he was liable to meet anywhere on the seabed. The more I thought of this mysterious danger that had spelled death for two or more expert divers, the less I relished my coming trip under the surface. But my word was pledged for it — though certainly against Abe's desire — and my sense of fairplay as co-partner in the undertaking, with that determination not to be frightened off what promised to be a peculiarly unique and perilous adventure, that is the bane of so many of us, overrode all other considerations.”

“When I came on deck that disastrous morning and glanced around, never surely was there a scene more enticing to a diver. There was the calm, blue sea on a voluptuous heave beautifully soft and satin-like, studded with lazy jelly fish of the bluest blue; there was the sky of cerulean depth kindling beneath an imperious sun; there was Point — on the starboard side, mellow and mild in its green garniture, with a tangled string of white long-beaked birds just sailing across it. And there was our coloured crew softly moving about the halliards and the freshly scrubbed deck, their lithe brown limbs and wild grace and bearing, the tameless fire lighting up their black dreamy eyes ever now and again at some witty sally in their own language, touching with a harmony of human interest the brilliant picture. And there, too, was Uncle helping Abe into his rubber dress and big brass-toed boots, and then adjusting the 561b. weights to his chest and back. As two of the crew step to the pump wheel, with a glance at the red rubber tube, ere Uncle clamps the helmet over Abe's head, I hear ‘Jim,’ and in two strides am by Abe's side. ‘Remember what I told you, old man.’ The helmet is on, and as the glass goes up to be screwed in its front, ‘Good-bye.’ Had he some presentiment at that moment? The honest, bright blue eyes gazed at me through the glass. He was smiling. In another minute the wheel was revolving, the pump panting, and the silver bubbles dancing to the surface. He was gone, and I was soon ready to follow. I cannot say I felt other than what I usually feel when entering into danger — cool, collected, determined. Perhaps the clear sunshine appeared precious when the water lapped over the glass, and I sank through its silky depths; but once on the bottom and my wits were keenly alert.”

“Following Abe's instructions I moved cautiously in his wake. Across a sandy patch with its ridgy curl here and there betraying shell; across a

plain green as with the weeds of a swamp I journeyed, raising a sort of fog with my feet, through which shoals of fish glimmered like flying bats. Then I sank deeper, with the monotonous beat of the pump becoming fainter, the fish more bladderly in appearance. Sometimes I fancied they were following me with scrutinizing eyes. One moment they were around me in hundreds; another, and I was moving alone. All at once something bulky seemed to slip down alongside of me. I halted startled, with my hand tightening on the lifeline. With his huge, spotted body, his goliath shoulders, his ugly flat head, yawning mouth, and coldly staring eyes, the brute appeared formidable. With a hideous grin he leisurely sailed around me, as though enjoying my discomfiture. I jerked my wrist, and the air flew from it across his path like a discharge of polished steel cones, and lo, he was gone. 'So much for Mr. Carpet Shark,' I thought moving on."

"Gradually I became aware I was approaching what looked like the loom of a mountain. A current began to drag at my feet like the noose of a lasso. Splintered peaks of rock shining like enamel were pinnacled above me. Terraces of caverns shagged with pulpous weed gloomed on either side. For some time I had seen no fish, and wondered. Deeper yet, and (if I may so designate that cloudy sullenness gathering about my path), into a monstrous twilight, I moved. Whither was I going? Slowly my eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, and I could now see the stationary outlines of Abe's figure ahead, and that it was a gigantic gallery into which we had entered. And then — Heavens! That shell. There was nothing else but shell to be seen, and my heart leaped. But stay! What is that? Again the length of horror moved, and I watched it with growing terror. The bravest man would have quailed at the sight of that heaving, miss-happen abortion of crab and fish. First a mouth like that of a filthy sewer, then a scaly incarnation of everything abominable and evil, weaponed with spikes, that are slowly erected as the dull, loathsome eyes fastened on me. The spines lash out, and I spring back just in time. God! The whole gallery is full of the monsters. Everywhere they are crawling — down the walls, over the shell — the very floor is beginning to lift. The water is curdling beneath myriads of threshing tentacles. And Abe? With the sweat of fright blinding me I leaped over the whipping nightmare in my path, possessed by one impulse — to get to him. How I escaped the poisonous scourges of that smiting hellspawn I never knew. I've a vivid recollection of two greenish eyes pressed like slimy bags against the glass, a tug, a burst of sparks. I knew no more till I lay gasping on deck, with Uncle's dark face bending over me. A shriek made me sit up, glancing to whence it came. There was Abe lying on his back with a group of brown men doing something to him."

'Stone-fish done it — him dry up soon like dead tree,' remarked Uncle quietly, helping me to my feet. Though brandy was poured down Abe's

throat like water his teeth chattered with cold. His cries of agony were dreadful. The deadly blue welts on his poor limp hands had explained everything to the crew. Well might Jhin fight shy of that awful gallery, with its colony of stone-fish of monstrous proportions — the most dreaded of all enemies by the divers of shell, the stroke of one of whose spikes on a naked limb can blast it for ever.”

“Our venture ended in disaster. No mortal man will ever possess that treasure of shell. For fear, however, some reckless fool, dazzled by a delusive dream, might sacrifice his life did he know its exact site, I purposely withhold it. Dhu had his arm withered and lost two sons in the attempt to get that wealth. Had not Uncle, alarmed at the depth to which we had sunk — far beyond that chronicled in Dhu's account of the blind channel — had he not hauled us both to the surface our lives would also have been lost. As it is, Abe is a cripple for life, and I a victim to nightmares more dreadful than Dante's visions of Hell.”

## Thirst!

I returned to my camp feeling ruffled. I couldn't help the tap getting stuck and wasting a little of the tank water. Luckily I respect old men, otherwise I should have answered his shove and stream of invectives with a blow. Perhaps surprise, too, that such a trifle should so much upset the old chap, who was shaking from head to foot as with fright, had held me in bounds. Anyway, as I glanced back at his cabin I determined not to again trouble him. This incident, together with several refusals of tucker that day, convinced me I had struck a bad patch for swagmen. Whilst boiling the billy I couldn't help contrasting the old man's courteous speech to my request for a billy of water with his subsequent insulting behaviour. He was certainly a man of better education than his appearance would lead one to expect. However, I dismissed him from my mind, and settled down to make the most of the scanty remnants of my last meal.

I had just lighted my pipe when the old man tramped up to the fire, picked up a pannikin, half filled it from a bottle of rum, and handed it over to me, gazing at him in astonishment, with —

“Ever been in West Australia? No, thought so.” After tossing off a tot of the spirit and a backhand wipe at his mouth: “Was dry-blowing and prospecting over there in the seventies. Climate like hell; in parts rain under ten inches; copper on the Murchison, gold on the Yule. Desert and unexplored country everywhere. Salt lakes and pans. Run your eyes over the map and call out the names, and I'll picture the places life-like. There were three of us, Stuckey, German Charley, and myself. Know anything about mining? No? No good detailing, then. Ever been bushed? Ah, three days. Had water and tucker, I reckon. No. Only a bit of a change for you. Does a new chum good. We were lost in the desert. My God!” The old man helped himself to more rum.

“Little tucker and no water, and we tramped on, nerves too unstrung to rest, till we dropped now and again, and held up a coat to shade the head. From sky-line to sky-line a flat wilderness of bleached sand like the bed of a dried-up sea, with a dazzle-dance of heat as from the quivering mouth of an oven. We sweated our juices, and then our hands and faces shredded. We spoke in whispers, for our voices frightened us in that dungeon-hush. The rustle of our footsteps seemed to come from another world. Our shirts and pants, sapless as withered leaves, stiff as buckram,

seemed heated to the edge of catching fire. The smiting glare shut down our eyelids till brain fireworks burst them open. Thus for hours, till we sank bewildered in the blood-red reflection of the sunken sun's raked-out fires. Darkness swept in with stars, but no dew. Not a current of air. Did I sleep? At first, yes — if incoherent nightmares woven out of every awful story connected with fire one reads in a lifetime, be sleep. Awaking through my own outcry from terror, I was thrust back into it by another horror. Ever seen the moon through a telescope? Conceive that sepulchre flattened out and sheeted in darkness rayed through by wandering fires on the borders of the phantasmal. Thus for hours, till the beak of the moon sharpened itself and faded; then a strange shiver — sudden passages of feverish light through the east as though a furnace door had been swung back, and then abruptly, like a red-hot ball shot from a cannon, the sun!”

“German Charley was the first to break up. A big flaxen-haired man, with saucer-like blue eyes and a hand that could cover a dinner-plate. It's lean, whipcordy men like me that can stretch without snapping. Poor devil! his big, clumsy feet ploughed through the sand like an elephant's. ‘Mein Gretchen,’ he said huskily, as I stumbled over him sprawling on his face. His tongue squeezed out and was jammed, and I touched it — it was like emery paper. Stuckey stared dazedly at me as I heaved him to his feet. I wanted to cheer him, but my mouth seemed full of soot. His hand crackled like old parchment in mine. His eyes turned on me, and I noticed an electric halo over the pupils. ‘Watter!’ The word came from his chest, I thought. Tottering in his tracks like an eighteen-month child, he stumbled on, screwed to his feet by my convulsive hand-grip. These giants that lift like a steam crane are mostly mullock at bottom. He was not with us the next dawn. Towards noon something kicking up the sand ahead brought the heart into my mouth. He had stripped off everything but his tattered shirt, and was stretched, striking out like a swimmer, every now and again flinging the sand about as though it were water. His hair was actually sticking up like a brush. He didn't know us, didn't know anything but his mad vision. Stuckey stared at him and then at me, and sank on his haunches, muttering, ‘I heard the splash.’ Night came, and we never moved nor uttered a sound, crouching beside him. What could we do? I swooned into a dream more realistic than fact. I heard the roaring plunge of the Pacific and the hissing backwash of cataracts down cliffs. Then I floated in a dark lake deliciously cool. Suddenly awaking, I staggered to my feet, and fell over Charley's dead body.”

The old man arose and strode up to me, and craning his bald head till the gaunt neck strung tight through its lean sinews appeared like a vulture's, fixed his cavernous eyes burningly on mine, his long face a mesh of creases slowly drawn out as he said in a tense voice.

“Thirst, man! The sight of a fresh-running creek gives me hell. Waste,

God! what waste. You thought me a pig. Couldn't help it. That rattle of wasting water brought it all back. I've had periodical breakdowns for years — water! water! I wasn't married in those days. Stuckey was — he babbled of his 'little woman.' I lived two lives, slipped from one to the other without shock. Was now lecturing at the 'varsity, now rambling through Aberdeen. A slip in the sand, and instantly across my vision ran the white dazzle, the fusing sky lines, and Stuckey's face thrust out at me, all eyes. Each strove to lag behind the other. Each knew but never betrayed what the other maddened for. Not a sign but each knew, and sidled for the chance. Yet neither dared snap the tension. Night saw us pretending sleep. If I dozed, the kick of his foot brought me like a thunderclap to the immediate horror. A swallowing thought hypnotised everything into one tiny circle — his throat. It fascinated me. Its skin was so shrunken the sinews strained and sprang back like wires when his head jerked towards me, and his eyes — God! time after time the thought lifted me to him and was baulked by those terrible eyes turned slowly on me. Through delirium, no doubt, but they appeared to swell, jetting red streamers, and then contracting, sink into pits of blood. Once I had a lightning vision of myself. Man! I was a wild beast. And yet I felt no repulsion. Water — there were oceans of it, clear as crystal, in which I gambolled, sucking it at every pore, and clamoured for more, and it pelted from everywhere. Then I laughed, for my thirst was a jest, and — with a sound like the ripping of a sheet I was staring at Stuckey jerking his head at me. What next happened only God knows. I must have crawled on hands and knees, for they were bone bare when the water carrier picked me up a furlong off his track. He was too late for Stuckey, a mile away, huddled in sand, his claws hooked across his eyes. Thirst! thirst! Oh! those deserts. And yet we let the glorious, precious rain waste away. Man, it's awful.”

## **The Triumph of Faith.**

Under the fervour of the dawn a faint breeze passed over the forest to a rustle of leaves, shaking dew on the sleeper's face. Crouching figures silently detach themselves from the huddle of darkness in the undergrowth, and crawl nearer towards him, gripping their spears. A bird bugled from a bough above his head as though giving warning. He stirred, and a long spear was poised and quivered. It sank, and again the figures slid nearer like snakes to crouch, listening, peering. Behind the barrier of boughs of the forest avenue bristled the golden lances of the ascending sun. Branches with leaf-clinging dews became spangled in the light with tremulous stars. Sweet odours steamed from hidden flowers, as from a censer. Huge trunks oozed pungent gums. A drowsy hum began to drone from under the rank vegetation and hang about aged roots, that exhaled a damp, cool, earthy smell. Abrupt notes and whistles from the neighbouring thickets were being answered at intervals by clear clarion calls, and bell-like chimes, in the awakening depths of the forest. Suddenly the figures leap to their feet, with spears pointing towards the sleeper, and simultaneously become transfixed, their wild eyes riveted on something beside him — a small lidless box, cushioned in blossoms, on an old, weather-stained wheelbarrow, across which a sunbeam had just sloped, lighting up a beautiful and yet awe-inspiring object behind a trellis work of wood. What was it? They gazed on it paralysed with terror. A tiny face, like a cherub's enframed in clustering tresses more lustrous than the sunbeam of which they seemed a part, beamed out at them as though sculptured in wax. Again the sleeper stirred, and with one impulse the figures fled, melting into the forest shadows like things of air.

The sunbeam lengthened, reaching the sleeper's long white hair and wrinkled face, and his eyes opened, glancing apprehensively towards the box. They grew moist as he lay gazing at it with a far-off wistfulness. Stretching his limbs, he groaned audibly with pain. Every bone began to ache. He felt too weary to arise, late as it was, and push onward. Eighteen miles yet to journey! His hand wandered to his rosary for his matin prayer. The beads clicked, slipping from his knotted fingers as he fell into reverie. Pictures of his past life came and went unsummoned, some vague, some vivid. From the day his wife had deserted him for another, some thirty years ago, to the day he found the little being, whose

corpse was in yonder box, eighteen months since, everything was cloudy, like a distant dream. Was it possible he had once cut himself off from God and man through his outraged feelings, had been a “hatter,” dwelling in the dense scrub, a mere machine? Though dim, the memory of those wasted years was not powerless. But ever since the little being entered into his life, shedding sunshine through the darkness and diffusing innocent joy, it began to lose its sting. He had viewed the working of her presence on him as a miracle. What else was it? He remembered now with a shudder the callous indifference with which he had surveyed the smoking home-stead as he emerged on to the creek bank, bent on fishing, twenty miles from his lair. “Blacks!” he had grimly muttered as he turned to cautiously regain the thick scrub. Then — and here the old man breathed heavily as the picture took shape in his mind — then he had rubbed his eyes, petulantly rebuking himself for such idle fancies. But the marvel did not vanish, still nestled at his feet, and his heart gave a great leap as he gazed wonderingly on it. Surely it was his darling Kathie, dead years ago — was he mad? A cold sweat was on him. His legs shook as he knelt beside the tiny figure under a bush, witless of her poor murdered parents. Her delicate face, touched in the cheeks with rose-bloom; her dimpled chin, a glen of loveliness; her large, mild eyes opening like blue bells, as his trembling hand stole timorously over her gold locks — at this moment a bird overhead thrilled the air like a blown clarionette, and the old man, rudely disturbed, shook himself and crawled to his feet, a blissful light fading from his watery eyes.

Fearing to make a fire in the hunting ground of wild blacks, the old man hastily munched some of the corned mutton and damper with which he had provided himself for his journey, deposited the remnants in his tucker bag, rolled up his blanket, and pushing in front of him the ancient, clumsy barrow containing the primitive coffin with its tiny corpse in the home-made nightdress he had washed to gleaming whiteness for its last sad office, he entered a forest avenue as vast as a cathedral, through which the lonely bush track meandered. Meanwhile, the sun rejoicing in a sea of blue splendour, was lifting veil after veil of azure mist from the pageant of spring. Choirs of magpies answered one another from the tree-tops, their fruity notes welling deep-throated, till the old man fancied young angels were chorussing him a song from Paradise. On the day previous, when he had tottered and fallen, stricken through with weariness, and lain as one dead, his soul gasping for help from the Blessed Virgin, the golden chime of a bellbird in some secluded dell lulled him like a Vesper call, and his shaking fingers stole to his beads and he arose refreshed, his load of seventy years strangely lightened. Gradually he became as one spell-bound, moving in a dream among seraphic beings, some with lovely female faces smiling down on him,

some with majestic fronts compassionately gazing from sunny places, their radiant locks circled with aureoles. Sometimes he heard melodious voices chanting paeans of victory over death. He listened eagerly, endeavoring to find whence they came, and confounded them with the deep boom of the wood pigeon, with the fluting notes of the butcher-bird. Flowers spilt liquid scent at every step. The very ground under his feet fumed with cleansing odour, and when a wind loitered among the boughs laden with blossom, he seemed moving in a sea of precious perfume. Snakes slipped from his path as though conscious he was protected. Tall gums swaying towards one another seemed whispering the wherefore he was journeying, dappling him with light and shade, and often dropping leaves on the little coffin as mute pledges of their sympathy. Wattles smothered in smouldering gold were lavish of delicious nooks for him to rest in. And ever and again from some ridge falling water would point like a plume to its pools to replenish his bag. And all the while the cherub-like face beamed out at him with lips pursed like a half-opened rosebud, her hands folded round a cross on her bosom, her long tresses like flames in the sunshine, like slips of virgin gold in the shadow. Sometimes he lost himself gazing at her, and halted without knowing it, letting down the barrow legs very gently under the delusion she was asleep. With half-lidded eyes he would await, till growing anxious he would cry, "Kathie!" startling himself with the sound of his voice.

Towards noon the old man felt very weary. Couched beside the barrow he thought of many things. He thought of the object of his long journey — to bury Kathie in consecrated ground; he thought of Father Brophy, regarding whom he knew little, having kept aloof from him for fear his little charge should be taken from his far-off lonely camp in the big scrub. He had now repented of that childishness, for then she might have lived. Yes, his poor old heart had been selfish in his love. He was punished, and his white head bowed silently. But ever since her chubby hands wandered over his shaggy chest, loosening the ice-bands about his heart, ever since her bird-like cries called down sacred thoughts to his soul, he had tried to quieten the insistent voice within himself by teaching her such devotions as her mind could grasp. How could he explain why he had not sought assistance, why he had kept her so sweetly to himself. How could he — could he explain it all? The old man was sobbing softly. All at once he burst out: "O, Father, me very soul was hers, me sweet lamby. Me Kathie! She was come to me to lead me to God. She would sleep with her little arms around me neck all the night through, an' her little heart beat against mine, an' rain would fall, an' the wind would blow, an' we was as happy as two lambs. Every day she would be wid me crawlin' about me feet, an' when I used to get pretty live creatures to play wid her she would sing like an angel — Father, it was singin', though she had no words. Then she died!" The forest was

breathless in the noontide. Everything seemed listening. A beam of sunshine slept on the tiny face that seemed strangely hushed.

Towards sunset the old man knew his strength was about spent. For some hours a keen pain at his heart and a thickness in his throat, making it difficult for him to breathe, had steadily increased; while his legs kept giving way from under him and seemed spongy. Yet, such was his determination to accomplish his purpose, such was his faith in the efficacy of his prayers, that for a little while he managed to stumble on, clutching the barrow handles to support himself when the ground appeared to fall away from his feet. He had issued from the forest on to a mountain ledge fledged with saplings, overlooking the little township in the gully, when his whole body seemed suddenly emptied and he sank on his knees bewildered. He strove to rise and failed, feebly settling down in the long grass, where he lay all night moaning faintly at times, with numb fingers touching his beads. Towards morn he crawled to his hands and knees, thinking someone was calling him. Perhaps it was the sough of the wind in the forest. Perhaps——. So tenacious, however, was his nature that the cold wind of dawn found him on his feet pushing the barrow towards the bridle track that led to the town. There was no hesitation till he reached it. Then the spasmodic vigour flashed out, like the last sudden gleam of an expiring candle light, and he fell on his face and lay motionless. Had he journeyed nearly sixty miles to fail in sight of his goal? No! A figure in a cassock had just turned his horse's head into the bridle-track and was cantering towards him. His prayer has been answered.

## **Jennie.**

What an extraordinary event it was! The girl had often craved for such a contingency, and yet now that it had come she was at a loss how to grapple with it. Her most prominent thought was congratulatory that her mother had not noticed her excitement during the evening. To get to her room and throw herself without undressing on the bed was such a relief, for it enabled her mind to work unrestrained.

Feeling sure her mother was now asleep, she slipped from her bed and out of the bark humpy into the detached kitchen, whose door was always unlocked, since the dwellers of the "Caves" were above suspicion as regards each other's honesty. The banked-up fire's dull glow lighted up with dusky illumination the dresser, table, two chairs, the array of cooking utensils, and the big basket of miscellaneous garments: crimean shirts, pants, socks — the weekly washing of the labourers at the breakwater she would have to distribute among their humpies in the morning. Withdrawing the teapot from the oven into which she had placed it at tea-time behind her mother's back, she poured the tea into a billy, foraged in the cupboard, heaping up thick slices of bread and cold meat; her black eyes like stars flashing hither and thither; her long hair widely dishevelled on her shoulders; her tall, sinewy figure in homespun dress and apron, with bare limbs from the knees and naked feet catching a goblin light and shadow as she moved silently about the kitchen. Several times she paused, listening intently, as though she heard something other than the roar of the breakers on the rocks. Her eyes falling on a half-filled flask of rum on the mantelpiece, she snatched at it eagerly, then hesitated with a frown on her brow and replaced it, her teeth gritting, instead of thrusting it into the linen bag with the victuals. Taking up a hurricane lamp, but without lighting its candle, the billy of tea and bag of victuals, she drew open the door softly with her forefinger, shut it behind her, and crept away into the night.

In a moment she was swallowed up by a raw fog rolling in slow, sluggish banks from the sea, that bit her eyes till they watered and scathed her throat with salty crudeness. The sea boomed everywhere, so it seemed, and she knew by the peculiar cracking roar every now and again that it was up over the reef, and therefore the near cut by the sand spit was denied her. Though she could not see a foot ahead she moved quickly forward along a narrow sand track, with numerous branches

crossing each other among stunted bushes. Without a moment's pause or hesitation she sped on, curving around a bark humpy here, silent and lightless, and dripping in the fog; jutting off from another there, with gleams of a kitchen fire through its cracks stabbing the white wet sand; gliding past groups of humpies huddled together like sheep, as though for protection from the harsh, clinging fog. Once a dog barked, straining on the chain, and she darted aside from a humpy she had nearly blundered against, and plunged into a wet undergrowth up to her shoulders, and listened anxiously. When the dog ceased she crawled back to the track and pushed on with greater haste. She was now wet to the skin with the fog, and her hair hung in matted masses. Her breath came thick and heavy, and with a shiver she stopped to swallow a mouthful of the hot tea; then almost ran, as though to make up for the wasted half-minute.

By-and-bye, she emerged upon the desolate blankness of fog and barriers of rock, with great thunders beyond, and a shrill hiss of flying spray from the concussion of heavy seas with the unfinished breakwater. She halted, and seemed to be calculating her bearings; hurriedly skirting the rampart of cliff, she paused a moment to sling the bag around her neck and seize the billy handle with her teeth, and entering a narrow vault of huge boulders, felt her way cautiously over its slippery floor till she reached a sort of dell of Morton Bay fig trees sheltered by circumambient ridges. Creeping among the dank boughs she gave a long, low coo-ee, and listened with straining ears. With a sigh of relief, she crawled on in the direction of a coo-ee that answered her from the thicket. Amid the cracking of dead twigs, she urged her way till the ambush deepened. Upon which she again coo-eed softly. A gruff voice almost at her feet, asking if she hadn't a lamp, gave her a start. She crawled forward with searching hands till they touched a recumbent figure. "Here's some hot tea, father."

There was a grunt of satisfaction as a big hand seized the billy pushed against it. She now lighted the lamp, and placed it between them. The yellow gleam struggling through the thin skirts of upcrawling fog outlined a shaggy head and face nearly hidden by a mat of black whiskers withdrawing from the now empty billy, and a squat figure rolled up in a blanket and an old tent fly.

"Ah! that's right, lass." His black eyes were riveted on the bag she was dipping into. He seized the victuals hungrily, his eyes still on the bag: "Aught else?"

Her face darkened, and she glanced sullenly at him.

"I don't want lush. I ain't touched it fur years," he burst out vehemently, interpreting her expression.

Her face cleared, and a joyous light came into her eyes, and she watched him devouring the food with child-like emotion. For a few minutes there was only the muffled roar of the sea beyond the cliff, and

then: "You ain't told mother I've turned up?"

She shook her head. He seemed half disappointed, but resumed as he tossed away a piece of gristle: "I reck'n she's all right. Her brother Bob's stuck to her since I cleared. I heard in Lismore all about it. But yer glad, ain't yer, Jennie, to see your old dad, eh?"

His voice betrayed his craving for someone to be pleased to see him.

"Yes, father," she replied, simply, though her eyes dimmed.

"I've been a bad egg. But I've turned over a new leaf, Jennie. I've had me gruel ... Oh! them plains," and he shuddered under the blanket.

She tingled for information, yet forebore to ask affected by his voice of misery, and murmured, "Poor dad."

"Yes," he went on, fired by his memory and her expression of sympathy, "I've been starved and blistered and freezed and sat on, blast 'em. And she left me in t' lurch after blewing all I had. Ah! I've been a mutton-head, by God I have."

"Who did, father?"

His eyes falling on her, he became all at once aware his Jennie was no longer the little lassie he dangled on his knees, and ashamed of something, he felt confused:

"Nobody — it's only me gabble ... How old are you, Jennie?"

"Sixteen, father."

"And yer knowed me voice right away when I bailed yer up near'd breakwater. Wonderful! I was clean shaved when I cleared. Lord! how time flies."

He tugged at his mat of whiskers as though they helped him to realise the years he had been away.

"Mother ever talk of me, Jen?"

She shook her head.

"And she's scratched along all right since your uncle Bob fetched yer both from Lismore" — and in a self-pitying tone: "And don't want me."

The girl did not answer, but cast down her eyes.

"By gum! that's hard," he commented, ignoring the facts in his memory that condemned him. "And she wouldn't see me, I reck'n ... What yer think, Jen — if I just walked in and ses" — he had been gazing furtively at Jennie, but the picture he had conjured up suddenly awakened old feelings, and he broke off with a brush at his eye, "I'm off to Bourke tomorrow."

Jennie looked up alarmed. "Oh, dad! yer mustn't go away again. I — I —"

She couldn't tell him how she had yearned for him all these years, how vivid he was in her memories, that every joy of her childhood she could recall was intimately connected with his presence — for she had been his pet who in his eyes never did anything amiss. She had grown to girlhood clinging to that radiant past, to her happy dream of her dada's return. And

now he had come — though she had been chilled by his undemonstrative manner, her heart yearned to him, and a horror seized her that now he had come 'twas only to leave her again.

The cry in her appeal was as a whip on his arising emotion. He felt like one who had been toiling through a desert to an oasis in his memory, and when in sight of it sees it flicked away like a mirage. It seemed for the moment as though his soul, like the prodigal's, would rend itself, that his anguish would make him mere woman — he writhed, and with a dart of escape from self-trampling, from an emotional breakdown, he struck at the fog with his fist as at an enemy, and burst out into violent imprecations at his bad luck, at drink, at her — that other woman. With a deep groan, as these swung him back to the truth, his head dropped: “It's me own fault! me own fault!” Then with the consciousness of the futility of his incipient regeneration before adverse circumstances: “And I meant to be good to'd poor old woman. But a chap never has a chance. He might as well just chuck it, just chuck it!”

The girl's mind, strung to a keen pitch by this poignant display, snapped at an idea shooting through its chaotic impressions.

“Uncle Bob would put yer on't breakwater” — and to intercept his remonstrances, “he wouldn't know yer, father, and then — ” She hesitated and chanced it, “I could tell mother.”

She saw the idea had taken effect, and explained: men were wanted; none there knew him; he could work and wait till she had talked mother over; he could board with old mother Lawson, who had several boarders —

“But I ain't fit,” he stopped her. He was a bundle of rags. If he had only a decent rig out — a pair of working pants even — he might have a show. But no boss would look at him in that state. He might manage with his boots — for a week any way. And he kicked his feet from the blanket to scrutinise his boots, as though he hadn't cast an eye on them for some time, when every day, in fact, he had examined them with forebodings. “They ain't gone much on tops,” he mused with self-congratulation ... “What's up, Jen?”

She was so overjoyed with what was in her mind, with a desire to put it into execution, that she wanted to be off. She was on her feet.

“I'll come at daybreak, dad. Y'aint cold?”

He wanted to know what she purposed doing. Her sudden silence, the gleam of bright anticipation in her eyes, the aptness with which she had conceived hopeful possibilities affected him. His Jen suddenly appeared in the guise of some wonderful guide on his desert of misery — he might reach his oasis after all. He was now all eager curiosity, but she was too practical to commit herself.

“Go to sleep, dad. Yer warm, ain't yer?” She was on her knees near his head, and groping under the blanket.

“But thou's cold, my Jen” — her hand was cold, icy cold. His arms were around her thin figure, and he groaned under her kisses.

“Ay! thou'll stick to s'd old dad.”

“All right, father!” as she arose.

“Right oh, Jen.”

The lamp was blown out, the fog swallowed her — he cried, “Good night, lass.” There was no response. She was stumbling along through the slippery vault.

She was pale and exhausted when she entered the kitchen, but her eyes glowed when her nimble fingers whipping out the garments from the basket stretched out a pair of khaki pants — just the size. She had no qualms. She might confide in Tom Carter her secret; he liked her. At the worst dad could pay him for the pants. She put them aside with a pair of scissors for her journey at daybreak.

For the first week everything turned out beautifully. Dad had got a job on the breakwater. Uncle Bob never guessed the man with the trimmed black whiskers was that reprobate brother-in-law of his, Tim Hogan. And as though Fate were striking on behalf of the little lass, Tom Carter had gone up the river, and never sent for his washing. Only her mother worried about his pants — where had they “got to?” They must have flown. Surely there ain't thieves about. That kitchen door lock would have to be mended. Jennie kept a discreet silence, and tugged away at the mangle.

Meanwhile she had been at work on her mother's memories. The unsophisticated life of the girl had made her as cute as a hawk; the innocence of her motives, the burning love for her dad increasing daily, gave her the docile subtlety of a cat. She sang praises of her dad in areas remote from her own personality. In numbers of little ways she plucked scenes from the past connected with him that displayed his best traits — unwittingly burnishing up some of the very incidents her mother secretly cherished to keep her heart from turning to stone. The woman would damp the girl's chatter in revenge for the wince at some reminiscence vivid with her husband's personality she invoked.

“He's not the man yer think him, Jennie. He's changed sadly I doubt sin'e yer saw him. Yer was only a kid.”

“No fear, mum. Dad was good as gold off the tank. He'll come back.”

“He'll get the door in his face then. I want no boosers here. The way I stuck to that man” — and she would pour out her grievances, and Jen would let the subject rip; for a time at least. It cannot be said the girl gained much on the surface, the woman's pride had been so deeply wounded by her husband, but she revived memories that broke down the wall between that which had been in her mother's life and that which was, between love's far off fruitful plot and her present monotonous sterility.

Every day the girl managed to meet her father, on the breakwater, among the humpies, in secluded places. They had interviews at night. Many and strange were the excuses her mother heard for her unexpected absences from home. But he grew restless; his desire to be at home, fed by the girl, clamoured. It taxed her invention to keep him away. She soothed, coaxed, chided. "Wait a bit longer, dad; mother's coming round." He would grumble, but always in the end acquiesce to his guide's advice.

Thus for weeks, and then Fate frowned. Their meetings began to be noticed, and wrongly construed. That huddle of humpies christened "The Caves," occupied by the labourers at the breakwater, was outside the world's channel. The nearest pub was on the other side of the river's mouth. Drunkenness was only an occasional occurrence. Men on pay-day certainly went on the spree at the pub. And liquor did find its way to the "Caves." But generally speaking, the little community accommodated itself to exigent circumstances. Thrown in such close propinquity, the families developed a social instinct for that which was "of good report." Hogan had given his name as Simpson, and he was a stranger. He was reticent, kept aloof. Suspicious glances had been repeatedly thrown at him of late. Men shunned him; women slammed their doors when he passed. Mischief was brewing somewhere. One day his boss, his brother-in-law, Bob Sanders, expressed the popular feeling: he told Hogan the precise date he wouldn't be wanted on the breakwater. As the poor fellow jumped off the embankment, smarting with the knowledge "he had got the sack," a young man jumped after him. "Allow me, mate." He lifted the back lappet of Hogan's coat, and with "I thought so," stalked away with a pugilistic swing of his arms. Hogan screwed his head, and a triangular slip of darker cloth than the khaki let into the pants' central seam at the top met his glance. What did the fellow mean?

Hogan had a big wrestle with himself that night, and the regenerating side of his nature won, though the victory brought sweat to his brow. He would tramp back to the plains, to misery, rather than seek an interview with his wife. Without work, he would only be a loafer on her bit of earnings, even if they were reconciled. The community for some reason was against him — ah, well, such was his luck. He would say nothing to Jennie or anyone about his intentions, but just "clear out" when he got his few pounds that would suffice for his long journey. Simple enough was the decision, yet it fetched groans.

The day came when he was paid off. Climbing the cliff, he gazed towards his wife's humpy, just beyond the Caves, opposite a sand spit. The sun was setting behind it in a solemnity of lilac sky and purpling sea. Into the still air, slid from its squat chimney a thin streak of blue smoke. Presently, columns of smoke began to arise from the Caves huddled in the basin, and straggling up the sandy slopes came the voices

of men and women and children — the tea-time humming of home life. He turned his eyes towards the river, and its gleaming curves among dairy farms and sugar plantations carried them to the distant mountains gathering the shadows about their waist, and he shuddered; beyond them was the track to the drought-stricken plains. A fierce hatred of their memory drove him from the cliff.

He had meant to steal away at daybreak, but his thoughts on the cliff had so unmanned him that through dread of his resolution breaking down he determined to leave as soon as the moon rose. Jennie would be waiting for him near the breakwater, and he miles away; his heart ached at the thought of it, but he dare not trust himself to wait and see her. As it was, his feelings were so assertive that no sooner had he swallowed his tea than he hastily rolled up his swag, and, watching his opportunity, stole out of the humpy in which he boarded, unobserved as he thought, and ensconced himself in one of the many nooks of the sand dunes. His heart was very heavy, and when the moon wandered up the face he turned towards it was pale and the cheeks wet. Hoisting up his swag, he suddenly remembered his path skirted the sand spit. A yearning to carry away in his memory his wife's face to comfort him when on those dreary, far-off plains, directed his feet towards her humpy. As he detached himself from the cliff shade and strode across the moonlit sand spit, a figure, that had been shadowing him, hastily clambered along the rocks and crouched, watching him.

Dropping his swag softly in the humpy shadow, Hogan with beating heart crept up to the little lighted window and peeped through. He nearly gave a cry — oh, how she had altered! Why, her hair was quite grey. His finger nails were driven into his palms under a rush of grief. He shut his eyes, breathing heavily, as his past life arose and smote him. He again looked, perusing with strained eyes line after line, every wrinkle of that once bonnie face. She was seated near the table knitting, her nimble fingers flashing the needles under the lamplight like a conjurer. Once they stopped as she sighed wearily, pressing her hand to her bosom, and her wedding ring glinted. Again she aroused herself, and her fingers made the needles flick and quiver — whatever her pain, her sorrow, she would not yield to it. Work, work! The home had to be kept together, her Jennie fed and clad. He read her expression like an open book. Read her mind — yes! and his head dropped on his bosom stricken before the vision of those dead, empty years she had struggled through. If he had suffered, had not she? My God! Now came the wormwood. He had made his bed, and must lie on it. He must be no burden to her. The least he could now do was to take himself off. “God help me,” rattled in his throat, as with eyes blinded with tears he snatched a last look. And——it was done in a minute; pitched on his back, a man's knees on his chest, he felt the cold steel on his wrists as the handcuffs snapped, ere he knew

what had happened.

“Get up!”

He obeyed, half-dazed. The man strode to the door, and knocked.

“For God's sake! Don't take me in there.”

So hoarse was the whisper that the man, suspicious, stepped back, and laid his hand on Hogan's shoulder with a warning grip.

The door opened, and Mrs. Hogan stood on the threshold with an expression of surprise that became one of alarm when the official coat and cap approached the light. Hogan suddenly stepped back, with his head bent. He was unceremoniously pushed forward into the light.

“What's wrong, sergeant?” her voice quavered.

“Only this man peeping about for another chance to steal something. Carter swears those pants he's got on are his — the ones you lost. Do you identify them?”

“They look like them. Who is he?”

“Just as well you don't keep your ears open, Mrs. Hogan. Where's your daughter?”

“Jennie — heaven help me! My poor lass — what's she to do with it?”

“Now, don't get upset, Mrs. Hogan. I only want to see her. Where is she?”

The woman threw up her arms despairingly——

“God help me to bear fresh trouble! She's out.”

“Then I'll stay till she comes back — inside!”

Hogan lurched forward into the room, his head still bent. There was a loud hissing in his ears, everything danced in a whirl of mad lights. With teeth set he held on to one purpose — to hide his identity.

He felt his wife's eyes on him.

“Hold up your head!”

Hogan daren't remonstrate; his voice would betray him.

“He's a sulky dog.”

“But my Jennie, sergeant — don't keep anything back, sir. What has she done?”

Her voice was broken with the emotion she tried to control. The sergeant was touched by her piteous look, and his blood boiled.

“A scoundrel like you ought to be kicked from here to Sydney” — he glared at Hogan. “Where were you before you came here? Won't speak! Record too bad, eh?”

Hogan's heart jumped; he heard quick steps approaching.

“Please, sergeant, tell me——”

Jennie's cry of joy as she sprang across the room to her dad startled the other two. Her arms were around his neck—— “O, Mother! Mother! Come and kiss him,” she sobbed.

“Do you know him?” suddenly inquired the sergeant, recovering from his astonishment. But the mother never replied. She hardly breathed, her

eyes were fixed like a wild woman's on Jennie and her father. Jennie unclasped her arms; she saw her father was weeping. No one moved. The hush frightened her. She glanced at her mother, at her father. Then, all at once, she seemed to realise the presence of the sergeant. She cried in a loud voice:

“Father, what is it?” and fell on his breast.

In a moment all was confusion. But, little by little, the sergeant unravelled the tangle. The man was innocent, and Mrs. Hogan's husband. That put a different complexion on the case. He unlocked and withdrew the handcuffs from Hogan's wrists. Hogan immediately glanced at his wife, but her face was like stone. He strode to the door.

“Mother! mother!” Jennie flew to her. But the mother's face did not relax. She sprang to her father, gazing over his shoulder at his wife from the doorway.

“You mustn't go, father!” She almost shrieked the words.

“Your mother don't want me, Jen.” He clasped her in his arms, soothing her sobbing soul.

At his voice — it was the first time he had spoken — a tremor went through the mother, and the tears began to trickle down her cheeks.

The sergeant quietly left the house, and listened outside the door. Above a confusion of ejaculating voices and sobbing, he heard Jennie exclaiming, “Then I'll go with him, mother; I'll go with dad.”

“She's a little brick,” he muttered. “She'll bring them together, and I shouldn't wonder if she don't talk her uncle round, too.”

And she did.

## **Ned's Return.**

The man seated on a stump at the edge of the clearing wiped the sweat from his brow, and glanced suspiciously at the sky. The thunderous cloud that had loomed, fringed with fire, above the horizon at sunset was now spreading like a huge pall over the heavens, shutting off the stars. Dead silence hung over the bush; not a leaf stirred, everyone was limp and listless in the hot, stagnant air. A stealthy night-creature, burrowing with the utmost caution in the undergrowth behind the stump, at last desisted, alarmed by the dry cracking of sticks at its slightest movement. The insect-life was dumb — the faint droning in the grass that set in with the darkness had ceased. It seemed as though the whole world in its stillness around the man was awaiting for something extraordinary to happen.

The man leaned forward and ran his hands over his swag, loosened the straps, and withdrew a mackintosh, and thrust the restrapped swag under the brushwood behind the stump. He shook out the mackintosh, and stretched himself on it, spread out on the ground, his head leaning against the stump, and his eyes on the humpy in the clearing, with its two small lighted windows. Between him and the humpy gloomed a cart-shed and a stable. His position gave him a survey of the rear of the humpy.

An hour passed, and the man had never moved. The thunderous cloud was now nearly over his head. A horse in the stable had become restless, and its pawings and jerks at a rope jarred on the dead, black silence.

The watcher sat up as two men, one carrying a hurricane lamp, the other leading a saddled horse, came into his view from the front part of the humpy. After a few moments' conversation, the man with the lamp walked to the detached bark kitchen, and the other, having mounted the horse and glanced up at the sky, rode hastily away down the track. The clatter of the horse's hoofs on the hard, parched ground rang sonorously in the sullen hush. In a few minutes the man, still carrying the lamp, came out of the kitchen, leaving the door open, where through could be seen the red glow of embers on the hearth, before which hung several under garments on a rail. He came straight on towards the stable. No sooner had he entered it, and his voice was heard speaking to the horse than the spectator arose, picked up his mackintosh, and also approached the stable.

Without the slightest hesitation he stepped into the area of light. As the

other, however, had his back to him, and was occupied in shaking up some straw with a pitchfork, the man stood unobserved. Though his face was nearly hidden by unkempt whiskers and a broad-brimmed hat, you could discern it was youthful, and had steady, clear, blue eyes. His frame, more supple than muscular, was at this moment drawn up to its full height, and displayed a bearing at variance with its stained patched-up garments.

“Jim.”

The swinging round of the other and his working face showed he was more than startled — he was panic-stricken by the subdued voice behind him. Keeping his black eyes on the erect figure, he retreated to the wall, holding the pitchfork in front of him, menacingly. In the hush you could hear his short, hard, breathing.

“You needn't be afraid of me, Jim,” went on the young man, after a few moments' pause. “I've not come to attack you, but to easy my mind. For the first few months up there I cursed you ... What would you have done?”

He advanced a step unconsciously as he put the question almost vehemently. The other crouched, exclaiming with the emphasis of apprehension: —

“I'll drive it at yer, Ned.”

“You would have killed me when I came out,” pursued the young man bitterly, disregarding the warning and the threatening gesture. “You knew I was innocent, and let me go to goal without even giving me a chance. But — ” and his voice suddenly softened — “we are brothers, Jim, and I have come to forgive and be forgiven. ... No I'm not mad, Jim,” reading his brother's quick scrutiny. “Men do go mad where I've been for years. Gaol does that for you or it makes you a devil, or — ” he paused, and then in an impressive voice, “it makes you realise there is a God.”

Scarcely had the words left his lips than there was a red flash through the stable, and simultaneously as though a cannon had been fired overhead, a terrific clap of thunder that shook the building to its foundation. With a wild snort the horse reared and bounded against the wall, bursting into a sweat of terror, and trembling like a leaf. Recovering his feet — for he had dropped on his hands and knees under the shock — Jim essayed to pacify the animal with coaxing endearments and caresses. When he glanced round his brother was still standing near the lamp. The door had, however, been shut against the gust of wind that was now tearing over the stable. Save that his blue eyes were no longer kindled, but had become grave, almost mournful, he exhibited no sign of how that awful clap had affected him.

“It's one of them dry storms. The doctor'll catch it.” Jim's voice betrayed his anxiety not to quarrel; his clean-shaven face was deathly-

pale. "Mother's down with her old complaint, and he left just as yer come in." He was still caressing the horse, though the animal was now quiet. It was evident he was agitated, that his nerves were unstrung.

"You heard what I said, Jim? I've realised——"

"Don't go on in that racket, Ned," hastily expostulated the other, all his superstitious instincts on a bristle. "Yer blame me," he continued, glancing at his brother across the horse's back, "for not appearing in court and swearing yer was in bed with me the night the Rileys said they saw yer with the cattle. How could I come when I was droving?"

"You went purposely, Jim, to be out of the way."

"The hides were found anyhow in't stable here. That's all I know."

"Jim, that's a lie!" It was uttered with a flash of anger, and then he subjoined remonstratingly: "Why do you want to pick up a row? I told you what I've come for. Before I went in there I'd nought to be proud of, but I'd never sunk to crime. The worse I did was to be always against you right or wrong. And you were as bad, though it was those Rileys as did it, your mates."

"They're no mates of mine now, anyhow."

"And Susan Riley — have you broken off with her?"

Jim reflected and spat.

"I'm off the whole kit of 'em ... I see yer talk more eddicated sin'e yer went, Ned." This observation came with a laugh, indicative of his desire to turn the conversation to less disturbing subjects. His brother must have divined it, for he said softly,

"Do you forgive me, Jim?"

I've nought to forgive, Ned. I was as bad as yersen."

"And I forgive you," and he put out his hand. Jim hesitated, standing near the horse, and rubbed his brow. At length he stepped forward, and grasped his brother's hand, but with averted eyes.

"But yer can't stay here," he said, with ill-concealed anxiety; "mother's agin yer!"

"You know I'm innocent, Jim" — and as the other turned away: "Bad luck goes with a bad conscience, Jim."

"What yer mean?" Jim had swung round with a fierce look, when his eyes caught sight of something through the stable window that made him spring to the door with horror in his face exclaiming:

"My God. The place is on fire."

The wind had now dropped, and when the two men ran into the open air their ears were greeted by a humming as of swarms of angry bees, and they saw a wild flare, the kitchen vanishing in flames. Under the yellow reflection the thunderous sky had assumed a sickly aspect, stamped with a sinister frown. Around the clearing the trees seemed like a hushed multitude of spectators that appeared to approach a step nearer the fire every time portions of the building fell in to bursts of

illumination and red clots shooting skyward scarring the wavering shadows.

At a glance it was seen the kitchen was doomed. But the humpy — not a moment could be lost, already rags of flame were being puffed towards it. Jim, in his rush forward, catching sight of the tall angular figure of his mother, half-dressed, hurriedly dragging and pitching tables and chairs and boxes from the humpy, swerved towards the well. But Ned, whipping on his mackintosh and flattening his hat over his ears to present some sort of a protection against the flames, threw himself on the bulging mass of kindling material projected towards the humpy. The flames flew at him with a venomous chorus, and he fell back singed, but dragging a support with him. A bucketful of water hissed to steam over the kindling projection, and Jim was back again at the well. Another dash forward of Ned's and the dislodgment of another support brought down the mass with a crash. With a great leap he escaped through a shower of sparks — his face and hands blackened, and this time bearing the brand of fire. A few bucketfuls of water, and the flames writhing within the humpy's propinquity were cowed. A dull orange glow, with patches of fiery red, now hung over the smouldering remnants of the kitchen.

“The devil's curse is on the place,” was the old woman's grim greeting as the two men approached the humpy door. “We've had no luck since ” she stopped suddenly as her eyes fell on Ned, who had halted in the back ground. She might have had some difficulty in recognising him had she seen him when he entered the stable; never having seen him otherwise than cleanshaved; but at this moment every vestige of his identity had been obliterated by smoke. They replaced the household appurtenances in the humpy, the old woman grumbling all the while about her bad luck, her internal pain, her neighbours — “the low scum that would see a poor body stiff, nor lift a finger to help 'er.” Ned held back as she carried in the last article. “Come yer way inside, my good fellow,” she exclaimed to him. “Strangers are offens more human than you own kin.”

Ned tramped into the humpy, followed by his brother, and seated himself in a corner. Oil was handed him in a bottle with which he soothed his burnt hands and face, whilst listening to his mother and Jim discussing the origin of the fire. The wind must have blown the garments on to the embers, and the old woman poured out abuse on Jim for his carelessness. Though Jim had inadvertently mentioned about his having left the kitchen door open, he was careful not to inform her of the extraordinary circumstances that had kept him so long in the stable.

“Ah, bad as Ned was he'd 'er never done that,” she grumbled, morosely; still harping on Jim's carelessness.

Jim glanced towards his brother, who kept his eyes steadily fixed on the floor. Jim appeared very uneasy, was restless in his chair. All at once

he interrupted the old woman's peevish strain with

"We'll take Tom Simpson's offer, mother, and clear out of this ... but yer ought to get back to bed. I can do that——"

His mother was pottering about making some tea. She now left the humpy for something. Ned arose and approached his brother.

"Mother must learn the truth, Jim." Then, as his listener shrank in his chair involuntarily, "Good God! You didn't do it."

His mother's step hurried him back to his chair. For a few minutes, during which his mother was busy, he appeared sunk in profound dejection. When he was invited to draw his chair to the table he arose, signing to his brother to follow him, and left the humpy. The old woman stared, perplexed, as Jim shut the door behind them. She reflected that perhaps they had gone to wash the grime off their hands and faces. Then she wondered with annoyance whether she had asked the young man if he had been blistered much.

Meanwhile Ned had drawn his brother aside, and said sternly: "Jim, the price has been paid, and let it go at that. I'd rather hump my trouble, bad as it is, than mother should know the truth — it would about settle her. ... But for your own sake, Jim, try to realise there's no happiness outside doing what's right."

"Yer wrong; yer wrong, Ned. It wasn't me — no! My God, no!" Jim's voice was hoarse with emotion. "I've been miserable ever sin'e, but it wasn't me that did it. I — I——" He sprang and threw open the door.

"Mother," he cried, "Ned was innocent, and is here."

Ned saw his mother rising stiffly from her chair as he was dragged towards the doorway by his brother, crying, "Bert Riley it was that stole 'm, not Ned at all; he was in bed with me that night ... Don't speak." His voice was now shrill; he was carried away by the emotion that had seized him. His mother's eyes were fixed like a hawk's on his lips; she hardly breathed as his words tumbled out: "Bert Riley did it, and left the hides here. I didn't know aught till Susan told me. She — she got me to clear out. I was mad, would do aught for her. They — the Rileys, worked it among 'em. They knowed me and Ned was at logger-heads. They wanted to save Bert. They was cute. They made a tool of me, for I'd do aught for Susan — oh, and she dropped me when it was too late for Ned. And Ned won't tell yer, mother; he thinks I did it, and — and," he broke down and covered his face with his hands.

Up flew his mother's arms, and her face was convulsed. Her voice was harsh with energy:

"And yer let Ned go up for that nest of vipers. Never whilst I have a day to live — "

"Hold, mother!" Ned's voice rang out as he stepped in front of his brother. "I've forgiven Jim. See!" and he caught up his brother's hand. "There!" and he shook it, "we are brothers, mother" — the old woman

was staring, spell-bound, “end this bad luck. Let us forget by-gones and start again, acting as we ought to do ... Not an inch nearer will I come until you forgive Jim. I'd rather hump my swag than stay in a house, divided against itself ... Go inside, Jim,” he whispered, as the old woman never moved nor spoke. Ned followed him into the humpy, and softly shut the door.

Presently there was the sound of the old woman sobbing: “Oh! Jim, Jim, how could yer do it?”

## **An Experience of Old Yorkie's.**

A flat, uninteresting stretch of country, mostly under potatoes, dismally lonely; under a rain-pouring dun sky, with raw, blood-red, jagged slashes across the west; trenched by a road whose shallow ruts froth yellow water, on either side of which contorted trees whine maledictions. Not a moving object but a swagman, crawling like a crab, callously indifferent. Crouching beneath a fifty-pound swag, he limps slowly along through slush and pool, avoiding only stranded road-metal instinctively. Once he paused to pick up and spit on a horse-shoe and pitch it over his left shoulder. Squinting ahead he discerned a small shed with a few sheep pens where the road crooked to the left. With the same, slow, deliberate limp he proceeded towards it, ignoring the opposite dwelling on the right, pulls back the door, jerks off his swag with a sigh of relief, and enters with subdued satisfaction appearing for a moment in his wrinkled face and peering, crab-like eyes at the sight of the heaped-up straw. Depositing his swag carefully on its end, he thrust his billy under the jetting of the roof's flooded spout, squints across at the dwelling, retreats, settles himself slowly down on the straw, and with the same methodical unhastiness unfastens his loose boots and uncoils from his sockless feet mud-oozing ragged clouts, which he carefully spreads out beside him. He then removes his dripping, thread-bare coat, and holds it up at arm's length, scrutinizing it thoughtfully. The coat drops, and his legs draw up with a jerk at the sudden appearance of a tall, long-legged, bony woman at the door. His withered face assumes its old weariness at the abuse streaming against him. He attempts a mild protest as she twists aside bawling, "Sool the dorg on 'im, Jim." With a deep sigh he crawls to his feet, slips on his coat and boots, thrusts the clouts into his coat pockets, and sallies out with his swag and billy of water. The woman watches him from her garden gate, her apron over her head. Ere he turns the crook of the road he slowly wheels round: "That's all leg and tongue," he grunts. Divining he had said something uncomplimentary, the woman dives into the garden for the "dorg," and the old man limps on a little quicker than usual. Ever now and again he chuckles to himself at his criticism of the woman. Meanwhile his gimlet eyes are fixed on the road, noting every scrap of paper — nothing escapes them. His loose, riddled' boots squelch mire, his old hat-brim slides water threads down his neck, his patched-up pants cleave with soaking insistence to his spider-like legs grotesquely

defined.

The sun had withdrawn its stabbing red shafts, and the doleful roof of clouds increased, lowering with funereal shade. The rain sloped and fell precipitate under the sigh and cessation of the inconstant wind, and had evidently set in for the night. The level flats alongside the road stretched obscurely under a smoke-like fog. There was not a sign of habitation in sight. Only a long rambling building, half in ruins, with a clump of acacia trees, beside it, projecting from a small eminence, arrested the wandering gaze. The old man stood regarding it with misgiving, his memory uncomfortably bringing back the stories he had heard about its spooks and ghosts. Many a time he had passed it on his yearly rounds. It was shunned and banned by everyone, especially swagmen. He rubbed his nose sideways, muttering, "They're nobbut yarns," but limped on a little nevertheless. "Dang it!" he exclaimed, suddenly hurrying back, "Awl camp, chance the ducks, Ghoarsts av'n't rheumatiz."

He cautiously approached the front of the "rookery," whose frameless windows gloomed on him like eyeless sockets, and again paused to survey it suspiciously. Heaps of weather-stained stones and broken, age-worn bricks were littered about. The cankering walls were fissured with abrupt gaps. Lappets of corroded galvanised iron dangled from the roof. The whole building appeared enveloped in a smoking fog, smelling of swamp fungus. The spectral trees shook their cypress-like tops, and swayed woefully to the fitful wind, their leaves setting up a faint hissing dirge on the ground work of the stealthy rain-patter on the roof.

He now moved silently forward and peered intently into the chamber, the walls of which, oppressed with a subterranean-like gloom, seemed slimy with a flocculent ooze. Stepping with great care over the sprawling debris, he proceeded to the large kitchen, with barrack-like walls of discolored plaster that had tumbled in lumps and crumbling flakes here and there and lay scattered over piles of damaged bricks, musty iron, dust, and a medley of odds and ends. A fireplace, huge enough to roast an ox, yawned like a cavern. After letting down his swag and much fumbling in his waist-coat pockets, the old man struck a match on his thumb nail, and lighted a bit of candle, which he held aloft, peering about him through the murky twilight. His eyes lighted with gleeful surprise when they fell on a heap of dead boughs and lumps of wood near the fireplace. "Ghoarsts humped none o' yon, fur they're not wick, the varmints," he muttered, losing his nervousness. In a little while he had a good fire blazing under his billy, and busied himself in rummaging in his tucker-bag, from which he presently hauled half-a-loaf of bread, an onion, a little bag containing his tea, a mustard-tin his sugar, and a piece of boiled salt meat carefully wrapped in what looked like the tail-end of a shirt. He had succeeded in touching the heart of a cocky's wife that day. His billy now boiling merrily, he squatted before the fire, and was soon

chewing with great gusto his “tucker” and steaming most delightfully. When he had finished he replaced his food in his tucker-bag, spread his coat to dry, withdrew his pipe from his waist-coat pocket, pressed his finger down the half-filled bowl and lighted it from an ember. For a few minutes he puffed with lazy contentment, blinking at the fire and drying beautifully. Then placing his pipe aside after quenching its glow with the end of his knife, he began peering at the odds and ends strewn about, endeavouring with knitted brows to connect them with some clue as to how they came there. The rusty fragment of a manacle interested him greatly. He weighed it several times with his hand, rubbed it against a brick, turned it over and over, shaking his head solemnly, and finally put it in his swag. The walls now received his attention. He strove to decipher the bits of rhyme pencilled here and there. Once he grunted as though something had annoyed him. Apparently satisfied with his observations, he carried his belongings to a corner at the far end of the kitchen; spread his swag, setting a brick, on which he placed his rolled-up coat, for a pillow; removed his boots; put his pipe near his pillow; wound himself in his blanket, and lay peering at the wall. In a little while his withered face puckered as with perplexity. Something in his mind seems worrying him. Is it his past life considered misspent? Is conscience twinging him? Not a bit of it. He is disturbed by two opposing inclinations, the one urging him to light up his last bit of “baccy” in his pipe, the other to keep it for a puff at daybreak. Meanwhile the fire has burnt down, and is throwing a smouldering red glow into the surrounding darkness. The wind is wailing through the lone “rookery,” the loosened iron on the roof clatters, the trees hiss and their aged boughs rub together creakingly betwixt the pauses of the rain's wild sobs. A dislodged brick tumbles in the next chamber with a dull shock that held his thoughts suspended for a moment. At last his eyes close wearily, and he gradually sinks into slumber, breathing as peacefully as a sleeping child.

All at once he awoke startled and half-bewildered — he must have had nightmare. He couldn't say what, but something dreadful has passed through his mind. When he had recovered a little from his alarm, he felt a vague surprise at the reflection of light on the wall. He didn't remember having replenished the fire. Just then a wild shriek rang through the kitchen. “Holy Moses! What's that?” he exclaimed. With instinctive apprehension of self-preservation, he ducked his head under the blanket. A cold shiver went up his spine at the thoughts of ghosts, at what he had heard about the devil haunting this old building. Then a frightful fear lest he should be grabbed without a chance of resistance, combined with uncontrollable inquisitiveness, possessed him. He peered cautiously out with head askew so as to see the fire, and his thin, grey hair slowly lifted with horror. In front of the fire, which was heaped up with wood and

burning like a furnace, was a black figure turning somersaults. Over and over it went, sometimes seeming to stand on its head, sometimes to twist on its feet, cracking its fingers. Naked and black, and unearthly, the figure seemed to the old man, with its glittering eyes and long hair, flying wildly in its antics, lighted fiercely up by the fire. Once it leaped as if towards the old man, who snatched up a brick and kicked up his feet. He was still quivering from the shock, when again the shriek rang out, and his head ducked under the blanket. Sweat streamed down his body, his heart thumped like a drum, he shook as with ague. He mumbled at haphazard an incongruous string of phrases from the psalms and prayers of different denominations. Then a bright idea struck him. He made the sign of the cross on his forehead, on his breast, and not being a catholic got mixed and repeated it several times. He then listened; gradually his nose peeped out like a hedgehog's. The figure was stalking to and fro in the shadow beyond the fire, chanting. The old man, craning his neck, strained his ears, muttered: "Aw's not freiten't of his gas." There was the flapping of wings and a series of long, unearthly shrieks that were smothered to the old man, whose head was under the blanket long before they ceased. He lay quaking, with no further desire for investigation. It was at least an hour before he ventured to again peep out, during which his mind was in a state of terrible suspense, a prey to grotesque imaginings. Having an impression his feet were the most unprotected because they were the furthest away from his head, he had huddled himself into an uncomfortable position that increased his distress. He only relinquished his strenuous clutch of the half-brick when he had satisfied himself by a prolonged peering that the figure had disappeared from before the fire, which had sunk to a flameless glow. Although his nervous excitement was fast subsiding, his mind was yet kept alert by an uneasy suspicion that the figure was somewhere plotting against him. Every sound made his heart jump. His mind was stretched on the rack of anticipating every second a recurrence of those unearthly shrieks and flapping of wings.

At daybreak the old man mustered enough courage to crawl to his feet and warily approach the fire, peering about him. The sight of a man stretched asleep in a blanket pulled him up with a start. An unmistakable snore, however, reassured him, and with, "Dang me, if it ar'n't one of them Cing'lee blokes," he shook the sleeper roughly. He nearly tumbled with fright at a loud shriek behind him. In another moment a big green parrot that had been suddenly knocked off its perch of firewood by the exasperated old man's fist would have been a lump of battered feathers had not the Cingalee sprung to his feet and caught at the stick the other had snatched up.

"Gerrou, yer black divil! What yer meean with yourn jimjam capers, eh? Yer thort to freiten me, dang yer. Awl crack yer on yourn heeth'n nut

if yer jump yourn ratty tricks on old Yorky. Clear out and take yourn varmint to 'ell with yer, or awl spiflicate the two on yer!"

The Cingalee, thinking it best for the safety of his parrot, hastily decamped into the open air from the threatening gestures of the infuriated old man. Not till after a smoke and his breakfast did old Yorky relent towards the unfortunate colored man, his anger meanwhile deriving much satisfaction at the spectacle of his and his feathered companion's drenched and woeful appearance in the rain. An ugly look had come into the Cingalee's eyes when he was hunted out of the other chamber into which he sought refuge, but the determined attitude and the way the old man flourished his stick dismissed thoughts of resistance. His concern for the welfare of his parrot and perhaps a clear apprehension of the cause of the other's hostility contributed to his obedience. Anyway, amid the old man's grunts and chuntering, he succeeded in pacifying him by an exhibition of some of his juggling tricks with his parrot and gymnastic feats that appeared so wonderful that old Yorky was greatly relieved when the weather took up and he departed with his swag and parrot in the direction of the town to which he was tramping to exhibit at its annual show.

## Little Paul.

Little Paul was in the rear of the hut blowing away at his hardest on the battered old trumpet his Uncle Bob had given him, to the consternation of some weedy hens that had fled into the crannies of the firewood stack, panic-stricken at such an uproar, when he heard his mother shouting for him to come and get his bumps read. He instantly stopped blowing, with a wild intention of following the hens baulked by an irresistible stomach-yearning at the unfamiliar smell of boiling cabbage coming from the kitchen, when his fate was settled by Clara swooping on him and depositing him in the parlour ere he had time to kick for freedom. At the sight of a stranger he ducked his head into his left elbow lifted instinctively for protection, and stood on view — a little chap with bare brown legs, in a crimean shirt and patched-up knickers drawn tightly up by a single brace, clutching his beloved trumpet, his black eyes furtively scrutinising the long-haired, blue-eyed man dressed in dusty black pants and a faded long-tailed coat, seated in his father's armchair talking to his mother.

“Eight years old. Just the age, misses. And I'll” — and the stranger's voice gave a jumping snort through some throat impediment — “bet yer what yer like I'll” — another snort — “tell yer what's he good for.”

“I wish ter goodness yer would, Professor, becos he gives me no end of trouble foolin' about the place and waggin' it from schol. An' he's that vent'resum I'm real scared as he'll be drouded. On'y yisterd'y his fether strapped him fur waggin'. It's on'y the bit of cabbige I managed to get from the Chows as is keepin' him — but he sharn't have any if he's not a good lad, an' I paid a bob fur it, fur things is that dear as it beats me what'll come of us. This 'ere drou is a fair terror. An' so yer think our Clara'll make a good nuss?” and fat Mrs. Logan bent forward and took Clara's phrenological chart from the table.

Paul pricked his ears at these words, and squinted across at his 16-year-old sister to see if she had altered at all. He felt relieved that her fat red face and stout, shapeless figure bore no signs of her recent ordeal.

“I marked her seven in order and benevolence. She must” — and his eyes closed as his voice arose snorting over — “cul-tivate contin-uity. Good Lord!”

The last exclamation, uttered with emotion, was accompanied by an expression of great astonishment in the Professor's countenance, who had

just caught sight for the first time of Paul's face, lifted cautiously into view. The sudden turning of all eyes into Paul's direction so disconcerted him that he stared blankly at them.

"Paul!" exclaimed Mrs. Logan, startled at the Professor's now eager gaze at Paul, and bewildered that she beheld nothing to explain the man's extraordinary behaviour, yet betrayed by force of habit into a sharp rebuke of her son.

There was a loud yell as the Professor pounced on Paul, and, running his hairy fingers over his cranium, kept jerking out:

"Tune 9 — time 9 — ideality 7; wonderful! Keep quiet, carn't yer? Veneration 8 — memory 9 — here, missus, I'll bet yer what yer like this 'ere lad's got genus."

"Got what?" exclaimed Mrs. Logan, alarmed.

"Genus! I tell yer, genus! Great Scott! what a head!" and his fingers ran caressingly over Paul's short-cropped headpiece.

Trembling with anxiety, and a desire to know the worst, Mrs. Logan gazed helplessly at the Professor, whilst the soft-hearted Clara felt such an inclination to cry that she hurried into the kitchen.

"Is it dang'rus, sir?" asked Mrs. Logan, feebly, confounding in her agitation the Professor's vocation with the doctor's.

Paul, who had meanwhile been passing through remarkable body contortions in the vain endeavour to escape the manipulating fingers, was invaded by such a paroxysm at this question, associated in his mind by past experience of what he suffered when he had the measles, that the Professor, hitherto indifferent to his attacking feet and fists, fell back with respect for a pair of lusty jaws assaulting his leg, leaving his assailant coiled up like a hedgehog and raising a plaint of remonstrances against having his bumps read amid howls at his having "got genus."

Checking with a hasty movement of his hand Mrs. Logan's commencement of a tirade of grievances against the district, the Professor whipped out a flute from his breast pocket, and with deliberate coolness began breathing out in soothing notes the memory-laden air of "Home, Sweet Home." With a far-away expression in his upturned eyes he filled the little parlor with the soft, pathetic melody. Mrs. Logan's apron kept moving absently to her eyes as they filled, for happy scenes of her childhood and courtship days in England's green lanes, fragrant with wild flowers, flitted through her memory. The assemblage of huts alongside the sun-glaring road sloping to the apology for a little town, the mines working night and day, with the treeless, sandy waste stretching monotonously around them all, for a few minutes quite faded from her life. Her dreaming mind, however, was all at once awakened by an inrush of astonishment as her wandering eyes happened to fall on Paul, who had uncoiled, and was straining his little figure eagerly as though he were drinking in the music at every pore, his swarthy features

transfixed, his eyes gazing with a devouring passion at the sweet sound-dispensing flute. She turned an inquiring glance towards Clara, now listening at the doorway, without getting any response, and then towards the Professor, who was evidently waiting for it, since he winked prodigiously, discoursed a final flourish, and gazed at her triumphantly.

“There, missis! are yer satisfied? Why, bless yer,” — and, catching hold of Paul, who seemed too dazed to offer any resistance, and tapping his forehead about the outer eyebrow with a sort of rapture, he exclaimed — “he's a musical genus, that's what he is. Look, missis, this is tune — see how big it is; and this is time. They're abnormal. The lad's a real genus, the first I've come across, and I've travelled the country for thirty years.” And he gazed down at the little chap, who was picking the ends of his fingers, with the pride one imagines a naturalist must feel when he examines the specimen of a new species of insect he has accidentally found. His excitement was such that his speech impediment for a time had been overcome.

Mrs. Logan's sudden relief from anxiety, produced by an indefinite impression regarding the meaning of “genus,” might have precipitated her into scolding little Paul for being somehow responsible for having it, had not the Professor broken out into an incoherent account of the poverty and sickness and unhappy marriages of men of “genus” in general, and of the fame and wealth and glorious lives of some exceptions in particular, all the while fingering Paul's abnormal organs with reverential fondness.

“Dear, dear!” — when the Professor at last paused for breath — ejaculated Mrs. Logan, too overcome by his energetic manner and display of knowledge to connect them with any applicability to Paul.

“An' yer think he takes after his Uncle Bob, then, as plays in the band? He doesn't get it from me, Professor, as our side wasn't brought up with no fiddle-faddle ways. Though my sister Sarah,” she added reflectively, “has Annie learnin' the pianer, but her old man can afford it. Anyways,” she continued with conviction, “the lad's fair mad after trumpits and such things. A body cannot get a bit of peace fur him. His fether gets fair knocked up on night-shifts, getting no sleep from the row, and strappin's no good.”

“Strapping, missis!” broke in the Professor in a high-pitched tone of angry amazement. “Killing a heaven-born genus in embro! Now, listen to me,” he went on hastily, seeing by Mrs. Logan's rearing in her chair that she was taking offence, “this lad wants learning music. Don't yer bother your head, as I'll” — (snort) — “learn him for nothing. Only yer mustn't strap him any more. He'll be a good boy for me, and when he plays ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ I'll” — (snort — “give him this 'ere flute.”

“It's very good, Professor, I'm sure! His fether'll be home soon,” and Mrs. Logan flurriedly turned to Paul. “What do you say to the Professor

fur his kindness, eh?"

Paul glanced up at the Professor's face with an expression dawning in his eyes, evidently understood by the other, for he waved his hand deprecatingly at Mrs. Logan's:

"Say 'thank yer, sir,' yer rude boy. Yer've no manners than a pig!"

And so it was finally arranged that during his stay in the district, which might be some months, the Professor should cultivate little Paul's musical "genus," and in return for which kindness Mrs. Logan, who could not bear to be beholden to a stranger, should attend to his washing and what not, as he looked "fair lost, poor man, for want of a woman to his bit of duds."

As might be expected, the Professor's visit that morning turned out of mighty importance to the growth of little Paul's mind. A strong desire in his nature ever since he could remember to imitate every agreeable sound he heard had become almost overpowering after a visit with his Uncle Bob to the town one Saturday night to hear the band playing in the main street. Bob, who was cornet-player, thereafter became in Paul's eyes a sought of divinity among his heroes. There was Pat Murphy, who had once fought for the middle-weight championship, and was only just beaten after as tremendous a slogging as had been witnessed in the ring for years, the referee in every local fight, a mate of his dad's, and working in the same copper-mine; there was Ted Hardy, who had taught him to swim in the mill-dam, a swaggy wisp of a chap with horribly squinting eyes, and a voice like the rumble of a traction engine, that could paralyse every lad in the district. But the Professor not only soon outstripped these two heroes, but reached a pinnacle in Paul's mind above even his divinity. Probably the Professor's unflagging enthusiasm in everything connected with the little chap's "genus," together with the bestowal of an indulgence at every visit in the shape of some sweetmeats or longed-for toy, both won his allegiance and captured his affections. Then the Professor had travelled so much, with an observing eye and a retentive memory; had actually known Red Angus, the bush-ranger; seen the Commonwealth procession, though he condemned the waste of money over it; and heard hundreds of musicians playing together. This was all very interesting, despite his snorts at the most enthralling parts of his stories, and the intrusion of phrenology when least expected. Little Paul soon got accustomed to these mannerisms, however, and such comments as "she's too big in self-esteem; he didn't like me tell-ing him he was wanting in caution; I cleared, for he was defici-ent in conscientiousness and veneration," came as a matter of course.

As was natural, the little fellow must reciprocate with odds and ends of information he had picked up about the mines; that such and such a number "oughter to be seen ter by the 'spector, who was a fair cow —By gum! jackets is bustin';" or drag the Professor to the mill-dam to

show off, perhaps barking his knees and elbows in his anxiety to accomplish some impossible feat. The Professor learned what to do when he had sandy blight, and the particulars of the worst dust-storm dad had ever seen, and such-like desirable items. The impressions Paul has received of this world were not over-varied and inspiring. The assemblage of miners' huts, most of them without enclosures, surrounded by a herbless waste, constituted his most immediate and strongest. About half a mile to the right of the huts, pouring out sulphurous smoke that, veering with the wind, half-suffocated the inhabitants around, the big copper mine lifted its ugly scaffolding towards the flaming, brassy-blue sky from the centre of its huge breastworks of slag. To the left, on the top of the sloping hill, about a mile away, another mine projected into sight from a huddle of huts and small cottages, connected with some outlying excavations by a bridge spanning the road, along which trucks kept moving to and fro, discernible as black dots. In front stretched the level desolate country, with columns of dust gyrating in the sky here and there like reddish and pale smoke, into a vaporish haze of sombre timber in the distance. Behind was the little town, hidden in a dip. No trees, no flowers, not even grass anywhere to relieve the eyes, aching with the pitiless sun-glare. The only water obtainable for household purposes was pumped from a tank four miles away, and distributed amongst the inhabitants in carts — a tawny, warm, silky water, of which you could drink and drink and drink, and still be thirsty. It was quite a treat to wander to the brackish mill-dam, dismal as it was, for a glimpse of its preciousness. Day after day the same exhausting heat; the same bright, naked, wearying sky; the same shadowless, distressing spread of brickish-red desert; and, alas! the same depressing sight of pale, haggard men, uncouthly garbed, listlessly wending to and fro betwixt the huts and the copper mine at the sound of the steam horn. When longed-for night at last shut off the blinding glare, the whole district was plunged into stifling darkness. At intervals a fiery torrent of molten slag pouring down one side of the copper mine's breastwork would shed a brilliant illumination for a few moments, and then fade into a dull, ruddy glow. Every now and again the steam horn would sound discordantly, as though the mine were a monster demanding its victims. Then tiny lights, like stars, singly and in clusters, begin to appear, travelling mysteriously to and fro. Did you approach them they would develop into miners carrying their crib with oil lamps fastened to their caps. Then the hours toil nervelessly on, the district breathing heavily under the choking sulphurous smoke, till dawn, like glittering steel, ushers in another destroying day of drought.

You may be sure there was much ado among the youngsters about the huts at Paul's acquisition of the rudiments of music. The Professor was delighted in the boy's progress, and spread his fame as a "genus" in his

bump-reading dissertations at the huts he canvassed. He was now in great demand by anxious parents curious to know what their “Tom or Sal was good for.” In fact, the Professor was doing a roaring trade when Fortune suddenly set her face dead against him.

An epidemic of petty burglaries had all at once broken out in the district. There was hardly a night that some articles of clothing or bits of jewellery did not vanish from its owner's hut. Eatables began to follow suit, causing dismay to hungry households. These depredations continued for some weeks, bewildering everyone, till a report that a bottle of mustard pickles had departed from old Mother Hayes's kitchen table in broad daylight threw the whole community into hysteria. This startling occurrence became the standard theme of conversation in the mines, in the pubs, and especially at mealtimes in the huts. Who was the burglar? Suspicions were levelled now at one person, now at another — newcomers to the district. Of course, the burglar was a stranger, no doubt of that. The Sydney travellers hurriedly booked their customers' orders and fled, alarmed at the vindictive glances from every side. The tide of suspicion set permanently towards the unfortunate Professor, however, when old Mother Hayes supplemented her last report with the information that “that there blamed prosser chap was worritin' her innards out about the kids when t' bottle was tuk.” The change of attitude of the whole district was as swift as it was disastrous towards him. Doors were banged to at his approach, angry faces glared at him from windows, scrutinising eyes followed him everywhere. He was shunned like a leper. His business connection was severed at one stroke. Fierce murmurs began to arise against the police for not arresting him. His bump-reading was only a blind. Why should he come to their part? They'd no money, and didn't believe in “fortin'-telling.” Then someone spread the terrible report that he was an escaped criminal. The whole place actually seethed with fury at the news. Several miners spoke vaguely of “slaggin' ” him if they caught him out of a night. The poor Professor was thrust unceremoniously into an almost dangerous position. Meanwhile the burglaries continued merrily.

The Professor, however, faced it all unflinchingly. He tramped from hut to hut, condemning the inmates when they slammed the door in his face for having flat heads, for having no “moral develop-ments,” and endeavoring to collect the little balances to his credit — but 'twas of no avail. At last he hopelessly desisted, and determined to depart by the excursion train advertised for the next month.

Little Paul, however, remained faithful to his teacher. He blubbered when the Professor, wiping a tear from his big blue eye, told him his father had forbidden him the hut. With a great thrill he felt the little chap's arms around his neck, and overlooked that thundering oath connected with something about “dirty leein' divils,” rapped out

viciously.

It was on a Saturday night following this blubbering fit that Paul had his mettle tested. His father was on night-shift, and his mother and Clara were in town shopping, and he had been left in his cot as usual. He was too miserable, however, to sleep, and the heat augmented his discomfort. Why shouldn't he play on his flute? No one would know. He crept from his cot, and was groping about the room, when he happened to glance through the window. The scattered huts were enveloped in silence and gloom, with a faint light only here and there shining from a window, for they were nearly always deserted on a Saturday night. Paul caught his breath with surprise as a flash of light from the window of Jim Jensen's hut at that moment arrested his glance, and disappeared. Jim was an old bachelor, a reputed miser, and was on night-shift with his dad. Again the light flashed and vanished. In another moment Paul had unfastened the window and crept through, his mind big with one thought: "They're in Jim's hut."

As he dropped lightly to his feet, he felt a faint shiver at the darkness. Nothing short of his passionate affection for the Professor, whose big blue eyes seemed somehow to be looking pathetically at him, would have set him creeping towards Jim's hut in a darkness that appeared dancing with uncanny things. Twice he stopped with a deadly chill striking at his hair roots, and peered for some place of safety, and then approached cautiously to within a few yards of the hut. All at once he discerned a dark form issue from the window and hasten away, and he silently sped after it, his teeth clenched, one thought absorbing him. On reaching the road the figure halted as though listening, and then strode on towards the copper mine. With a flash of inspiration Paul made a bee-line for a recent clay-pan opposite the smouldering slag embankment, into which he crept, his head peeping from behind a small hillock alongside the road. The man came striding on, obviously careless now he was away from the huts. At the sudden illumination of the molten slag, splashing and streaming down the embankment, he slackened his pace to avoid the searching glare, and passed when the crackling surface of the slag threw only a deep crimson shadow. But Paul's keen eyes had detected his face. He arose silently and shadowed Bill Foggerty, the gaol-bird, who had recently returned to the district.

Before many weeks the Professor was not only reinstated in his former glory as the greatest bump-reader in Australia, was not only congratulated and repeatedly informed by those who had been most suspicious of him that "they'd allus said he'd nought to do wiv it," but this Christmas he and little Paul, by special invitation, will play at a concert to be given in aid of the local hospital the memory-laden air of "Home, Sweet Home," in duet, arranged by himself.

## Waiting.

Reginald Dubois, on a six months' trip to Australia for the good of his health, after passing his final examination for a barristership-at-law, was standing on the steps of a fashionable hotel, the morning after his arrival in Sydney, smoking a cigar, and enjoying the genial sunshine, when a curious thing happened. A brougham drove up to the hotel, and its coachman entered the corridor to return almost immediately, and quietly approached him:

“Mr. Reginald Dubois, I believe, sir?”

“Yes, that is my name,” he replied, glancing curiously into the man's clean-shaven face. “What is this?” and he ripped open the envelope.

“When you are ready, sir,” remarked the coachman, withdrawing to the curbstone. Dubois read, and reread the letter carefully with a perplexed expression. It was neatly written on pink paper, faintly perfumed, and ran thus: —

“Sydney,

“June 7th, 19——.

“Dear Reginald, —

“I've only just learned you have come at last. I'm so overjoyed that I've sent the brougham for you. Come at once to yours ever,  
“CONSTANCE.”

Beckoning the coachman to him, Dubois hastily said:

“You've made a mistake. This letter is not for me.”

The man glanced at him, and at the letter. “You're Mr. Reginald Dubois, sir, from Yorkshire, England.”

“Yes, that's so. But——who told you to give me this letter?”

“Miss Dennis, sir. And she said I hadn't to return without you,” he added nervously. Dubois scrutinised the man, who stroked his chin as though embarrassed, and then glanced at the brougham with its pair of silver-harnessed chestnuts shining sleekly in the sunshine.

“Wait a few minutes,” and the young man leaped up the steps, and entered the hotel corridor on the impulse of making some inquiries of the hotel proprietor. On second thoughts, however, he slipped into a chair. There had been a number of Sydney people on board his steamer, and

perhaps——. He racked his brain in the attempt to focus their personalities. Though he had been on speaking terms with several of them the intimacy was not such as to invoke a desire on either side for correspondence when ashore, much less for him to receive from any one of them an invitation couched so affectionately. More perplexed than ever, he again read the letter. “There must be some mistake,” he thought. “The writer evidently expects someone. Can there be another Reginald Dubois? But the fellow says from Yorkshire. Never heard of another Reginald Dubois in the county. If it's not for me, for whom is it? Very mysterious! Well, what must I do? There's no fear of a plot in these civilised days, although this isn't England. But the brougham augurs everything is genuine. I'll go anyway. It will be an adventure whichever way it moves.”

In another minute the young man was bowling along to interview his unknown correspondent. He was soon aroused from his pondering by the sudden stopping of the brougham before a suburban mansion, and the appearance of a man-servant standing at the open front door. “Evidently expected,” he thought. He was at once conducted through the hall into a room sumptuously, though somewhat gloomily furnished. It struck him the servant had eyed him curiously as he solemnly withdrew, and, with a strained attempt to conceal his embarrassment beneath an air of studied respect. Glancing round the chamber his eye was caught by a large portrait in black and white crayons hanging above the mantelpiece, that gave him a shock. Striding nearer he examined it with astonishment. “How extraordinary!” he muttered. The portrait could easily have passed as the likeness of himself. The difference was that the countenance was a shade thinner, the hair cut short, the lips more compressed, and the general expression more resolute. The young man was still contemplating what appeared his own double gazing down at him when a breath of air from behind and a slight rustle notified that someone had entered the room, and he turned on his heel. A tall woman, of spare figure, attired in black, was standing near him, her large brilliantly glittering black eyes fixed earnestly on him, her long, white, tapering fingers cracking together convulsively. He gazed at her, riveted, her deadly-white face was so corpse-like, enframed in the coal-black hair parted down the middle, and drawn back over the ears in a fashion long obsolete. He felt she had once been a vividly beautiful brunette of the type he had seen when ashore at Gibraltar. But years and some deep-abiding grief had chastened it all down to spectre-like unearthliness. He felt rather than saw the shining white teeth through her parted lips, held spell-bound by the brilliant eyes that seemed to pierce his soul. So transfixed was the young man that he failed to realise she had spoken, and fell back with alarm when her white writhing fingers clutched his hand, shooting a freezing chill through his marrow. “Ah!” The long

moaning sigh lifted and depressed her bosom, as though her soul were escaping.

Collecting his thoughts with a quick effort, he bowed.

She started, her white face craned into his with eyes like dazzling stars till her breath fanned his forehead curls.

"It's Reggy," she muttered to herself; then her arms flew around his neck, and with tears falling like rain she exclaimed, amid intermittent sobs:

"My darling has come! Day after day I've waited. Oh, Reggy, how I have suffered! Is it months or years? Look at me! Why don't you kiss and caress me? Your voice has changed. Your face isn't quite the same. And these curls; how cruel I am. You kept your promise. How beautiful they are. Why didn't you write, darling? Everyone has been against me. What haven't they said? But why talk of them. I saw your name in the paper in the list of arrivals. They don't know you are here. Don't let them part us again. God! it would kill me. Look, Reggy, look at me; kiss me, sweet. Why are you so cold and distant? Are you —— ah!"

Her arms fell to her side, and she drew abruptly back, biting her under lip, with eyes flashing defiance on a stout woman in a travelling costume, who had quietly entered the room. The young man stood dumb-founded, with a quiver of agitation in every limb. Everything wore the aspect of a strange dream, from which he struggled to awake, and could not. He was too overwhelmed to know what he was doing, and stood gazing at them like one stupified. There was a deep silence, snapped suddenly by the beseeching cry of the one who had first entered the room:

" 'Tis Reggy, sister, come at last."

"Constance, go to your room at once."

The other darted towards Dubois, crying loudly: "No! You shall not part us. I will shout for help. Don't let her, Reggy, don't let her. She always hated you. Don't! Don't!"

"What dreadful work! The nurse shall suffer for this," murmured the stout woman, hurrying to the door.

"My God!" ejaculated the young man, frightfully distressed as he endeavored to console the anguished being clinging to him desperately, entreating him in shrill tones to protect her. The sweat streamed from his brow with agitation. His arms ached beneath her frantic tugs and struggles. He felt a pang of pain for her, despite his relief, when a middle-aged woman garbed as a nurse, hastened into the room, and, catching the poor creature by her hands with a sharp jerk, unlocked her fingers from his neck, snatched her up, and carried her wailing from the room.

With a harassed expression the portly woman returned almost immediately, shutting the door gently behind her, and, approaching the young man, studied his face silently, her brows working over some

inward amazement.

“Be seated, sir,” and motioning him to a chair she continued to scrutinise his countenance, regardless of his obvious discomposure at his extraordinary position. Several times her eyes glanced at the crayon portrait and back at Dubois face, her brows never ceasing to express some mental perturbation.

“Very remarkable,” she at length commented audibly.

The young man stared blankly at her, instinctively recoiling from obtruding vapourish apologies in a hush so momentous. As though recalled to a sense of obligation to a stranger by the sound of her own voice she seated herself, and bending forward spoke slowly in deferential tones:

“I greatly regret, sir, I was not at home when you came to prevent what has taken place. I trust, however, you will accept my sincere apologies and overlook the unprecedented act of my unfortunate sister. Against my expressed orders the coachman has thought fit to execute her wishes, for which he will be at once dismissed. How she has managed it all is astonishing. Indeed, everything connected with it is astonishing. Your name, I believe, is Mr. Reginald Dubois, and you are from Yorkshire, England?”

“That is so,” replied Dubois in a low voice, his heart sinking he knew not why.

The lady thought a few moments, fidgeting nervously.

“I’m so amazed by what appears more than a coincidence, that you will pardon me if I appear rude. Was your father’s name Reginald?” And she waited a reply with acute tension of body.

“It was, madam.”

“You see the likeness;” and she nodded towards the portrait. A wave of impressions swept over Dubois’ mind; his father’s bearded face as he last saw him; his father’s boast that he would never die whilst his son lived. He glanced at the portrait — was it possible? Then something like awe touched him. He awaited the next question breathlessly.

“Is he still alive?”

“No, madam; my father died some years ago. I feel bewildered. That portrait——”

“Was given to my sister. But, tell me, do you know anything of your father’s life that would lead you to suppose he had ever been in Australia?”

“He was a midshipman, madam, and——”

“That is your father’s portrait, sir. Everything is explained; but it seems like the hand of God. Poor Constance!”

Dubois shivered as the revelation burst on him. Then one flashing thought — my mother must never know this! The lady’s voice recalled him from his subjective turmoil. Her acrid first words cut his sensitive

nature sharply:

“Your father soon forgot her for another. You've seen the ruin of a once clever, beautiful girl. Constance worshipped him. Month after month, year after year, it was always Reggy. We might have saved her had we noticed the malady in time. But she betrayed no sign to us. Only became melancholy as the years passed. I married, and did not see her again until it was too late. Had your father seen but for one day her misery, her constant trust, her love for him—— But it was madness from the beginning. She was only a child. Then — but you see how like a ghost she is. Always listless, except when her poor mad brain conjures up something about him. And he——married in England. What brutes men are!” And with that vehement objurgation she paused, wiping the streaming tears from her cheeks. Dubois mastering an emotion also perilously on the edge of tears, huskily asked:

“Is there no hope?”

“None! I'm now a widow, and live with her, so she has everything she craves for. Our grandfather, whose pet she was, bequeathed her this home, and an income to me for her behalf. She has every indulgence. However did she learn you were in Sydney?”

“She said she saw my name in the list of arrivals.”

“The newspapers print the lists. How cunningly she did it, thinking I shouldn't know. Harris ought to be ashamed of himself. He knows her state. I suppose he had no idea of what he was doing. The cause of her malady is only known to the family and the doctor. But, sir, pray tell me, did you father enter any profession?”

“Well, no. He lived a country gentleman's life after his marriage.”

The young man sat a picture of discomfiture, facing his interlocutrix, craving for the interview to end, to be alone with the emotion swelling his heart, all the while conscious of a far-off dread lest he should hear more facts to pain him.

“Are you sure my father was altogether to blame for your sister's calamity? I never knew him guilty of a dishonorable action,” he said.

“Quite sure. They were betrothed. He promised to return at the end of his voyage and marry her. We were given to understand his father would allow him an income till his position was assured.”

The young man felt sick at heart, and sadly went away.

And poor Constance is still waiting——still waiting!

## A Pawn of Fate's.

“Poems so unemotional and moral.” — The criticism hit Crackton's soul with an awakening shock. The applause that followed was as wormwood. The eulogy of him as a man, whom lovers of literature were proud to see among them, seemed superfluous. But his pride checked a betrayal of discomposure, and he smiled complacently at the speaker when he reseated himself. He had hitherto held a calm reserve during the evening, consistent with what he considered his position among the company. The speech he had anticipated with unctuous assumption. He had always had a contempt for the Bohemians, and held aloof from them through a desire to be uncontaminated by even the remotest wafting of their abandonment, hugging to his soul his ascetic ideals in voluntary loneliness, and publishing his verses and receiving the praise of a selected few with self-gratification. He would have courteously excused himself from being a guest at the dinner in honour of the birthday of “the most popular poet of the day,” had not some neatly-turned phrases about his own reputation as a poet in the invitation seduced his faculty for appreciation. And this was how “the most popular poet of the day” reciprocated his condescension. However, in his congratulatory reply, he aimed high and succeeded in electrifying his listeners with his aphorisms, playfully piquing them with sprinkles of praise of a limited value over the reputation of “the most popular poet of the day.” Thereafter his most intimate friends would have had difficulty in reconciling their impressions of him with his almost reckless exhibitions of sociability. He recited, gave toasts, coruscated with quips and repartees, and — most alarming symptom — drank whisky with unaffected satisfaction. The Bohemians were delighted. Whispers of “a fine fellow,” “one of us,” “a revelation, boys,” seemed but a fitting prelude to “the most popular poet of the day's” glorious outburst as he clinked his glass on the table with decision — “By Thunder, Crackton, what slashingly fine poems you could write did you let yourself go!” Crackton's innocent “Do you think so?” with a humourously lachrymose, face twist, was superb. When the laughter subsided he was withdrawn by the honoured guest to a corner to receive hints and suggestions, while the disciples fawned at elbow distance, and the acolytes rolled out their good-night, rollicking Bohemian song.

Humming snatches of the last song of the evening, which have

obstinately clung to his memory, Crackton shot across the street and dived down the road that led city-ward. His nerves tingled with such exhilaration that he broke every now and again into a half-run for sheer relief.

“What a fool I've been,” he murmured, halting and wiping his wet brow. “Any way,” he continued, interrogating the moon, “I'm not unemotional now, and as for being moral, why — ” Whatever was on his tongue slipped into a half smothered laugh. Instantly something approaching gravity glanced across his face as some unexpected thought pushed itself forward. He moved on, hat in hand, at a pondering pace. With a jerk he replaced his hat as with a thought's dismissal and pressed it down significant of determination to keep the thought precluded. The shrill notes of a violin relieved his mind of further effort in that direction, and caused him to quicken his pace. They issued from a dancing saloon at the street corner, and, as he approached, were supported by a piano's accompaniment. He crossed the street, and entered the saloon as though it had been his goal at starting. He had just time ere the waltz's prelude ceased, to select a partner, a black-eyed damsel dressed in pink, with a red rose in her hair. Oh! the rapture of the dance. The music, vile as it was, seemed heavenly. His feet appeared to have a gliding intelligence. He fancied his partner clung closer to him every moment. The pressure of her bosom swayed him luxuriously to some enticing deliciousness. A faint subtle odour, as of a tropical bloom, mounted to his brain like wine-fumes. “It is her breath,” he murmured within himself. The music ceased, and with a buoyancy unknown since his boyhood, he seated himself beside her.

“We dance well together,” she said, in a low voice, and as though she had betrayed something, continued in a higher key:

“You work at Richards and Richards, don't you?”

The question jarred him, but he was too dazed to analyse her motive so simply expressed.

“And you?”

“Oh! I work at Miss Cates, you know the dressmaker in Earl Street. I've often wondered who you was.”

His vanity was touched. He had always plumed himself on his good looks. His impressions were too pronounced to permit even an abortive attempt of his reason to mockingly acknowledge to itself how prepossessing he was. He felt something attracting him to her. What was it? She had a comely figure, but her face; well, it was decidedly plain, and he hated plain women. She had coarse hands, too. He could excuse her woeful lack of artistic perception displayed in those abominable colours, but not Nature's rough handiwork. But a mastering passion was sweeping his poetic susceptibilities aside. That faint subtle odour he had previously inhaled was more evident; it came to him in breaths of animal

sweetness. He watched her full red lips as she chatted, carelessly lodging in his memory that she was under the doctor, and had been forbidden to dance. He felt rather than saw the heaving of her half-exposed bosom.

“What nice blue eyes you have. I like blue eyes. Let me have a look at them. Don't be shy, you silly boy.”

He looked searchingly into her black glowing eyes.

“That's enough!” she laughed, swerving her head, and her hand pushing his till he nipped it.

“Another dance.”

She hesitated, but at a caressing touch arose, and they whirled among the dancers. Her swaying form, her pressing hands, her hot breath, administered to a passion already perilously assertive in his soul. When the music ceased he felt irritated as from an insult.

“It was too short,” he exclaimed, and noticing how heavily she breathed, and that she pressed her hand to her bosom:

“Have you hurt yourself?”

“I won't dance any more. I can hardly get my breath.”

She fanned herself with her handkerchief.

“Must I get you something?”

“No! No! Don't leave me, it'll soon go. There!” and she gave a sigh of relief, and bending her black eyes on him, murmured caressingly:

“What a nice boy you are. I'm so glad I've met you.”

“I'll take you home,” he whispered.

She shook her head, and her fingers twitched at her handkerchief's hem.

“But I will!” he said emphatically.

“How hot the room is. Goodness gracious! One would think it was summer.”

“Do you hear? I'm going to take you home.”

“Don't be silly.”

“Don't you want me?”

“Why, yes, if you like, but I live a long way.”

“Don't care. I'm going to take you home. Another dance?”

“No! No! I mustn't. I feel quite faint.”

“But I say you *must*,” and he looked firmly into her eyes.

“What a funny man you are. Well, this must be the last.”

She seemed exhausted when he conducted her back to her seat, and he noticed dark circles under her eyes, and that her hands were cold and clammy though her brow was wet with perspiration. He felt an ominous chill, and tried to collect his thoughts. A passing desire for whisky touched him. His limbs were trembling. He had a craving for something that beckoned obscurely. He again looked into her face and again that chill crept over him. A presentiment hung about his soul like a thundercloud.

“I will get you something,” and not waiting a reply, he hastened to the room from which he had seen refreshments brought. The smuggling away of a bottle from the counter piqued him into interrogatory expressions of countenance with the caterer. The signals were accepted, and with a gaping throat he tossed off a tumbler full of neat whisky. He returned to her with a glass of lemonade. Leaning against him, she clutched his hand. A fierce yearning to again feel her in his arms flung itself through him. The music once more filled the saloon. Heedless of her remonstrances and exerting power over her he grasped her to himself, and whirled her away among the dancers. His whole self, body and soul, was in a fever, and he communicated it to her. His soul devoured the impressions his senses poured on it. He could have shouted delirious defiances to imaginary opponents. Dance on! Dance on! though the sky shatter and rain fire; though the earth crack, and swallow all — was the chorus of the infuriated rebels within.

Breathless and streaming with perspiration, with flashing eyes and every nerve on a white quiver, he swung with her to a form laughing hysterically. There is a simultaneous movement among the dancers near them to catch her as she falls heavily to the floor. Several hasten for water, others tear open her bodice. Meanwhile he stands staring stupidly at her. Then the dancers, the lamps, the bunting get inextricably mixed, heave and collapse with black discs spinning off. A rough voice, and a heavy hand on his shoulder drive him blinking into consciousness of his surroundings:

“That young 'oman's real bad, and a bloke 'as knows 'er seys its 'art disease, and seys 'e send for the doctor quick.”

With a horrified exclamation he catches up his hat and hurries from the room.

The cool air without revives him. Taking the middle of the street he walks at a quick pace. His reason begins to recover from the shock that had prostrated his fascination. A dreadful thought suddenly fastens itself on him and he instinctively slips from the moonlight to the shadow. It still presses on him, and to escape it he breaks into a half-run with an inward voice of “heart-disease, death; heart-disease, death;” set to the sound of his feet. The refrain pauses whilst he hammers at the doctor's door, to again begin when he hurries away not waiting to hear further than the doctor was out. He must find another doctor. “No! No! I must go back; this suspense is dreadful!” He starts at the shrillness of his voice not knowing he had spoken. He falls into a swinging stride and communes with himself. He endeavours to cheat himself that she has only fainted, and actually catches himself laughing at the merriment he will have when he reviews his night's episode a few hours later. But the fervent “Thank God,” when he hears the saloon music betrays his real feelings.

He is met at the doorway, and quietly conducted through the dancers to the ladies' dressing room by the caterer, who whispers, as his hand turns the doorknob:

“She's dead. Have a look at her.”

Ere he grasps the import of the man's words the scene confronts him. Lying on a cloak in the centre of the room is his late partner. Her face is darkish ashen with black shadows about the eyes — eyes once so black and brimful of expression, but dull and heavy now beneath half-closed lids. Poor coarse hands — hands he had despised and dallied with in — spare him the thrust! A woman kneels beside the body and strokes the brow with a wet handkerchief, pausing now and again to gaze sorrowfully into the hushed countenance. She presses back some stray locks, and arises silently as a constable enters, helmet in hand. Another woman, with a baby, stands near its feet with drooping head and bosom heaving with half-stifled sobs that fret the ear. Meanwhile, he stands near the door, a passive spectator. His body is numb, his impressions confused; nothing seems real, a stage tableau often had had more effect. And yet — and yet. An involuntary desire is moving him towards the body when the music for the next dance, a waltz, causes him to turn abruptly. He softly opens the door, and pushes through the dancers, indifferent to their exclamations of anger at his rudeness. He reaches the open-air, and hurries down the street without any idea as to his destination. Something within him is beginning to ferment. Hitherto all has been excitement, confusion, unreality, but now — he quickens his pace. Something is forcing itself into his mind, and he dreads it. The sudden clashing of the clock in a church close by makes him halt with a start, and he looks fearfully around. He mechanically counts the strokes which cease with a solemn tremour and a dreadful hush ensues. He is alone. The houses loom funereally, casting great shadows. He dares not glance upward where the moon sits regarding him quietly. The hush closes in upon him, and he moves on, stamping his feet to make a noise. He has a vague impression he should go home, yet he is retracing his steps towards the saloon. Anywhere but to that place, the very thought of it makes him shudder, and yet he is beginning to run as with a feverish desire to be there. He is now running at full speed, but why he does not know. Is it to find relief? Or does he shrink from something that is insidiously worming itself into his soul? “I must!” he mutters, as he enters the saloon.

The dancers, having discovered the tragedy, have hurried home, frightened and shivering with cold. Near the piano stands the constable writing in a pocketbook. On a table near the dressing room lies the body, the head folded in a cloak, and a few red rose leaves beside it. A casual observer might have thought it a half-muffled effigy. He straightens his back, and moves cautiously toward it on tip-toe. His mind projects her

image as she was an hour ago, and contrasts it with the stiffening figure before him. Then all at once an insane desire to shout at the top of his voice comes over him. He crushes it with an effort, and a cold sweat breaks from every pore. His limbs are losing their strength, and yet they support him. An almost overpowering impulse seizes him to walk to the constable and say, "I killed her!" He feels it pass without an effort, and a faintness steals over him. He is dimly aware the place is full of reverential awe, which he vainly endeavours to realize as unconnected with himself. The constable moves towards him. The creaking of the man's boots through the solemn silence snaps his mind's extreme tension, and at the same moment the inevitable something he dreads leaps into vividness, and with a rush of horror he knows himself. Enough! Let him slink home, poor wretch, his punishment is assured.

## **A Study in White and Yellow.**

“Him Kum Sing” and the Mongolian's beady eyes glanced at the bony countenance and tall, gaunt, Salvation-army-garbed figure of his interrogator. He pointed toward a bloated form in a brown smock that was hustling with a rock of the shoulders through his lean, half-naked countrymen as they crowded into the semi-dark compartment. Then the speaker's eyes vanished in a mesh of wrinkles. In a few seconds they stole insidiously out again, furtively taking in the dogged twitching of the woman's thin lips, and the cold glitter of her pale-blue eyes as they fastened on the object of her enquiry. Yet to all outward seeming the woman was complacently gazing on the white-robed banker moving to and fro behind the massive wooden balusters that reached from the smooth-worn counter to the low, dingy ceiling and divided the chamber into the two compartments. Presently, her eyes slowly wandered from the bloated figure of Kum Sing, now leaning heavily against the counter, and settled on the two placards affixed to the otherwise naked wall, the one a local money-bank's guarantee that £500 lay on deposit in the name of Lee Kong, the other its duplicate in Chinese — evidence enough in that Mongolian quarter that Lee Kong's gambling den was worthy of patronage. The squalid crowd suddenly ceased its cackle, and its many eyes brilliantly alight all at once with the insatiable delirium of gambling, turned towards the white-robed banker, who had approached the balusters. The banker's clerk, also in a white robe, was seated at a mahogany table, ticking off something in a book like a ledger under the luminous gleam of two huge lamps. In a sing-song voice, not unlike some religious chant, the banker began reading the winning numbers of the tickets to an accompaniment of long sighs and many interjections and lamentations from the gazing, wrinkled, yellow crowd. The compartment reeked with the taint of decayed vegetables and of dried sweat that clung to the stained garments and dilapidated drab shirts, with the confused exhalations of acrid breath, of bodies recently come from the manure pits, and from the pungent smoke of the opium dens. The banker ceased and turned away, and immediately the brilliant lights faded from the slant eyes of his listeners. The compartment rapidly emptied itself of all but the owners of winning tickets, who breasted the counter. The bloated figure of Kum Sing waddled out, closely followed by the woman.

In the dark alley the woman quickened her steps, as if to accost Kum

Sing, but the impulse died away, and she dropped behind him, moving stealthily. Several times her eyes glanced towards the starry strip above that slit in the bewildering bogglement of squat hovels that exhaled an effluvium as of drugs, and her lips moved as though she were praying. On either side of the alley hutch-like doors kept opening silently in the darkness as she passed, disclosing under the flicker and glare of the candles and slush lamps hushed figures staring at gambling tables, or white women crouching in passages, squatting in corners, lounging in and out of kennel-like dens. The Salvation-army woman noticed that whatever the woman happened to be doing when the doors opened their livid faces invariably turned towards the dark alley before they shut to again. A droning hum hung over the alley, frequently diversified by cackles and sharp stabbing "Yah! Yahs!" The hot night pressed down like a curtain. Slippered feet shuffled in and out of passages like tunnels.

All at once the woman stopped, staring at the black aperture in the windowless flat wall through which Kum Sing had disappeared. Stooping through it with a determined pluck at her coarse dress, she ascended the narrow, foot-worn, wooden staircase, guided by a guttering lamp nailed to the wall at the top. A hot, greasy air spumed into her face, making her feel sick and dizzy with its peculiar nauseating pungency. Holding her breath, she peered into the murkiness of what appeared a cellar above ground. At first she could only discern the tiny opium lamps set near the mats spread out in parallel rows the whole length of the oblong wooden cellar. They pricked with their spots of light the half-lifted gloom, and reflected on the sluggish, black coils of smoke loitering under the suffocating clouds near the ceiling. The smokers gradually bulked on her view. Each had his flat-bowled pipe with its long, thick bamboo stem beside him — some of them stretched cut on their backs, some with their legs curled up, and all of the appearance of dried-up, attenuated anatomies awaiting the varnish prior to being packed in cases and sent to a museum. One grunted in his throat; another sighed heavily; a third "Yah-yahed" wearily to himself with little sobbing sounds. Several scarcely seemed to breathe at all.

On one side of the cellar was a row of bunks, all empty but the one at the end above which a slush lamp hung flaring from the ceiling. There a young woman lay with upturned face and shut eyes. Beyond these bunks a spread of thick canvas, suspended on rings driven into the wall, concealed the entrance to an adjoining room. When the Salvation-army woman's eyes caught sight of that colorless upturned face, a spasm passed over her countenance. Her lips tightened, and she rapidly tiptoed between the lines of recumbent figures towards the bunk. A head bobbed up from a mat, and its blinking eyes followed her. Another jutted into view from the top of the staircase. She saw neither; her eyes were fixed with wild intentness on the upturned face, devouring its every line. It

seemed, for the moment, as though some great passion would flood her with tears or drive her to frenzy. Craning her head till her lips almost touched the sleeper's ear, she tensely breathed:

“Lottie!”

The occupant of the bunk seemed jerked into a sitting posture by some hidden spring. Her eyes were like those of a panic-stricken animal.

“It's me. Come quick. Don't speak — they'll hear you,” whispered the other.

The young woman's face was now of a corpse-like pallor, and seemed to have become attenuated. Her lips moved, yet there was no sound.

The other's eyes were blinded with tears, but her lips were rigid as metal. She moistened her lips with her tongue, and whispered:

“Where are your things? Don't speak loud. God forgive me for what I did!” and she fumbled among the blankets.

“God! It's mother.” The words came as from a cavern.

“Hush! Slip them on quick,” and she dragged Lottie's garments from the twisted blankets.

With the speed of lightning there leaped into the young woman's mind memories of her “fall,” her expulsion from her mother's home in Sydney, and the subsequent misery that scorched her soul like flame till she drifted to this North Queensland town and sank into the Pit. Her eyes lost their panic-stricken stare and filled with a sombre glow. Beads of perspiration appeared on her brow. A dull resentment displaced her heart's abortive response to her mother's appeal and struggled with a vague curiosity as to why her mother (of all people) wore Salvation-army clothes — her mother, a prize-fighter's wife. A passionate desire to discharge a volley of oaths at her, to heap abuse on her, was balked by inquisitiveness, by a curious sense of homeliness at her mother's presence, and by some slight stirring of her human individuality so long suppressed by bestial conditions. She watched her mother fingering her jacket, and noted how her tears fell unheeded.

“You're sorry now, ain't you?” she asked with a little touch of triumph in her voice.

“I wasn't converted then. I didn't know your soul was going to perdition. See, here's your things.”

A shade of annoyance crossed Lottie's face. She petulantly pushed the garments aside.

“You don't want a thing like me. I'm no good. You made me what I am, and you talk about my soul. I'm not balmy, mother, if I *am* in hell. I'm not coming——” Then hurriedly, as though half-repenting her words, “How did you know I was here?”

A hard determined expression had come into the mother's face as Lottie spoke. She replied, however, in a conciliatory voice:

“Through the Army. And I go back to Sydney in to-morrow's boat with

you if I've to carry you.”

The last six words were decisive in tone. Lottie's gratified sense of her new found value to someone was rudely overset by her old wayward mood of defiance.

“You will!” With shrillness: “I'm my own missis, thank you. You'll take me to Sydney? What did you do to me when I was there? Turned me out without a crust.” . . . Then she exploded. The other gazed at her with an expression half of stern pity, half of self-condemnation.

The vehement pitch of words was all at once clipped by the sharp voice of Kum Sing who had noiselessly approached from behind the canvas. His little snake-like eyes darted furious lights at the silenced girl, who sank back cowering under the shower of his needle-edged vocabulary. Though the Salvation-army woman did not know what had been said to her daughter, the pitiful spectacle of her shivering under the blanket with terrified eyes fixed on Kum Sing was evidence enough. The mother's sinews straightened with their old agility, and her eyes were dried with a smouldering fire behind their blue pallor.

“Whaffor you here, eh?”

Her eyes travelled rapidly over his broad body, rancid with fat, and rested on his yellow, flat, puffy face, dripping with sweat that shone under the lamp flare like grease.

“*Pig!*”

The word fell pat, expressing deliberately, and with contemptuous disgust, her cold summing up of his appearance. His mammoth bulk heaved like a blanket of blubber under the rush of his fury.

“Hit him, mother,” shrilled the young woman as his swollen hands fell on the other's shoulders. His yell when the woman's bony fingers sank into the rank flesh of his arms as into ripe cheese died into a suffocating gasp when her swiftly-uplifted knee was violently projected into his capacious paunch. He flew back against the wall with a hollow boom like the note of a smitten drum.

In a moment the cellar was like an overturned anthill, alive with shouting yellow men, who hurried in from unsuspected gaps and crannies. Snatching her half-clad daughter from the bunk, the mother bent forward and coolly tilted the hanging lamp. A stream of blazing fat poured spluttering on the blankets and splashed into the wild-eyed faces confronting her. Hands plucked at her and smote as she fought her way in the stampede to the staircase. Smoke eddied round the running flames that hissed on the dried-up walls, and grew into blown clouds around the rushing figures. Borne helplessly on the panting, pushing, squeezing crowd that struggled foot by foot in pitch darkness down the staircase, and discharged its units, yelling like savages, into the alley, the mother, still clutching her child, staggered a few paces in the open air, fell on her knees, and feebly sank forward, releasing her burden.

“Mother, speak——”

Clang! clang! went the fire-bell in the street beyond. The crowd broke around the two figures and swerved in its flight.

“Mother, don't you hear me?” Then, as the red soakage from the saturated corset pressed warm and damp against her cheek, “Help! Help! Murder! Murder! Murder!”

The yellow faces turned towards them, yet still fled past. Smoke was now issuing from the roof of the building in dense masses. A plume of fire shot through it, hissing like a gigantic gas jet under tremendous pressure. There was a roar from the crowded street beyond. Still that dreadful cry of “Murder!” never for a moment ceased.

A rush of helmeted figures through the alley scattered the yellow mob like chaff.

“Women!”

The big fireman was on his knees.

“What's up, my lass? What! stabbed?” The rough fingers pressed tenderly on the elder woman's wrist. The other saw the compassionate expression come into his bearded face as he gently turned the white, fixed countenance towards the increasing light of the fire, and her soul yearned as she sobbed bitterly.

“Hush, then? She's your mother, is she?” in a tone wistfully soft and pitiful, and in a voice like a trumpet to a fireman hurrying past:

“Hi! Jack, there's a woman here stabbed; help us to shift her.” Cheerily: “Don't cry, lass, we'll pull her round.” And finally, with a great volume of human heartiness: “Blast them Chows!”

The two fugitives were carried off to the young one's whimpering refrain: “My poor mother, my poor murdered mother.”

## **His Invisible Enemy.**

“Douse glim!” The light was shut off and the two men remained motionless, the one kneeling before the open safe, the other crouching behind him with a lantern, their eyes straining on a profound darkness, their ears on a stillness like a dungeon's.

To one unaccustomed to prolonged and intent listening the beat of the heart would have appeared the only sound audible in the upper storey of the huge building, that stood massively out under the moonless sky, from among the narrow streets of chaotically designed warehouses, tumble-down offices, and crowded alleys of weather-stained, dilapidated human kennels. The rattle of some hurrying hansom had now and again disturbed the stillness of the low-lying levels, flinging a whirr of echoes over that towering wholesale emporium without once, however, arresting the two men at their work.

Despite the rustle of paper as his hands deftly whipped out of the safe its contents, the one on his knees had heard a faint crackling in the hosiery department below. The uncertainty of its meaning had pricked him into that abrupt injunction to his mate. Both men remained some minutes like inanimate objects, listening, peering.

“Rats,” was the brief, deep-throated comment of the man on his knees.

Again a narrow but keen shaft of light shot into the safe and the kneeling man continued his operations rapidly; his short thick frame bulking largely in the lamp gleam; his sunken black eyes scintillating; and his square bony chin jerking continually to his freckle-faced, sandy-haired companion, who kept murmuring gleefully to himself as he eagerly slid into a bag whatever was elbowed towards him.

“Here's a jollo, Bill,” the sandy-haired man ejaculated, his big, watery blue eyes a-glisten with suppressed excitement as he clutched a leather bag heavy with sovereigns, forgetting for the moment his instinctive fear of his saturnine companion, and that Bill kept sternly aloof from “carousing dens.”

The sight of gold affected him like the sound of the big drum in the Salvation Army when in one of his vacillating moods he had become a soldier for a few weeks after a lengthened period in “chokey.” He hummed, flapped an elbow, and was launching in a vibrating undertone on a ditty of strung words of mysterious meaning, when Bill swung his great head towards him, his heavily hewn countenance ploughed into

lines like an enraged tiger's.

“Stow it” he growled, his eyes like bits of fiery jet.

At once the other shrank into his habitual subserviency and the work went on in silence.

The sandy-haired one would have dared a constable with his “gun” up rather than have bearded Bill. The aloofness of the man, his reticence as to himself, his imperturbability in moments of danger, his sudden rages at trivial causes, his great physical strength, the secrecy of his life apart from his consultations and subsequent illegal operations with Harry, invested him with a mysterious awe-inspiring power in the eyes of that volatile mate. Harry knew nothing of Bill other than he was “a good worker.” He often pondered, however, over Bill's peculiar character.

The men had ransacked the office, distributed the loot into portable parcels, and stepped on to the landing, when a confused sound transfixed them. In another moment they made a rush for the staircase and were met by a current of hot, pungent air. A colossal hum, as of some powerful instrument vibrating, arose from the capacious body of the building. “Fire!” the word sprang from their lips unknowingly.

They rushed back to the office, tore off their shirts, saturated them from the half filled pitcher, bound them turban-like around their heads, and tossed on their coats again, buttoning them to the throat.

Though short their delay the pungency of the up-pouring air currents had increased, fretting their eyes and stinging their nostrils as they sped down the staircase. A swirl of sulphurous smoke coiled about them on their flight to the next landing and the colossal hum, now more predominant, was accompanied by multitudinous flappings. A draught of smoke and fiery particles discharged from the next staircase as from a funnel drove them back singed in places.

Harry hesitated, but Bill again faced it, and with desperate determination was crawling backward when a report like a cannon's, and the violent heaving of the steps warned him to retreat. He had barely reached the landing when a long flame was brandished like a sabre up the staircase.

By the light of the lamp strapped to Harry's waist they groped to one of the windows. Bill mounted his mate's shoulders and peeped through. He could see figures of men and women hurrying hither and thither as in a ruddy abyss. “To the roof,” he shouted in Harry's ear, dropping to his feet. They hastened to the topmost landing and flashing the lamp above them discerned a skylight.

They at length succeeded in reaching the roof, an oblong terrace with stone parapets. A cold breeze soothed their burnt hands and face. They inflated their lungs, and then with one accord stole to a parapet and peeped over.

From their great height the narrow street appeared a slit swimming in a

tremulous blood-red vapour. A row of fronting cottages seemed to be peeling away, to be actually melting before some terrific furnace glow. The beating fierceness of the fire had swept the street clean. It lay bare, naked, in that fiery crimson.

Without a word the two men hastened to the opposite parapet and peered over, with suddenly blanched faces. At first the awfulness of the scene appalled them, and they realised nothing but a dizzy blurr of tumultuous figures in a gulf of intolerable light. Though they only gazed a minute it seemed an eternity. Within those sixty seconds a vision as of hell had been outspread beneath them.

Down in that great depth the broad street was as a chasm of white uplifted faces extended in a quivering sea of roseate splendor, from which arose a roar as of billows breaking on a reef. The crowd had seen them. They sprang instinctively back, and at the same moment long lines of smoke drifted past. The fire was approaching, no time was to be lost. Already the tramping paeon of the flames had made speech impossible. They rushed madly to and fro like caged animals, peering now over one part of the parapet, now over another, seeking some outlet of escape. The roof was isolated like an island in mid-ocean. There was no friendly shelter within access. The nearest building mocked them from a dizzy distance, and even on its roof their enemy had planted a banner of flame. They were utterly beyond the reach of human help. Whither could they flee? Whither?

Suddenly Bill stopped in mid career and seizing Harry by the wrist stared into his face. The other lifted a hand imploringly. Bill shook his head mournfully, and striding to the parapet gazed into the night. That significant act drove the already hysterical Harry to frenzy. He ran hither and thither, tossing his arms, now glancing piteously upward as though the sky might proffer assistance, now darting from parapet to parapet and coo-eeing through hollowed hands to the white sea of upward staring faces, now flinging himself before his mate, beseeching him in shrill cries that sometimes pierced the roaring revelry of the flames to save him. The last vestige of his self-control had vanished. His whole soul was fused into one overwhelming desire for life. Everything had become a hideous nightmare. Sometimes he fell prostrate, sobbing like a child, and words he had not uttered for years flew to his lips. "Mother! God! Jesus! Mercy!" were incoherently poured out. Once he endeavoured to pray, but his tongue stumbled over oaths, snatches of sentimental songs, slang phrases, bits of Salvation Army hymns. Yelling "save me!" with violent reiteration he again leaped to the parapet, craning his neck over the abyss with protruding eyes and working jaw. At last he sank exhausted, his fingers clawing at the floor and saliva trickling from his lips, daubed with sweat and grime.

Meanwhile his mate stands like a dark pillar, with folded arms, gazing

into the night. Never once has his eye turned to his swooning mate. He appears scarce conscious of the flames flying upward, chorussing their furious song of victory. His mind is far away. He sees his young wife, the only being he had ever met who seemed to understand his slow unwieldy nature, lying in bed, an invalid, with a lamp beside her, waiting, listening for his return. A bitter wrath is raging in his soul. All his life had been a fight with an invisible enemy that had persecuted him when he was honest, and now at last had trapped him when, to obtain food for her, he threw in his lot with men too strong to starve, too weak to be martyrs. In his blind blundering way he had grasped the fact that something amiss infected the world. No work — no food. Ah! those cruel, cruel days he had trudged the wet streets, hung round wharves, searching, waiting, almost imploring for work. Everywhere his invisible enemy had thwarted him, had followed him here and was now mocking ere it destroyed him. Yon crowd could they save him from death would bundle him into gaol — for what? For daring to snatch food from one who had plenty for one who was without, and an invalid. He turned his eyes on the fire and to his outraged soul it appeared the visible manifestation of his invisible enemy. A fierce desire to taunt and mock at it, to shake his fist at it, to revile it as a coward, died away in an absorbing wonder at its magnificent and irresistible display.

Storey after storey had been captured by the flames and their contents converted into heaps of smouldering ashes, tempests of sparks, showers of flickering embers, all contributing to the voluminous clouds and volleys of smoke. In the street the huge crowd swayed and moved its great length like some phantasmagorical monster, venting every now and again its agonising intensity in a roar like the sea. From the roof he could discern the fire engines, diminished to curious toys, emitting vaporish threads into what seemed to the crowd in the street below a turbulent fire-bed rocking on columns like trunks of a blazing forest. The firemen moving about in an open space appeared from that great height like creatures of some strange species perceivable by glinting discs. The city for miles he could see — its tiers upon tiers of roofs branching in all directions, as under a flash of some gigantic limelight seemed to have been drawn into startling proximity to the fire, their long lines interrupted in places by some towering pile or church steeple, catching wavering reflections on its upper abutments, its flanks sunk in shadow. Overhead a flaring crimson flung over the city a canopy of dusky red. Frequently the glaring roofs in one direction would be plunged into a sea of darkness that dazzled his eye and immediately in another, streets of climbing houses, squares, terraces, flights of stone steps ascending to bridges, with here and there a space of open ground, would start vividly into sight, as the fire flung itself now into one wing, now into another. At intervals a hoarse roar from the crowd would precede a crash of falling timber and a

whirlwind of spinning sparks, dust, and shreds of burnt cloth, would rush skyward, choking the air currents. The fitful breeze played on the fire as a harper on his harp, now with one sweep bringing out the full orchestral scale of infinite sounds, now lulling them to a deep, sonorous bass.

As the man awaits his end he has a sensation of sombre joy that his wife will never know what he had become for her sake. Since it was for that, and that alone, he had deliberately committed crime. His last thought, as the flames muster around, compelling him to retire into the centre of the roof, is of pity for her. There is no room in his soul for thoughts of himself. He has, perhaps, a passing sympathy for his mate, who has leaped to his feet and rushed to him, catching his hand with convulsed face.

Suddenly the terrace is fringed with fire. There is a harsh cracking, and the upper frontage splits, yawns into a chasm with cliffs of shaggy flame. The two men are seen for a moment as smoke belches from the top storey and spreads to the wind. Then the crowd heaves back with a dreadful shudder, as with a rending uproar the shattered roof tumbles in.

## **Fantasies.**

### **The Romance of a Moth.**

“What are they, sisters?” murmured the youngest of the waterlilies lolling in her snowy bell.

“Spirits of the foamflakes,” languidly lisped a full blown beauty. “Do not notice them for they are full of mischief.”

“What a liquid splendour drips from their foreheads. They are nearly as beautiful as we,” reflected the other half regretfully. “There is that insolent fellow again,” and she began closing her curtains as a young moth circled about her, peering with ruby-lighted eyes.

“Well, dreamer, mad as ever,” greeted a voice, rich as the tone of a golden harp-string, when he settled on a bloom-laden wattle bough to stroke his saffron wings. “Still seeking the impossible? Look at me, how beautiful I am. Are you not jealous?” And she shook out a fragrance as a tiny breeze crept in among her leaves to kiss her amorously.

“Softly, my lover,” she breathed. “Ruffle not my royal raiment. Chase that ugly madcap away. He is ever boasting of a dream he has had of a being more beautiful than I. The lilies detest him. Every sunset he hovers near them, spying on their ablutions. Flick him away, he annoys me, dearest.”

But the little madcap was already gone, heedless of everything but his dream. Through a cloud of fire-flies he fluttered, disorganising their ranks in his flurry at their freakish lights, and sank discomfited on a rock near the waterfall.

“They all think themselves beautiful,” he soliloquised. “But wait awhile, she will abash them.”

He felt uneasy, however, as he remembered his mother's injunction to be cautious, and not be dazzled by the beautiful fiends that lay in wait to lure him to sudden doom.

“Banish it, my child,” she had expostulated when he whispered his dream. “It was a fiend like that dazzling marvel that destroyed thy father.”

Nevertheless she had pondered at the strangeness of it all. Never yet had she heard of a moth possessing an aspiration like her youngest born. What was this lovely creature he had seen and yearned to embrace. So incoherent was his description that her conjecture was very vague. Then

it was so unearthly and far away and shimmered so softly. She trembled for her strange offspring. He was not like other moths, content with simple joys. Ever since he was winged a wild craving for some ideal had made him restless and peculiar. Night after night he would leave his companions to return at dawn with weary wings, so wet with dew he could scarcely flutter. Even honey-juice failed to delight him. He had never been a cheerful, but of late he was a positively melancholy creature. He had been banned by his kindred as a useless nonentity, who could scarcely forage for himself, an incubus to the tribe. And his mother waxed fearful, pining in secret under a stigma that she gave birth to pests. Yet she loved him more than any child she had ever borne. Then mothers are so foolish!

Meanwhile the young eccentric was curiously watching the antics of the foam spirits. To and fro they sported, as in a shoot of etherealised feathers, shaking their locks of azure fire in the gathering gloom and singing together. Myriads of tiny eyes twinkled at him from a grove of purpling weed in the shallows below. Dangling from out a glaucous cavern behind the descending water could just be discerned the long tresses of some secluded nymph.

“They are very beautiful,” he mused, as a procession of sylphs in the guise of bubbles glided past, fanning their beamy wings. The gloom gradually grew soft and silky. The tinkling airs of innumerable water sprites on some mystic mission ascended from below the fall. Then the moth tightened his wings and waited, his roseate eyes shining with anticipation. Presently a faint radiance of some far-off glory appeared like a dream on the crest of the sliding water. The darkling pools dimpled with smiles when the lustre rested on them in a clasp of glistening silver. Then from on high, suspended as in a liquid trance, a sphere like a pearl in a tremulous opaline splendour glanced serenely down on them.

In that peerless radiance the moth was transfigured. Dazzled with beauty, reckless, forgetting everything but the dream, he spread his wings and soared towards the fair flame. Over the waterfall he quivered, an aspiring speck. Athwart the limpid beam he struggled. Shaking as with joy the sphere poured out of its magic vase a stream of such luminous splendour that his vision failed — yet he still fluttered up and up, blind, distraught, exultant. A wind blew him back, roaring: “The sea! The sea!” Hither and thither he was tossed like a mote. Still towards that perfection he toiled, as he thought. He could not see the beach besprent with foam-beardlings; he could not hear the ruffianly shouts of the waves. The gleam, the dazzling gleam — nothing else existed. He knew not the lovely glow was now illumining the pavilions of a cloud, and that along a shaft of fiercely-piercing light he was feebly fluttering. An atom overcharged with the intoxicating fluid that propels the whole universe towards the Absolute Perfection he struggled fearlessly towards the

imagined glory. Into the white glare that channelled the darkness, his sightless eyes protruding like red sparks, he rushed. A smiting furnace flash, and then — a ruffled spot of stunned enthusiasm dropped from the light-house glass into the darkness of death to shape a moral for a famous stanza:

“The desire of the moth for the star,  
The night for the morrow;  
The devotion to something afar  
From the sphere of our sorrow.”

## **The Poet's Vision.**

The visions of this world's so-called madmen are the truths of life. Lift your soul but a mournful inch above your fellow-creatures and they will condemn you as a madman. What is madness, pray? Is it to extinguish in the soul the lights of Paradise and herd with swine, or to unbandage the spirit's eyes and gaze on the beautiful beings that dwell in the fair places of earth? Think you those ancient poets fed on dreams, those seers of the young world babbled for nurseries? These little men of to-day, with rule and tape, how can they with spirits blinded by the smoke of the fires of brute desire perceive the beatific vision of Plato, the spiritual essences of Zoroaster descending like lambent flames, the sylphs that sport through the radiant bubbles of Hermes? How can *they* know that a wattle abloom is spring's visible trumpet-blast of triumph, that music is the manna on which the angels feed?

I underwent the ordeals that purify the spirit in its earthy mesh. The brute was slowly squeezed out. My spirit was gradually unfiled. The stars then opened into ethereal pavilions. Night and day I hung about the Blue Mountains and rambled through their valleys, listening, gazing, brooding. The waterfalls sang to me a new song, the trees whispered new secrets, the flowers at my feet breathed new intelligences. In lines of yellow fire the wattles invaded the gorges and blazoned a new revelation. Not yet — not yet. Further and further from the sounding halls of the senses my spirit retired. I felt the gasping overburdened joy of life within the trees moving nearer and nearer. I felt the song of waters becoming more spiritually subtle. The turf panted to speak, the dews trembled to sing — not yet, not yet. Driven by an inexplicable impulse I haunted one secluded waterfall. I breathed entreaties, petitions, vows, and the waters chorussed in bass: Soon! Soon! A splendor flew through the falling foam-flakes like gleams of silver. Not yet — not yet. My spirit was still twitched by a tangle of matter. But day by day, night by night, the influence grew, the enchantment deepened, the glamour increased, till one night — a night like this, lovely with moonlight on the falling

water — the vision came: first a limb as of sleeping foam, then a shoulder and a throat more white than a lily, and then a beautiful being, with locks of flame and gracious eyes of moonlight, in whose ineffable countenance the joyous innocence and purity our souls crave for slept as in a bridal chamber. Her grave sweet eyes glistened amid the spray that sparkled like hoar frost. The green rock against which rested her lovely head shone like an emerald amid the snow-white tapestry of falling foam. Was it an angel muffling smitten harp-chords at their richest tone? She spoke!

I learned the names of the divinities that rule over our beloved country. I dare not reveal their mystic rites, though believe me these are for our welfare. Sadness has prevailed amongst that gentle race for many years through our barterage of high virtues for gold and station. They have their labors, too, as well as we. Mighty and malignant are the powers they have to combat. There are potentates of fire and storm, wielders of flood, slingers of drought, whom they dread and yet against whom they array themselves for our sake. And she, the fairest daughter of the mountain stream, admitted me into the presence of the mountain Genius. More magnificent than Saturn in his prideful days, with limbs more radiantly beautiful than Apollo's, a visage weighty with thought and grandly sculptured, locks like sheaves of sunbeams, he surveyed me from a slanting ridge with kingly beneficence. Thus for weeks I breathed the atmosphere of our divinities, rejoicing to learn the epic of the Bush.

And then, whilst in the plentitude of all my spirit had craved for, I fell!

### **The Philosopher's Dream.**

He dreamed he stood on a huge mountain alone with the stars and solitude of night. Before him stretched a broad streamless valley filled with the flowing of a spectral twilight that showed all things but nothing as it was. He had no fear, neither did he marvel wherefore he was there. He felt that somewhere in that valley a scene was about to be enacted, a colossal pageantry evolved, with which his thoughts would be interwoven. Meanwhile a hush, such as broods in the pine woods ere the tempest be heard through their boughs, settled on him. Suddenly in the middle of the valley, dimly revealed by the spectral light, loomed a vast shapeless Image craped, across the front of which ran these words in letters of fire: "I am the Riddle of Death; come and uncloak me, ye dwellers of earth." Then it seemed a finger touched the dreamer's eyes and a voice born of the silence whispered: "Behold the procession of the would-be solvers of the Great Riddle." At once a film fell from his vision and he saw the whole valley distinctly.

Scarce had the whisper faded when a procession of men slowly and with solemn faces moved towards the Image. The first glanced at it

curiously and then glided into the darkness beyond. Soft as the fall of a dew-drop on a lily came a single word of that mysterious voice: "Confutzee." Another figure strode forward and endeavored to withdraw the crape, a lappet lifted a little and he staggered — dazzled by what he had glimpsed — and with hand to his eyes retired in reverie. Mournful as a weak wind among leaves came the voice thrilling itself away: "Gautama."

Figure after figure now stepped forward, some in Oriental robes and carrying in their hands the symbols of office; some thoughtfully and slow with faces haggard and mournful; but all endeavored to uncloak the Image and all were doomed to absolute failure. Others stood afar off and stared at it stupidly as though their minds had tottered.

Suddenly the crowd parted and a man smeared with dust and blood staggered toward it, turned, and fixing his unearthly eyes on the multitude that pressed upon him, calmly smiled. Such a radiance beamed around him that the Image could not be discerned in the darkness behind him. A train of worshippers kneeled before him, crowned him, and to their dazzled eyes angelic wings sprang from his shoulders. The dreamer felt a thrill of joy that the Image had ceased to cast its shadow o'er the lives of men. But a shiver went through him when a man with furrowed face and searching eyes moved towards the glorious figure. He gazed long and earnestly into its face and behold! the radiance began to languish. Silently and with slow and determined steps a second took the other's place when he retired, and perused it patiently and lo! the eyes lost their seraphic magnificence, and became human and sorrowful. A third pushed himself forward with hurried steps, and fixing his keen eyes on the beautiful countenance sarcastically smiled. There was a sudden snap and the crown fell — and the crowd recoiled with wonder and fear. Cool and unembarrassed and with a sneer deepening round the edges of his lips the man turned not, but stared at the face more intently than ever. A hoarse cry reverberated through the valley as with a clash the angelic wings fell and were broken. Then, and only then, did the man step lightly aside and glide into the darkness. "Voltaire," whispered the voice as the dreamer shut his startled eyes.

When he again looked the Image crape, and still bearing the dismal words of fire, loomed as heretofore. Many lay before it, some praying, some beseeching, some cursing, some dumb with a terrible despair. Once a man rushed forward and smote it with a scimitar, but the blade shivered, and the man sank crying: "Allah! Allah!"

Phantoms and black night-mares drifted round it; there was a sound of lamentation and much weeping, the jostling of a panic-stricken multitude, the uplifting of white and ghastly faces, the wringing of hands and the deep muttering of many voices in prayer; then the mountain shook, the valley upheaved, there was a rush of bewildering lights, a

whirlwind of terrible shapes; and then, the majestic gloom and solemn hush of a dead and wandering world.

With a convulsive start the philosopher awoke to find the east coloring with the dawn and the birds were holding life's high festival in his garden trees.

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