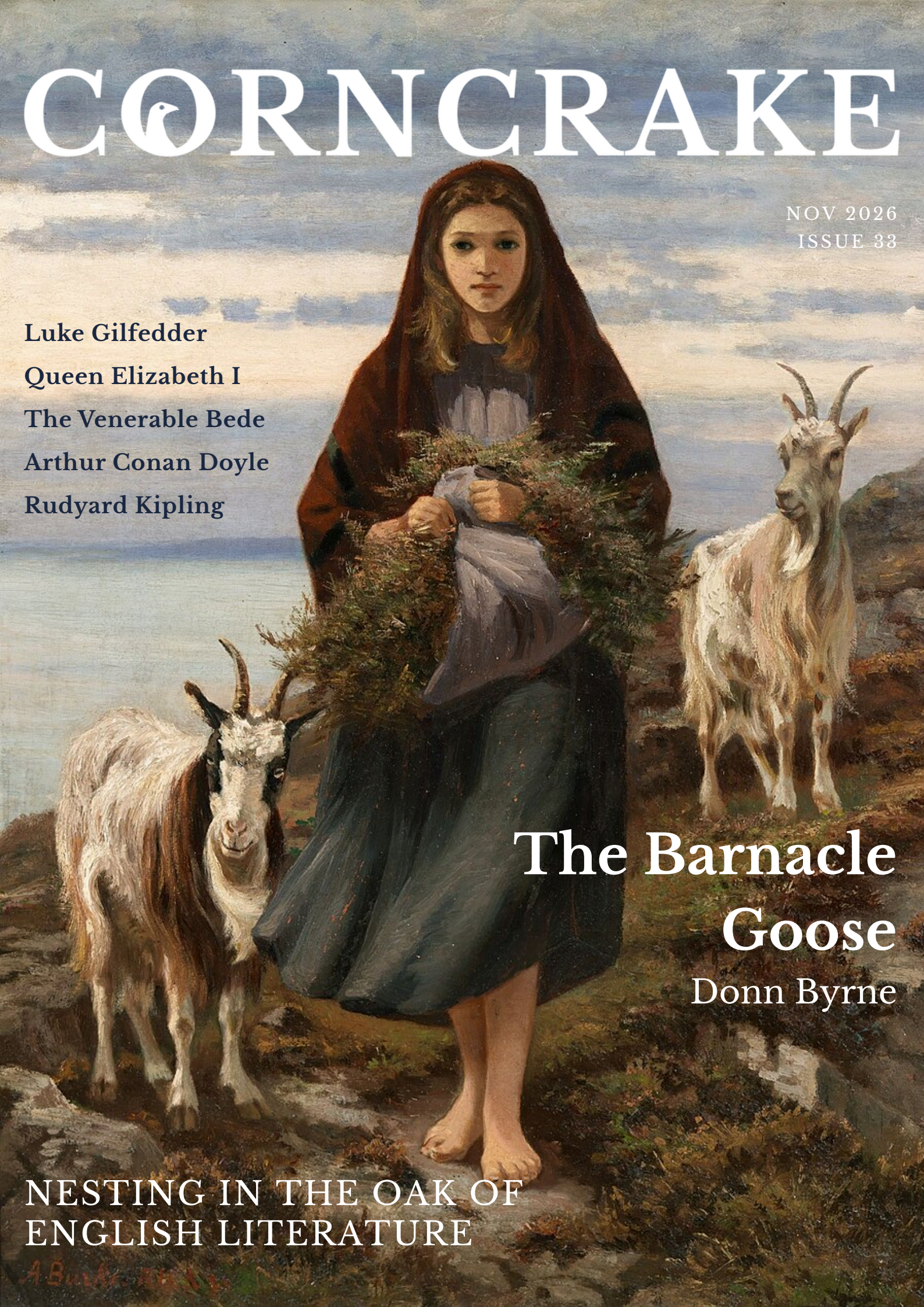
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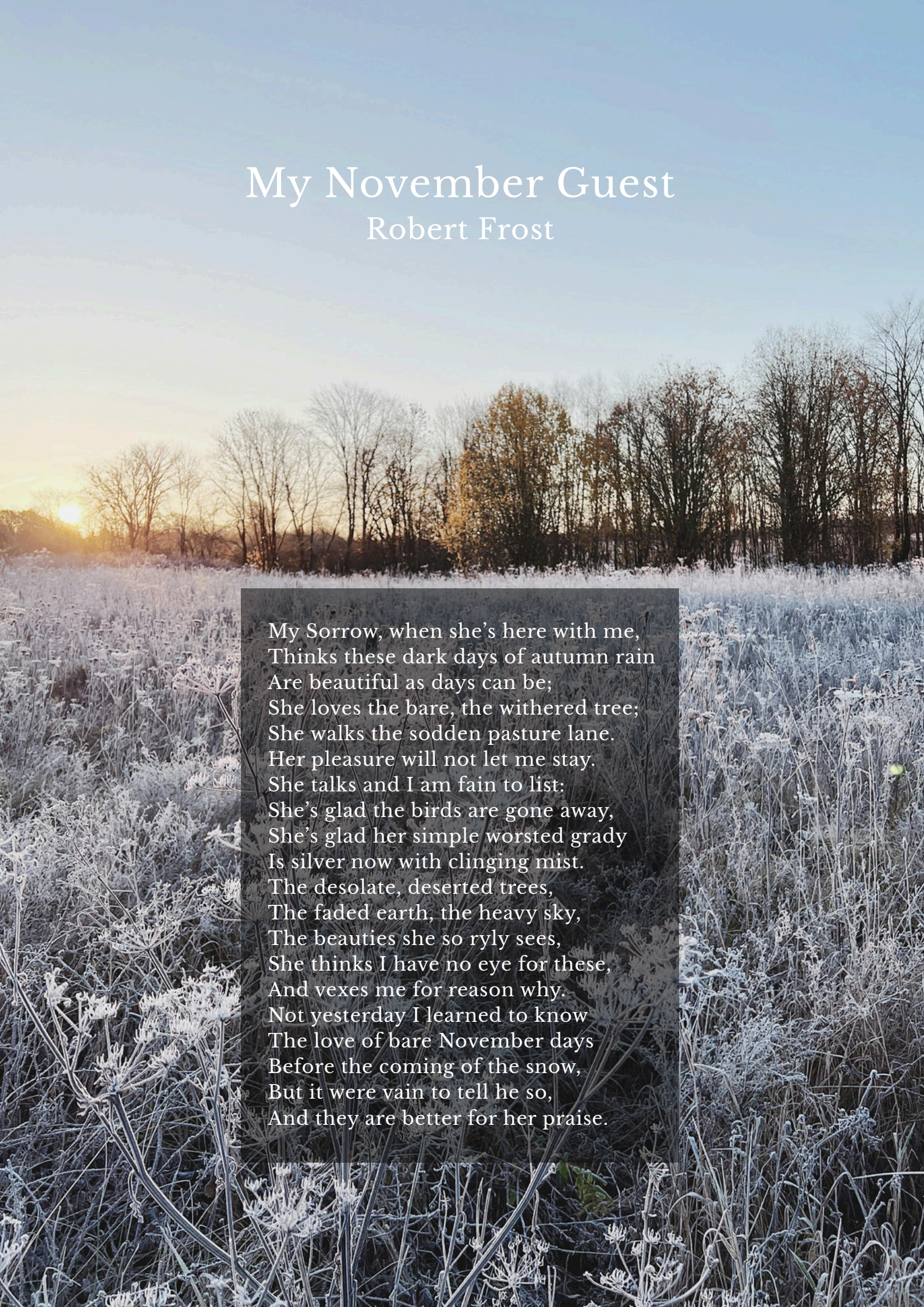


Luke Gilfedder
Queen Elizabeth I
The Venerable Bede
Arthur Conan Doyle
Rudyard Kipling

The Barnacle Goose

Donn Byrne

NESTING IN THE OAK OF ENGLISH LITERATURE



My November Guest

Robert Frost

My Sorrow, when she's here with me,
Thinks these dark days of autumn rain
Are beautiful as days can be;
She loves the bare, the withered tree;
She walks the sodden pasture lane.
Her pleasure will not let me stay.
She talks and I am fain to list:
She's glad the birds are gone away,
She's glad her simple worsted grady
Is silver now with clinging mist.
The desolate, deserted trees,
The faded earth, the heavy sky,
The beauties she so ryly sees,
She thinks I have no eye for these,
And vexes me for reason why.
Not yesterday I learned to know
The love of bare November days
Before the coming of the snow,
But it were vain to tell he so,
And they are better for her praise.

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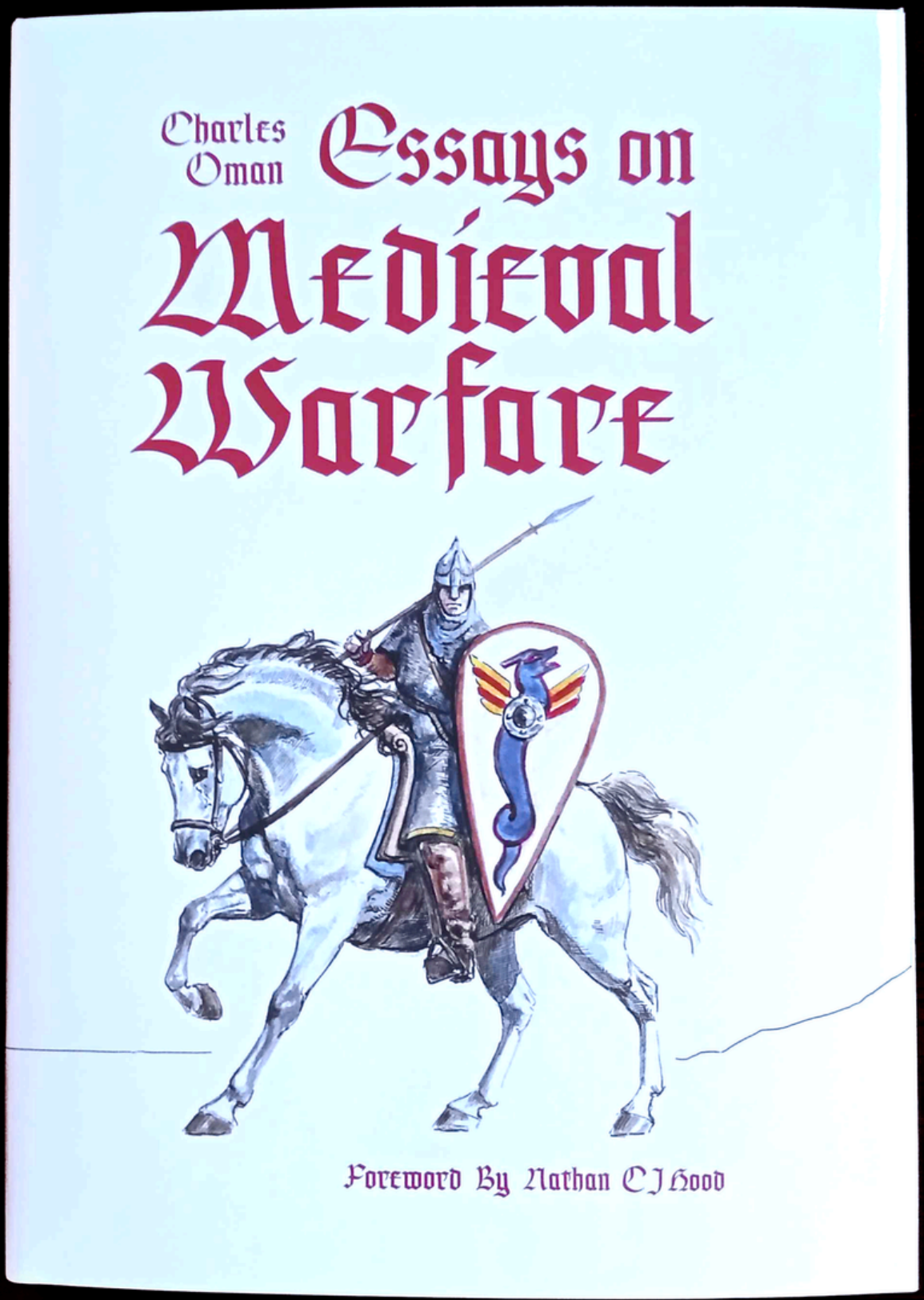
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Cover: A Connemara Girl
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Happy Reading!

shieldmaiden

Editor-in-Chief

> Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape?... If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can!
> JRR Tolkien

The Barnacle Goose

From Changeling and Other Stories

By Donn Byrne



By Charles J. Sharp - Own work, from Sharp Photography, sharpphotography.co.uk, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=192298645

I

He might have been a hundred years away, he thought, as he sped along the road on the jaunting-car; he might have been a hundred years away instead of a meager dozen, so strange did everything appear to him. Every turn of the way, every stone, every smoking farm-house, every green field, was new. Even the sea to the right of him, beside which he had played for nineteen years, was dramatically unexpected. Faintly the whole landscape came back to him; hazily, as though he were seeing for the first time a scene that had been inadequately described in a book.

First, there was the road itself, broad, undulating, rising and falling, like an artist's fancy. Then, right and left, fields of delicate blue-green corn, soft as no carpet could be; and great meadows of hay, sprinkled with white and red clover; long stretches of potatoes with delicate pink and mauve flowers; and here and there a gnarled apple orchard. Huge chestnut trees lined the way, and mellow farm-houses showed cozily, with their dun thatched roofs. Cows grazed in the distance—shining, mottled Jerseys and stocky Kerrys, black as ink.

In the background the purple Mourne Mountains loomed like strange giants; and beside him the sea plashed musically, with a sound reminiscent of the chiming of bells. It was all surprisingly mellow, surprisingly rich, like the land which the spies of Joshua reported to lie past the Jordan's banks. Grant's eyebrows raised in puzzlement.

The brick-faced driver looked at him with a horseman's shrewd eyes.

"I knew you the first time I put eyes on you," he said in his clipped Ulster accent. "You 're Thomas Grant's son—Willie John—that went away to America twelve years ago last March. And why should n't I know you? Many 's the time I drove you when you were that high." He gave the dapper little mare a flick of the whip. "I suppose you 'll be settling down and staying at home now?" he asked.

"No; I don't think I will," Grant answered; and he smiled as he heard his voice slip into the musical singsong it had n't known for many years. "I 'll be going back in a month or so."

They whipped along past the sea for another mile, the little mare's hoofs striking the white road as true and as staccato as drumsticks. A strip of salt-marsh spun toward them. Eastward, over the sea, a flock of birds hove. Their wings flapped wearily, and as they flew landward they uttered faint whimpering cries.

"The wild geese." The driver pointed them out with his whip. "They're coming back to the marsh. They 're queer birds."

Grant watched them as they came. Their cries came sharp and complaining through the air, high-pitched, querulous, turbulent. And still there seemed to be something satisfied in them, like the sobbing of a child who has received what he wants but cannot stop for a moment.

"I often heard my grandfather say—and it's little he did n't know about birds," the driver went on "that there is n't a queerer bird in the world than the barnacle goose. The moment they can fly they 'll leave the country. My grandfather saw them in Egypt, and he saw them in France, traveling all the time; but they can never get the taste of the Irish marshes out of their mouths, and they come back. The young ones go and the old ones stay. Even a bird does n't get sense until it's taught."

They swept from the highway into a narrower road, and Grant's heart jumped a little, for he recognized it, broader though it was, and greener its hedges and smoother its surface than he had thought it. The sun was going down and a soft bronze twilight was beginning to settle. A little river ran past to the sea through the lush meadowland, and for an instant he saw the shimmer of a trout as it leaped for a fly. And from everywhere came the scent of clover.

They had turned, almost before he noticed it, into the yard of the farm-house, and again the sense of surprise struck Grant like a blow. Of course he remembered everything now—the long white-washed farm-house, thatched with golden straw, with the sweet-pea and ivy clustering about its walls; the massive slated stable and byre; the barn to the rear of that, in the orchard; the white dairy near the big iron gates with its cinder churning table; the giant ricks of hay back of it all; the dogs running in the yard—sheep-dog and setter and greyhound—the two farm-hands stopping to look at him solemnly as he came through the gates; the thick servant-girl hurrying out of the front door as she heard the grinding of wheels. It was so different from what he had thought it was that he caught his breath in shamed embarrassment.

A tall young fellow with red hair and a humorous twist to his mouth came strolling from the stables. He wore a tweed coat and riding-breeches and boots. He stopped short and looked at the car.

"It's Willie John!" he shouted.

He swung across the yard like a flash and grasped Grant's hand in something that felt like a vise. He slammed his returned brother a terrific blow on the shoulder.

"Willie John! I 'm glad to see you!"

Grant's father came out of the house, a spare Titan of a man, hair shot through with gray and a great bronzed hawk's face. He pushed Joe aside and caught Grant by the shoulders. He was inarticulate for a moment.

"You 're back again, Willie John," he said simply and quietly; but behind the simple words Grant felt there was a wealth of welcome and of pleasure that David could not psalm. The elder Grant looked round toward the house. "Sarah Ann," he called, "here 's Willie John!"

She came out through the door with a quick, trembling step, a very little woman to be the mother of two such powerful men and the wife of a giant—a little woman of fifty, with the face of a russet apple, with fine lacework about the corners of her eyes, hair a delicate gray, like rich silk, and a girl's mouth and eyes. She had Grant in her arms in an instant, as though he were no more than a boy. Slowly she looked at him. "My son! Willie John!" she murmured.

They took him into the house, and they looked at him again; and they talked to him for hours, the mother with her eyes shining like stars, the father with that steadfast, proud expression on his face, the brother Joe in his riotous, loud-voiced way.

It was a welcome that overwhelmed Grant; that took him off his feet, like a great wave, and sent him spinning; that warmed him with a flame, setting his heart alight.

But there was something disappointing and strange about it all. They were just content and happy to have him. He had come back to their hearts after twelve years. They did n't care where he had been or how he had prospered. He might have just come from the next townland. He might have come back a pauper. Their welcome would have been the same warm, hearty thing. And he had imagined something so very different! He had pictured the land he was returning to as a thriftless waste. His own home he had never thought of as the richly comfortable place it was. He had seen himself returning in triumph from beyond the seas, laden with treasure, like Columbus returning with the wealth of Borinquen, or like the legendary Irish lad who married the Spanish king's daughter and returned to his impoverished people in a coach-and-four.

He had imagined himself telling them of the wonders of New York,—tales as marvelous as any of the thousand and one told in Oriental bazaars,—of the buildings that tower as high as the Irish mountains; of the river of light that is Broadway; of the shop windows on Fifth Avenue, each of which holds a king's ransom; of the motley throngs in New York, greater in number than all Ireland holds; of the struggle and competition in which he, their son and brother, had won a sound business worth ten thousand dollars.

He wanted to tell them of his own epic. He wanted to be questioned; to be admired. And they did none of that. They were only glad to have him back. And he was disappointed!

II

It was after the March fairs, twelve years ago, that he had gone to America. He had taken over a drove of cattle to Liverpool for his father and uncles, had delivered them and received the purchase money. There was one small venture of his own among the lot—a calf that he had raised to be a personable heifer, and that brought him in nine pounds. Along the docks he saw a liner bound for New York, a great leviathan, like a city. The thing hypnotized him by its vastness.

"I 'm going to America," he said out loud on the pier; and in a great glow he took his passage and sent home the purchase money for the cattle.

He did not know at the time what the impulse was that sent him abroad, and he did not trouble to analyze it. Later he found a motive, and it was a false one. He might have asked his father, who had gone in an ancient high moment to fight as a Papal Zouave against the onrush of the Neapolitan cohorts on Rome. He might have asked his red- and curly-headed brother Joe, who had once shipped from Newry to Iceland, and to Archangel, in Russia, and to Vladivostok, coming home by way of the China Seas. And, again, he might have asked the downy young of the barnacle goose, who wing their way down southward when the first black frost comes. All these could have told him.

He had very little difficulty in finding something to do in New York, for a stocky, healthy man, with honesty written all over a clean-cut face and looking unabashed from clear gray eyes, is an acquisition to any employer. They put him to work on a street-car, conducting and taking in the fares with assiduous honesty. The ten or twelve dollars a week he made, and what he got for them, compared very unfavorably with the healthful comfort and clean sea air of home. But the adventure of the New World held his attention until home became an affectionate and dull memory. And letters to and from Ireland were rare.

He stood, in his stocking feet, as fine a specimen of strength and health as there is outside the ranks of professional athletes; he was good-looking in an impersonal way; to doubt his honesty was impossible against the evidence of those gray eyes; but he had been allotted no more than the usual share of brains. Wherefore, it took three years for the New York idea to get home, which was to put money in his purse. He went about it in the way one should expect of him. He sought a position that gave reasonable promise of advancement. A great chain of grocery stores gave him an assistantship in one of its shops.

"Hard work, and saving your money," he said to himself, "that's the way you get on in the world."

And he got on, with his dogged persistence. Six years of that, with the money he had saved, and he had set himself up in business on his own account, in an out-of-the-way avenue, on the road to Coney Island—a squat two-story building with an apartment upstairs and his shop below. A long, bare street, newly bedded, with grayish-white apartment-houses on each hand, so new that the mortar still lay in ugly flecks about the sidewalk.

Opposite him a newly fitted chemist's shop showed garishly with its green and red lights. A valet's store was beside him, and here and there in the avenue gaps showed where the real-estate men had not yet found capitalists to erect stores or flats. It was very bleak and new, and somehow lonely; but in his own store he was happy and busy all day long. He had had his name put on the glass window—William J. Grant—in angular gold letters; and inside he and his assistant, a sallow Scotch boy, attended customers, a lean but constant string. They took loaves from the glass case on the counter, or dug butter from the cool, moist vat, or ground coffee in the red mill that suggested a ceremonial vessel in a Hindu temple. He wished the people in Ireland could see him now.

"Ay!" he would say. "I think this would open their eyes."

He had heard much about Ireland and talked much about it since he came to America—a great deal more than he had ever heard or talked about it at home. And in his eyes now it had taken on a dim, distorted shape and spirit. The physical contours of it he had forgotten—the lush green hillsides, the fruitful orchards, the kine heavy with fat, the dim, warm houses—all these were to him as though they had never been. Instead of them, he saw a frail, worn country, with a vague spiritual light emanating from it, like the light from the face of a man who knows that death is near him and is resigned to it. The people about him mentioned it with sympathetic voices. They spoke of the poverty of it, with a sort of contemptuous affection. And little by little Grant came to think of it in that way, too, as one thinks of a poor but worthy relative.

"There 's no doubt to it," he would say to himself; "a man doesn't get a chance there. He has to come over here." And he would look about his store with proud satisfaction.

He began to think even of his own home as a place that the poisonous finger of poverty had touched; and for a year now, and more, he had thought of returning to see it. Maybe he could do something for the people at home. A few pounds would come in useful. And, apart from that, he could tell them some things that would help them along. He would make them "get a move on," as the New York phrase went. Perhaps he would take Joe, his brother, out and give him a chance to show what he had in him. Perhaps they might all come out with him—the father and mother too.

"Ay! Why not!" he would argue. "Why shouldn't they? What's there for them in Ireland?"

He ruminated over the idea every day as he came from work to the brown stone boarding-house where he lived, in Schermerhorn Street, a dingy, unpalatable sort of place that had become a home to him. There were employees of department-stores there; and an occasional theatrical couple stayed a week in it, a week electric with criticism. In the summer evenings the boarders sat on the stoop, and in the winter they congregated inside to be played to in insufficient light on a tinkling piano. For Grant the place had a metropolitan quality that others sought in the great hotels.

And, with the same care he had used in mapping out his business career, he watched for somebody to marry.

He found her in the boarding-house—a trim and rather pale girl, who acted as though she were twenty and looked twenty-eight, but whom the Vital Statistics Bureau had registered as having been born thirty years before. Her hair was black and glossy, and her eyes were big and black and lustrous; her face, outside those features, was the face of a hundred others. But what captivated Grant about her was her chicness, her quality of being up-to-the-minute in dress and deed and word. Grant liked the flare of her wide skirts and the gray suede shoes lacing up the sides. He liked the faint powder on her face, and her carefully cultured eyebrows. He liked her talk of skating and of the new theatrical pieces, and her ability to do the latest twirls in the one-step. Her name was Miss Levine—Ada Levine.

"It's not every man could have a wife like that!" he told himself; and he thought of the awe in which his people in Ireland would behold her.

She talked to him interestedly of his prospects and the trend of business in his direction; and that pleased him, for, what with that interest and with the training she received in the department-store where she worked, she would be exactly what he needed to get on in the world. He told her of his intention of going back home for a month, of putting the store in the care of a friend of his from the old business where he had worked.

"And when I come back," he said, "I 'd like to say something to you." She sat on the steps quietly and lowered her eyes demurely.

"That is," he continued, "if nobody gets there before me."

She looked up at him and smiled.

"That's a date," she agreed.

His heart expanded blithely. Everything was settled now. Life showed in front of him like a straight line. A wife like that! And his thriving business! Now he would go back to Ireland and show them something!

III

He had been home for a month and he had made no move toward returning—not that it was ever out of his mind for an instant, but it pleased him to stay there and savor the ripe mellow ness of everything as he might savor a fruit. Summer was fairly in and the yellow blossoms had fallen from the gorse, but roses were blooming in every garden, great creamy ones and others with the vivid red of an autumn sunset.

The horse-chestnuts were heavy with balloons of white flowers, and every evening the bees returned drowsy from the heather of the purple mountains. There was something in it all that he had missed for years and that he was greedy for.

At first he had gone about, a splendid figure, in the clothes he had brought with him from America: suits of fine broadcloth, and buttoned shoes, and a watch that was held in place by a fob. But nobody seemed impressed by this splendor and a few were covertly amused; and suddenly he had discarded it in a sort of shame, returning to the rich tweeds of his own people. He had helped a little about the farm, finding again a lost aptitude in milking a cow and in handling a horse in a dog-cart. He had gone to the fairs and put in a shrewd word here and there on the price of a colt. He had gaped in wonder at the antics of the Punch-and-Judy show and had listened to the croon of the ballad-singer. He lost sixpences with the trick-of-the-loop man and with the artist of the three cards. All through it he tried to keep in his mind and on his face the attitude of a grown-up who is playing a child's game, a patronizing superiority.

"If they could only see this at Coney Island," he thought, "they would laugh their heads off."

And he tried to remember as enjoyable the days he had spent there in search of amusement, returning in the evening a battered and limp and irritated rag.

It was the evening of the Newry Fair when he began to think seriously of returning. They were all sitting in the great stone-flagged kitchen of the farm-house. From the long deal table in the middle of the room a huge lamp filled the space with creamy light, and in the lighted fireplace a kettle purred, hanging from its crane. The kitchen rafters were black and amber from the smoke of four generations, and below them hung at intervals long flitches of bacon. Over the mantel were the guns he remembered from his boyhood—his father's double-barreled fowling-piece with the long, true barrels; his grandfather's old musket; and the flintlock his great-grandfather had borne when he went out with Lord Edward in '98.

His father sat by the table, reading a paper diligently, and he was

surprised to see how hale the old man looked; he was sixty now and looked fifteen years younger. His mother fussed about with a pannikin of milk, followed by three mewing kittens, while in a corner of the room Joe was binding whipcord about the handle of a fishing-rod, occasionally making it swish through the air with a keen sibilant sound like the hiss of a snake.
"I think I 'll be going back soon," Grant said suddenly. "I think I 'd better be getting along."
His mother looked at him sharply, but said nothing. Joe lowered his rod. His father raised his eyes from his paper.
"And what would you be doing that for?" he asked slowly. "Sure, I thought you were going to stay with us."
"I can't be doing that," Grant answered easily. "I 've got my business over there. And I 've got to be making my way in the world."
"And why can't you stay and do it here?" the old man went on.
"Ah, sure, what would I be doing here?" Grant began impatiently. "There 's nothing for a man here. On the other side I 've got a place of my own, made by my own hands in twelve years. That's something, is n't it?"
"There 's no use talking to you," his father said resignedly. "If you must go, you must go. But if you were wise, Willie John, you would take whatever money you 've made in America and buy that place of Peter McKenna's down the road. You 'd get it cheap now. And after I 'm gone the farm goes to you and Joe. If you have n't got enough money I 'll lend it to you."
"No, thank you," Grant replied a little surlily. "I 'll get back to my own place."
"Ah, well—" his father turned back to his paper—"have it your own way."
Joe sent the rod swishing through the air a couple of times. He turned to Grant with a quick smile.
"It's not back to your business you want to be getting, Willie John," he laughed. "You want to be getting back to where the good times are. In a week or two you 'll be walking up Broadway, looking at the big buildings you do be telling about. Or going down Fifth Avenue, maybe, riding in a motor-car. Or hanging round all day drinking highballs with the millionaires. That's what you will be after. Business!"
Grant turned on him with a sudden gust of anger.
"I want to tell you something, Joe," he whipped back: "I'm up in the morning at half-past six. I 've got the place open by eight. It's seldom I 'm through before ten at night—and twelve of a Saturday night. Do you know, this is the first holiday I 've had for twelve years, barring Sundays and bank holidays! And on them I 'm too tired to do anything. I 'm as hard worked as you are."
"I 'm afraid you 're worse," the brother replied. He looked keenly at the hitch of the whipcord to the haft of the rod. "It's seldom we can't get a day off when there 's a fair on, or a good horse-race, or a coursing-match. What would life be if we couldn't?" He swished the rod through the air again. "And as for your father—" he took a sidelong smiling look at the old man—"he 's hardly ever at home now since they elected him to the County Council."
"To get on in the world," Grant said sententiously, "you 've got to work night, noon, and morning. There's no time for flying round to places of amusement, and chucking away hard-earned money. That's what's wrong with all this country."
Joe looked up at the rafters heavy with flitches of bacon; at the kettle purring on its crane. He glanced through the window to where the full haggard lay. His ever-ready smile crept about his eyes.
"Oh, I hardly think we 'll starve for a while," he laughed. "Will we, mother?"
The little old lady with the kittens smiled and shook her head.
"I 'm not saying anything," she said.
There was the sound of a gate clanging and the chime of voices. A dog growled and then broke into a bark of welcome. The voices came nearer to the door. Joe rose to open it. The mother put her head on one side to listen.
"Do you know who that is, Willie John?" she asked.
"No," Grant answered, "I do not."
"It 's Eunice Doran," she said. She waited an instant. A smile crept over her face. "Larry Doran's daughter, from beyond the hill."
"Oh, to be sure; I remember her," Grant smiled back.
Of course he did—a lank, gray-eyed girl, with a habit of staring you out of countenance. The last time he had seen her she was fifteen, with long arms and legs that seemed eternally in the way; and he recalled, with a smile, how in those days he had been a little in love with her, and they had passed many queer, awkward moments together.
A funny, pathetic thing! And as he thought of it a shutter in his mind opened and he saw again the girl he had left on the stoop in Schermerhorn Street, with her chic way and flashing eyes.
He wondered what she would think if she knew he had once had a boyish affair with this simple thing from his own townland; and he blushed in imagining her teasing laughter.
He warmed with a glow of pride as he thought of her,—of Miss Levine, as he somehow always called her to himself,—of her marvelous clothes, of her manicured hands and wonderful eyebrows, of her appreciation of the latest effort of a cinematograph comedian, and her up-to-dateness with the last flivver joke. He smiled, too, as he thought of the wonder with which this poor country girl would regard the metropolitan divinity.
She came into the room slowly; and, though he could distinguish little of her features or form, he felt a sense of shock, for somehow he had expected a lanky, overgrown girl with arms and hands like the awkward legs of a foal—and what he saw was a tall woman, as tall as he, who moved with the slow dignity of a queen. She threw her cloak off and Joe took it from her, and as it fell Grant caught one instantaneous glimpse of her that effectually wiped the Brooklyn girl from his mind, like a sponge passing over a chalked slate. He saw first the great mass of black hair knotted at the back of her head, which seemed less like hair than a splash of dim, vivid color; and from a side view he saw the small nose, with the sensitive nostrils, as clearly cut as the nose on an intaglio; and the line of chin sweeping down, as it were, in one soft, firm stroke. That was all he saw for a minute—that and the flush on her cheeks.
"How are you?" she said to his mother. "And how are you, Mr. Grant? And Joe?" She turned to Grant, looked at him for an instant and put out her hand. "And this is Willie John," she said. "You 've been a long time away, Willie John."
He saw, as he looked at her, how very gray her eyes were, and how very deep—like orifices through which light shone—and how very steady. He noticed that her mouth was firm, and that she seemed to have lived each instant of her twenty-seven years; and still she was a woman with the first flush of beauty on her. She turned away to talk to his mother and he saw for the first time that her servant-girl was with her. So engrossed had he been with her entry, and so shocked by seeing her beauty, that he had seen only her.
"I 'm going to have the flax pulled on the ten-acre," she was saying—and Grant felt every syllable of her low contralto strike him clear and compelling—"so I 'm asking the neighbors fair and early. My father 's dead, Willie John—" she turned to Grant for a moment—"and I 've the place on my hands."
"Ay; I heard that, Eunice," he said. "I was sorry to hear it."
"You 'll be going back soon?" she asked.
"I 'll be going back very soon now," he said. "In a couple of weeks at most."
"I 've been wanting him to stay and settle down," his father broke in; "but there 's no use talking to him."
"Ah, there's nothing for a man here," he answered disgustedly. "It's on the other side a man gets his chance—ay, and a woman, too, for that matter."
"Is that so?" Eunice uttered; and she caught him with her serious gray eyes.
"There was Joe Carragher's daughter, from Balleek," he instanced; "you knew her well. She went over six years ago and now she 's a lady's maid in one of the big houses on Fifth Avenue. A grand position!"
"Is that so?" she repeated; her eyes had narrowed a little and she was studying him intently.
"Then there was Patrick Hagan, the brother of the captain in the Dublin Fusiliers. He 's got a saloon on Third Avenue and does a grand business."
"That's the devil's business, Willie John," his mother said quietly. It was the first time since he came back that he had seen her without a smile on her lips.
"It's different on the other side, I tell you," Grant commented with asperity. "And there's Barney Doyle, that went over before me; he 's head waiter in one of the big places on Broadway. Do you know that fellow makes as much as seventy dollars a week in tips? Seventy dollars! Fourteen pounds!"
"His father was a great lawyer." Old Grant shook his head. "God be good to him! They called him the Star of the North."
"Fourteen pounds a week—in tips!"
Grant thought he could detect a chill, contemptuous tone in the Doran girl's voice; but he put the thought out of his head, for why should she be contemptuous? She drew her blue cloak about her.
"I think I 'll be going," she said.

"I 'll leave you a bit of the road," Grant offered.
They went out and down the loaning. Overhead a great white moon showed, a great silver plate of a thing whose beams scintillated in minute gossamer threads. Before them the road ran, as white as the moon, and everything showed in a faint purple—trees, fields, the singing river on the left of them, and the hill that rose between them and the sea. A little breeze was stirring and they could hear a soft soughing from the trees and a murmur from the beach. Somewhere behind them, on the Yellow Road probably, a corn-crake was venting its harmoniously raucous cry.
They stopped and looked about them. Beneath them the great plain of Louth lay, which Maeve of Connaught had once raided at the head of a hundred thousand men. And as Grant looked at it in the subtle moonlight the memory of forgotten legends came to him in vague uncoördinated fragments. There was Slieve Gullion behind him, where Cuala, the great artificer, hammered on his magic anvil night and day, and up whose slopes Finn MacCool had pursued the white deer without horns.
And in front of him was the sea, where for thrice three hundred years the Children of Lir had mourned in the guise of white swans. And on the hill beside him was the fortress of Bricriu of the poisoned tongue, whose satires killed men and withered the leaves on the green trees. Suddenly he heard Eunice's voice addressing him.
"I suppose you 've done well for yourself, Willie John?" she asked.
"Ay; I 've done well," he told her. "I 've got a business over there worth ten thousand dollars. And I 've built it up in twelve years."
"Ten thousand dollars!" she mused. "Two thousand pounds; that's a good deal. That's half as much as your brother Joe made, and it's a great deal more than I have myself."
"Brother Joe made!" he muttered in a tone of amazement.
"Yes—your brother Joe made," she answered naïvely. "He 's made as much as four thousand pounds trading in cattle between here and England, and buying horses for the Italian Government."
"Twenty thousand dollars!" Grant said, dumb-founded. "Brother Joe!"
"And you 've more than I have," she continued mercilessly. "The Cliff Farm is worth only eighteen hundred pounds. That's only nine thousand of your dollars."
He answered nothing, for a quick sense of shame suddenly suffused him when he remembered how much he had talked, and the others keeping so dumb. Something began tumbling very fast about him. They went up the hill and suddenly the sea stretched before them, sheer through to England, a vast surface of shimmering ripples, where the moon touched, and here and there white curling waves. And beneath them it murmured on the beach in a steady crooning. The breeze blew landward and pressed about them firmly in a cool, even motion. To the right the Cliff Farm lay, softly white, and a faint scent came down from its orchard. The servant-girl passed through the gate and up toward the house.
"America 's a great country!" Grant said aloud.
He did not know why he said it. Perhaps it was because he could find nothing else to say, and perhaps it was a sort of incantation, conjuring away the doubts that were rising in his mind.
Eunice made no answer. And as he looked at her, standing there in the moonlight and the breeze, the old affection he had for her a dozen years ago rose within him, and he wondered whether he should n't put his arm about her and kiss her for old times' sake. But the idea left him as soon as it came, for the thought of trifling with her seemed a desecration.
"It's a great place!" he said again lamely.
She swung around upon him suddenly, savagely, her head tilted, her eyes flashing. The cloak behind her stood backward with the breeze; and as he watched her, amazed, petrified almost, the thought of dead ancient Irish women flashed through his brain—Maeve, the fighting queen of Connaught; and Deirdre, who dashed herself dead against a rock; and Grainne, the king's daughter, who fled to follow Diarmuid of the Spears.
"Then why don't you stay there?" she uttered passionately.
"Why don't I stay there?" he repeated blankly.
"Why don't you stay there?" she said again. "You come back here—you and your like—with a smile on your mouth and a sneer in your eye. You come back here in your fine clothes, that you 've sweated day and night for, and taken charity to get—ay, charity! What's tips but charity?—And you lord it round for a while and tell us what fools we are—and patronize us. Patronize us!"
She swung round and fronted the low-lying land with the faint blue heat haze of summer over it, touched into silver in the June moon. The muscles of her throat were throbbing. She was poised on her feet like a bird ready for flight.
"Look down there at your father's farm," she told him. Her hand stretched toward it and her gray eyes blazed in his face. "Look at it well! Look at the corn that's green, and the rye ripening, and the stacked haggard. Look at the trees in the orchard and the fruit hanging from them, and the river alive with trout, and the mountain with its grouse and hares. And then go back to your grand business and fumble the halfpence in your greasy till!"
He said nothing. Mechanically his eyes followed her hand where it pointed, and every word ate its meaning into his brain as if etched by strong acid.
"Ay!" he said dully.
"Have you eyes to see, man?" She bent toward him with her hands outstretched and her face aflame with anger. "Or have you ears to hear? Or has groping for coppers made you blind like a mole? Or the tinkle of tuppences deafened you the like of a bat?"
"I 've got eyes," he answered sullenly.
"Use them, then!" she snapped. "And when you go back to your grand business, stop making a poor mouth about Ireland. Don't whine the like of a beggar in the street. Stop your talk about poverty-stricken Ireland, and oppressed Ireland and lazy Ireland. We 've got money here as well as you, for all your grand business; and we've got pride; and we 've got strength. And we don't want anybody talking about our sorrows, and the nations pitying us in the four corners of the earth."
He said nothing, but his face had gone white; and every now and then he winced, as though he had been caught by a whip. He wished to Heaven she would stop; and still, back in him, something had awakened that yearned to be lashed into life.
"I heard you wanted your father and mother to go back to America with you and partake of the grand business. Look at that farm-house again. Your grandfather built that with granite hewn from his own quarry. And you want them to leave that and to go off with you and grub in a huckster's booth! God's glory and the blue sky over us!"
There was the rapid flapping of wings and they saw a wedge of birds in the moonlight. Suddenly they caught the shrill clamor of the barnacle goose.
"Even the birds," she uttered with scorn, "even the birds have sense. They 're happy when they get back from roving. Not like you and your like, Willie John. If you want to go, go! And God go with you! If you want to stay, stay—and you're welcome. But don't come back for a while, croaking like a magpie chattering over a ruined hearth."
She turned to him, and the agitation and passion seemed to leave her by a great effort of will. Her hands unclenched and her voice grew calm, with even a queer crooning melody in it; but her bosom heaved tumultuously.
"I liked you once, Willie John," she said. "I thought there was the makings of a big man in you. I mind the time at the football, and you running down the field like a hare, and no one to catch or trip you. And at the fairs I mind you putting the horses through their paces like a jockey born. And at throwing the weight there was no one of your size or years that could best you. Ay! I mind you, and your dogs following you, and your head high up in the air. I thought well of you that time, Willie John. I thought there was no one like you." She raised herself to her full height and looked at him squarely. "But now," she said, "I 'd rather have a stray tinker that does be traveling the roads."
And scornfully she left him.

IV

He came into the kitchen, two evenings later, from the parlor. His father sat by the table, reading his paper. His mother pottered about the turf fire, teasing it into flame. In a corner Joe sat, polishing the barrel of a breech-loading fowling-piece with an old rag. His father caught the glimpse of paper in his hand.
"Were you writing, Willie John?"
"Ay," Grant answered; "I was writing a letter to America."
He moved toward the fireplace and turned slowly about again to his father.
"You were saying," he asked, "that that place of McKenna's was for sale. I wonder how much he 'd want for it."
"He 'd take four thousand pounds," his father answered. "Maybe less."
"I 'm afraid I have n't got that much." Grant shook his head. "I 've only two thousand."
"We can lend you the difference, Willie John," Joe broke in. He squinted down the barrel of the rifle. "Can't we, Dad?"
"Ay sure!" his father answered.
"I 'm much obliged to both of you," Grant said.

He reached for his hat.
"Are you going out, Willie John?" his mother asked.
"I thought I 'd go up and call on Eunice Doran," Grant answered her. "I might as well be neighborly."
He went out, and there was silence in the kitchen for a few minutes. Joe clicked the lock of the gun.
"Do you mind that wild gander I put a ring on three years ago?" he asked his father. "It's back again. I saw it over the marshes to-day."
"It 'll take a mate and settle down in the marsh now." His father nodded. "It took it three years to find out that home is a good place. It's a queer, silly bird—the barnacle goose."
A little ripple of laughter came from the mother's lips as she stood over and poked the turf. The elder Grant looked up, astonished.
"What are you laughing at, Sarah Ann?" he inquired.
"I was thinking," she answered.
"What was it you were thinking about?" he pursued.
"Oh nothing!" she parried. "I was just thinking."
And she went on teasing the fire, while a subtle, affectionate smile played about the corners of her eyes.

Done is a Battle

By William Dunbar

Done is a battle on the dragon black,
Our champion Christ confoundit has his force;
The yetis of hell are broken with a crack,
The sign triumphal raisit is of the cross,
The devillis trymmillis with hiddous voce,
The saulis are borrowit and to the bliss can go,
Christ with his bloud our ransonis dois indoce:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

Dungan is the deidly dragon Lucifer,
The cruewall serpent with the mortal stang;
The auld kene tiger, with his teith on char,
Whilk in a wait has lyen for us so lang,
Thinking to grip us in his clawis strang;
The merciful Lord wald nocht that it were so,
He made him for to failye of that fang.
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

He for our saik that sufferit to be slane,
And lyk a lamb in sacrifice was dicht,
Is lyk a lion risen up agane,
And as a gyane raxit him on hicht;
Sprungen is Aurora radious and bricht,
On loft is gone the glorious Apollo,
The blissful day departit fro the nicht:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

The grit victour again is rissen on hicht,
That for our querrell to the deth was woundit;
The sun that wox all pale now shynis bricht,
And, derkness clearit, our faith is now refoundit;
The knell of mercy fra the heaven is soundit,
The Christin are deliverit of their wo,
The Jowis and their errour are confoundit:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

The fo is chasit, the battle is done ceis,
The presone broken, the jevellouris fleit and flemit;
The weir is gon, confermit is the peis,
The fetteris lowsit and the dungeon temit,
The ransoun made, the prisoneris redeemit;
The field is won, owrecomen is the fo,
Dispuilit of the treasure that he yemit:
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

Sonnet 17

By Richard Barnfield

Cherry-lipt Adonis in his snowie shape,
Might not compare with his pure ivorie white,
On whose faire front a poet's pen may write,
Whose roseate red excels the crimson grape,
His love-enticing delicate soft limbs,
Are rarely fram'd t'intrap poore gazine eies:
His cheeks, the lillie and carnation dies,
With lovely tincture which Apollo's dims.
His lips ripe strawberries in nectar wet,
His mouth a Hive, his tongue a hony-combe,
Where Muses (like bees) make their mansion.
His teeth pure pearle in blushing correll set.
Oh how can such a body sinne-procuring,
Be slow to love, and quicke to hate, enduring?

Bede's Death Song

By The Venerable Bede

Fore there neidfaerae naenig uuiurthit
thoncsnotturra than him tharf sie
to ymbhycggannae aer his hiniongae
huaet his gastae godaes aeththa yflaes
aefter deothdaege doemid uueorthae.



The National Gallery

By Alice Corkran

"DIGNITY AND IMPUDENCE" (604)
BY SIR EDWIN LANDSEER, R.A

LESSER LIGHTS
YET GREAT
"A man's a man
for a' that."



Sir David Wilkie (1785–1841) was the son of a Scotch minister. He was born in November 1785. The child was father to the man, for nothing pleased the laddie so much as scribbling in pencil on his copybook and on every piece of paper he could lay hands on. He never sought to illustrate mythological subjects or fairy stories. It was always the animals, the surrounding objects, the people about him, which the little mannikin was drawing. At last he was allowed to cultivate his gift, and, in 1799, when he was just fourteen, he was placed in the Trustees Academy at Edinburgh, and, in 1805, he became a student of the Royal Academy schools.

Oh these happy student days, how Wilkie loved them! How hard he worked, how frugal he was; all this is related in his biography. He had many friends, amongst whom was Haydon, the self-centred, the warm-hearted, the unfortunate painter. It was in rendering the actual life around him that Wilkie from the first excelled, and it was this talent that had been foreshadowed in his childish scribblings. "I could draw before I could read, and paint before I could spell," he says.

He has been compared to Goldsmith, the Goldsmith of art; the comedy and tragedy of life as it went on around him, its humour, its delicious contradictions, its simple yet often heart-breaking pathos, charmed and attracted him. Everything that was sincere, however humble, interested him. If we compare him with Hogarth, we will see that as Hogarth saw nothing but the baseness of life, Wilkie saw its pity and its innocent happiness. He inspired great affection, and he gave it back with all the strength of his nature. Haydon has told us that the "Village Politicians" was exhibited in 1806, and was very favourably noticed in the papers. When he read the notices, "I was in the clouds," says Haydon, "hurried over my breakfast, rushed away, met Jackson, who joined me, and we both bolted into Wilkie's room. I roared out 'Wilkie, my boy, your name's in the paper.' 'Is it rea-al-ly?' said David. I read the puff. We huzzaed, and, shaking hands, all three danced round the table until we were tired." Next day the friends went arm in arm to the Gallery. There was no getting near. Wilkie, pale as death, kept saying, "Dear, dear, it's just wonderful." From that time forward his success was assured.

Here is "The Blind Fiddler". Wilkie was a great admirer of the Dutch school, and, in painting this picture, he borrowed one by Teniers, and kept it by him all the time he was at work. It shows the interior of a farmhouse; the mother tosses her baby to the tune of the fiddler, the father snaps his fingers, the boy, making a pair of bellows his fiddle, 203the poker his bow, mimics the musician, the girl listens intently; even the dog is all attention to the music. The picture is full of elaborate details and none are far-fetched. It is a scene that might take place in any happy home circle. Another picture, "The Village Festival", and "The Bagpiper" are pages torn from the life of the rustics about.

Wilkie had a second manner in which he became an historical painter. His most celebrated historical picture was "John Knox Preaching to the Lords of the Congregation." Wilkie grew more and more in popularity. He was made an Associate in 1809, and a full R.A. in 1811. After the death of Sir Thomas Lawrence, he was appointed painter in ordinary to his Majesty, and, after the death of Sir Henry Raeburn, limner to the King in Scotland. Then came a short period of illness and his sudden death. He had gone in search of health to the Holy Land and to Egypt. He died on the 1st June, 1841. His body was committed to the deep, and Turner painted the scene. "I wish I could paint them blacker," he said, when some one objected to the black sails in the picture.

Let us now look at two strange pictures by Blake, the poet-painter (1757–1827). He was a visionary, and he painted visions; he was a poet with the heart of a child and a child's imagination. He wrote the "Songs of Innocence," those lovely songs pure and bright as the voice of spring. He ornamented each song with a fanciful border, printed poem and design in wonderful colours. It 204was his dead brother, he said, who appeared in a dream and taught him thus to ornament his poems.

Wordsworth and Shelley were singing of the war of the spiritual and the material world, and Blake, enraptured by Wordsworth's poetry, dreamt of bringing mystic Swedenborgianism into art. He lived among dreams and spirits, and people called him mad. They did not buy his pictures, they paid no attention to his poetry, but he was content. In the picture of "The Spiritual Form of Pitt guiding Behemoth" (1110), we see the spiritual form of Pitt as Blake imagined it. "Pitt," he says, in his catalogue to the pictures he exhibited, "is that angel who pleads to perform the Almighty's order." The picture really means the power of statesmanship to control the brute forces. It is full of a strange symbolism. I could write to you much about Blake's beautiful soul. He lived and died in great poverty, always sustained by the love of his wife, and for all the misery of his outward circumstances he was happy. "May God make this world to you, my child, as beautiful as it has been to me," he said, stroking the hair of a little girl who had been brought by her mother to see him. As he lay dying he sang songs to his Maker. His life is a beautiful and unique example of the spirit sustained by the love of his wife, and for all the misery of his outward circumstances he was happy. "May God make this world to you, my child, as beautiful as it has been to me," he said, stroking the hair of a little girl who had been brought by her mother to see him. As he lay dying he sang songs to his Maker. His life is a beautiful and unique example of the spirit over all the diverse circumstances of the material world. His other picture in this Gallery is the "Procession from Calvary" (1164).

Landseer (1802–1873) contrasts with this mystic painter. He is the painter of dogs and of all the dear dumb creatures that we love. He knew all their 205attitudes, and their least movements possessed a meaning for him. He sympathised with them so much that he made their expression quite human. For this he has been found fault with, and yet it is this which draws us to him. The texture of the animals' coats, the fire or the wistfulness of their eyes, the eager poise of their bodies in action, the beautiful laxity of their lines in repose, all this he studied. He has gained his knowledge by his loving watchfulness. He entered the Academy schools when he was thirteen. "Where is my little dog boy?" Fuseli, the keeper, used to ask when Landseer was missing. I think the animals understood and loved him as much as he loved and understood them. A story was told me by a friend of his that I have never seen in print. Landseer had a beautiful dog, which he was always painting. The poor dog did not like to be made such constant use of, and he plainly showed his reluctance, and told his master that he thought it unfair. One day Landseer said to him, "This is the last time I shall ask you to sit, the very last," so the dog wagged his tail and sat beautifully and patiently to the end. When the picture was done Landseer renewed his promise, and the dog henceforth took his ease and was happy. One day my friend came on a visit to the artist. "This is a jolly dog of yours; I should like to paint him," he said. "Certainly," replied Landseer, forgetting all about his promise, and he whistled to the dog, and bade him sit. The dog, said my friend, sat up surprised; he looked at his master, and, when the 206signal was renewed, he threw his head back and uttered one long dismal howl, sprung out of the window and disappeared. They sought for him everywhere, but Landseer had broken his promise, and the dog had vanished. I hope he came back after the visitor had left.

Landseer was very young when he began painting. His father was an engraver, and he educated his sons in art. At thirteen years of age the boy won a medal from the Society of Arts for the drawing of a large Alpine mastiff. From that time to the year of his death, in 1873, his life was a series of triumphs. He was elected an Associate of the Academy when he was twenty-four, and four years later he was made a full Academician. He won the friendship of many remarkable men, among others of Sydney Smith and Dickens. He was as great a social, as he was an artistic, success; he sang beautifully; he told stories with great zest and point. The Queen and Prince Albert honoured him with their friendship, and the Queen knighted him in 1850.

"Dignity and Impudence", is a perfect bit of character drawing. Grafton is the name of the bloodhound who stands alert, with chest thrown back and head uplifted, intently watching. His paw hangs over the lintel of his kennel, but he is not fussed; he is quietly surveying the stranger who is entering, and whom we do not see. He is "Dignity." A small Scotch terrier represents "Impudence." He sits in the same kennel, and he is all in a flurry at the approach of the stranger; we seem to hear him bark. It is a perfect representation of dignity and impudence. See how beautifully the glossy hair of the animals' coats is painted, their eyes speak. Then look at "Shoeing the Bay Mare". A farrier is trying on a shoe on the hind foot of a mare, whose name was "Old Betty," and she stands in a characteristic attitude; on her neck is no halter, for "Old Betty" would never wear one. She used to love to go to the blacksmith to have her shoe put on. The bloodhound who is watching is called Lama, and the donkey in the background, a grey furry donkey, is also watching. The farrier is a portrait. I want you to notice the glossiness and crispness of the hide of the animals. It is really a portrait group. We seem to know the three animals—"Betty," the mare of character, "Lama," the bloodhound of observation, and the dear old ass behind—all are watching intently the farrier at his work.

"The King Charles Spaniels" and "The Sleeping Bloodhound" are the beautiful representations of three animals who all died violent deaths. The bloodhound had fallen asleep upon a balcony, awaiting his master's return. He heard the wheels of his carriage in the distance, and, leaping down, missed his balance, fell between twenty and thirty feet, and died during the night. Landseer painted the splendid dog while he lay dead. The little spaniels also died from falls.

Landseer, the lover of animals, died in 1873, and received a public funeral in St. Paul's Cathedral. The design is his of the great lions at the foot of Nelson's statue in Trafalgar Square.

Bush Cats

By Henry Lawson



The Tabby
Henri Rousseau

"Domestic cats" we mean—the descendants of cats who came from the northern world during the last hundred odd years. We do not know the name of the vessel in which the first Thomas and his Maria came out to Australia, but we suppose that it was one of the ships of the First Fleet. Most likely Maria had kittens on the voyage—two lots, perhaps—the majority of which were buried at sea; and no doubt the disembarkation caused her much maternal anxiety.

The feline race has not altered much in Australia, from a physical point of view—not yet. The rabbit has developed into something like a cross between a kangaroo and a possum, but the bush has not begun to develop the common cat. She is just as sedate and motherly as the mummy cats of Egypt were, but she takes longer strolls of nights, climbs gum-trees instead of roofs, and hunts stranger vermin than ever came under the observation of her northern ancestors. Her views have widened. She is mostly thinner than the English farm cat—which is, they say, on account of eating lizards.

English rats and English mice—we say "English" because everything which isn't Australian in Australia, IS English (or British)—English rats and English mice are either rare or non-existent in the bush; but the hut cat has a wider range for game. She is always dragging in things which are unknown in the halls of zoology; ugly, loathsome, crawling abortions which have not been classified yet—and perhaps could not be.

The Australian zoologist ought to rake up some more dead languages, and then go Out Back with a few bush cats.
The Australian bush cat has a nasty, unpleasant habit of dragging a long, wriggling, horrid, black snake—she seems to prefer black snakes—into a room where there are ladies, proudly laying it down in a conspicuous place (usually in front of the exit), and then looking up for approbation. She wonders, perhaps, why the visitors are in such a hurry to leave.

Pussy doesn't approve of live snakes round the place, especially if she has kittens; and if she finds a snake in the vicinity of her progeny—well, it is bad for that particular serpent.

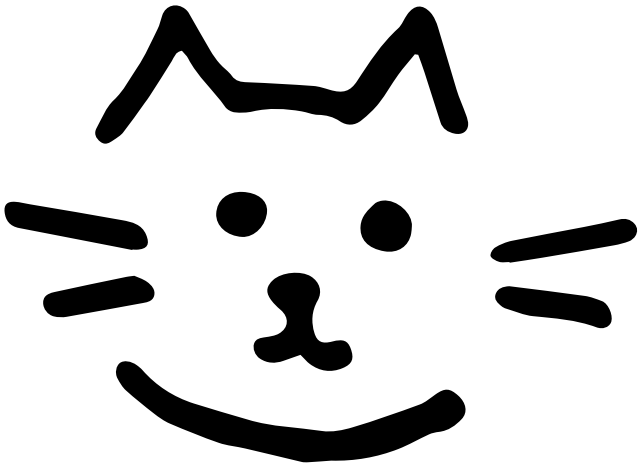
This brings recollections of a neighbour's cat who went out in the scrub, one midsummer's day, and found a brown snake. Her name—the cat's name—was Mary Ann. She got hold of the snake all right, just within an inch of its head; but it got the rest of its length wound round her body and squeezed about eight lives out of her. She had the presence of mind to keep her hold; but it struck her that she was in a fix, and that if she wanted to save her ninth life, it wouldn't be a bad idea to go home for help. So she started home, snake and all.

The family were at dinner when Mary Ann came in, and, although she stood on an open part of the floor, no one noticed her for a while. She couldn't ask for help, for her mouth was too full of snake. By-and-bye one of the girls glanced round, and then went over the table, with a shriek, and out of the back door. The room was cleared very quickly. The eldest boy got a long-handled shovel, and in another second would have killed more cat than snake; but his father interfered. The father was a shearer, and Mary Ann was a favourite cat with him. He got a pair of shears from the shelf and deftly shore off the snake's head, and one side of Mary Ann's whiskers. She didn't think it safe to let go yet. She kept her teeth in the neck until the selector snipped the rest of the snake off her. The bits were carried out on a shovel to die at sundown. Mary Ann had a good drink of milk, and then got her tongue out and licked herself back into the proper shape for a cat; after which she went out to look for that snake's mate. She found it, too, and dragged it home the same evening.

Cats will kill rabbits and drag them home. We knew a fossicker whose cat used to bring him a bunny nearly every night. The fossicker had rabbits for breakfast until he got sick of them, and then he used to swap them with a butcher for meat. The cat was named Ingersoll, which indicates his sex and gives an inkling to his master's religious and political opinions. Ingersoll used to prospect round in the gloaming until he found some rabbit holes which showed encouraging indications. He would shepherd one hole for an hour or so every evening until he found it was a duffer, or worked it out; then he would shift to another. One day he prospected a big hollow log with a lot of holes in it, and more going down underneath. The indications were very good, but Ingersoll had no luck. The game had too many ways of getting out and in. He found that he could not work that claim by himself, so he floated it into a company. He persuaded several cats from a neighbouring selection to take shares, and they watched the holes together, or in turns—they worked shifts. The dividends more than realised even their wildest expectations, for each cat took home at least one rabbit every night for a week.

A selector started a vegetable garden about the time when rabbits were beginning to get troublesome up country. The hare had not shown itself yet. The farmer kept quite a regiment of cats to protect his garden—and they protected it. He would shut the cats up all day with nothing to eat, and let them out about sundown; then they would mooch off to the turnip patch like farm-labourers going to work. They would drag the rabbits home to the back door, and sit there and watch them until the farmer opened the door and served out the ration of milk. Then the cats would turn in. He nearly always found a semi-circle of dead rabbits and watchful cats round the door in the morning. They sold the product of their labour direct to the farmer for milk. It didn't matter if one cat had been unlucky—had not got a rabbit—each had an equal share in the general result. They were true socialists, those cats.

One of those cats was a mighty big Tom, named Jack. He was death on rabbits; he would work hard all night, laying for them and dragging them home. Some weeks he would graft every night, and at other times every other night, but he was generally pretty regular. When he reckoned he had done an extra night's work, he would take the next night off and go three miles to the nearest neighbour's to see his Maria and take her out for a stroll. Well, one evening Jack went into the garden and chose a place where there was good cover, and lay low. He was a bit earlier than usual, so he thought he would have a doze till rabbit time. By-and-bye he heard a noise, and slowly, cautiously opening one eye, he saw two big ears sticking out of the leaves in front of him. He judged that it was an extra big bunny, so he put some extra style into his manoeuvres. In about five minutes he made his spring. He must have thought (if cats think) that it was a whopping, old-man rabbit, for it was a pioneer hare—not an ordinary English hare, but one of those great coarse, lanky things which the bush is breeding. The selector was attracted by an unusual commotion and a cloud of dust among his cabbages, and came along with his gun in time to witness the fight. First Jack would drag the hare, and then the hare would drag Jack; sometimes they would be down together, and then Jack would use his hind claws with effect; finally he got his teeth in the right place, and triumphed. Then he started to drag the corpse home, but he had to give it best and ask his master to lend a hand. The selector took up the hare, and Jack followed home, much to the family's surprise. He did not go back to work that night; he took a spell. He had a drink of milk, licked the dust off himself, washed it down with another drink, and sat in front of the fire and thought for a goodish while. Then he got up, walked over to the corner where the hare was lying, had a good look at it, came back to the fire, sat down again, and thought hard. He was still thinking when the family retired.



The Story of the Girl Forger

Romances of the Old Town of Edinburgh

By Alexander Leighton



T is a common thing for writers of a certain class, when they want to produce the feeling of wonder in their readers, to introduce some frantic action, and then to account for it by letting out the secret that the actor was mad. The trick is not so necessary as it seems, for the strength of human passions is a potentiality only limited by experience; and so it is that a sane person may under certain stimulants do the maddest thing in the world. The passion itself is always true, it is only the motive that may be false; and therefore it is that in narrating for your amusement, perhaps I may add instruction, the following singular story—traces of the main parts of which I got in the old books of a former procurator-fiscal—I assume that there was no more insanity in the principal actor, Euphemia, or, as she was called, Effie, Carr, when she brought herself within the arms of the law, than there is in you, when now you are reading the story of her strange life. She was the only daughter of John Carr, a grain merchant, who lived in Bristo Street. It would be easy to ascribe to her all the ordinary and extraordinary charms that are thought so necessary to embellish heroines; but as we are not told what these were in her case, we must be contented with the assurance that nature had been kind enough to her to give her power over the hearts of men. We shall be nearer our purpose when we state, what is necessary to explain a peculiar part of our story, that her father, in consequence of his own insufficient education, had got her trained to help him in keeping his accounts with the farmers, and in writing up his books; nay, she enjoyed the privilege of writing his drafts upon the Bank of Scotland, which the father contrived to sign, though in his own illiterate way, and with a peculiarity which it would not have been easy to imitate.

But our gentle clerk did not consider these duties imposed upon her by her father as excluding her either from gratifying her love of domestic habits by assisting her mother in what at that time was denominated hussyskep or housekeeping, or from a certain other gratification, which might without a hint from us be anticipated—no other than the luxury of falling head and ears, and heart too we fancy, in love with a certain dashing young[192] student of the name of Robert Stormonth, then attending the University more for the sake of polish than of mere study; for he was the son of the proprietor of Kelton, and required to follow no profession. How Effie got entangled with this youth we have no means of knowing, so we must be contented with the Scotch proverb—

"Tell me where the flea may bite,
And I will tell where love may light."

The probability is that, from the difference of their stations and the retiring nature of our gentle clerk, we shall be safe in assuming that he had, as the saying goes, been smitten by her charms in some of those street encounters, where there is more of Love's work done than in "black-footed" tea coteries expressly held for the accommodation of Cupid. And that the smitting was a genuine feeling we are not left to doubt, for, in addition to the reasons we shall afterwards have too good occasion to know, he treated Effie, not as those wild students who are great men's sons do "the light o' loves" they meet in their escapades; for he intrusted his secrets to her, he took such small counsel from her poor head as a "learned clerk" might be supposed able to give; nay, he told her of his mother, and how one day he hoped to be able to introduce her at Kelton as his wife. All[193] which Effie repaid with the devotedness of that most wonderful affection called the first or virgin love—the purest, the deepest, the most thoroughgoing of all the emotions of the human heart. But as yet he had not conceded to her wish that he should consent to their love being made known to Effie's father and mother: love is only a leveller to itself and its object; the high-born youth, inured to refined manners, shrunk from a family intercourse, which put him too much in mind of the revolt he had made against the presumed wishes and intentions of his proud parents. Wherein, after all, he was only true to the instincts of that institution, apparently so inhumane as well as unchristian in its exclusiveness, called aristocracy; and yet with the excuse that its roots are pretty deeply set in human nature.

But, proud as he was, Bob Stormonth the younger, of Kelton, was amenable to the obligations of a necessity, forged by his own imprudent hands. He had, by a fast mode of living, got into debt—a condition from which his father, a stern man, had relieved him twice before, but with a threat on the last occasion that if he persevered in his prodigality he would withdraw from him his yearly allowance, and throw him upon his own resources. The threat proved ineffectual, and this young heir of entail, with all his pride, was once in the grasp of low-born creditors: nay, things in this evil direction had gone so far that writs were out against him, and one in the form of a caption was already in the hands of a messenger-at-arms. That the debts were comparatively small in amount was no amelioration where the purse was all but empty; and he had exhausted the limited exchequers of his chums, which with college youths was, and is, not difficult to do. So the gay Bob was driven to his last shift, and that, as is generally the case, was a mean one; for necessity, as the mother of inventions, does not think it proper to limit her births to genteel or noble devices to please her proud consort. He even had recourse to poor Effie to help him; and, however ridiculous this may seem, there were reasons that made the application appear not so desperate as some of his other schemes. It was only the caption that as yet quickened his fears; and as the sum for which the writ was issued was only twenty pounds, it was not, after all, so much beyond the power of a clerk.

It was during one of their ordinary walks in the Meadows that the pressing necessity was opened by Stormonth to the vexed and terrified girl. He told her that, but for the small help he required in the meantime, all would be ruined. The wrath of his father would be excited once more, and probably to the exclusion of all reconciliation; and he himself compelled to flee, but whither he knew not. He had his plan prepared, and proposed to Effie, who had no means of her own, to take a loan of the sum out of her father's cash-box—words very properly chosen according to the euphemistic policy of the devil, but Effie's genuine spirit was roused and alarmed.

"Dreadful!" she whispered, as if afraid that the night-wind would carry her words to honest ears. "Besides," she continued, "my father, who is a hard man, keeps his desk lockit."
Words which took Stormonth aback, for even he saw there was here a necessity as strong as his own; yet the power of invention went to work again.

"Listen, Effie," said he. "If you cannot help me, it is not likely we shall meet again. I am desperate, and will go into the army."
The ear of Effie was chained to a force which was direct upon the heart. She trembled and looked wistfully into his face, even as if by that look she could extract from him some other device less fearful by which she might have the power of retaining him for so short a period as a day.

"You draw out your father's drafts on the bank, Effie," he continued. "Write one out for me, and I will put your father's name to it. You can draw the money. I will be saved from ruin; and your father will never know."

A proposal which again brought a shudder over the girl.

"Is it Robert Stormonth who asks me to do this thing?" she whispered again.

"No," said he; "for I am not myself. Yesterday, and before the messenger was after me, I would have shrunk from the suggestion. I am not myself, I say, Effie. Ay or no; keep me or lose me,—that is the alternative."

"Oh, I cannot," was the language of her innocence, and for which he was prepared; for the stimulant was again applied in the most powerful of all forms—the word farewell was sounded in her ear.

"Stop, Robert; let me think." But there was no thought, only the heart beating wildly. "I will do it; and may the penalty be mine, and mine only."

So it was: "even virtue's self turns vice when misapplied." What her mind shrank from was embraced by the heart as a kind of sacred duty of a love making a sacrifice for the object of its first worship. It was arranged; and as the firmness of a purpose is often in proportion to the prior disinclination, so Effie's determination to save her lover from ruin was forthwith put in execution; nay, there was even a touch of the heroine in her, so wonderfully does the heart, acting under its primary instincts, sanctify the device which favours its affection. That same evening Effie Carr wrote out the draft for twenty pounds on the Bank of Scotland, gave it to Stormonth, who from a signature of the father's, also furnished by her, perpetrated the forgery—a crime at that time punishable by death. The draft so signed was returned to Effie. Next forenoon she went to the bank, as she had often done for her father before; and the document being in her handwriting, as prior ones of the same kind had also been, no scrutinising eye was turned to the signature. The money was handed over, but not counted by the recipient, as before had been her careful habit—a circumstance with its effect to follow in due time. Meanwhile Stormonth was at a place of appointment out of the reach of the executor of the law, and was soon found out by Effie, who gave him the money with trembling hands. For this surely a kiss was due. We do not know; but she returned with the satisfaction, overcoming all the impulses of fear and remorse,

that she had saved the object of her first and only love from ruin and flight.

But even then the reaction was on the spring;[198] the rebound was to be fearful and fatal. The teller at the bank had been struck with Effie's manner; and the non-counting of the notes had roused a suspicion, which fought its way even against the improbability of a mere girl perpetrating a crime from which females are generally free. He examined the draft, and soon saw that the signature was a bad imitation. Thereupon a messenger was despatched to Bristo Street for inquiry. John Carr, taken by surprise, declared that the draft, though written by the daughter, was forged—the forgery being in his own mind attributed to George Lindsay, his young salesman. Enough this for the bank, who had in the first place only to do with the utterer, against whom their evidence as yet only lay. Within a few hours afterwards Effie Carr was in the Tolbooth, charged with the crime of forging a cheque on her father's account-current.

The news soon spread over Edinburgh—at that time only an overgrown village, in so far as regarded local facilities for the spread of wonders. It had begun there, where the mother was in recurring faints, the father in distraction and not less mystery, George Lindsay in terror and pity. And here comes in the next strange turn of our story. Lindsay all of a sudden declared he was the person who imitated the name—a device of the yearning heart to save the girl of his affection from the gallows, and clutched at by the mother and father as a means of their daughter's redemption. One of those thinly-sown beings who are cold-blooded by nature, who take on love slowly but surely, and seem fitted to be martyrs, Lindsay defied all consequences, so that it might be that Effie Carr should escape an ignominious death. Nor did he take time for further deliberation; in less than half an hour he was in the procurator-fiscal's office; the willing self-criminator; the man who did the deed; the man who was ready to die for his young mistress and his love. His story, too, was as ready as it was truth-seeming. He declared that he had got Effie to write out the draft as if commissioned by John Carr; that he took it away, and with his own hands added the name; that he had returned the cheque to Effie to go with it to the bank, and had received the money from her on her return. The consequence was his wish, and it was inevitable. That same day George Lindsay was lodged also in the Tolbooth, satisfied that he had made a sacrifice of his life for one whom he had loved for years, and who yet had never shown him even a symptom of hope that his love would be returned.

All which proceedings soon came on the wings of rumour to the ears of Robert Stormonth, who was not formed to be a martyr even for a love which was to him as true as his nature would permit. He saw his danger, because he did not see the character of a faithful girl who would die rather than compromise her lover. He fled—aided probably by that very money he had wrung out of the hands of the devoted girl; nor was his disappearance connected with the tragic transaction; for, as we have said, the connexion between him and Effie had been kept a secret, and his flight could be sufficiently accounted for by his debt.

Meanwhile the precognitions or examination of the parties went on, and with a result as strange as it was puzzling to the officials. Effie was firm to her declaration that she not only wrote the body of the cheque, but attached to it the name of her father, and had appropriated the money in a way which she declined to state. On the other hand, Lindsay was equally stanch to his statement made to the procurator-fiscal, that he had got Effie to write the draft, had forged the name to it, and got the money from her. The authorities very soon saw that they had got more than the law bargained for or wanted; nor was the difficulty likely soon to be solved. The two parties could not both be guilty, according to the evidence, nor could one of them be guilty to the exclusion of the other; neither, when the balance[201] was cast, was there much difference in the weight of the scales, because while it was in one view more likely that Lindsay signed the false name, it was beyond doubt that Effie wrote the body of the document, and she had moreover presented it. But was it for the honour of the law that people should be hanged on a likelihood? It was a new case without new heads to decide it, and it made no difference that the body of the people, who soon became inflamed on the subject, took the part of the girl and declared against the man. It was easy to be seen that the tracing of the money would go far to solve the mystery; and accordingly there was a strict search made in Lindsay's lodgings, as well as in Effie's private repositories at home. We need not say with what effect, where the money was over the Border and away. It was thus in all views more a case for Astræa than common heads; but then she had gone to heaven. The Lord Advocate soon saw that the law was likely to be caught in its own meshes. The first glimpse was got of the danger of hanging so versatile, so inconsistent, so unsearchable a creature as a human being on a mere confession of guilt. That that had been the law of Scotland in all time, nay, that it had been the law of the world from the beginning, there was no doubt. Who could know the murderer or the forger better than the murderer or the forger themselves? and would any one throw away his life on a false plea? The reasoning does not exhaust the deep subject; there remains the presumption that the criminal will, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, deny, and deny boldly. But our case threw a new light on the old law, and the Lord Advocate was slow to indict where he saw not only reasons for failure, but also rising difficulties which might strike at the respect upon which the law was founded.

The affair hung loose for a time; and Lindsay's friends, anxious to save him, got him induced to run his letters,—the effect of which is to give the prosecutor a period wherein to try the culprit, on failure of which the person charged is free. The same was done by Effie's father; but quickened as the Lord Advocate was, the difficulty still met him like a ghost that would not be laid,—that if he put Effie at the bar, Lindsay would appear in the witness-box; and if he put Lindsay on his trial, Effie would swear he was innocent; and as for two people forging the same name, the thing had never been heard of. And so it came to pass that the authorities at last, feeling they were in a cleft stick, where if they relieved one hand the other would be caught, were inclined to liberate both panels. But the bank was at that time preyed upon by forgeries, and were determined to make an example now when they had a culprit, or perhaps two. The consequence was, that the authorities were forced to give way, vindicating their right of choice as to the party they should arraign. That party was Effie Carr; and the choice justified itself by two considerations: that she, by writing and uttering the cheque, was so far committed by evidence exterior to her self-inculpation; and secondly, that Lindsay might break down in the witness-box under a searching examination. Effie was therefore indicted and placed at the bar. She pleaded guilty, but the prosecutor notwithstanding led evidence; and at length Lindsay appeared as a witness for the defence. The people who crowded the court had been aware from report of the condition in which Lindsay stood; but the deep silence which reigned throughout the hall when he was called to answer evinced the doubt whether he would stand true to his self-impeachment. The doubt was soon solved. With a face on which no trace of fear could be perceived, with a voice in which there was no quaver, he swore that it was he who signed the draft and sent Effie for the money. The oscillation of sympathy, which had for a time been suspended, came round again to the thin pale girl, who sat there looking wistfully and wonderingly into the face of the witness; and the murmuring approbation that broke out, in spite of the shrill "Silence" of the crier, expressed at once admiration of the man—criminal as he swore himself to be—and pity for the accused. What could the issue be? Effie was acquitted, and Lindsay sent back to gaol. Was he not to be tried? The officials felt that the game was dangerous. If Lindsay had stood firm in the box, had not Effie sat firm at the bar, with the very gallows in her eye; and would not she, in her turn, be as firm in the box? All which was too evident; and the consequence in the end came to be, that Lindsay was in the course of a few days set at liberty.

And now there occurred proceedings not less strange in the house of John Carr. Lindsay was turned off, because, though he had made a sacrifice of himself to save the life of Effie, the sacrifice was only that due to the justice he had offended. The dismissal was against the protestations of Effie, who alone knew he was innocent; and she had to bear the further grief of learning that Stormonth had left the city on the very day whereon she was apprehended—a discovery this too much for a frame always weak, and latterly so wasted by her confinement in prison, and the anguish of mind consequent upon her strange position. And so it came to pass, in a few more days, that she took to her bed, a wan, wasted, heart-broken creature; but stung as she had been by the conduct of the man she had offered to die to save, she felt even more the sting of ingratitude in herself for not divulging to her mother as much of her secret as would have saved Lindsay from dismissal; for she was now more and more satisfied that it was the strength of his love for her that had driven him to his great and perilous sacrifice. Nor could her mother, as she bent over her daughter, understand why her liberation should have been followed by so much of sorrow; nay, loving her as she did,

she even reproached her as being ungrateful to God.

"Mother," said the girl, "I have a secret that lies like a stane upon my heart. George Lindsay had nae mair to do with that forgery than you."

"And who had to do with it then, Effie, dear?"

"Myself," continued the daughter; "I filled up the cheque at the bidding o' Robert Stormonth, whom I had lang loved. It was he wha put my faither's name to it. It was to him I gave the money, to relieve him from debt, and he has fled."

"Effie, Effie!" cried the mother; "and we have done this thing to George Lindsay—ta'en from him his basket and his store, yea, the bread o' his mouth, in recompense for trying to save your life by offering his ain."

"Yes, mother," added Effie; "but we must make that wrang richt."

"And mair, lass," rejoined the mother, as she rose abruptly and nervously, and hurried to her husband, to whom she told the strange intelligence. Then John Carr was a just man as well as a loving parent; and while he forgave his unfortunate daughter, he went and brought back George Lindsay to his old place that very night; nor did he or Mrs Carr know the joy they had poured into the heart of the young man, for the reason that they did not know the love he bore to their daughter. But if this was a satisfaction to Effie, in so far as it relieved her heart of a burden, it brought to her a burden of another kind. The mother soon saw how matters stood with the heart of Lindsay, and she moreover saw that her or her daughter's gratitude could not be complete so long as he was denied the boon of being allowed to marry the girl he had saved from the gallows; and she waited her opportunity of breaking the delicate subject to Effie. It was not time yet, when Effie was an invalid; and even so far wasted and worn as to cause apprehensions of her ultimate fate, even death; nor perhaps would that time ever come when she could bear to hear the appeal without pain; for though Stormonth had ruined her character and her peace of mind—nay, had left her in circumstances almost unprecedented for treachery, baseness, and cruelty—he retained still the niche where the offerings of a first love had been made: his image had been indeed burned into the virgin heart, and no other form of man's face, though representing the possessor of beauty, wealth, and worldly honours, would ever take away that treasured symbol. It haunted her even as a shadow of herself, which, disappearing at sundown, comes again at the rise of the moon; nay, she would have been contented to make other sacrifices equally great as that which she had made; nor wild moors, nor streams, nor rugged hills, would have stopped her in an effort to look upon him once more, and replace that inevitable image by the real vision, which had first taken captive her young heart.

But time passed, bringing the usual ameliorations to the miserable. Effie got so far better in health that she became able to resume, in a languid way, her former duties, with the exception of those of "the gentle clerk"—for of these she had had enough; even the very look of a bank-draft brought a shudder over her; nor would she have entered the Bank of Scotland again, even with a good cheque for a thousand pounds to have been all her own. Meanwhile the patient George had plied a suit which he could only express by his eyes, or the attentions of one who worships; but he never alluded, even in their conversations, to the old sacrifice. The mother too, and not less the father, saw the advantages that might result as well to the health of her mind as that of her body. They had waited—a vain waiting—for the wearing out of the traces of the obdurate image: and when they thought they might take placidity as the sign of what they waited for, they first hinted, and then expressed in plain terms, the wishes of their hearts. For a time all their efforts were fruitless; but John Carr, getting old and weak, wished to be succeeded in his business by George; and the wife, when she became a widow, would require to be maintained,—reasons which had more weight with Effie than any others, excepting always the act of George's self-immolation at the shrine in which his fancy had placed her. The importunities at length wore out her resistings, without effacing the lines of the old and still endeared image; and she gave a cold, we may say reluctant, consent. The bride's "ay" was a sigh, the rapture a tear of sadness. But George was pleased even with this: Effie, the long-cherished Effie, was at length his. In her new situation Effie Carr—now Mrs Lindsay—performed all the duties of a good and faithful wife; by an effort of the will no doubt, though in another sense only a sad obedience to necessity, of which we are all, as the creatures of motives, the very slaves. But the old image resisted the appeals of her reason, as well as the blandishments of a husband's love. She was only true, faithful, and kind, till the birth of a child lent its reconciling power to the efforts of duty. Some time afterwards John Carr died—an event which carried in its train the subsequent death of his wife. There was left to the son-in-law a dwindling business, and a very small sum of money; for the father had met with misfortunes in his declining years, which impaired health prevented him from resisting. Time wore on, and showed that the power of the martyr-spirit is not always that of the champion of worldly success; for it was now but a struggle between George Lindsay, with a stained name, and the stern demon of misfortune. He was at length overtaken by poverty, which, as affecting Effie, preyed so relentlessly upon his spirits, that within two years he followed John Carr to the grave. Effie was now left with two children to the work of her fingers, a poor weapon wherewith to beat off the wolf of want; and even this was curtailed by the effects of the old crime, which the public still kept in green remembrance.

Throughout, our story has been the sensationalism of angry Fate, and even less likely to be believed than the work of fiction. Nor was the vulture face of the Nemesis yet smoothed down. The grief of her bereavement had only partially diverted Effie's mind from the recollections of him who had ruined her, and yet could not be hated by her, nay, could not be but loved by her. The sensitised nerve, which had received the old image, gave it out fresh again to the reviving power of memory, and this was only a continuation of what had been a corroding custom of years and years. But as the saying goes, it is a long road that does not offer by its side the spreading bough of shade to the way-worn traveller. One day, when Effie was engaged with her work, of which she was as weary as of the dreaming which accompanied it, there appeared before her, without premonition or foreshadowing sign, Robert Stormonth, of Kelton, dressed as a country gentleman, booted, and with a whip in his hand.

"Are you Effie Carr?"

The question was useless to one who was already lying back in her chair in a state of unconsciousness, from which she recovered only to open her eyes and avert them, and shut them and open them again, like the victim of epilepsy.

"And do you fear me?" said the excited man, as he took her in his strong arms and stared wildly into her face; "I have more reason to fear you, whom I ruined," he continued. "Ay, brought within the verge of the gallows. I know it all, Effie. Open your eyes, dear soul, and smile once more upon me. Nay, I have known it for years, during which remorse has scourged me through the world. Look up, dear Effie, while I tell you I could bear the agony no longer; and now opportunity favours the wretched penitent, for my father is dead, and I am not only my own master, but master of Kelton, of which you once heard me speak. Will you not look up yet, dear Effie? I come to make amends to you, not by wealth merely, but to offer you again that love I once bore to you, and still bear. Another such look, dear; it is oil to my parched spirit. You are to consent to be my wife—the very smallest boon I dare offer."

During which strange rambling speech Effie was partly insensible; yet she heard enough to afford her clouded mind a glimpse of her condition, and of the meaning of what was said to her. For a time she kept staring into his face as if she had doubts of his real personality; nor could she find words to express even those more collected thoughts that began to gather into form.

"Robert Stormonth," at length she said, calmly, "and have you suffered too? Oh, this is more wonderful to me than a' the rest o' these wonderful things."

"As no man ever suffered, dear Effie," he answered. "I was on the eve of coming to you, when a friend I retained here wrote me to London of your marriage with the man who saved you from the fate into which I precipitated you. How I envied that man who offered to die for you! He seemed to take from me my only means of reparation; nay, my only chance of happiness. But he is dead. Heaven give peace to so noble a spirit! And now you are mine. It is mercy I come to seek in the first instance; the love—if that, after all that is past, is indeed possible—I will take my chance of that."

"Robert," cried the now weeping woman, "if that love had been aince less, what misery I would have been spared! Ay, and my father, and mother, and poor George Lindsay; a' helped awa to the grave by my crime, for it stuck to us to the end." And she buried her head in his bosom, sobbing piteously.

"My crime, dear Effie, not yours," said he. "It was you who saved my life; and if Heaven has a kindlier part than another for those who err by the fault of others, it will be reserved for one who made a sacrifice to love. But we have, I hope, something to enjoy before you go there, and as yet I have not got your forgiveness."

"It is yours—it is yours, Robert," was the sobbing answer. "Ay, and

with it a' the love I ever had for you."
"Enough for this time, dear Effie," said he. "My horse waits for me. Expect me to-morrow at this hour with a better-arranged purpose." And folding her in his arms, and kissing her fervently, even as his remorse were thereby assuaged as well as his love gratified, he departed, leaving Effie to thoughts we should be sorry to think ourselves capable of putting into words. Nor need we say more than that Stormonth kept his word. Effie Carr was in a few days Mrs Stormonth, and in not many more the presiding female power in the fine residence of Kelton.

Ah, Silly Pug, wert thou so Sore Afraid

By Queen Elizabeth I

Ah, silly Pug, wert thou so sore afraid?
Mourn not, my Wat, nor be thou so dismayed.
It passeth fickle Fortune's power and skill
To force my heart to think thee any ill.
No Fortune base, thou sayest, shall alter thee?
And may so blind a witch so conquer me?
No, no, my Pug, though Fortune were not blind,
Assure thyself she could not rule my mind.
Fortune, I know, sometimes doth conquer kings,
And rules and reigns on earth and earthly things,
But never think Fortune can bear the sway
If virtue watch, and will her not obey.
Ne chose I thee by fickle Fortune's rede,
Ne she shall force me alter with such speed
But if to try this mistress' jest with thee.
Pull up thy heart, suppress thy brackish tears,
Torment thee not, but put away thy fears.
Dead to all joys and living unto woe,
Slain quite by her that ne'er gave wise men blow,
Revive again and live without all dread,
The less afraid, the better thou shalt speed.

Book 4, Epigram 7: "Our fathers did but use the world before"

By Thomas Bastard

Our fathers did but use the world before,
And having used did leave the same to us.
We spill whatever resteth to their store.
What can our heirs inherit but our curse?
For we have sucked the sweet and sap away,
And sowed consumption in the fruitful ground;
The woods and forests clad in rich array
With nakedness and baldness we confound.
We have defaced the lasting monuments,
And caused all honour to have end with us;
The holy temples feel our ravishments.
What can our heirs inherit but our curse?
The world must end, for men are so accurst;
Unless God end it sooner, they will first.

Care for Thy Soul as Thing of Greatest Price

By William Byrd

Care for thy soul as thing of greatest price,
Made to the end to taste of power divine,
Devoid of guilt, abhorring sin and vice,
Apt by God's grace to virtue to incline.
Care for it so as by thy retchless train
It be not brought to taste eternal pain.

Care for thy corse, but chiefly for soul's sake;
Cut off excess, sustaining food is best;
To vanquish pride but comely clothing take;
Seek after skill, deep ignorance detest.
Care so, I say, the flesh to feed and clothe
That thou harm not thy soul and body both.

Care for the world to do thy body right;
Rack not thy wit to win thy wicked ways;
Seek not to oppress the weak by wrongful might;
To pay thy due do banish all delays.
Care to dispend according to thy store,
And in like sort be mindful of the poor.

Care for thy soul, as for thy chiefest stay;
Care for thy body for thy soul's avail;
Care for the world for body's help alway;
Care yet but so as virtue may prevail.
Care in such sort that thou be sure of this:
Care keep thee not from heaven and heavenly bliss.



A Pair of Silk Stockings

By Kate Chopin



Little Mrs. Sommers one day found herself the unexpected possessor of fifteen dollars. It seemed to her a very large amount of money, and the way in which it stuffed and bulged her worn old porte-monnaie gave her a feeling of importance such as she had not enjoyed for years.

The question of investment was one that occupied her greatly. For a day or two she walked about apparently in a dreamy state, but really absorbed in speculation and calculation. She did not wish to act hastily, to do anything she might afterward regret. But it was during the still hours of the night when she lay awake revolving plans in her mind that she seemed to see her way clearly toward a proper and judicious use of the money.

A dollar or two should be added to the price usually paid for Janie's shoes, which would insure their lasting an appreciable time longer than they usually did. She would buy so and so many yards of percale for new shirt waists for the boys and Janie and Mag. She had intended to make the old ones do by skilful patching. Mag should have another gown. She had seen some beautiful patterns, veritable bargains in the shop windows. And still there would be left enough for new stockings—two pairs apiece—and what darning that would save for a while! She would get caps for the boys and sailor-hats for the girls. The vision of her little brood looking fresh and dainty and new for once in their lives excited her and made her restless and wakeful with anticipation.

The neighbors sometimes talked of certain "better days" that little Mrs. Sommers had known before she had ever thought of being Mrs. Sommers. She herself indulged in no such morbid retrospection. She had no time—no second of time to devote to the past. The needs of the present absorbed her every faculty. A vision of the future like some dim, gaunt monster sometimes appalled her, but luckily to-morrow never comes.

Mrs. Sommers was one who knew the value of bargains; who could stand for hours making her way inch by inch toward the desired object that was selling below cost. She could elbow her way if need be; she had learned to clutch a piece of goods and hold it and stick to it with persistence and determination till her turn came to be served, no matter when it came.

But that day she was a little faint and tired. She had swallowed a light luncheon—no! when she came to think of it, between getting the children fed and the place righted, and preparing herself for the shopping bout, she had actually forgotten to eat any luncheon at all!

She sat herself upon a revolving stool before a counter that was comparatively deserted, trying to gather strength and courage to charge through an eager multitude that was besieging breastworks of shirting and figured lawn. An all-gone limp feeling had come over her and she rested her hand aimlessly upon the counter. She wore no gloves. By degrees she grew aware that her hand had encountered something very soothing, very pleasant to touch. She looked down to see that her hand lay upon a pile of silk stockings. A placard near by announced that they had been reduced in price from two dollars and fifty cents to one dollar and ninety-eight cents; and a young girl who stood behind the counter asked her if she wished to examine their line of silk hosiery. She smiled, just as if she had been asked to inspect a tiara of diamonds with the ultimate view of purchasing it. But she went on feeling the soft, sheeny luxurious things—with both hands now, holding them up to see them glisten, and to feel them glide serpent-like through her fingers.

Two hectic blotches came suddenly into her pale cheeks. She looked up at the girl.

"Do you think there are any eights-and-a-half among these?"

There were any number of eights-and-a-half. In fact, there were more of that size than any other. Here was a light-blue pair; there were some lavender, some all black and various shades of tan and gray. Mrs. Sommers selected a black pair and looked at them very long and closely. She pretended to be examining their texture, which the clerk assured her was excellent.

"A dollar and ninety-eight cents," she mused aloud. "Well, I'll take this pair." She handed the girl a five-dollar bill and waited for her change and for her parcel. What a very small parcel it was! It seemed lost in the depths of her shabby old shopping-bag.

Mrs. Sommers after that did not move in the direction of the bargain counter. She took the elevator, which carried her to an upper floor into the region of the ladies' waiting-rooms. Here, in a retired corner, she exchanged her cotton stockings for the new silk ones which she had just bought. She was not going through any acute mental process or reasoning with herself, nor was she striving to explain to her satisfaction the motive of her action. She was not thinking at all. She seemed for the time to be taking a rest from that laborious and fatiguing function and to have abandoned herself to some mechanical impulse that directed her actions and freed her of responsibility.

How good was the touch of the raw silk to her flesh! She felt like lying back in the cushioned chair and reveling for a while in the luxury of it. She did for a little while. Then she replaced her shoes, rolled the cotton stockings together and thrust them into her bag. After doing this she crossed straight over to the shoe department and took her seat to be fitted.

She was fastidious. The clerk could not make her out; he could not reconcile her shoes with her stockings, and she was not too easily pleased. She held back her skirts and turned her feet one way and her head another way as she glanced down at the polished, pointed-tipped boots. Her foot and ankle looked very pretty. She could not realize that they belonged to her and were a part of herself. She wanted an excellent and stylish fit, she told the young fellow who served her, and she did not mind the difference of a dollar or two more in the price so long as she got what she desired.

It was a long time since Mrs. Sommers had been fitted with gloves. On rare occasions when she had bought a pair they were always "bargains," so cheap that it would have been preposterous and unreasonable to have expected them to be fitted to the hand.

Now she rested her elbow on the cushion of the glove counter, and a pretty, pleasant young creature, delicate and deft of touch, drew a long-wristed "kid" over Mrs. Sommers's hand. She smoothed it down over the wrist and buttoned it neatly, and both lost themselves for a second or two in admiring contemplation of the little symmetrical gloved hand. But there were other places where money might be spent.

There were books and magazines piled up in the window of a stall a few paces down the street. Mrs. Sommers bought two high-priced magazines such as she had been accustomed to read in the days when she had been accustomed to other pleasant things. She carried them without wrapping. As well as she could she lifted her skirts at the crossings. Her stockings and boots and well fitting gloves had worked marvels in her bearing—had given her a feeling of assurance, a sense of belonging to the well-dressed multitude.

She was very hungry. Another time she would have stilled the cravings for food until reaching her own home, where she would have brewed herself a cup of tea and taken a snack of anything that was available. But the impulse that was guiding her would not suffer her to entertain any such thought.

There was a restaurant at the corner. She had never entered its doors; from the outside she had sometimes caught glimpses of spotless damask and shining crystal, and soft-stepping waiters serving people of fashion.

When she entered her appearance created no surprise, no consternation, as she had half feared it might. She seated herself at a small table alone, and an attentive waiter at once approached to take her order. She did not want a profusion; she craved a nice and tasty bite—a half dozen blue-points, a plump chop with cress, a something sweet—a crème-frappée, for instance; a glass of Rhine wine, and after all a small cup of black coffee.

While waiting to be served she removed her gloves very leisurely and laid them beside her. Then she picked up a magazine and glanced through it, cutting the pages with a blunt edge of her knife. It was all very agreeable. The damask was even more spotless than it had seemed through the window, and the crystal more sparkling. There were quiet ladies and gentlemen, who did not notice her, lunching at the small tables like her own. A soft, pleasing strain of music could be heard, and a gentle breeze was blowing through the window. She tasted a bite, and she read a word or two, and she sipped the amber wine and wiggled her toes in the silk stockings. The price of it made no difference. She counted the money out to the waiter and left an extra coin on his tray, whereupon he bowed before her as before a princess of royal blood.

There was still money in her purse, and her next temptation presented itself in the shape of a matinee poster.

It was a little later when she entered the theatre, the play had begun and the house seemed to her to be packed. But there were vacant seats here and there, and into one of them she was ushered, between brilliantly dressed women who had gone there to kill time and eat candy and display their gaudy attire. There were many others who were there solely for the play and acting. It is safe to say there was no one present who bore quite the attitude which Mrs. Sommers did to her surroundings. She gathered in the whole—stage and players and people in one wide impression, and absorbed it and enjoyed it. She laughed at the

comedy and wept—she and the gaudy woman next to her wept over the tragedy. And they talked a little together over it. And the gaudy woman wiped her eyes and sniffled on a tiny square of filmy, perfumed lace and passed little Mrs. Sommers her box of candy.

The play was over, the music ceased, the crowd filed out. It was like a dream ended. People scattered in all directions. Mrs. Sommers went to the corner and waited for the cable car.

A man with keen eyes, who sat opposite to her, seemed to like the study of her small, pale face. It puzzled him to decipher what he saw there. In truth, he saw nothing—unless he were wizard enough to detect a poignant wish, a powerful longing that the cable car would never stop anywhere, but go on and on with her forever.

Lament For The Makers

By William Dunbar

I that in heill wes and gladnes,
Am trublit now with gret seiknes,
And feblit with infermite;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Our plesance heir is all vane glory,
This fals warld is bot transitory,
The flesche is brukle, the Fend is sle;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

The stait of man dois change and vary,
Now sound, now seik, now blith, now sary,
Now dansand mery, now like to dee;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

No stait in erd heir standis sickir;
As with the wynd wavis the wickir,
Wavis this warldis vanite.
Timor mortis conturbat me.

On to the ded gois all estatis,
Princis, prelotis, and potestatis,
Baith riche and pur of al degre;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

He takis the knychtis in to feild,
Anarmit under helme and scheild;
Victour he is at all mellie;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

That strang unmercifull tyrand
Takis, on the moderis breist sowkand,
The bab full of benignite;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

He takis the campion in the stour,
The capitane closit in the tour,
The lady in bour full of bewte;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

He sparis no lord for his piscence,
Na clerk for his intelligence;
His awfull strak may no man fle;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Art-magicianis, and astrologgis,
Rethoris, logicianis, and theologgis,
Thame helpis no conclusionis sle;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

In medicyne the most practicianis,
Lechis, surrigianis, and phisicianis,
Thame self fra ded may not supple;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

I se that makaris amang the laif
Playis heir ther pageant, syne gois to graif;
Sparit is nocht ther faculte;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

He hes done petuously devour,
The noble Chaucer, of makaris flour,
The Monk of Bery, and Gower, all thre;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

The gude Syr Hew of Eglintoun,
And eik Heryot, and Wyntoun,
He hes tane out of this cuntre;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

That scorpion fell hes done infek
Maister Johne Clerk, and Jame Afflek,
Fra balat making and tragidie;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Holland and Barbour he hes berevit;
Allace! that he nocht with us levit
Schir Mungo Lokert of the Le;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Clerk of Tranent eik he has tane,
That maid the Anteris of Gawane;
Schir Gilbert Hay endit hes he;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

He hes Blind Hary and Sandy Traill
Slaine with his schour of mortall haill,
Quhilk Patrik Johnestoun myght nocht fle;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

He hes reft Merseir his endite,
That did in luf so lifly write,
So schort, so quyk, of sentence hie;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

He hes tane Roull of Aberdene,
And gentill Roull of Corstorphin;
Two bettir fallowis did no man se;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

In Dumfermelyne he hes done roune
With Maister Robert Henrisoun;
Schir Johne the Ros enbrast hes he;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

And he hes now tane, last of aw,
Gud gentill Stobo and Quintyne Schaw,
Of quham all wichtis hes pete:
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Gud Maister Walter Kennedy
In poynt of dede lyis veraly,
Gret reuth it wer that so suld be;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Sen he hes all my brether tane,
He will nocht lat me lif alane,
On forse I man his nyxt pray be;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Sen for the deid remeid is none,
Best is that we for dede dispone,
Eftir our deid that lif may we;
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Featured Art: Autumn in Britain



This 1905 print by Maxfield Frederick Parrish illustrated John Keats' poem To Autumn



Wooded Landscape
John Constable

Frederic Leighton
A Wooded Hill with the Sea beyond



Rocky, Wooded Landscape with a Dell and Weir,

by Thomas Gainsborough



Autumn Leaves
John Everett Millais

Die When I Say When

Luke Gilfedder

Cover Art by Samuel Wild



Die When I Say When *by Luke Gilfedder is an existential noir set in North West England, due to be released in January 2027 by SNN Books. In it, playwright Quinn Roseblade leads a manhunt to catch his old friend Falin MacNaught, a former actor turned suspected serial killer. But the closer Quinn gets to Falin, the more he finds the lines between guilt and innocence—and between murder and suicide—begin to blur...*

In this extract, Quinn returns to his flat in Alderley Edge after glimpsing a man he suspects is Falin dining with his next victim. Sifting through old photographs, he recalls their boyhood friendship and the guilt he carries over what Falin has become.

The taxi dropped Quinn outside Horwood House, a dingily yellow ex-Victorian mansion portioned into apartments. An old spreading elm overshadowed the house, while above and far beyond loomed the Edge, wreathed in fog, the fire-lit windows of millionaire estates constellating its dark wooded slopes like a town of people from another planet. Moonlight shining through the elm's branches put a copper gleam on the handle of Horwood's front entrance; Quinn turned it, walked a long shabby corridor, climbed three flights of stairs to his flat, and unlocked his rickety door.

Travel-worn, he dropped his suitcase to the floor and tossed his coat on top of it. He stepped inside without switching on the light, and the dim interior of his neglected rooms accosted him with sad inquiry. No. 9 looked like any bachelor's flat: cigar-coloured walls, gas-ring cookery stains, astray ashtrays, empty bottles on the sill, Corningware pans, a kettle on the hob... Still, despite the extortionate rent, Quinn could never quite bring himself to give the place up. Among Alderley's heartless condos, one could at least live here like a bankrupt count.

Quinn flicked on his desk lamp and lifted a box of photos from the drawer. He pulled up a chair and rifled through carelessly indexed polaroids of last season's theatre tours: Europe, America, and Asia mashed together, salted by Australasia. He found the snapshot he wanted hidden beneath these. It showed him and a friend, their boy-knees crossed, playing chess on a school lawn. His friend was a slim lad of an ambered paleness, but his eyes were dark and Lermontovian: doomed to die in a duel, almost certainly to die young.

Quinn studied the image for a while, wondering if this elfin choirboy could really have grown into that man in the dark, thin suit outside De Lynn. The Silver Killer... With a shiver, Quinn flipped the photo over. It was captioned in a schoolboy's squat cursive scrawl:

'Orphan vs. Prodigy'

The tragedy, Quinn thought, was that the orphan was the rich boy. How and why two lads from such disparate social classes became such close friends mystified many in Alderley—a constituency that had been Conservative-held since the Triassic Age. But Quinn and Falin were not so much best mates as fate mates. It had all begun on that first day's registration at Legh Hall, when their form tutor, Dr Falconer, burred:

"R.C.'s over this side, Proddies that, fancy beggars in the middle."

Falin and Quinn were the only Roman Catholics in their form, and so, in a way, they had to be friends. They were given adjoining desks, shared a bunk on camping trips to the Peaks or the Glens, and spent each weekend drinking together in the Northern Quarter. Falconer nicknamed them the school's 'Dioscuri boys', and they became such fast friends that their classmates assumed they were homosexuals. Yet their friendship was strangely innocent, like that of Tieck and Wackenroder or some of the other early Romantics. In truth, they found each other's bodies antipathetic: Quinn would cringe at Falin's pale aristocratic virilia, exposed when skinny dipping in highland pools, while Falin mocked his friend as resembling some big-boned Irish farm boy with rank red hair and skin untanned and untannable.

Quinn exhaled, pushed the photos and memories aside, and went to the bathroom to shave. The moon rising behind the Edge flared like zinc in his frosted window, silvering the washbasin. He lathered his face and wet his razor, his running tap casting a static shadow. To one side, he noticed two toothbrushes stood like sad marionettes in a glass tumbler. Yes, he and Falin had stayed friends for some years after school, occasionally and even less wisely flat sharing. Against all social rhyme and reason, they had turned down university to form a globe-trotting theatre company, each clinging to the belief that there existed to every meaningful experience a shortcut — a shortcut which, like the back ways into school, they alone knew how to take. But both soon learnt there was no meaning to be found in the vast, jangling, journalistic fairy-desert of modern life, and so—even worse—no shortcuts to take to it.

"Ack!"

Quinn nicked his chin and tasted blood. Like a mockery of conscience in a cheap drama, he dabbed at it with a tissue in the mirror, as if trying to stanch his reopened guilt over Falin's fate. Not that he had to feel too tristful... Christ, the last he had heard, Falin was a millionaire, owned multiple apartments in various European capitals, and even had a private plane—and all after leaving Strangeways without a penny to his name. Still, he knew Falin would not be satisfied with all that. He never was. 'Grow or die' was his motto. Youth to itself rebels, more like...

Quinn finished shaving, recalling Dr Falconer's parting words on their last day of school: "The trouble with you two lads is neither of you wants anything clearly: the ideals are English, the ambitions Irish." Falconer had said the same about T. E. Lawrence, so Falin took it as a compliment. Quinn took it as a warning.

He towelled his face dry, changed into something less comfortable, slipped the photo into his pocket, and headed downstairs. If the figure he had seen earlier was indeed Falin, then tonight's mission was to save two souls from destruction. Two was the thing. It mattered not that one of them was his own.

Luke Gilfedder is a British author. His first book, on the modernist painter and writer, Wyndham Lewis, was published by Logos Verlag Berlin in 2025. He writes on literature and art for UK and US publications including Islander Magazine, The Jackdaw, Rain Taxi, The Brazen Head, and The Miskatonian. His debut novel, Die When I Say When, is to be released in January 2027 by SNN Books.





The Wind in the Willows

By Kenneth Grahame



XI “LIKE SUMMER TEMPESTS CAME HIS TEARS”

THE Rat put out a neat little brown paw, gripped Toad firmly by the scruff of the neck, and gave a great hoist and a pull; and the water-logged Toad came up slowly but surely over the edge of the hole, till at last he stood safe and sound in the hall, streaked with mud and weed to be sure, and with the water streaming off him, but happy and high-spirited as of old, now that he found himself once more in the house of a friend, and dodgings and evasions were over, and he could lay aside a disguise that was unworthy of his position and wanted such a lot of living up to.

“O, Ratty!” he cried. “I've been through such times since I saw you last, you can't think! Such trials, such sufferings, and all so nobly borne! Then such escapes, such disguises, such subterfuges, and all so cleverly planned and carried out! Been in prison—got out of it, of course! Been thrown into a canal—swam ashore! Stole a horse—sold him for a large sum of money! Humbugged everybody—made 'em all do exactly what I wanted! Oh, I am a smart Toad, and no mistake! What do you think my last exploit was? Just hold on till I tell you—”

“Toad,” said the Water Rat, gravely and firmly, “you go off upstairs at once, and take off that old cotton rag that looks as if it might formerly have belonged to some washerwoman, and clean yourself thoroughly, and put on some of my clothes, and try and come down looking like a gentleman if you can; for a more shabby, bedraggled, disreputable-looking object than you are I never set eyes on in my whole life! Now, stop swaggering and arguing, and be off! I'll have something to say to you later!”

Toad was at first inclined to stop and do some talking back at him. He had had enough of being ordered about when he was in prison, and here was the thing being begun all over again, apparently; and by a Rat, too! However, he caught sight of himself in the looking-glass over the hat-stand, with the rusty black bonnet perched rakishly over one eye, and he changed his mind and went very quickly and humbly upstairs to the Rat's dressing-room. There he had a thorough wash and brush-up, changed his clothes, and stood for a long time before the glass, contemplating himself with pride and pleasure, and thinking what utter idiots all the people must have been to have ever mistaken him for one moment for a washerwoman.

By the time he came down again luncheon was on the table, and very glad Toad was to see it, for he had been through some trying experiences and had taken much hard exercise since the excellent breakfast provided for him by the gipsy. While they ate Toad told the Rat all his adventures, dwelling chiefly on his own cleverness, and presence of mind in emergencies, and cunning in tight places; and rather making out that he had been having a gay and highly-coloured experience. But the more he talked and boasted, the more grave and silent the Rat became.

When at last Toad had talked himself to a standstill, there was silence for a while; and then the Rat said, "Now, Toady, I don't want to give you pain, after all you've been through already; but, seriously, don't you see what an awful ass you've been making of yourself? On your own admission you have been handcuffed, imprisoned, starved, chased, terrified out of your life, insulted, jeered at, and ignominiously flung into the water—by a woman, too! Where's the amusement in that? Where does the fun come in? And all because you must needs go and steal a motor-car. You know that you've never had anything but trouble from motor-cars from the moment you first set eyes on one. But if you will be mixed up with them—as you generally are, five minutes after you've started—why steal them? Be a cripple, if you think it's exciting; be a bankrupt, for a change, if you've set your mind on it: but why choose to be a convict? When are you going to be sensible, and think of your friends, and try and be a credit to them? Do you suppose it's any pleasure to me, for instance, to hear animals saying, as I go about, that I'm the chap that keeps company with gaol-birds?"

Now, it was a very comforting point in Toad's character that he was a thoroughly good-hearted animal and never minded being jawed by those who were his real friends. And even when most set upon a thing, he was always able to see the other side of the question. So although, while the Rat was talking so seriously, he kept saying to himself mutinously, "But it WAS fun, though! Awful fun!" and making strange suppressed noises inside him, k-i-ck-ck-ck, and poop-p-p, and other sounds resembling stifled snorts, or the opening of soda-water bottles, yet when the Rat had quite finished, he heaved a deep sigh and said, very nicely and humbly, "Quite right, Ratty! How sound you always are! Yes, I've been a conceited old ass, I can quite see that; but now I'm going to be a good Toad, and not do it any more. As for motor-cars, I've not been at all so keen about them since my last ducking in that river of yours. The fact is, while I was hanging on to the edge of your hole and getting my breath, I had a sudden idea—a really brilliant idea—connected with motor-boats—there, there! don't take on so, old chap, and stamp, and upset things; it was only an idea, and we won't talk any more about it now. We'll have our coffee, and a smoke, and a quiet chat, and then I'm going to stroll quietly down to Toad Hall, and get into clothes of my own, and set things going again on the old lines. I've had enough of adventures. I shall lead a quiet, steady, respectable life, pottering about my property, and improving it, and doing a little landscape gardening at times. There will always be a bit of dinner for my friends when they come to see me; and I shall keep a pony-chaise to jog about the country in, just as I used to in the good old days, before I got restless, and wanted to do things."

"Stroll quietly down to Toad Hall?" cried the Rat, greatly excited. "What are you talking about? Do you mean to say you haven't heard?"

"Heard what?" said Toad, turning rather pale. "Go on, Ratty! Quick! Don't spare me! What haven't I heard?"

"Do you mean to tell me," shouted the Rat, thumping with his little fist upon the table, "that you've heard nothing about the Stoats and Weasels?"

"What, the Wild Wooders?" cried Toad, trembling in every limb. "No, not a word! What have they been doing?"

"—And how they've been and taken Toad Hall?" continued the Rat.

Toad leaned his elbows on the table, and his chin on his paws; and a large tear welled up in each of his eyes, overflowed and splashed on the table, plop! plop!

"Go on, Ratty," he murmured presently; "tell me all. The worst is over. I am an animal again. I can bear it."

"When you—got—into that—that—trouble of yours," said the Rat, slowly and impressively; "I mean, when you—disappeared from society for a time, over that misunderstanding about a—a machine, you know—"

Toad merely nodded.

"Well, it was a good deal talked about down here, naturally," continued the Rat, "not only along the river-side, but even in the Wild Wood. Animals took sides, as always happens. The River-bankers stuck up for you, and said you had been infamously treated, and there was no justice to be had in the land nowadays. But the Wild Wood animals said hard things, and served you right, and it was time this sort of thing was stopped. And they got very cocky, and went about saying you were done for this time! You would never come back again, never, never!"

Toad nodded once more, keeping silence.

"That's the sort of little beasts they are," the Rat went on. "But Mole and Badger, they stuck out, through thick and thin, that you would come back again soon, somehow. They didn't know exactly how, but somehow!"

Toad began to sit up in his chair again, and to smirk a little.

"They argued from history," continued the Rat. "They said that no criminal laws had ever been known to prevail against cheek and plausibility such as yours, combined with the power of a long purse. So they arranged to move their things in to Toad Hall, and sleep there, and keep it aired, and have it all ready for you when you turned up. They didn't guess what was going to happen, of course; still, they had their suspicions of the Wild Wood animals. Now I come to the most painful and tragic part of my story. One dark night—it was a very dark night, and blowing hard, too, and raining simply cats and dogs—a band of weasels, armed to the teeth, crept silently up the carriage-drive to the front entrance. Simultaneously, a body of desperate ferrets, advancing through the kitchen-garden, possessed themselves of the backyard and offices; while a company of skirmishing stoats who stuck at nothing occupied the conservatory and the billiard-room, and held the French windows opening on to the lawn.

"The Mole and the Badger were sitting by the fire in the smoking-room, telling stories and suspecting nothing, for it wasn't a night for any animals to be out in, when those bloodthirsty villains broke down the doors and rushed in upon them from every side. They made the best fight they could, but what was the good? They were unarmed, and taken by surprise, and what can two animals do against hundreds? They took and beat them severely with sticks, those two poor faithful creatures, and turned them out into the cold and the wet, with many insulting and uncalled-for remarks!"

Here the unfeeling Toad broke into a snigger, and then pulled himself together and tried to look particularly solemn.

"And the Wild Wooders have been living in Toad Hall ever since," continued the Rat; "and going on simply anyhow! Lying in

bed half the day, and breakfast at all hours, and the place in such a mess (I'm told) it's not fit to be seen! Eating your grub, and drinking your drink, and making bad jokes about you, and singing vulgar songs, about—well, about prisons and magistrates, and policemen; horrid personal songs, with no humour in them. And they're telling the tradespeople and everybody that they've come to stay for good."

"O, have they!" said Toad getting up and seizing a stick. "I'll jolly soon see about that!"

"It's no good, Toad!" called the Rat after him. "You'd better come back and sit down; you'll only get into trouble."

But the Toad was off, and there was no holding him. He marched rapidly down the road, his stick over his shoulder, fuming and muttering to himself in his anger, till he got near his front gate, when suddenly there popped up from behind the palings a long yellow ferret with a gun.

"Who comes there?" said the ferret sharply.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Toad, very angrily. "What do you mean by talking like that to me? Come out of that at once, or I'll —"

The ferret said never a word, but he brought his gun up to his shoulder. Toad prudently dropped flat in the road, and Bang! a bullet whistled over his head.

The startled Toad scrambled to his feet and scampered off down the road as hard as he could; and as he ran he heard the ferret laughing and other horrid thin little laughs taking it up and carrying on the sound.

He went back, very crestfallen, and told the Water Rat.

"What did I tell you?" said the Rat. "It's no good. They've got sentries posted, and they are all armed. You must just wait."

Still, Toad was not inclined to give in all at once. So he got out the boat, and set off rowing up the river to where the garden front of Toad Hall came down to the waterside.

Arriving within sight of his old home, he rested on his oars and surveyed the land cautiously. All seemed very peaceful and deserted and quiet. He could see the whole front of Toad Hall, glowing in the evening sunshine, the pigeons settling by twos and threes along the straight line of the roof; the garden, a blaze of flowers; the creek that led up to the boat-house, the little wooden bridge that crossed it; all tranquil, uninhabited, apparently waiting for his return. He would try the boat-house first, he thought. Very warily he paddled up to the mouth of the creek, and was just passing under the bridge, when . . . Crash!

A great stone, dropped from above, smashed through the bottom of the boat. It filled and sank, and Toad found himself struggling in deep water. Looking up, he saw two stoats leaning over the parapet of the bridge and watching him with great glee. "It will be your head next time, Toady!" they called out to him. The indignant Toad swam to shore, while the stoats laughed and laughed, supporting each other, and laughed again, till they nearly had two fits—that is, one fit each, of course.

The Toad retraced his weary way on foot, and related his disappointing experiences to the Water Rat once more.

"Well, what did I tell you?" said the Rat very crossly. "And, now, look here! See what you've been and done! Lost me my boat that I was so fond of, that's what you've done! And simply ruined that nice suit of clothes that I lent you! Really, Toad, of all the trying animals—I wonder you manage to keep any friends at all!"

The Toad saw at once how wrongly and foolishly he had acted. He admitted his errors and wrong-headedness and made a full apology to Rat for losing his boat and spoiling his clothes. And he wound up by saying, with that frank self-surrender which always disarmed his friends' criticism and won them back to his side, "Ratty! I see that I have been a headstrong and a wilful Toad! Henceforth, believe me, I will be humble and submissive, and will take no action without your kind advice and full approval!"

"If that is really so," said the good-natured Rat, already appeased, "then my advice to you is, considering the lateness of the hour, to sit down and have your supper, which will be on the table in a minute, and be very patient. For I am convinced that we can do nothing until we have seen the Mole and the Badger, and heard their latest news, and held conference and taken their advice in this difficult matter."

"Oh, ah, yes, of course, the Mole and the Badger," said Toad, lightly. "What's become of them, the dear fellows? I had forgotten all about them."

"Well may you ask!" said the Rat reproachfully. "While you were riding about the country in expensive motor-cars, and galloping proudly on blood-horses, and breakfasting on the fat of the land, those two poor devoted animals have been camping out in the open, in every sort of weather, living very rough by day and lying very hard by night; watching over your house, patrolling your boundaries, keeping a constant eye on the stoats and the weasels, scheming and planning and contriving how to get your property back for you. You don't deserve to have such true and loyal friends, Toad, you don't, really. Some day, when it's too late, you'll be sorry you didn't value them more while you had them!"

"I'm an ungrateful beast, I know," sobbed Toad, shedding bitter tears. "Let me go out and find them, out into the cold, dark night, and share their hardships, and try and prove by—Hold on a bit! Surely I heard the chink of dishes on a tray! Supper's here at last, hooray! Come on, Ratty!"

The Rat remembered that poor Toad had been on prison fare for a considerable time, and that large allowances had therefore to be made. He followed him to the table accordingly, and hospitably encouraged him in his gallant efforts to make up for past privations.

They had just finished their meal and resumed their arm-chairs, when there came a heavy knock at the door.

Toad was nervous, but the Rat, nodding mysteriously at him, went straight up to the door and opened it, and in walked Mr. Badger.

He had all the appearance of one who for some nights had been kept away from home and all its little comforts and conveniences. His shoes were covered with mud, and he was looking very rough and touzled; but then he had never been a very smart man, the Badger, at the best of times. He came solemnly up to Toad, shook him by the paw, and said, "Welcome home, Toad! Alas! what am I saying? Home, indeed! This is a poor home-coming. Unhappy Toad!" Then he turned his back on him, sat down to the table, drew his chair up, and helped himself to a large slice of cold pie.

Toad was quite alarmed at this very serious and portentous style of greeting; but the Rat whispered to him, "Never mind; don't take any notice; and don't say anything to him just yet. He's always rather low and despondent when he's wanting his victuals. In half an hour's time he'll be quite a different animal."

So they waited in silence, and presently there came another and a lighter knock. The Rat, with a nod to Toad, went to the door and ushered in the Mole, very shabby and unwashed, with bits of hay and straw sticking in his fur.

"Hooray! Here's old Toad!" cried the Mole, his face beaming. "Fancy having you back again!" And he began to dance round him. "We never dreamt you would turn up so soon! Why, you must have managed to escape, you clever, ingenious, intelligent Toad!"

The Rat, alarmed, pulled him by the elbow; but it was too late. Toad was puffing and swelling already.

"Clever? O, no!" he said. "I'm not really clever, according to my friends. I've only broken out of the strongest prison in England, that's all! And captured a railway train and escaped on it, that's all! And disguised myself and gone about the country humbugging everybody, that's all! O, no! I'm a stupid ass, I am! I'll tell you one or two of my little adventures, Mole, and you shall judge for yourself!"

"Well, well," said the Mole, moving towards the supper-table; "supposing you talk while I eat. Not a bite since breakfast! O my! O my!" And he sat down and helped himself liberally to cold beef and pickles.

Toad straddled on the hearth-rug, thrust his paw into his trouser-pocket and pulled out a handful of silver. "Look at that!" he cried, displaying it. "That's not so bad, is it, for a few minutes' work? And how do you think I done it, Mole? Horse-dealing! That's how I done it!" "Go on, Toad," said the Mole, immensely interested.

"Toad, do be quiet, please!" said the Rat. "And don't you egg him on, Mole, when you know what he is; but please tell us as soon as possible what the position is, and what's best to be done, now that Toad is back at last."

"The position's about as bad as it can be," replied the Mole grumpily; "and as for what's to be done, why, blest if I know! The Badger and I have been round and round the place, by night and by day; always the same thing. Sentries posted everywhere, guns poked out at us, stones thrown at us; always an animal on the look-out, and when they see us, my! how they do laugh! That's what annoys me most!"

"It's a very difficult situation," said the Rat, reflecting deeply. "But I think I see now, in the depths of my mind, what Toad really ought to do. I will tell you. He ought to—"

"No, he oughtn't!" shouted the Mole, with his mouth full. "Nothing of the sort! You don't understand. What he ought to do is, he ought to—" "Well, I shan't do it, anyway!" cried Toad, getting

excited. "I'm not going to be ordered about by you fellows! It's my house we're talking about, and I know exactly what to do, and I'll tell you. I'm going to—"

By this time they were all three talking at once, at the top of their voices, and the noise was simply deafening, when a thin, dry voice made itself heard, saying, "Be quiet at once, all of you!" and instantly every one was silent.

It was the Badger, who, having finished his pie, had turned round in his chair and was looking at them severely. When he saw that he had secured their attention, and that they were evidently waiting for him to address them, he turned back to the table again and reached out for the cheese. And so great was the respect commanded by the solid qualities of that admirable animal, that not another word was uttered until he had quite finished his repast and brushed the crumbs from his knees. The Toad fidgeted a good deal, but the Rat held him firmly down.

When the Badger had quite done, he got up from his seat and stood before the fireplace, reflecting deeply. At last he spoke.

"Toad!" he said severely. "You bad, troublesome little animal! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? What do you think your father, my old friend, would have said if he had been here to-night, and had known of all your goings on?"

Toad, who was on the sofa by this time, with his legs up, rolled over on his face, shaken by sobs of contrition.

"There, there!" went on the Badger, more kindly. "Never mind. Stop crying. We're going to let bygones be bygones, and try and turn over a new leaf. But what the Mole says is quite true. The stoats are on guard, at every point, and they make the best sentinels in the world. It's quite useless to think of attacking the place. They're too strong for us."

"Then it's all over," sobbed the Toad, crying into the sofa cushions. "I shall go and enlist for a soldier, and never see my dear Toad Hall any more!"

"Come, cheer up, Toady!" said the Badger. "There are more ways of getting back a place than taking it by storm. I haven't said my last word yet. Now I'm going to tell you a great secret."

Toad sat up slowly and dried his eyes. Secrets had an immense attraction for him, because he never could keep one, and he enjoyed the sort of unhallowed thrill he experienced when he went and told another animal, after having faithfully promised not to.

"There—is—an—underground—passage," said the Badger, impressively, "that leads from the river-bank, quite near here, right up into the middle of Toad Hall."

"O, nonsense! Badger," said Toad, rather airily. "You've been listening to some of the yarns they spin in the public-houses about here. I know every inch of Toad Hall, inside and out. Nothing of the sort, I do assure you!"

"My young friend," said the Badger, with great severity, "your father, who was a worthy animal—a lot worthier than some others I know—was a particular friend of mine, and told me a great deal he wouldn't have dreamt of telling you. He discovered that passage—he didn't make it, of course; that was done hundreds of years before he ever came to live there—and he repaired it and cleaned it out, because he thought it might come in useful some day, in case of trouble or danger; and he showed it to me. 'Don't let my son know about it,' he said. 'He's a good boy, but very light and volatile in character, and simply cannot hold his tongue. If he's ever in a real fix, and it would be of use to him, you may tell him about the secret passage; but not before.'"

The other animals looked hard at Toad to see how he would take it. Toad was inclined to be sulky at first; but he brightened up immediately, like the good fellow he was.

"Well, well," he said; "perhaps I am a bit of a talker. A popular fellow such as I am—my friends get round me—we chaff, we sparkle, we tell witty stories—and somehow my tongue gets wagging. I have the gift of conversation. I've been told I ought to have a salon, whatever that may be. Never mind. Go on, Badger. How's this passage of yours going to help us?"

"I've found out a thing or two lately," continued the Badger. "I got Otter to disguise himself as a sweep and call at the back-door with brushes over his shoulder, asking for a job. There's going to be a big banquet to-morrow night. It's somebody's birthday—the Chief Weasel's, I believe—and all the weasels will be gathered together in the dining-hall, eating and drinking and laughing and carrying on, suspecting nothing. No guns, no swords, no sticks, no arms of any sort whatever!"

"But the sentinels will be posted as usual," remarked the Rat.

"Exactly," said the Badger; "that is my point. The weasels will trust entirely to their excellent sentinels. And that is where the passage comes in. That very useful tunnel leads right up under the butler's pantry, next to the dining-hall!"

"Aha! that squeaky board in the butler's pantry!" said Toad. "Now I understand it!"

"We shall creep out quietly into the butler's pantry—" cried the Mole.

"—with our pistols and swords and sticks—" shouted the Rat.

"—and rush in upon them," said the Badger.

"—and whack 'em, and whack 'em, and whack 'em!" cried the Toad in ecstasy, running round and round the room, and jumping over the chairs.

"Very well, then," said the Badger, resuming his usual dry manner, "our plan is settled, and there's nothing more for you to argue and squabble about. So, as it's getting very late, all of you go right off to bed at once. We will make all the necessary arrangements in the course of the morning to-morrow."

Toad, of course, went off to bed dutifully with the rest—he knew better than to refuse—though he was feeling much too excited to sleep. But he had had a long day, with many events crowded into it; and sheets and blankets were very friendly and comforting things, after plain straw, and not too much of it, spread on the stone floor of a draughty cell; and his head had not been many seconds on his pillow before he was snoring happily. Naturally, he dreamt a good deal; about roads that ran away from him just when he wanted them, and canals that chased him and caught him, and a barge that sailed into the banqueting-hall with his week's washing, just as he was giving a dinner-party; and he was alone in the secret passage, pushing onwards, but it twisted and turned round and shook itself, and sat up on its end; yet somehow, at the last, he found himself back in Toad Hall, safe and triumphant, with all his friends gathered round about him, earnestly assuring him that he really was a clever Toad.

He slept till a late hour next morning, and by the time he got down he found that the other animals had finished their breakfast some time before. The Mole had slipped off somewhere by himself, without telling any one where he was going to. The Badger sat in the arm-chair, reading the paper, and not concerning himself in the slightest about what was going to happen that very evening. The Rat, on the other hand, was running round the room busily, with his arms full of weapons of every kind, distributing them in four little heaps on the floor, and saying excitedly under his breath, as he ran, "Here's-a-sword-for-the-Rat, here's-a-sword-for-the-Mole, here's-a-sword-for-the-Toad, here's-a-sword-for-the-Badger! Here's-a-pistol-for-the-Rat, here's-a-pistol-for-the-Mole, here's-a-pistol-for-the-Toad, here's-a-pistol-for-the-Badger!" And so on, in a regular, rhythmical way, while the four little heaps gradually grew and grew.

"That's all very well, Rat," said the Badger presently, looking at the busy little animal over the edge of his newspaper; "I'm not blaming you. But just let us once get past the stoats, with those detestable guns of theirs, and I assure you we shan't want any swords or pistols. We four, with our sticks, once we're inside the dining-hall, why, we shall clear the floor of all the lot of them in five minutes. I'd have done the whole thing by myself, only I didn't want to deprive you fellows of the fun!"

"It's as well to be on the safe side," said the Rat reflectively, polishing a pistol-barrel on his sleeve and looking along it.

The Toad, having finished his breakfast, picked up a stout stick and swung it vigorously, belabouring imaginary animals. "I'll learn 'em to steal my house!" he cried. "I'll learn 'em, I'll learn 'em!"

"Don't say 'learn 'em,' Toad," said the Rat, greatly shocked. "It's not good English."

"What are you always nagging at Toad for?" inquired the Badger, rather peevishly. "What's the matter with his English? It's the same what I use myself, and if it's good enough for me, it ought to be good enough for you!"

"I'm very sorry," said the Rat humbly. "Only I think it ought to be 'teach 'em,' not 'learn 'em.' "

"But we don't want to teach 'em," replied the Badger. "We want to learn 'em — learn 'em, learn 'em! And what's more, we're going to do it, too!"

"Oh, very well, have it your own way," said the Rat. He was getting rather muddled about it himself, and presently he retired into a corner, where he could be heard muttering, "Learn 'em, teach 'em, teach 'em, learn 'em!" till the Badger told him rather sharply to leave off.

Presently the Mole came tumbling into the room, evidently very pleased with himself. "I've been having such fun!" he began at once; "I've been getting a rise out of the stoats!"

"I hope you've been very careful, Mole?" said the Rat anxiously.

"I should hope so, too," said the Mole confidently. "I got the idea

when I went into the kitchen, to see about Toad's breakfast being kept hot for him. I found that old washerwoman-dress that he came home in yesterday, hanging on a towel-horse before the fire. So I put it on, and the bonnet as well, and the shawl, and off I went to Toad Hall, as bold as you please. The sentries were on the look-out, of course, with their guns and their 'Who comes there?' and all the rest of their nonsense. 'Good morning, gentlemen!' says I, very respectful. 'Want any washing done to-day?' They looked at me very proud and stiff and haughty, and said, 'Go away, washerwoman! We don't do any washing on duty.' 'Or any other time?' says I. Ho, ho, ho! Wasn't I funny, Toad?"

"Poor, frivolous animal!" said Toad, very loftily. The fact is, he felt exceedingly jealous of Mole for what he had just done. It was exactly what he would have liked to have done himself, if only he had thought of it first, and hadn't gone and overslept himself.

"Some of the stoats turned quite pink," continued the Mole, "and the Sergeant in charge, he said to me, very short, he said, 'Now run away, my good woman, run away! Don't keep my men idling and talking on their posts.' 'Run away?' says I; 'it won't be me that'll be running away, in a very short time from now!' "

"O Moly, how could you?" said the Rat, dismayed.

The Badger laid down his paper.

"I could see them pricking up their ears and looking at each other," went on the Mole; "and the Sergeant said to them, 'Never mind her; she doesn't know what she's talking about.'"

"'O! don't I?' said I. 'Well, let me tell you this. My daughter, she washes for Mr. Badger, and that'll show you whether I know what I'm talking about; and you'll know pretty soon, too! A hundred bloodthirsty badgers, armed with rifles, are going to attack Toad Hall this very night, by way of the paddock. Six boatloads of Rats, with pistols and cutlasses, will come up the river and effect a landing in the garden; while a picked body of Toads, known as the Die-hards, or the Death-or-Glory Toads, will storm the orchard and carry everything before them, yelling for vengeance. There won't be much left of you to wash, by the time they've done with you, unless you clear out while you have the chance!' Then I ran away, and when I was out of sight I hid; and presently I came creeping back along the ditch and took a peep at them through the hedge. They were all as nervous and flustered as could be, running all ways at once, and falling over each other, and every one giving orders to everybody else and not listening; and the Sergeant kept sending off parties of stoats to distant parts of the grounds, and then sending other fellows to fetch 'em back again; and I heard them saying to each other, 'That's just like the weasels; they're to stop comfortably in the banqueting-hall, and have feasting and toasts and songs and all sorts of fun, while we must stay on guard in the cold and the dark, and in the end be cut to pieces by bloodthirsty Badgers!'"

"Oh, you silly ass, Mole!" cried Toad, "You've been and spoilt everything!"

"Mole," said the Badger, in his dry, quiet way, "I perceive you have more sense in your little finger than some other animals have in the whole of their fat bodies. You have managed excellently, and I begin to have great hopes of you. Good Mole! Clever Mole!"

The Toad was simply wild with jealousy, more especially as he couldn't make out for the life of him what the Mole had done that was so particularly clever; but, fortunately for him, before he could show temper or expose himself to the Badger's sarcasm, the bell rang for luncheon.

It was a simple but sustaining meal—bacon and broad beans, and a macaroni pudding; and when they had quite done, the Badger settled himself into an arm-chair, and said, "Well, we've got our work cut out for us to-night, and it will probably be pretty late before we're quite through with it; so I'm just going to take forty winks, while I can." And he drew a handkerchief over his face and was soon snoring.

The anxious and laborious Rat at once resumed his preparations, and started running between his four little heaps, muttering, "Here's-a-belt-for-the-Rat, here's-a-belt-for-the-Mole, here's-a-belt-for-the-Toad, here's-a-belt-for-the-Badger!" and so on, with every fresh accoutrement he produced, to which there seemed really no end; so the Mole drew his arm through Toad's, led him out into the open air, shoved him into a wicker chair, and made him tell him all his adventures from beginning to end, which Toad was only too willing to do. The Mole was a good listener, and Toad, with no one to check his statements or to criticise in an unfriendly spirit, rather let himself go. Indeed, much that he related belonged more properly to the category of what-might-have-happened-had-I-only-thought-of-it-in-time-instead-of-ten-minutes-afterwards. Those are always the best and the raciest adventures; and why should they not be truly ours, as much as the somewhat inadequate things that really come off?



His Last Bow: The War Service of Sherlock Holmes

By Arthur Conan Doyle



It was nine o'clock at night upon the second of August—the most terrible August in the history of the world. One might have thought already that God's curse hung heavy over a degenerate world, for there was an awesome hush and a feeling of vague expectancy in the sultry and stagnant air. The sun had long set, but one blood-red gash like an open wound lay low in the distant west. Above, the stars were shining brightly, and below, the lights of the shipping glimmered in the bay. The two famous Germans stood beside the stone parapet of the garden walk, with the long, low, heavily gabled house behind them, and they looked down upon the broad sweep of the beach at the foot of the great chalk cliff in which Von Bork, like some wandering eagle, had perched himself four years before. They stood with their heads close together, talking in low, confidential tones. From below the two glowing ends of their cigars might have been the smouldering eyes of some malignant fiend looking down in the darkness.

A remarkable man this Von Bork—a man who could hardly be matched among all the devoted agents of the Kaiser. It was his talents which had first recommended him for the English mission, the most important mission of all, but since he had taken it over those talents had become more and more manifest to the half-dozen people in the world who were really in touch with the truth. One of these was his present companion, Baron Von Herling, the chief secretary of the legation, whose huge 100-horse-power Benz car was blocking the country lane as it waited to waft its owner back to London.

"So far as I can judge the trend of events, you will probably be back in Berlin within the week," the secretary was saying. "When you get there, my dear Von Bork, I think you will be surprised at the welcome you will receive. I happen to know what is thought in the highest quarters of your work in this country." He was a huge man, the secretary, deep, broad, and tall, with a slow, heavy fashion of speech which had been his main asset in his political career.

Von Bork laughed.

"They are not very hard to deceive," he remarked. "A more docile, simple folk could not be imagined."

"I don't know about that," said the other thoughtfully. "They have strange limits and one must learn to observe them. It is that surface simplicity of theirs which makes a trap for the stranger. One's first impression is that they are entirely soft. Then one comes suddenly upon something very hard, and you know that you have reached the limit and must adapt yourself to the fact. They have, for example, their insular conventions which simply must be observed."

"Meaning 'good form' and that sort of thing?" Von Bork sighed as one who had suffered much.

"Meaning British prejudice in all its queer manifestations. As an example I may quote one of my own worst blunders—I can afford to talk of my blunders, for you know my work well enough to be aware of my successes. It was on my first arrival. I was invited to a week-end gathering at the country house of a cabinet minister. The conversation was amazingly indiscreet."

Von Bork nodded. "I've been there," said he dryly.

"Exactly. Well, I naturally sent a résumé of the information to Berlin. Unfortunately our good chancellor is a little heavy-handed in these matters, and he transmitted a remark which showed that he was aware of what had been said. This, of course, took the trail straight up to me. You've no idea the harm that it did me. There was nothing soft about our British hosts on that occasion, I can assure you. I was two years living it down. Now you, with this sporting pose of yours—"

"No, no, don't call it a pose. A pose is an artificial thing. This is quite natural. I am a born sportsman. I enjoy it."

"Well, that makes it the more effective. You yacht against them, you hunt with them, you play polo, you match them in every game, your four-in-hand takes the prize at Olympia. I have even heard that you go the length of boxing with the young officers. What is the result? Nobody takes you seriously. You are a 'good old sport' 'quite a decent fellow for a German,' a hard-drinking, night-club, knock-about-town, devil-may-care young fellow. And all the time this quiet country house of yours is the centre of half the mischief in England, and the sporting squire the most astute secret-service man in Europe. Genius, my dear Von Bork—genius!"

"You flatter me, Baron. But certainly I may claim my four years in this country have not been unproductive. I've never shown you my little store. Would you mind stepping in for a moment?"

The door of the study opened straight on to the terrace. Von Bork pushed it back, and, leading the way, he clicked the switch of the electric light. He then closed the door behind the bulky form which followed him and carefully adjusted the heavy curtain over the latticed window. Only when all these precautions had been taken and tested did he turn his sunburned aquiline face to his guest.

"Some of my papers have gone," said he. "When my wife and the household left yesterday for Flushing they took the less important with them. I must, of course, claim the protection of the embassy for the others."

"Your name has already been filed as one of the personal suite. There will be no difficulties for you or your baggage. Of course, it is just possible that we may not have to go. England may leave France to her fate. We are sure that there is no binding treaty between them."

"And Belgium?"

"Yes, and Belgium, too."

Von Bork shook his head. "I don't see how that could be. There is a definite treaty there. She could never recover from such a humiliation."

"She would at least have peace for the moment."

"But her honour?"

"Tut, my dear sir, we live in a utilitarian age. Honour is a mediæval conception. Besides England is not ready. It is an inconceivable thing, but even our special war tax of fifty million, which one would think made our purpose as clear as if we had advertised it on the front page of the Times, has not roused these people from their slumbers. Here and there one hears a question. It is my business to find an answer. Here and there also there is an irritation. It is my business to soothe it. But I can assure you that so far as the essentials go—the storage of munitions, the preparation for submarine attack, the arrangements for making high explosives—nothing is prepared. How, then, can England come in, especially when we have stirred her up such a devil's brew of Irish civil war, window-breaking Furies, and God knows what to keep her thoughts at home."

"She must think of her future."

"Ah, that is another matter. I fancy that in the future we have our own very definite plans about England, and that your information will be very vital to us. It is to-day or to-morrow with Mr. John Bull. If he prefers to-day we are perfectly ready. If it is to-morrow we shall be more ready still. I should think they would be wiser to fight with allies than without them, but that is their own affair. This week is their week of destiny. But you were speaking of your papers." He sat in the armchair with the light shining upon his broad bald head, while he puffed sedately at his cigar.

The large oak-panelled, book-lined room had a curtain hung in the further corner. When this was drawn it disclosed a large, brass-bound safe. Von Bork detached a small key from his watch chain, and after some considerable manipulation of the lock he swung open the heavy door.

"Look!" said he, standing clear, with a wave of his hand.

The light shone vividly into the opened safe, and the secretary of the embassy gazed with an absorbed interest at the rows of stuffed pigeon-holes with which it was furnished. Each pigeon-hole had its label, and his eyes as he glanced along them read a long series of such titles as "Fords," "Harbour-defences," "Aeroplanes," "Ireland," "Egypt," "Portsmouth forts," "The Channel," "Rosythe," and a score of others. Each compartment was bristling with papers and plans.

"Colossal!" said the secretary. Putting down his cigar he softly clapped his fat hands.

"And all in four years, Baron. Not such a bad show for the hard-drinking, hard-riding country squire. But the gem of my collection is coming and there is the setting all ready for it." He pointed to a space over which "Naval Signals" was printed.

"But you have a good dossier there already."

"Out of date and waste paper. The Admiralty in some way got the alarm and every code has been changed. It was a blow, Baron—the worst setback in my whole campaign. But thanks to my check-book and the good Altamont all will be well to-night."

The Baron looked at his watch and gave a guttural exclamation of disappointment.

"Well, I really can wait no longer. You can imagine that things are moving at present in Carlton Terrace and that we have all to be at our posts. I had hoped to be able to bring news of your great coup. Did Altamont name no hour?"

Von Bork pushed over a telegram.

Will come without fail to-night and bring new sparking plugs.
—ALTAMONT.

"Sparking plugs, eh?"

"You see he poses as a motor expert and I keep a full garage. In

our code everything likely to come up is named after some spare part. If he talks of a radiator it is a battleship, of an oil pump a cruiser, and so on. Sparking plugs are naval signals."

"From Portsmouth at midday," said the secretary, examining the superscription. "By the way, what do you give him?"

"Five hundred pounds for this particular job. Of course he has a salary as well."

"The greedy rogue. They are useful, these traitors, but I grudge them their blood money."

"I grudge Altamont nothing. He is a wonderful worker. If I pay him well, at least he delivers the goods, to use his own phrase. Besides he is not a traitor. I assure you that our most pan-Germanic Junker is a sucking dove in his feelings towards England as compared with a real bitter Irish-American."

"Oh, an Irish-American?"

"If you heard him talk you would not doubt it. Sometimes I assure you I can hardly understand him. He seems to have declared war on the King's English as well as on the English king. Must you really go? He may be here any moment."

"No. I'm sorry, but I have already overstayed my time. We shall expect you early to-morrow, and when you get that signal book through the little door on the Duke of York's steps you can put a triumphant Finis to your record in England. What! Tokay!" He indicated a heavily sealed dust-covered bottle which stood with two high glasses upon a salver.

"May I offer you a glass before your journey?"

"No, thanks. But it looks like revelry."

"Altamont has a nice taste in wines, and he took a fancy to my Tokay. He is a touchy fellow and needs humouring in small things. I have to study him, I assure you." They had strolled out on to the terrace again, and along it to the further end where at a touch from the Baron's chauffeur the great car shivered and chuckled. "Those are the lights of Harwich, I suppose," said the secretary, pulling on his dust coat. "How still and peaceful it all seems. There may be other lights within the week, and the English coast a less tranquil place! The heavens, too, may not be quite so peaceful if all that the good Zepplin promises us comes true. By the way, who is that?"

Only one window showed a light behind them; in it there stood a lamp, and beside it, seated at a table, was a dear old ruddy-faced woman in a country cap. She was bending over her knitting and stopping occasionally to stroke a large black cat upon a stool beside her.

"That is Martha, the only servant I have left."

The secretary chuckled.

"She might almost personify Britannia," said he, "with her complete self-absorption and general air of comfortable somnolence. Well, au revoir, Von Bork!" With a final wave of his hand he sprang into the car, and a moment later the two golden cones from the headlights shot through the darkness. The secretary lay back in the cushions of the luxurious limousine, with his thoughts so full of the impending European tragedy that he hardly observed that as his car swung round the village street it nearly passed over a little Ford coming in the opposite direction.

Von Bork walked slowly back to the study when the last gleams of the motor lamps had faded into the distance. As he passed he observed that his old housekeeper had put out her lamp and retired. It was a new experience to him, the silence and darkness of his widespread house, for his family and household had been a large one. It was a relief to him, however, to think that they were all in safety and that, but for that one old woman who had lingered in the kitchen, he had the whole place to himself. There was a good deal of tidying up to do inside his study and he set himself to do it until his keen, handsome face was flushed with the heat of the burning papers. A leather valise stood beside his table, and into this he began to pack very neatly and systematically the precious contents of his safe. He had hardly got started with the work, however, when his quick ears caught the sounds of a distant car. Instantly he gave an exclamation of satisfaction, strapped up the valise, shut the safe, locked it, and hurried out on to the terrace. He was just in time to see the lights of a small car come to a halt at the gate. A passenger sprang out of it and advanced swiftly towards him, while the chauffeur, a heavily built, elderly man with a grey moustache, settled down like one who resigns himself to a long vigil.

"Well?" asked Von Bork eagerly, running forward to meet his visitor.

For answer the man waved a small brown-paper parcel triumphantly above his head.

"You can give me the glad hand to-night, mister," he cried. "I'm bringing home the bacon at last."

"The signals?"

"Same as I said in my cable. Every last one of them, semaphore, lamp code, Marconi—a copy, mind you, not the original. That was too dangerous. But it's the real goods, and you can lay to that." He slapped the German upon the shoulder with a rough familiarity from which the other winced.

"Come in," he said. "I'm all alone in the house. I was only waiting for this. Of course a copy is better than the original. If an original were missing they would change the whole thing. You think it's all safe about the copy?"

The Irish-American had entered the study and stretched his long limbs from the armchair. He was a tall, gaunt man of sixty, with clear-cut features and a small goatee beard which gave him a general resemblance to the caricatures of Uncle Sam. A half-smoked, sodden cigar hung from the corner of his mouth, and as he sat down he struck a match and relit it. "Making ready for a move?" he remarked as he looked round him. "Say, mister," he added, as his eyes fell upon the safe from which the curtain was now removed, "you don't tell me you keep your papers in that?"

"Why not?"

"Gosh, in a wide-open contraption like that! And they reckon you to be some spy. Why, a Yankee crook would be into that with a can-opener. If I'd known that any letter of mine was goin' to lie loose in a thing like that I'd have been a mug to write to you at all."

"It would puzzle any crook to force that safe," Von Bork answered. "You won't cut that metal with any tool."

"But the lock?"

"No, it's a double combination lock. You know what that is?"

"Search me," said the American.

"Well, you need a word as well as a set of figures before you can get the lock to work." He rose and showed a double-radiating disc round the keyhole. "This outer one is for the letters, the inner one for the figures."

"Well, well, that's fine."

"So it's not quite as simple as you thought. It was four years ago that I had it made, and what do you think I chose for the word and figures?"

"It's beyond me."

"Well, I chose August for the word, and 1914 for the figures, and here we are."

The American's face showed his surprise and admiration.

"My, but that was smart! You had it down to a fine thing."

"Yes, a few of us even then could have guessed the date. Here it is, and I'm shutting down to-morrow morning."

"Well, I guess you'll have to fix me up also. I'm not staying in this goldarned country all on my lonesome. In a week or less, from what I see, John Bull will be on his hind legs and fair ramping. I'd rather watch him from over the water."

"But you're an American citizen?"

"Well, so was Jack James an American citizen, but he's doing time in Portland all the same. It cuts no ice with a British copper to tell him you're an American citizen. 'It's British law and order over here,' says he. By the way, mister, talking of Jack James, it seems to me you don't do much to cover your men."

"What do you mean?" Von Bork asked sharply.

"Well, you are their employer, ain't you? It's up to you to see that they don't fall down. But they do fall down, and when did you ever pick them up? There's James—"

"It was James's own fault. You know that yourself. He was too self-willed for the job."

"James was a bonehead—I give you that. Then there was Hollis."

"The man was mad."

"Well, he went a bit woozy towards the end. It's enough to make a man bug-house when he has to play a part from morning to night with a hundred guys all ready to set the coppers wise to him. But now there is Steiner—"

Von Bork started violently, and his ruddy face turned a shade paler.

"What about Steiner?"

"Well, they've got him, that's all. They raided his store last night, and he and his papers are all in Portsmouth jail. You'll go off and he, poor devil, will have to stand the racket, and lucky if he gets off with his life. That's why I want to get over the water as soon as you do."

Von Bork was a strong, self-contained man, but it was easy to see that the news had shaken him.

"How could they have got on to Steiner?" he muttered. "That's the worst blow yet."

"Well, you nearly had a worse one, for I believe they are not far off me."

"You don't mean that!"

"Sure thing. My landlady down Fratton way had some inquiries, and when I heard of it I guessed it was time for me to hustle. But what I want to know, mister, is how the coppers know these things? Steiner is the fifth man you've lost since I signed on with you, and I know the name of the sixth if I don't get a move on. How do you explain it, and ain't you ashamed to see your men go down like this?"

Von Bork flushed crimson.

"How dare you speak in such a way!"

"If I didn't dare things, mister, I wouldn't be in your service. But I'll tell you straight what is in my mind. I've heard that with you German politicians when an agent has done his work you are not sorry to see him put away."

Von Bork sprang to his feet.

"Do you dare to suggest that I have given away my own agents!"

"I don't stand for that, mister, but there's a stool pigeon or a cross somewhere, and it's up to you to find out where it is. Anyhow I am taking no more chances. It's me for little Holland, and the sooner the better."

Von Bork had mastered his anger.

"We have been allies too long to quarrel now at the very hour of victory," he said. "You've done splendid work and taken risks, and I can't forget it. By all means go to Holland, and you can get a boat from Rotterdam to New York. No other line will be safe a week from now. I'll take that book and pack it with the rest."

The American held the small parcel in his hand, but made no motion to give it up.

"What about the dough?" he asked.

"The what?"

"The boodle. The reward. The £500. The gunner turned damned nasty at the last, and I had to square him with an extra hundred dollars or it would have been nitsky for you and me. 'Nothin' doin'!' says he, and he meant it, too, but the last hundred did it. It's cost me two hundred pound from first to last, so it isn't likely I'd give it up without gettin' my wad."

Von Bork smiled with some bitterness. "You don't seem to have a very high opinion of my honour," said he, "you want the money before you give up the book."

"Well, mister, it is a business proposition."

"All right. Have your way." He sat down at the table and scribbled a check, which he tore from the book, but he refrained from handing it to his companion. "After all, since we are to be on such terms, Mr. Altamont," said he, "I don't see why I should trust you any more than you trust me. Do you understand?" he added, looking back over his shoulder at the American. "There's the check upon the table. I claim the right to examine that parcel before you pick the money up."

The American passed it over without a word. Von Bork undid a winding of string and two wrappers of paper. Then he sat gazing for a moment in silent amazement at a small blue book which lay before him. Across the cover was printed in golden letters Practical Handbook of Bee Culture. Only for one instant did the master spy glare at this strangely irrelevant inscription. The next he was gripped at the back of his neck by a grasp of iron, and a chloroformed sponge was held in front of his writhing face.

"Another glass, Watson!" said Mr. Sherlock Holmes as he extended the bottle of Imperial Tokay.

The thickset chauffeur, who had seated himself by the table, pushed forward his glass with some eagerness.

"It is a good wine, Holmes."

"A remarkable wine, Watson. Our friend upon the sofa has assured me that it is from Franz Josef's special cellar at the Schoenbrunn Palace. Might I trouble you to open the window, for chloroform vapour does not help the palate."

The safe was ajar, and Holmes standing in front of it was removing dossier after dossier, swiftly examining each, and then packing it neatly in Von Bork's valise. The German lay upon the sofa sleeping stertorously with a strap round his upper arms and another round his legs.

"We need not hurry ourselves, Watson. We are safe from interruption. Would you mind touching the bell? There is no one in the house except old Martha, who has played her part to admiration. I got her the situation here when first I took the matter up. Ah, Martha, you will be glad to hear that all is well."

The pleasant old lady had appeared in the doorway. She curtseyed with a smile to Mr. Holmes, but glanced with some apprehension at the figure upon the sofa.

"It is all right, Martha. He has not been hurt at all."

"I am glad of that, Mr. Holmes. According to his lights he has been a kind master. He wanted me to go with his wife to Germany yesterday, but that would hardly have suited your plans, would it, sir?"

"No, indeed, Martha. So long as you were here I was easy in my mind. We waited some time for your signal to-night."

"It was the secretary, sir."

"I know. His car passed ours."

"I thought he would never go. I knew that it would not suit your plans, sir, to find him here."

"No, indeed. Well, it only meant that we waited half an hour or so until I saw your lamp go out and knew that the coast was clear. You can report to me to-morrow in London, Martha, at Claridge's Hotel."

"Very good, sir."

"I suppose you have everything ready to leave."

"Yes, sir. He posted seven letters to-day. I have the addresses as usual."

"Very good, Martha. I will look into them to-morrow. Good-night. These papers," he continued as the old lady vanished, "are not of very great importance, for, of course, the information which they represent has been sent off long ago to the German government. These are the originals which could not safely be got out of the country."

"Then they are of no use."

"I should not go so far as to say that, Watson. They will at least show our people what is known and what is not. I may say that a good many of these papers have come through me, and I need not add are thoroughly untrustworthy. It would brighten my declining years to see a German cruiser navigating the Solent according to the mine-field plans which I have furnished. But you, Watson"—he stopped his work and took his old friend by the shoulders—"I've hardly seen you in the light yet. How have the years used you? You look the same blithe boy as ever."

"I feel twenty years younger, Holmes. I have seldom felt so happy as when I got your wire asking me to meet you at Harwich with the car. But you, Holmes—you have changed very little—save for that horrible goatee."

"These are the sacrifices one makes for one's country, Watson," said Holmes, pulling at his little tuft. "To-morrow it will be but a dreadful memory. With my hair cut and a few other superficial changes I shall no doubt reappear at Claridge's to-morrow as I was before this American stunt—I beg your pardon, Watson, my well of English seems to be permanently defiled—before this American job came my way."

"But you have retired, Holmes. We heard of you as living the life of a hermit among your bees and your books in a small farm upon the South Downs."

"Exactly, Watson. Here is the fruit of my leisured ease, the magnum opus of my latter years!" He picked up the volume from the table and read out the whole title, Practical Handbook of Bee Culture, with Some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen. "Alone I did it. Behold the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days when I watched the little working gangs as once I watched the criminal world of London."

"But how did you get to work again?"

"Ah, I have often marvelled at it myself. The Foreign Minister alone I could have withstood, but when the Premier also deigned to visit my humble roof—! The fact is, Watson, that this gentleman upon the sofa was a bit too good for our people. He was in a class by himself. Things were going wrong, and no one could understand why they were going wrong. Agents were suspected or even caught, but there was evidence of some strong and secret central force. It was absolutely necessary to expose it. Strong pressure was brought upon me to look into the matter. It has cost me two years, Watson, but they have not been devoid of excitement. When I say that I started my pilgrimage at Chicago, graduated in an Irish secret society at Buffalo, gave serious trouble to the constabulary at Skibbareen, and so eventually caught the eye of a subordinate agent of Von Bork, who recommended me as a likely man, you will realise that the matter was complex. Since then I have been honoured by his confidence, which has not prevented most of his plans going subtly wrong and five of his best agents being in prison. I watched them, Watson, and I picked them as they ripened. Well, sir, I hope that you are none the worse!"

The last remark was addressed to Von Bork himself, who after much gasping and blinking had lain quietly listening to Holmes's statement. He broke out now into a furious stream of German invective, his face convulsed with passion. Holmes continued his swift investigation of documents while his prisoner cursed and

swore.

"Though unmusical, German is the most expressive of all languages," he observed when Von Bork had stopped from pure exhaustion. "Hullo! Hullo!" he added as he looked hard at the corner of a tracing before putting it in the box. "This should put another bird in the cage. I had no idea that the paymaster was such a rascal, though I have long had an eye upon him. Mister Von Bork, you have a great deal to answer for."

The prisoner had raised himself with some difficulty upon the sofa and was staring with a strange mixture of amazement and hatred at his captor.

"I shall get level with you, Altamont," he said, speaking with slow deliberation. "If it takes me all my life I shall get level with you!"

"The old sweet song," said Holmes. "How often have I heard it in days gone by. It was a favorite ditty of the late lamented Professor Moriarty. Colonel Sebastian Moran has also been known to warble it. And yet I live and keep bees upon the South Downs."

"Curse you, you double traitor!" cried the German, straining against his bonds and glaring murder from his furious eyes.

"No, no, it is not so bad as that," said Holmes, smiling. "As my speech surely shows you, Mr. Altamont of Chicago had no existence in fact. I used him and he is gone."

"Then who are you?"

"It is really immaterial who I am, but since the matter seems to interest you, Mr. Von Bork, I may say that this is not my first acquaintance with the members of your family. I have done a good deal of business in Germany in the past and my name is probably familiar to you."

"I would wish to know it," said the Prussian grimly.

"It was I who brought about the separation between Irene Adler and the late King of Bohemia when your cousin Heinrich was the Imperial Envoy. It was I also who saved from murder, by the Nihilist Klopman, Count Von und Zu Grafenstein, who was your mother's elder brother. It was I—"

Von Bork sat up in amazement.

"There is only one man," he cried.

"Exactly," said Holmes.

Von Bork groaned and sank back on the sofa. "And most of that information came through you," he cried. "What is it worth? What have I done? It is my ruin forever!"

"It is certainly a little untrustworthy," said Holmes. "It will require some checking and you have little time to check it. Your admiral may find the new guns rather larger than he expects, and the cruisers perhaps a trifle faster."

Von Bork clutched at his own throat in despair.

"There are a good many other points of detail which will, no doubt, come to light in good time. But you have one quality which is very rare in a German, Mr. Von Bork: you are a sportsman and you will bear me no ill-will when you realise that you, who have outwitted so many other people, have at last been outwitted yourself. After all, you have done your best for your country, and I have done my best for mine, and what could be more natural? Besides," he added, not unkindly, as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the prostrate man, "it is better than to fall before some ignoble foe. These papers are now ready, Watson. If you will help me with our prisoner, I think that we may get started for London at once."

It was no easy task to move Von Bork, for he was a strong and a desperate man. Finally, holding either arm, the two friends walked him very slowly down the garden walk which he had trod with such proud confidence when he received the congratulations of the famous diplomatist only a few hours before. After a short, final struggle he was hoisted, still bound hand and foot, into the spare seat of the little car. His precious valise was wedged in beside him.

"I trust that you are as comfortable as circumstances permit," said Holmes when the final arrangements were made. "Should I be guilty of a liberty if I lit a cigar and placed it between your lips?"

But all amenities were wasted upon the angry German.

"I suppose you realise, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said he, "that if your government bears you out in this treatment it becomes an act of war."

"What about your government and all this treatment?" said Holmes, tapping the valise.

"You are a private individual. You have no warrant for my arrest. The whole proceeding is absolutely illegal and outrageous."

"Absolutely," said Holmes.

"Kidnapping a German subject."

"And stealing his private papers."

"Well, you realise your position, you and your accomplice here. If I were to shout for help as we pass through the village—"

"My dear sir, if you did anything so foolish you would probably enlarge the two limited titles of our village inns by giving us 'The Dangling Prussian' as a signpost. The Englishman is a patient creature, but at present his temper is a little inflamed, and it would be as well not to try him too far. No, Mr. Von Bork, you will go with us in a quiet, sensible fashion to Scotland Yard, whence you can send for your friend, Baron Von Herling, and see if even now you may not fill that place which he has reserved for you in the ambassadorial suite. As to you, Watson, you are joining us with your old service, as I understand, so London won't be out of your way. Stand with me here upon the terrace, for it may be the last quiet talk that we shall ever have."

The two friends chatted in intimate converse for a few minutes, recalling once again the days of the past, while their prisoner vainly wriggled to undo the bonds that held him. As they turned to the car Holmes pointed back to the moonlit sea and shook a thoughtful head.

"There's an east wind coming, Watson."

"I think not, Holmes. It is very warm."

"Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared. Start her up, Watson, for it's time that we were on our way. I have a check for five hundred pounds which should be cashed early, for the drawer is quite capable of stopping it if he can."

Sonnet 16

By Richard Barnfield

Long have I long'd to see my love againe,
Still have I wisht, but never could obtaine it;
Rather than all the world (if I might gaine it)
Would I desire my love's sweet precious gaine.
Yet in my soule I see him everie day,
See him, and see his still sterne countenaunce,
But (ah) what is of long continuance,
Where majestie and beautie beares the sway?
Sometimes, when I imagine that I see him,
(As love is full of foolish fantasies)
Weening to kisse his lips, as my love's fees,
I feele but aire: nothing but aire to bee him.
Thus with Ixion, kisse I clouds in vaine:
Thus with Ixion, feele I endles paine.

The Man Who Would Be King

By Rudyard Kipling



McNair in disguise (centre)

"Brother to a Prince and fellow to a beggar if he be found worthy."

The Law, as quoted, lays down a fair conduct of life, and one not easy to follow. I have been fellow to a beggar again and again under circumstances which prevented either of us finding out whether the other was worthy. I have still to be brother to a Prince, though I once came near to kinship with what might have been a veritable King and was promised the reversion of a Kingdom — army, law-courts, revenue and policy all complete. But, to-day, I greatly fear that my King is dead, and if I want a crown I must go and hunt it for myself.

The beginning of everything was in a railway train upon the road to Mhow from Ajmir. There had been a deficit in the Budget, which necessitated travelling, not Second-class, which is only half as dear as First-class, but by Intermediate, which is very awful indeed. There are no cushions in the Intermediate class, and the population are either Intermediate, which is Eurasian, or native, which for a long night journey is nasty; or Loafer, which is amusing though intoxicated. Intermediates do not patronize refreshment-rooms. They carry their food in bundles and pots, and buy sweets from the native sweetmeat-sellers, and drink the roadside water. That is why in the hot weather Intermediates are taken out of the carriages dead, and in all weathers are most properly looked down upon.

My particular Intermediate happened to be empty till I reached Nasirabad, when a huge gentleman in shirt-sleeves entered, and, following the custom of Intermediates, passed the time of day. He was a wanderer and a vagabond like myself, but with an educated taste for whiskey. He told tales of things he had seen and done, of out-of-the-way corners of the Empire into which he had penetrated, and of adventures in which he risked his life for a few days' food. "If India was filled with men like you and me, not knowing more than the crows where they'd get their next day's rations, it isn't seventy millions of revenue the land would be paying — it's seven hundred million," said he; and as I looked at his mouth and chin I was disposed to agree with him. We talked politics — the politics of Loaferdom that sees things from the underside where the lath and plaster is not smoothed off — and we talked postal arrangements because my friend wanted to send a telegram back from the next station to Ajmir, which is the turning-off place from the Bombay to the Mhow line as you travel westward. My friend had no money beyond eight annas which he wanted for dinner, and I had no money at all, owing to the hitch in the Budget before mentioned. Further, I was going into a wilderness where, though I should resume touch with the Treasury, there were no telegraph offices. I was, therefore, unable to help him in any way.

"We might threaten a Station-master, and make him send a wire on tick," said my friend, "but that'd mean inquiries for you and for me, and I've got my hands full these days. Did you say you are travelling back along this line within any days?"

"Within ten," I said.

"Can't you make it eight?" said he. "Mine is rather urgent business."

"I can send your telegram within ten days if that will serve you," I said.

"I couldn't trust the wire to fetch him now I think of it. It's this way. He leaves Delhi on the 23d for Bombay. That means he'll be running through Ajmir about the night of the 23d."

"But I'm going into the Indian Desert," I explained.

"Well and good," said he. "You'll be changing at Marwar Junction to get into Jodhpore territory — you must do that — and he'll be coming through Marwar Junction in the early morning of the 24th by the Bombay Mail. Can you be at Marwar Junction on that time? 'Twon't be inconveniencing you because I know that there's precious few pickings to be got out of these Central India States — even though you pretend to be correspondent of the Backwoodsman."

"Have you ever tried that trick?" I asked.

"Again and again, but the Residents find you out, and then you get escorted to the Border before you've time to get your knife into them. But about my friend here. I must give him a word o' mouth to tell him what's come to me or else he won't know where to go. I would take it more than kind of you if you was to come out of Central India in time to catch him at Marwar Junction, and say to him:— 'He has gone South for the week.' He'll know what that means. He's a big man with a red beard, and a great swell he is. You'll find him sleeping like a gentleman with all his luggage round him in a second-class compartment. But don't you be afraid. Slip down the window, and say:— 'He has gone South for the week,' and he'll tumble. It's only cutting your time of stay in those parts by two days. I ask you as a stranger — going to the West," he said with emphasis.

"Where have you come from?" said I.

"From the East," said he, "and I am hoping that you will give him the message on the Square — for the sake of my Mother as well as your own."

Englishmen are not usually softened by appeals to the memory of their mothers, but for certain reasons, which will be fully apparent, I saw fit to agree.

"It's more than a little matter," said he, "and that's why I ask you to do it — and now I know that I can depend on you doing it. A second-class carriage at Marwar Junction, and a red-haired man asleep in it. You'll be sure to remember. I get out at the next station, and I must hold on there till he comes or sends me what I want."

"I'll give the message if I catch him," I said, "and for the sake of your Mother as well as mine I'll give you a word of advice. Don't try to run the Central India States just now as the correspondent of the Backwoodsman. There's a real one knocking about here, and it might lead to trouble."

"Thank you," said he simply, "and when will the swine be gone? I can't starve because he's ruining my work. I wanted to get hold of the Degumber Rajah down here about his father's widow, and give him a jump."

"What did he do to his father's widow, then?"

"Filled her up with red pepper and slippered her to death as she hung from a beam. I found that out myself and I'm the only man that would dare going into the State to get hush-money for it. They'll try to poison me, same as they did in Chortumna when I went on the loot there. But you'll give the man at Marwar Junction my message?"

He got out at a little roadside station, and I reflected. I had heard, more than once, of men personating correspondents of newspapers and bleeding small Native States with threats of exposure, but I had never met any of the caste before. They lead a hard life, and generally die with great suddenness. The Native States have a wholesome horror of English newspapers, which may throw light on their peculiar methods of government, and do their best to choke correspondents with champagne, or drive them out of their mind with four-in-hand barouches. They do not understand that nobody cares a straw for the internal administration of Native States so long as oppression and crime are kept within decent limits, and the ruler is not drugged, drunk, or diseased from one end of the year to the other. Native States were created by Providence in order to supply picturesque scenery, tigers and tall-writing. They are the dark places of the earth, full of unimaginable cruelty, touching the Railway and the Telegraph on one side, and, on the other, the days of Harun-al-Raschid. When I left the train I did business with divers Kings, and in eight days passed through many changes of life. Sometimes I wore dress-clothes and consorted with Princes and Politicals, drinking from crystal and eating from silver. Sometimes I lay out upon the ground and devoured what I could get, from a plate made of a flapjack, and drank the running water, and slept under the same rug as my servant. It was all in a day's work.

Then I headed for the Great Indian Desert upon the proper date, as I had promised, and the night Mail set me down at Marwar Junction, where a funny little, happy-go-lucky, native managed railway runs to Jodhpore. The Bombay Mail from Delhi makes a short halt at Marwar. She arrived as I got in, and I had just time to hurry to her platform and go down the carriages. There was only one second-class on the train. I slipped the window and looked down upon a flaming red beard, half covered by a railway rug. That was my man, fast asleep, and I dug him gently in the ribs. He woke with a grunt and I saw his face in the light of the lamps. It was a great and shining face.

"Tickets again?" said he.

"No," said I. "I am to tell you that he is gone South for the week. He is gone South for the week!"

The train had begun to move out. The red man rubbed his eyes. "He has gone South for the week," he repeated. "Now that's just like his impudence. Did he say that I was to give you anything? — 'Cause I won't."

"He didn't," I said and dropped away, and watched the red lights die out in the dark. It was horribly cold because the wind was blowing off the sands. I climbed into my own train — not an Intermediate Carriage this time — and went to sleep.

If the man with the beard had given me a rupee I should have kept it as a memento of a rather curious affair. But the consciousness of having done my duty was my only reward. Later on I reflected that two gentlemen like my friends could not

do any good if they foregathered and personated correspondents of newspapers, and might, if they "stuck up" one of the little rat-trap states of Central India or Southern Rajputana, get themselves into serious difficulties. I therefore took some trouble to describe them as accurately as I could remember to people who would be interested in deporting them; and succeeded, so I was later informed, in having them headed back from the Degumber borders.

Then I became respectable, and returned to an Office where there were no Kings and no incidents except the daily manufacture of a newspaper. A newspaper office seems to attract every conceivable sort of person, to the prejudice of discipline. Zenana-mission ladies arrive, and beg that the Editor will instantly abandon all his duties to describe a Christian prize-giving in a back-slum of a perfectly inaccessible village; Colonels who have been overpassed for commands sit down and sketch the outline of a series of ten, twelve, or twenty-four leading articles on Seniority versus Selection; missionaries wish to know why they have not been permitted to escape from their regular vehicles of abuse and swear at a brother-missionary under special patronage of the editorial We; stranded theatrical companies troop up to explain that they cannot pay for their advertisements, but on their return from New Zealand or Tahiti will do so with interest; inventors of patent punkah-pulling machines, carriage couplings and unbreakable swords and axle-trees call with specifications in their pockets and hours at their disposal; tea-companies enter and elaborate their prospectuses with the office pens; secretaries of ball-committees clamor to have the glories of their last dance more fully expounded; strange ladies rustle in and say:— "I want a hundred lady's cards printed at once, please," which is manifestly part of an Editor's duty; and every dissolute ruffian that ever tramped the Grand Trunk Road makes it his business to ask for employment as a proof-reader. And, all the time, the telephone-bell is ringing madly, and Kings are being killed on the Continent, and Empires are saying, "You're another," and Mister Gladstone is calling down brimstone upon the British Dominions, and the little black copy-boys are whining, "kaa-pi chayha-yeh" (copy wanted) like tired bees, and most of the paper is as blank as Modred's shield.

But that is the amusing part of the year. There are other six months wherein none ever come to call, and the thermometer walks inch by inch up to the top of the glass, and the office is darkened to just above reading light, and the press machines are red-hot of touch, and nobody writes anything but accounts of amusements in the Hill-stations or obituary notices. Then the telephone becomes a tinkling terror, because it tells you of the sudden deaths of men and women that you knew intimately, and the prickly-heat covers you as with a garment, and you sit down and write:— "A slight increase of sickness is reported from the Khuda Janta Khan District. The outbreak is purely sporadic in its nature, and, thanks to the energetic efforts of the District authorities, is now almost at an end. It is, however, with deep regret we record the death, etc."

Then the sickness really breaks out, and the less recording and reporting the better for the peace of the subscribers. But the Empires and the Kings continue to divert themselves as selfishly as before, and the foreman thinks that a daily paper really ought to come out once in twenty-four hours, and all the people at the Hill-stations in the middle of their amusements say:— "Good gracious! Why can't the paper be sparkling? I'm sure there's plenty going on up here."

That is the dark half of the moon, and, as the advertisements say, "must be experienced to be appreciated."

It was in that season, and a remarkably evil season, that the paper began running the last issue of the week on Saturday night, which is to say Sunday morning, after the custom of a London paper. This was a great convenience, for immediately after the paper was put to bed, the dawn would lower the thermometer from 96° to almost 84° for almost half an hour, and in that chill — you have no idea how cold is 84° on the grass until you begin to pray for it — a very tired man could set off to sleep ere the heat roused him.

One Saturday night it was my pleasant duty to put the paper to bed alone. A King or courtier or a courtesan or a community was going to die or get a new Constitution, or do something that was important on the other side of the world, and the paper was to be held open till the latest possible minute in order to catch the telegram. It was a pitchy black night, as stifling as a June night can be, and the loo, the red-hot wind from the westward, was booming among the tinder-dry trees and pretending that the rain was on its heels. Now and again a spot of almost boiling water would fall on the dust with the flop of a frog, but all our weary world knew that was only pretence. It was a shade cooler in the press-room than the office, so I sat there, while the type ticked and clicked, and the night-jars hooted at the windows, and the all but naked compositors wiped the sweat from their foreheads and called for water. The thing that was keeping us back, whatever it was, would not come off, though the loo dropped and the last type was set, and the whole round earth stood still in the choking heat, with its finger on its lip, to wait the event. I drowsed, and wondered whether the telegraph was a blessing, and whether this dying man, or struggling people, was aware of the inconvenience the delay was causing. There was no special reason beyond the heat and worry to make tension, but, as the clock-hands crept up to three o'clock and the machines spun their fly-wheels two and three times to see that all was in order, before I said the word that would set them off, I could have shrieked aloud.

Then the roar and rattle of the wheels shivered the quiet into little bits. I rose to go away, but two men in white clothes stood in front of me. The first one said:— "It's him!" The second said—"So it is!" And they both laughed almost as loudly as the machinery roared, and mopped their foreheads. "We see there was a light burning across the road and we were sleeping in that ditch there for coolness, and I said to my friend here, the office is open. Let's come along and speak to him as turned us back from the Degumber State," said the smaller of the two. He was the man I had met in the Mhow train, and his fellow was the red-bearded man of Marwar Junction. There was no mistaking the eyebrows of the one or the beard of the other.

I was not pleased, because I wished to go to sleep, not to squabble with loafers. "What do you want?" I asked.

"Half an hour's talk with you cool and comfortable, in the office," said the red-bearded man. "We'd like some drink — the Contrack doesn't begin yet, Peachey, so you needn't look — but what we really want is advice. We don't want money. We ask you as a favor, because you did us a bad turn about Degumber."
I led from the press-room to the stifling office with the maps on the walls, and the red-haired man rubbed his hands. "That's something like," said he. "This was the proper shop to come to. Now, Sir, let me introduce to you Brother Peachey Carnehan, that's him, and Brother Daniel Dravot, that is me, and the less said about our professions the better, for we have been most things in our time. Soldier, sailor, compositor, photographer, proof-reader, street-preacher, and correspondents of the Backwoodsman when we thought the paper wanted one. Carnehan is sober, and so am I. Look at us first and see that's sure. It will save you cutting into my talk. We'll take one of your cigars apiece, and you shall see us light." I watched the test. The men were absolutely sober, so I gave them each a tepid peg. "Well and good," said Carnehan of the eyebrows, wiping the froth from his mustache. "Let me talk now, Dan. We have been all over India, mostly on foot. We have been boiler-fitters, engine-drivers, petty contractors, and all that, and we have decided that India isn't big enough for such as us."

They certainly were too big for the office. Dravot's beard seemed to fill half the room and Carnehan's shoulders the other half, as they sat on the big table. Carnehan continued: — "The country isn't half worked out because they that governs it won't let you touch it. They spend all their blessed time in governing it, and you can't lift a spade, nor chip a rock, nor look for oil, nor anything like that without all the Government saying — 'Leave it alone and let us govern.' Therefore, such as it is, we will let it alone, and go away to some other place where a man isn't crowded and can come to his own. We are not little men, and there is nothing that we are afraid of except Drink, and we have signed a Contrack on that. Therefore, we are going away to be Kings."

"Kings in our own right," muttered Dravot.

"Yes, of course," I said. "You've been tramping in the sun, and it's a very warm night, and hadn't you better sleep over the notion? Come to-morrow."

"Neither drunk nor sunstruck," said Dravot. "We have slept over the notion half a year, and require to see Books and Atlases, and we have decided that there is only one place now in the world that two strong men can Sar-a-whack. They call it Kafiristan. By my reckoning its the top right-hand corner of Afghanistan, not more than three hundred miles from Peshawar. They have two and thirty heathen idols there, and we'll be the thirty-third. It's a mountainous country, and the women of those parts are very beautiful."

"But that is provided against in the Contrack," said Carnehan. "Neither Women nor Liquor, Daniel."

"And that's all we know, except that no one has gone there, and they fight, and in any place where they fight a man who knows how to drill men can always be a King. We shall go to those parts and say to any King we find — 'D' you want to vanquish your foes?' and we will show him how to drill men; for that we know better than anything else. Then we will subvert that King and seize his Throne and establish a Dy-nasty."

"You'll be cut to pieces before you're fifty miles across the Border," I said. "You have to travel through Afghanistan to get to that country. It's one mass of mountains and peaks and glaciers, and no Englishman has been through it. The people are utter brutes, and even if you reached them you couldn't do anything."

"That's more like," said Carnehan. "If you could think us a little more mad we would be more pleased. We have come to you to know about this country, to read a book about it, and to be shown maps. We want you to tell us that we are fools and to show us your books." He turned to the book-cases.

"Are you at all in earnest?" I said.

"A little," said Dravot, sweetly. "As big a map as you have got, even if it's all blank where Kafiristan is, and any books you've got. We can read, though we aren't very educated."

I uncased the big thirty-two-miles-to-the-inch map of India, and two smaller Frontier maps, hauled down volume INF-KAN of the Encyclopædia Britannica, and the men consulted them.

"See here!" said Dravot, his thumb on the map. "Up to Jagdallak, Peachey and me know the road. We was there with Roberts's Army. We'll have to turn off to the right at Jagdallak through Laghmann territory. Then we get among the hills — fourteen thousand feet — fifteen thousand — it will be cold work there, but it don't look very far on the map."

I handed him Wood on the Sources of the Oxus. Carnehan was deep in the Encyclopædia.

"They're a mixed lot," said Dravot, reflectively; "and it won't help us to know the names of their tribes. The more tribes the more they'll fight, and the better for us. From Jagdallak to Ashang. H'mm!"

"But all the information about the country is as sketchy and inaccurate as can be," I protested. "No one knows anything about it really. Here's the file of the United Services' Institute. Read what Bellew says."

"Blow Bellew!" said Carnehan. "Dan, they're an all-fired lot of heathens, but this book here says they think they're related to us English."

I smoked while the men pored over Raverty, Wood, the maps and the Encyclopædia.

"There is no use your waiting," said Dravot, politely. "It's about four o'clock now. We'll go before six o'clock if you want to sleep, and we won't steal any of the papers. Don't you sit up. We're two harmless lunatics, and if you come, to-morrow evening, down to the Serai we'll say good-by to you."

"You are two fools," I answered. "You'll be turned back at the Frontier or cut up the minute you set foot in Afghanistan. Do you want any money or a recommendation down-country? I can help you to the chance of work next week."

"Next week we shall be hard at work ourselves, thank you," said Dravot. "It isn't so easy being a King as it looks. When we've got our Kingdom in going order we'll let you know, and you can come up and help us to govern it."

"Would two lunatics make a Contrack like that!" said Carnehan, with subdued pride, showing me a greasy half-sheet of note-paper on which was written the following. I copied it, then and there, as a curiosity:—

This Contract between me and you persuing witnesseth in the name of God — Amen and so forth.

(One) That me and you will settle this matter together: i.e., to be Kings of Kafiristan.

(Two) That you and me will not while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any Woman black, white or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful.

(Three) That we conduct ourselves with Dignity and Discretion, and if one of us gets into trouble the other will stay by him.

Signed by you and me this day.

Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan.

Daniel Dravot.

Both Gentlemen at Large.

"There was no need for the last article," said Carnehan, blushing modestly; "but it looks regular. Now you know the sort of men that loafers are — we are loafers, Dan, until we get out of India — and do you think that we could sign a Contrack like that unless we was in earnest? We have kept away from the two things that make life worth having."

"You won't enjoy your lives much longer if you are going to try this idiotic adventure. Don't set the office on fire," I said, "and go away before nine o'clock."

I left them still poring over the maps and making notes on the back of the "Contrack." "Be sure to come down to the Serai to-morrow," were their parting words.

The Kumharsen Serai is the great four-square sink of humanity where the strings of camels and horses from the North load and unload. All the nationalities of Central Asia may be found there, and most of the folk of India proper. Balkh and Bokhara there meet Bengal and Bombay, and try to draw eye-teeth. You can buy ponies, turquoises, Persian pussy-cats, saddle-bags, fat-tailed sheep and musk in the Kumharsen Serai, and get many strange things for nothing. In the afternoon I went down there to see whether my friends intended to keep their word or were lying about drunk.

A priest attired in fragments of ribbons and rags stalked up to me, gravely twisting a child's paper whirligig. Behind him was his servant, bending under the load of a crate of mud toys. The two were loading up two camels, and the inhabitants of the Serai watched them with shrieks of laughter.

"The priest is mad," said a horse-dealer to me. "He is going up to Kabul to sell toys to the Amir. He will either be raised to honor or have his head cut off. He came in here this morning and has been behaving madly ever since."

"The witless are under the protection of God," stammered a flat-cheeked Usbeg in broken Hindi. "They foretell future events."

"Would they could have foretold that my caravan would have been cut up by the Shinwaris almost within shadow of the Pass!" grunted the Eusufzai agent of a Rajputana trading-house whose goods had been feloniously diverted into the hands of other robbers just across the Border, and whose misfortunes were the laughing-stock of the bazar. "Ohé, priest, whence come you and whither do you go?"

"From Roum have I come," shouted the priest, waving his whirligig; "from Roum, blown by the breath of a hundred devils across the sea! O thieves, robbers, liars, the blessing of Pir Khan on pigs, dogs, and perjurers! Who will take the Protected of God to the North to sell charms that are never still to the Amir? The camels shall not gall, the sons shall not fall sick, and the wives shall remain faithful while they are away, of the men who give me place in their caravan. Who will assist me to slipper the King of the Roos with a golden slipper with a silver heel? The protection of Pir Kahn be upon his labors!" He spread out the skirts of his gaberdine and pirouetted between the lines of tethered horses.

"There starts a caravan from Peshawar to Kabul in twenty days, Huzrut," said the Eusufzai trader. "My camels go therewith. Do thou also go and bring us good luck."

"I will go even now!" shouted the priest. "I will depart upon my winged camels, and be at Peshawar in a day! Ho! Hazar Mir Khan," he yelled to his servant "drive out the camels, but let me first mount my own."

He leaped on the back of his beast as it knelt, and turning round to me, cried:—

"Come thou also, Sahib, a little along the road, and I will sell thee a charm — an amulet that shall make thee King of Kafiristan."

Then the light broke upon me, and I followed the two camels out of the Serai till we reached open road and the priest halted.

"What d' you think o' that?" said he in English. "Carnehan can't talk their patter, so I've made him my servant. He makes a handsome servant. 'Tisn't for nothing that I've been knocking about the country for fourteen years. Didn't I do that talk neat? We'll hitch on to a caravan at Peshawar till we get to Jagdallak, and then we'll see if we can get donkeys for our camels, and strike into Kafiristan. Whirligigs for the Amir, O Lor! Put your hand under the camel-bags and tell me what you feel."

I felt the butt of a Martini, and another and another.

"Twenty of 'em," said Dravot, placidly.

"Twenty of 'em, and ammunition to correspond, under the whirligigs and the mud dolls."

"Heaven help you if you are caught with those things!" I said. "A Martini is worth her weight in silver among the Pathans."

"Fifteen hundred rupees of capital — every rupee we could beg, borrow, or steal — are invested on these two camels," said Dravot. "We won't get caught. We're going through the Khaiber with a regular caravan. Who'd touch a poor mad priest?"

"Have you got everything you want?" I asked, overcome with astonishment.

"Not yet, but we shall soon. Give us a momento of your

kindness, Brother. You did me a service yesterday, and that time in Marwar. Half my Kingdom shall you have, as the saying is." I slipped a small charm compass from my watch-chain and handed it up to the priest.

"Good-by," said Dravot, giving me his hand cautiously. "It's the last time we'll shake hands with an Englishman these many days. Shake hands with him, Carnehan," he cried, as the second camel passed me.

Carnehan leaned down and shook hands. Then the camels passed away along the dusty road, and I was left alone to wonder. My eye could detect no failure in the disguises. The scene in the Serai attested that they were complete to the native mind. There was just the chance, therefore, that Carnehan and Dravot would be able to wander through Afghanistan without detection. But, beyond, they would find death, certain and awful death.

Ten days later a native friend of mine, giving me the news of the day from Peshawar, wound up his letter with:— "There has been much laughter here on account of a certain mad priest who is going in his estimation to sell petty gauds and insignificant trinkets which he ascribes as great charms to H. H. the Amir of Bokhara. He passed through Peshawar and associated himself to the Second Summer caravan that goes to Kabul. The merchants are pleased because through superstition they imagine that such mad fellows bring good-fortune."

The two then, were beyond the Border. I would have prayed for them, but, that night, a real King died in Europe, and demanded an obituary notice.

The wheel of the world swings through the same phases again and again. Summer passed and winter thereafter, and came and passed again. The daily paper continued and I with it, and upon the third summer there fell a hot night, a night-issue, and a strained waiting for something to be telegraphed from the other side of the world, exactly as had happened before. A few great men had died in the past two years, the machines worked with more clatter, and some of the trees in the Office garden were a few feet taller. But that was all the difference.

I passed over to the press-room, and went through just such a scene as I have already described. The nervous tension was stronger than it had been two years before, and I felt the heat more acutely. At three o'clock I cried, "Print off," and turned to go, when there crept to my chair what was left of a man. He was bent into a circle, his head was sunk between his shoulders, and he moved his feet one over the other like a bear. I could hardly see whether he walked or crawled — this rag-wrapped, whining cripple who addressed me by name, crying that he was come back. "Can you give me a drink?" he whimpered. "For the Lord's sake, give me a drink!"

I went back to the office, the man following with groans of pain, and I turned up the lamp.

"Don't you know me?" he gasped, dropping into a chair, and he turned his drawn face, surmounted by a shock of gray hair, to the light.

I looked at him intently. Once before had I seen eyebrows that met over the nose in an inch-broad black band, but for the life of me I could not tell where.

"I don't know you," I said, handing him the whiskey. "What can I do for you?"

He took a gulp of the spirit raw, and shivered in spite of the suffocating heat.

"I've come back," he repeated; "and I was the King of Kafiristan — me and Dravot — crowned Kings we was! In this office we settled it — you setting there and giving us the books. I am Peachey — Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan, and you've been setting here ever since — O Lord!"

I was more than a little astonished, and expressed my feelings accordingly.

"It's true," said Carnehan, with a dry cackle, nursing his feet which were wrapped in rags. "True as gospel. Kings we were, with crowns upon our heads — me and Dravot — poor Dan — oh, poor, poor Dan, that would never take advice, not though I begged of him!"

"Take the whiskey," I said, "and take your own time. Tell me all you can recollect of everything from beginning to end. You got across the border on your camels, Dravot dressed as a mad priest and you his servant. Do you remember that?"

"I ain't mad — yet, but I will be that way soon. Of course I remember. Keep looking at me, or maybe my words will go all to pieces. Keep looking at me in my eyes and don't say anything." I leaned forward and looked into his face as steadily as I could. He dropped one hand upon the table and I grasped it by the wrist. It was twisted like a bird's claw, and upon the back was a ragged, red, diamond-shaped scar.

"No, don't look there. Look at me," said Carnehan.

"That comes afterwards, but for the Lord's sake don't distrack me. We left with that caravan, me and Dravot, playing all sorts of antics to amuse the people we were with. Dravot used to make us laugh in the evenings when all the people was cooking their dinners — cooking their dinners, and … what did they do then? They lit little fires with sparks that went into Dravot's beard, and we all laughed — fit to die. Little red fires they was, going into Dravot's big red beard — so funny." His eyes left mine and he smiled foolishly.

"You went as far as Jagdallak with that caravan," I said at a venture, "after you had lit those fires. To Jagdallak, where you turned off to try to get into Kafiristan."

"No, we didn't neither. What are you talking about? We turned off before Jagdallak, because we heard the roads was good. But they wasn't good enough for our two camels — mine and Dravot's. When we left the caravan, Dravot took off all his clothes and mine too, and said we would be heathen, because the Kafirs didn't allow Mohammedans to talk to them. So we dressed betwixt and between, and such a sight as Daniel Dravot I never saw yet nor expect to see again. He burned half his beard, and slung a sheep-skin over his shoulder, and shaved his head into patterns. He shaved mine, too, and made me wear outrageous things to look like a heathen. That was in a most mountaineous country, and our camels couldn't go along any more because of the mountains. They were tall and black, and coming home I saw them fight like wild goats — there are lots of goats in Kafiristan. And these mountains, they never keep still, no more than the goats. Always fighting they are, and don't let you sleep at night."

"Take some more whiskey," I said, very slowly. "What did you and Daniel Dravot do when the camels could go no further because of the rough roads that led into Kafiristan?"

"What did which do? There was a party called Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan that was with Dravot. Shall I tell you about him? He died out there in the cold. Slap from the bridge fell old Peachey, turning and twisting in the air like a penny whirligig that you can sell to the Amir — No; they was two for three ha'pence, those whirligigs, or I am much mistaken and woful sore. And then these camels were no use, and Peachey said to Dravot — 'For the Lord's sake, let's get out of this before our heads are chopped off,' and with that they killed the camels all among the mountains, not having anything in particular to eat, but first they took off the boxes with the guns and the ammunition, till two men came along driving four mules. Dravot up and dances in front of them, singing, — 'Sell me four mules.' Says the first man, — 'If you are rich enough to buy, you are rich enough to rob;' but before ever he could put his hand to his knife, Dravot breaks his neck over his knee, and the other party runs away. So Carnehan loaded the mules with the rifles that was taken off the camels, and together we starts forward into those bitter cold mountainous parts, and never a road broader than the back of your hand."

He paused for a moment, while I asked him if he could remember the nature of the country through which he had journeyed.

"I am telling you as straight as I can, but my head isn't as good as it might be. They drove nails through it to make me hear better how Dravot died. The country was mountainous and the mules were most contrary, and the inhabitants was dispersed and solitary. They went up and up, and down and down, and that other party Carnehan, was imploring of Dravot not to sing and whistle so loud, for fear of bringing down the tremenjus avalanches. But Dravot says that if a King couldn't sing it wasn't worth being King, and whacked the mules over the rump, and never took no heed for ten cold days. We came to a big level valley all among the mountains, and the mules were near dead, so we killed them, not having anything in special for them or us to eat. We sat upon the boxes, and played odd and even with the cartridges that was jolted out.

"Then ten men with bows and arrows ran down that valley, chasing twenty men with bows and arrows, and the row was tremenjus. They was fair men — fairer than you or me — with yellow hair and remarkable well built. Says Dravot, unpacking the guns — 'This is the beginning of the business. We'll fight for the ten men,' and with that he fires two rifles at the twenty men and drops one of them at two hundred yards from the rock where we was sitting. The other men began to run, but Carnehan and Dravot sits on the boxes picking them off at all ranges, up and down the valley. Then we goes up to the ten men that had run across the snow too, and they fires a footy little arrow at us.

Dravot he shoots above their heads and they all falls down flat. Then he walks over them and kicks them, and then he lifts them up and shakes hands all around to make them friendly like. He calls them and gives them the boxes to carry, and waves his hand for all the world as though he was King already. They takes the boxes and him across the valley and up the hill into a pine wood on the top, where there was half a dozen big stone idols. Dravot he goes to the biggest — a fellow they call Imbra — and lays a rifle and a cartridge at his feet, rubbing his nose respectful with his own nose, patting him on the head, and saluting in front of it. He turns round to the men and nods his head, and says, — 'That's all right. I'm in the know too, and these old jim-jams are my friends.' Then he opens his mouth and points down it, and when the first man brings him food, he says — 'No;' and when the second man brings him food, he says — 'No;' but when one of the old priests and the boss of the village brings him food, he says — 'Yes;' very haughty, and eats it slow. That was how we came to our first village, without any trouble, just as though we had tumbled from the skies. But we tumbled from one of those damned rope-bridges, you see, and you couldn't expect a man to laugh much after that."

"Take some more whiskey and go on," I said. "That was the first village you came into. How did you get to be King?"

"I wasn't King," said Carnehan. "Dravot he was the King, and a handsome man he looked with the gold crown on his head and all. Him and the other party stayed in that village, and every morning Dravot sat by the side of old Imbra, and the people came and worshipped. That was Dravot's order. Then a lot of men came into the valley, and Carnehan and Dravot picks them off with the rifles before they knew where they was, and runs down into the valley and up again the other side, and finds another village, same as the first one, and the people all falls down flat on their faces, and Dravot says, — 'Now what is the trouble between you two villages?' and the people points to a woman, as fair as you or me, that was carried off, and Dravot takes her back to the first village and counts up the dead — eight there was. For each dead man Dravot pours a little milk on the ground and waves his arms like a whirligig and, 'That's all right,' says he. Then he and Carnehan takes the big boss of each village by the arm and walks them down into the valley, and shows them how to scratch a line with a spear right down the valley, and gives each a sod of turf from both sides o' the line. Then all the people comes down and shouts like the devil and all, and Dravot says, — 'Go and dig the land, and be fruitful and multiply,' which they did, though they didn't understand. Then we asks the names of things in their lingo — bread and water and fire and idols and such, and Dravot leads the priest of each village up to the idol, and says he must sit there and judge the people, and if anything goes wrong he is to be shot.

"Next week they was all turning up the land in the valley as quiet as bees and much prettier, and the priests heard all the complaints and told Dravot in dumb show what it was about. 'That's just the beginning,' says Dravot. 'They think we're gods.' He and Carnehan picks out twenty good men and shows them how to click off a rifle, and form fours, and advance in line, and they was very pleased to do so, and clever to see the hang of it. Then he takes out his pipe and his baccy-pouch and leaves one at one village, and one at the other, and off we two goes to see what was to be done in the next valley. That was all rock, and there was a little village there, and Carnehan says, — 'Send 'em to the old valley to plant,' and takes 'em there and gives 'em some land that wasn't took before. They were a poor lot, and we blooded 'em with a kid before letting 'em into the new Kingdom. That was to impress the people, and then they settled down quiet, and Carnehan went back to Dravot who had got into another valley, all snow and ice and most mountainous. There was no people there and the Army got afraid, so Dravot shoots one of them, and goes on till he finds some people in a village, and the Army explains that unless the people wants to be killed they had better not shoot their little matchlocks; for they had matchlocks. We makes friends with the priest and I stays there alone with two of the Army, teaching the men how to drill, and a thundering big Chief comes across the snow with kettledrums and horns twanging, because he heard there was a new god kicking about. Carnehan sights for the brown of the men half a mile across the snow and wings one of them. Then he sends a message to the Chief that, unless he wished to be killed, he must come and shake hands with me and leave his arms behind. The Chief comes alone first, and Carnehan shakes hands with him and whirls his arms about, same as Dravot used, and very much surprised that Chief was, and strokes my eyebrows. Then Carnehan goes alone to the Chief, and asks him in dumb show if he had an enemy he hated. 'I have,' says the Chief. So Carnehan weeds out the pick of his men, and sets the two of the Army to show them drill and at the end of two weeks the men can manœuvre about as well as Volunteers. So he marches with the Chief to a great big plain on the top of a mountain, and the Chiefs men rushes into a village and takes it; we three Martinis firing into the brown of the enemy. So we took that village too, and I gives the Chief a rag from my coat and says, 'Occupy till I come': which was scriptural. By way of a reminder, when me and the Army was eighteen hundred yards away, I drops a bullet near him standing on the snow, and all the people falls flat on their faces. Then I sends a letter to Dravot, wherever he be by land or by sea."

At the risk of throwing the creature out of train I interrupted, — "How could you write a letter up yonder?"

"The letter? — Oh! — The letter! Keep looking at me between the eyes, please. It was a string-talk letter, that we'd learned the way of it from a blind beggar in the Punjab."

I remember that there had once come to the office a blind man with a knotted twig and a piece of string which he wound round the twig according to some cypher of his own. He could, after the lapse of days or hours, repeat the sentence which he had reeled up. He had reduced the alphabet to eleven primitive sounds; and tried to teach me his method, but failed.

"I sent that letter to Dravot," said Carnehan; "and told him to come back because this Kingdom was growing too big for me to handle, and then I struck for the first valley, to see how the priests were working. They called the village we took along with the Chief, Bashkai, and the first village we took, Er-Heb. The priest at Er-Heb was doing all right, but they had a lot of pending cases about land to show me, and some men from another village had been firing arrows at night. I went out and looked for that village and fired four rounds at it from a thousand yards. That used all the cartridges I cared to spend, and I waited for Dravot, who had been away two or three months, and I kept my people quiet.

"One morning I heard the devil's own noise of drums and horns, and Dan Dravot marches down the hill with his Army and a tail of hundreds of men, and, which was the most amazing — a great gold crown on his head. 'My Gord, Carnehan,' says Daniel, 'this is a tremenjus business, and we've got the whole country as far as it's worth having. I am the son of Alexander by Queen Semiramis, and you're my younger brother and a god too! It's the biggest thing we've ever seen. I've been marching and fighting for six weeks with the Army, and every footy little village for fifty miles has come in rejoiceful; and more than that, I've got the key of the whole show, as you'll see, and I've got a crown for you! I told 'em to make two of 'em at a place called Shu, where the gold lies in the rock like suet in mutton. Gold I've seen, and turquoise I've kicked out of the cliffs, and there's garnets in the sands of the river, and here's a chunk of amber that a man brought me. Call up all the priests and, here, take your crown.'

"One of the men opens a black hair bag and I slips the crown on. It was too small and too heavy, but I wore it for the glory. Hammered gold it was — five pound weight, like a hoop of a barrel.

"'Peachey,' says Dravot, 'we don't want to fight no more. The Craft's the trick so help me!' and he brings forward that same Chief that I left at Bashkai — Billy Fish we called him afterwards, because he was so like Billy Fish that drove the big tank-engine at Mach on the Bolan in the old days. 'Shake hands with him,' says Dravot, and I shook hands and nearly dropped, for Billy Fish gave me the Grip. I said nothing, but tried him with the Fellow Craft Grip. He answers, all right, and I tried the Master's Grip, but that was a slip. 'A Fellow Craft he is!' I says to Dan. 'Does he know the word?' 'He does,' says Dan, 'and all the priests know. It's a miracle! The Chiefs and the priest can work a Fellow Craft Lodge in a way that's very like ours, and they've cut the marks on the rocks, but they don't know the Third Degree, and they've come to find out. It's Gord's Truth. I've known these long years that the Afghans knew up to the Fellow Craft Degree, but this is a miracle. A god and a Grand-Master of the Craft am I, and a Lodge in the Third Degree I will open, and we'll raise the head priests and the Chiefs of the villages.'

"'It's against all the law,' I says, 'holding a Lodge without warrant from any one; and we never held office in any Lodge.'

"'It's a master-stroke of policy,' says Dravot. 'It means running the country as easy as a four-wheeled bogy on a down grade. We can't stop to inquire now, or they'll turn against us. I've forty Chiefs at my heel, and passed and raised according to their merit they shall be. Billet these men on the villages and see that we run up a Lodge of some kind. The temple of Imbra will do for the

Lodge-room. The women must make aprons as you show them. I'll hold a levee of Chiefs tonight and Lodge to-morrow.'

"I was fair rim off my legs, but I wasn't such a fool as not to see what a pull this Craft business gave us. I showed the priests' families how to make aprons of the degrees, but for Dravot's apron the blue border and marks was made of turquoise lumps on white hide, not cloth. We took a great square stone in the temple for the Master's chair, and little stones for the officers' chairs, and painted the black pavement with white squares, and did what we could to make things regular.

"At the levee which was held that night on the hillside with big bonfires, Dravot gives out that him and me were gods and sons of Alexander, and Past Grand-Masters in the Craft, and was come to make Kafiristan a country where every man should eat in peace and drink in quiet, and specially obey us. Then the Chiefs come round to shake hands, and they was so hairy and white and fair it was just shaking hands with old friends. We gave them names according as they was like men we had known in India — Billy Fish, Holly Dilworth, Pikky Kergan that was Bazar-master when I was at Mhow, and so on, and so on.

"The most amazing miracle was at Lodge next night. One of the old priests was watching us continuous, and I felt uneasy, for I knew we'd have to fudge the Ritual, and I didn't know what the men knew. The old priest was a stranger come in from beyond the village of Bashkai. The minute Dravot puts on the Master's apron that the girls had made for him, the priest fetches a whoop and a howl, and tries to overturn the stone that Dravot was sitting on. 'It's all up now,' I says. 'That comes of meddling with the Craft without warrant!' Dravot never winked an eye, not when ten priests took and tilted over the Grand-Master's chair — which was to say the stone of Imbra. The priest begins rubbing the bottom end of it to clear away the black dirt, and presently he shows all the other priests the Master's Mark, same as was on Dravot's apron, cut into the stone. Not even the priests of the temple of Imbra knew it was there. The old chap falls flat on his face at Dravot's feet and kisses 'em. 'Luck again,' says Dravot, across the Lodge to me, 'they say it's the missing Mark that no one could understand the why of. We're more than safe now.' Then he bangs the butt of his gun for a gavel and says:— 'By virtue of the authority vested in me by my own right hand and the help of Peachey, I declare myself Grand-Master of all Freemasonry in Kafiristan in this the Mother Lodge o' the country, and King of Kafiristan equally with Peachey!' At that he puts on his crown and I puts on mine — I was doing Senior Warden — and we opens the Lodge in most ample form. It was a amazing miracle! The priests moved in Lodge through the first two degrees almost without telling, as if the memory was coming back to them. After that, Peachey and Dravot raised such as was worthy — high priests and Chiefs of far-off villages. Billy Fish was the first, and I can tell you we scared the soul out of him. It was not in any way according to Ritual, but it served our turn. We didn't raise more than ten of the biggest men because we didn't want to make the Degree common. And they was clamoring to be raised.

"'In another six months,' says Dravot, 'we'll hold another Communication and see how you are working.' Then he asks them about their villages, and learns that they was fighting one against the other and were fair sick and tired of it. And when they wasn't doing that they was fighting with the Mohammedans. 'You can fight those when they come into our country,' says Dravot. 'Tell off every tenth man of your tribes for a Frontier guard, and send two hundred at a time to this valley to be drilled. Nobody is going to be shot or speared any more so long as he does well, and I know that you won't cheat me because you're white people — sons of Alexander — and not like common, black Mohammedans. You are my people and by God,' says he, running off into English at the end — 'I'll make a damned fine Nation of you, or I'll die in the making!'

"I can't tell all we did for the next six months because Dravot did a lot I couldn't see the hang of, and he learned their lingo in a way I never could. My work was to help the people plough, and now and again to go out with some of the Army and see what the other villages were doing, and make 'em throw rope-bridges across the ravines which cut up the country horrid. Dravot was very kind to me, but when he walked up and down in the pine wood pulling that bloody red beard of his with both fists I knew he was thinking plans I could not advise him about, and I just waited for orders.

"But Dravot never showed me disrespect before the people. They were afraid of me and the Army, but they loved Dan. He was the best of friends with the priests and the Chiefs; but any one could come across the hills with a complaint and Dravot would hear him out fair, and call four priests together and say what was to be done. He used to call in Billy Fish from Bashkai, and Pikky Kergan from Shu, and an old Chief we called Kafuzelum — it was like enough to his real name — and hold councils with 'em when there was any fighting to be done in small villages. That was his Council of War, and the four priests of Bashkai, Shu, Khawak, and Madora was his Privy Council. Between the lot of 'em they sent me, with forty men and twenty rifles, and sixty men carrying turquoises, into the Ghorband country to buy those hand-made Martini rifles, that come out of the Amir's workshops at Kabul, from one of the Amir's Herati regiments that would have sold the very teeth out of their mouths for turquoises.

"I stayed in Ghorband a month, and gave the Governor the pick of my baskets for hush-money, and bribed the colonel of the regiment some more, and, between the two and the tribes-people, we got more than a hundred hand-made Martinis, a hundred good Kohat Jezails that'll throw to six hundred yards, and forty manloads of very bad ammunition for the rifles. I came back with what I had, and distributed 'em among the men that the Chiefs sent in to me to drill. Dravot was too busy to attend to those things, but the old Army that we first made helped me, and we turned out five hundred men that could drill, and two hundred that knew how to hold arms pretty straight. Even those cork-screwed, hand-made guns was a miracle to them. Dravot talked big about powder-shops and factories, walking up and down in the pine wood when the winter was coming on.

"'I won't make a Nation,' says he. 'I'll make an Empire! These men aren't niggers; they're English! Look at their eyes — look at their mouths. Look at the way they stand up. They sit on chairs in their own houses. They're the Lost Tribes, or something like it, and they've grown to be English. I'll take a census in the spring if the priests don't get frightened. There must be a fair two million of 'em in these hills. The villages are full o' little children. Two million people — two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men — and all English! They only want the rifles and a little drilling. Two hundred and fifty thousand men, ready to cut in on Russia's right flank when she tries for India! Peachey, man,' he says, chewing his beard in great hunks, 'we shall be Emperors — Emperors of the Earth! Rajah Brooke will be a suckling to us. I'll treat with the Viceroy on equal terms. I'll ask him to send me twelve picked English — twelve that I know of — to help us govern a bit. There's Mackray, Sergeant-pensioner at Segowli — many's the good dinner he's given me, and his wife a pair of trousers. There's Donkin, the Warder of Tounghoo Jail; there's hundreds that I could lay my hand on if I was in India. The Viceroy shall do it for me. I'll send a man through in the spring for those men, and I'll write for a dispensation from the Grand Lodge for what I've done as Grand-Master. That — and all the Sniders that'll be thrown out when the native troops in India take up the Martini. They'll be worn smooth, but they'll do for fighting in these hills. Twelve English, a hundred thousand Sniders run through the Amir's country in driblets — I'd be content with twenty thousand in one year — and we'd be an Empire. When everything was ship-shape, I'd hand over the crown — this crown I'm wearing now — to Queen Victoria on my knees, and she'd say:— "Rise up, Sir Daniel Dravot." Oh, its big! It's big, I tell you! But there's so much to be done in every place — Bashkai, Khawak, Shu, and everywhere else.'

"'What is it?' I says. 'There are no more men coming in to be drilled this autumn. Look at those fat, black clouds. They're bringing the snow.'

"'It isn't that,' says Daniel, putting his hand very hard on my shoulder; 'and I don't wish to say anything that's against you, for no other living man would have followed me and made me what I am as you have done. You're a first-class Commander-in-Chief, and the people know you; but — it's a big country, and somehow you can't help me, Peachey, in the way I want to be helped.'

"'Go to your blasted priests, then!' I said, and I was sorry when I made that remark, but it did hurt me sore to find Daniel talking so superior when I'd drilled all the men, and done all he told me.

"'Don't let's quarrel, Peachey,' says Daniel without cursing. 'You're a King too, and the half of this Kingdom is yours; but can't you see, Peachey, we want cleverer men than us now — three or four of 'em that we can scatter about for our Deputies? It's a hugeous great State, and I can't always tell the right thing to do, and I haven't time for all I want to do, and here's the winter coming on and all.' He put half his beard into his mouth, and it was as red as the gold of his crown.

"'I'm sorry, Daniel,' says I. 'I've done all I could. I've drilled the men and shown the people how to stack their oats better, and I've brought in those tinware rifles from Ghorband — but I know

what you're driving at. I take it Kings always feel oppressed that way.'

"'There's another thing too,' says Dravot, walking up and down. 'The winter's coming and these people won't be giving much trouble, and if they do we can't move about. I want a wife.'

"'For Gord's sake leave the women alone!' I says. 'We've both got all the work we can, though I am a fool. Remember the Contrack, and keep clear o' women.'

"'The Contrack only lasted till such time as we was Kings; and Kings we have been these months past,' says Dravot, weighing his crown in his hand. 'You go get a wife too, Peachey — a nice, strappin', plump girl that'll keep you warm in the winter. They're prettier than English girls, and we can take the pick of 'em. Boil 'em once or twice in hot water, and they'll come as fair as chicken and ham.'

"'Don't tempt me!' I says. 'I will not have any dealings with a woman not till we are a dam' side more settled than we are now. I've been doing the work o' two men, and you've been doing the work o' three. Let's lie off a bit, and see if we can get some better tobacco from Afghan country and run in some good liquor; but no women.'

"'Who's talking o' women?' says Dravot. 'I said wife — a Queen to breed a King's son for the King. A Queen out of the strongest tribe, that'll make them your blood-brothers, and that'll lie by your side and tell you all the people thinks about you and their own affairs. That's what I want.'

"'Do you remember that Bengali woman I kept at Mogul Serai when I was plate-layer?' says I. 'A fat lot o' good she was to me. She taught me the lingo and one or two other things; but what happened? She ran away with the Station Master's servant and half my month's pay. Then she turned up at Dadur Junction in tow of a half-caste, and had the impidence to say I was her husband — all among the drivers of the running-shed!'

"'We've done with that,' says Dravot. 'These women are whiter than you or me, and a Queen I will have for the winter months.'

"'For the last time o' asking, Dan, do not,' I says. 'It'll only bring us harm. The Bible says that Kings ain't to waste their strength on women, 'specially when they've got a new raw Kingdom to work over.'

"'For the last time of answering, I will,' said Dravot, and he went away through the pine-trees looking like a big red devil. The low sun hit his crown and beard on one side, and the two blazed like hot coals.

"But getting a wife was not as easy as Dan thought. He put it before the Council, and there was no answer till Billy Fish said that he'd better ask the girls. Dravot damned them all round. 'What's wrong with me?' he shouts, standing by the idol Imbra. 'Am I a dog or am I not enough of a man for your wenches? Haven't I put the shadow of my hand over this country? Who stopped the last Afghan raid?' It was me really, but Dravot was too angry to remember. 'Who bought your guns? Who repaired the bridges? Who's the Grand-Master of the sign cut in the stone?' and he thumped his hand on the block that he used to sit on in Lodge, and at Council, which opened like Lodge always. Billy Fish said nothing and no more did the others. 'Keep your hair on, Dan,' said I; 'and ask the girls. That's how it's done at home, and these people are quite English.'

"'The marriage of a King is a matter of State,' says Dan, in a white-hot rage, for he could feel, I hope, that he was going against his better mind. He walked out of the Council-room, and the others sat still, looking at the ground.

"'Billy Fish,' says I to the Chief of Bashkai, 'what's the difficulty here? A straight answer to a true friend.' 'You know,' says Billy Fish. 'How should a man tell you who know everything? How can daughters of men marry gods or devils? It's not proper.'

"I remembered something like that in the Bible; but if, after seeing us as long as they had, they still believed we were gods it wasn't for me to undeceive them.

"'A god can do anything,' says I. 'If the King is fond of a girl he'll not let her die.' 'She'll have to,' said Billy Fish. 'There are all sorts of gods and devils in these mountains, and now and again a girl marries one of them and isn't seen any more. Besides, you two know the Mark cut in the stone. Only the gods know that. We thought you were men till you showed the sign of the Master.'

"'I wished then that we had explained about the loss of the genuine secrets of a Master-Mason at the first go-off; but I said nothing. All that night there was a blowing of horns in a little dark temple half-way down the hill, and I heard a girl crying fit to die. One of the priests told us that she was being prepared to marry the King.

"'I'll have no nonsense of that kind,' says Dan. 'I don't want to interfere with your customs, but I'll take my own wife. 'The girl's a little bit afraid,' says the priest. 'She thinks she's going to die, and they are a-heartening of her up down in the temple.'

"'Hearten her very tender, then,' says Dravot, 'or I'll hearten you with the butt of a gun so that you'll never want to be heartened again.' He licked his lips, did Dan, and stayed up walking about more than half the night, thinking of the wife that he was going to get in the morning. I wasn't any means comfortable, for I knew that dealings with a woman in foreign parts, though you was a crowned King twenty times over, could not but be risky. I got up very early in the morning while Dravot was asleep, and I saw the priests talking together in whispers, and the Chiefs talking together too, and they looked at me out of the corners of their eyes.

"'What is up, Fish?' I says to the Bashkai man, who was wrapped up in his furs and looking splendid to behold.

"'I can't rightly say,' says he; 'but if you can induce the King to drop all this nonsense about marriage, you'll be doing him and me and yourself a great service.'

"'That I do believe,' says I. 'But sure, you know, Billy, as well as me, having fought against and for us, that the King and me are nothing more than two of the finest men that God Almighty ever made. Nothing more, I do assure you.'

"'That may be,' says Billy Fish, 'and yet I should be sorry if it was.' He sinks his head upon his great fur cloak for a minute and thinks. 'King,' says he, 'be you man or god or devil, I'll stick by you to-day. I have twenty of my men with me, and they will follow me. We'll go to Bashkai until the storm blows over.'

"A little snow had fallen in the night, and everything was white except the greasy fat clouds that blew down and down from the north. Dravot came out with his crown on his head, swinging his arms and stamping his feet, and looking more pleased than Punch.

"'For the last time, drop it, Dan,' says I in a whisper. 'Billy Fish here says that there will be a row.'

"'A row among my people!' says Dravot. 'Not much. Peachy, you're a fool not to get a wife too. Where's the girl?' says he with a voice as loud as the braying of a jackass. 'Call up all the Chiefs and priests, and let the Emperor see if his wife suits him.'

"There was no need to call any one. They were all there leaning on their guns and spears round the clearing in the centre of the pine wood. A deputation of priests went down to the little temple to bring up the girl, and the horns blew up fit to wake the dead. Billy Fish saunters round and gets as close to Daniel as he could, and behind him stood his twenty men with matchlocks. Not a man of them under six feet. I was next to Dravot, and behind me was twenty men of the regular Army. Up comes the girl, and a strapping wench she was, covered with silver and turquoises but white as death, and looking back every minute at the priests.

"'She'll do,' said Dan, looking her over. 'What's to be afraid of, lass? Come and kiss me.' He puts his arm round her. She shuts her eyes, gives a bit of a squeak, and down goes her face in the side of Dan's flaming red beard.

"'The slut's bitten me!' says he, clapping his hand to his neck, and, sure enough, his hand was red with blood. Billy Fish and two of his matchlock-men catches hold of Dan by the shoulders and drags him into the Bashkai lot, while the priests howls in their lingo, — 'Neither god nor devil but a man!' I was all taken aback, for a priest cut at me in front, and the Army behind began firing into the Bashkai men.

"'God A-mighty!' says Dan. 'What is the meaning o' this?'

"'Come back! Come away!' says Billy Fish. 'Ruin and Mutiny is the matter. We'll break for Bashkai if we can.'

"I tried to give some sort of orders to my men — the men o' the regular Army — but it was no use, so I fired into the brown of 'em with an English Martini and drilled three beggars in a line. The valley was full of shouting, howling creatures, and every soul was shrieking, 'Not a god nor a devil but only a man!' The Bashkai troops stuck to Billy Fish all they were worth, but their matchlocks wasn't half as good as the Kabul breech-loaders, and four of them dropped. Dan was bellowing like a bull, for he was very wrathy; and Billy Fish had a hard job to prevent him running out at the crowd.

"'We can't stand,' says Billy Fish. 'Make a run for it down the valley! The whole place is against us.' The matchlock-men ran, and we went down the valley in spite of Dravot's protestations. He was swearing horribly and crying out that he was a King. The priests rolled great stones on us, and the regular Army fired hard, and there wasn't more than six men, not counting Dan, Billy Fish, and Me, that came down to the bottom of the valley alive.

"'Then they stopped firing and the horns in the temple blew

again. 'Come away — for Gord's sake come away!' says Billy Fish. 'They'll send runners out to all the villages before ever we get to Bashkai. I can protect you there, but I can't do anything now.'

"My own notion is that Dan began to go mad in his head from that hour. He stared up and down like a stuck pig. Then he was all for walking back alone and killing the priests with his bare hands; which he could have done. 'An Emperor am I,' says Daniel, 'and next year I shall be a Knight of the Queen.

"'All right, Dan,' says I; 'but come along now while there's time.'

"'It's your fault,' says he, 'for not looking after your Army better. There was mutiny in the midst, and you didn't know — you damned engine-driving, plate-laying, missionary's-pass-hunting hound!' He sat upon a rock and called me every foul name he could lay tongue to. I was too heart-sick to care, though it was all his foolishness that brought the smash.

"'I'm sorry, Dan,' says I, 'but there's no accounting for natives. This business is our Fifty-Seven. Maybe we'll make something out of it yet, when we've got to Bashkai.'

"'Let's get to Bashkai, then,' says Dan, 'and, by God, when I come back here again I'll sweep the valley so there isn't a bug in a blanket left!'

"'We walked all that day, and all that night Dan was stumping up and down on the snow, chewing his beard and muttering to himself.

"'There's no hope o' getting clear,' said Billy Fish. 'The priests will have sent runners to the villages to say that you are only men. Why didn't you stick on as gods till things was more settled? I'm a dead man,' says Billy Fish, and he throws himself down on the snow and begins to pray to his gods.

"Next morning we was in a cruel bad country — all up and down, no level ground at all, and no food either. The six Bashkai men looked at Billy Fish hungry-wise as if they wanted to ask something, but they said never a word. At noon we came to the top of a flat mountain all covered with snow, and when we climbed up into it, behold, there was an army in position waiting in the middle!

"'The runners have been very quick,' says Billy Fish, with a little bit of a laugh. 'They are waiting for us.'

"Three or four men began to fire from the enemy's side, and a chance shot took Daniel in the calf of the leg. That brought him to his senses. He looks across the snow at the Army, and sees the rifles that we had brought into the country.

"'We're done for,' says he. 'They are Englishmen, these people, — and it's my blasted nonsense that has brought you to this. Get back, Billy Fish, and take your men away; you've done what you could, and now cut for it. Carnehan,' says he, 'shake hands with me and go along with Billy. Maybe they won't kill you. I'll go and meet 'em alone. It's me that did it. Me, the King!'

"'Go!' says I. 'Go to Hell, Dan. I'm with you here. Billy Fish, you clear out, and we two will meet those folk.'

"'I'm a Chief,' says Billy Fish, quite quiet. 'I stay with you. My men can go.'

"The Bashkai fellows didn't wait for a second word but ran off, and Dan and Me and Billy Fish walked across to where the drums were drumming and the horns were horning. It was cold-awful cold. I've got that cold in the back of my head now. There's a lump of it there."

The punkah-coolies had gone to sleep. Two kerosene lamps were blazing in the office, and the perspiration poured down my face and splashed on the blotter as I leaned forward. Carnehan was shivering, and I feared that his mind might go. I wiped my face, took a fresh grip of the piteously mangled hands, and said: — "What happened after that?"

The momentary shift of my eyes had broken the clear current. "What was you pleased to say?" whined Carnehan. "They took them without any sound. Not a little whisper all along the snow, not though the King knocked down the first man that set hand on him — not though old Peachey fired his last cartridge into the brown of 'em. Not a single solitary sound did those swines make. They just closed up, tight, and I tell you their furs stunk. There was a man called Billy Fish, a good friend of us all, and they cut his throat, Sir, then and there, like a pig; and the King kicks up the bloody snow and says:— 'We've had a dashed fine run for our money. What's coming next?' But Peachey, Peachey Taliaferro, I tell you, Sir, in confidence as betwixt two friends, he lost his head, Sir. No, he didn't neither. The King lost his head, so he did, all along o' one of those cunning rope-bridges. Kindly let me have the paper-cutter, Sir. It tilted this way. They marched him a mile across that snow to a rope-bridge over a ravine with a river at the bottom. You may have seen such. They prodded him behind like an ox. 'Damn your eyes!' says the King. 'D'you suppose I can't die like a gentleman?' He turns to Peachey — Peachey that was crying like a child. 'I've brought you to this, Peachey,' says he. 'Brought you out of your happy life to be killed in Kafiristan, where you was late Commander-in-Chief of the Emperor's forces. Say you forgive me, Peachey.' 'I do,' says Peachey. 'Fully and freely do I forgive you, Dan.' 'Shake hands, Peachey,' says he. 'I'm going now.' Out he goes, looking neither right nor left, and when he was plumb in the middle of those dizzy dancing ropes, 'Cut, you beggars,' he shouts; and they cut, and old Dan fell, turning round and round and round, twenty thousand miles, for he took half an hour to fall till he struck the water, and I could see his body caught on a rock with the gold crown close beside.

"But do you know what they did to Peachey between two pine-trees? They crucified him, sir, as Peachey's hands will show. They used wooden pegs for his hands and his feet; and he didn't die. He hung there and screamed, and they took him down next day, and said it was a miracle that he wasn't dead. They took him down — poor old Peachey that hadn't done them any harm — that hadn't done them any..."

He rocked to and fro and wept bitterly, wiping his eyes with the back of his scarred hands and moaning like a child for some ten minutes.

"They was cruel enough to feed him up in the temple, because they said he was more of a god than old Daniel that was a man. Then they turned him out on the snow, and told him to go home, and Peachey came home in about a year, begging along the roads quite safe; for Daniel Dravot he walked before and said:— 'Come along, Peachey. It's a big thing we're doing.' The mountains they danced at night, and the mountains they tried to fall on Peachey's head, but Dan he held up his hand, and Peachey came along bent double. He never let go of Dan's hand, and he never let go of Dan's head. They gave it to him as a present in the temple, to remind him not to come again, and though the crown was pure gold, and Peachey was starving, never would Peachey sell the same. You knew Dravot, sir! You knew Right Worshipful Brother Dravot! Look at him now!"

He fumbled in the mass of rags round his bent waist; brought out a black horsehair bag embroidered with silver thread; and shook therefrom on to my table — the dried, withered head of Daniel Dravot! The morning sun that had long been paling the lamps struck the red beard and blind sunken eyes; struck, too, a heavy circlet of gold studded with raw turquoises, that Carnehan placed tenderly on the battered temples.

"You behold now," said Carnehan, "the Emperor in his habit as he lived — the King of Kafiristan with his crown upon his head. Poor old Daniel that was a monarch once!"

I shuddered, for, in spite of defacements manifold, I recognized the head of the man of Marwar Junction. Carnehan rose to go. I attempted to stop him. He was not fit to walk abroad. "Let me take away the whiskey, and give me a little money," he gasped. "I was a King once. I'll go to the Deputy Commissioner and ask to set in the Poor-house till I get my health. No, thank you, I can't wait till you get a carriage for me. I've urgent private affairs — in the south — at Marwar."

He shambled out of the office and departed in the direction of the Deputy Commissioner's house. That day at noon I had occasion to go down the blinding hot Mall, and I saw a crooked man crawling along the white dust of the roadside, his hat in his hand, quavering dolorously after the fashion of street-singers at Home. There was not a soul in sight, and he was out of all possible earshot of the houses. And he sang through his nose, turning his head from right to left:—

"The Son of Man goes forth to war,
A golden crown to gain;
His blood-red banner streams afar—
Who follows in his train?"

I waited to hear no more, but put the poor wretch into my carriage and drove him off to the nearest missionary for eventual transfer to the Asylum. He repeated the hymn twice while he was with me whom he did not in the least recognize, and I left him singing to the missionary.

Two days later I inquired after his welfare of the Superintendent of the Asylum.

"He was admitted suffering from sun-stroke. He died early yesterday morning," said the Superintendent. "Is it true that he was half an hour bareheaded in the sun at midday?"

"Yes," said I, "but do you happen to know if he had anything upon him by any chance when he died?"

"Not to my knowledge," said the Superintendent.

And there the matter rests.

Kingsflame Festival

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Love is enough:
though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder
And this day draw a veil over all deeds pass'd over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

From Love is Enough by William Morris

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