

*Ellery
Queen's
Poetic
Justice*

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The French Powder Mystery
The Dutch Shoe Mystery
The Greek Coffin Mystery
The Egyptian Cross Mystery
The American Gun Mystery
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The Spanish Cape Mystery
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The Door Between
The Devil To Pay
The Four of Hearts
The Dragon's Teeth
Calamity Town
There Was an Old Woman

The Murderer Is a Fox
Ten Days' Wonder
Cat of Many Tails
Double, Double
The Origin of Evil
The King Is Dead
The Scarlet Letters
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The Tragedy of X The Tragedy of Z
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*Ellery
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Poetic
Justice*

23 STORIES OF CRIME,
MYSTERY, AND DETECTION
BY WORLD-FAMOUS POETS
FROM Geoffrey Chaucer
to Dylan Thomas



The New American Library

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Introduction

Dear Reader:

Say the word softly . . . books.

See them as images — the tree of life, the fourfold rivers of Paradise, the treasurehouse of jeweled words.

See them as our hope for the future — for a finer world within the world.

See them in your mind's eye — your friends, your counselors, your comforters . . .

All these things have been said, with gratitude and humility.

So say the word softly. And behold how good and how pleasant it is for books to dwell together — for who touches a book touches man, and who touches a great book touches himself.

Books . . . imagine a row of them, all of different sizes and shapes, tall, small, thick, thin, bound in pastel wrappers or patterned boards or bright cloth — a rainbow row of books of poetry by

Geoffrey Chaucer
Oliver Goldsmith
Sir Walter Scott
Lord Byron
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Edgar Allan Poe
Walt Whitman
W. S. Gilbert
Thomas Hardy
Robert Louis Stevenson
William Butler Yeats
Rudyard Kipling
G. K. Chesterton
John Masefield
Joyce Kilmer
Conrad Aiken
Edna St. Vincent Millay
Mark Van Doren
Robert Graves
Stephen Vincent Benét
Ogden Nash
Muriel Rukeyser
Dylan Thomas

Now, why have we chosen these particular poets? Is there something “special” about them? Do they have something in common besides being famous poets? Yes, they do — these 23 poets all wrote short stories of crime or detection or suspense.

That is the theme of this anthology — mystery short stories by 23 world-famous poets, from Chaucer to Dylan Thomas, presented in chronological order of the poets’ dates of birth.¹

¹ The chronological arrangement tends to show the changes and variations in style between 1766 and 1955, between Oliver Goldsmith and Dylan Thomas (omitting Chaucer because his story is “translated” into modern

Surprising? Yes — even startling. And yet we hold with Pliny the Younger that “fiction is the privilege of poets” (admitting that Pliny the Younger had a different meaning in mind). And to paraphrase Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay, we certainly hold that the most wonderful and splendid proof of genius is a great mystery story produced in a civilized age.

And when Shakespeare saw “the poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,” and saw the poet’s pen, “as imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown,” turn “them to shapes,” and give “to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name,” surely he saw not only the poet creating poetry, but with equal integrity, the poet creating prose. Startling? No — not at all. Horace has told us that “poets have always had license to dare anything.” So why not mystery stories? Why not stories of crime and suspense? Why not tales of ratiocination?

We chose the title *Poetic Justice* for this anthology because it seemed to combine, in one phrase, the two different yet related themes which this unique collection of stories offers — tales of justice written by poets. And in these tales you will find, to quote Alexander Pope, “Poetic Justice, with her lifted scale, / Where in nice balance truth with gold she weighs.” For, as Benjamin Disraeli once said, “Justice is truth in action” — and surely there is no better definition of the true nature of the detective story.

The editor of any anthology can be guilty of two crimes — the crime of commission and the crime of omission. If we are guilty of the first crime, the evidence confronts you in the pages of this book; if we are guilty of the second crime — if there is a tale of detection or mystery which you hoped

English). The changes and variations in technique are shown more clearly by the work of the detective-story writers, beginning with Poe.

or expected to find in this book but which is absent (a tale, for example, by Robert Frost or T. S. Eliot)² — well, that reminds us of a story.

It happened quite a few years ago. One evening in May 1948 — after a cocktail party honoring the late Sir Victor Gollancz on the occasion of the British publisher's first visit to the United States — a group of us entered a restaurant in New York's fashionable seventies. There were Louis Untermeyer, the always gay and witty poet and a noble fashioner of anthologies; Philip Van Doren Stern, novelist, historian, and also a noble fashioner of anthologies; Leon Shimkin, the brilliantly practical man of publishing; ourselves; and our respective ladies-in-waiting.

The moment we reached the head waiter and viewed the sumptuous décor of the restaurant's interior, we knew we had stepped into a high-bracket milieu. We remember one of the others saying — an echo of our own thought — "This will teach me a lesson!" But the meal was excellent, the prices proved not too disastrous, and the table talk (what Victor Gollancz called a "causerie") was worth the cover charge and more.

We talked of many things — of gumshoes, ships, and sealing wax. And at one point we touched on the conception and execution of anthologies, and if we remember correctly, it was Louis Untermeyer who described a fine anthology as "a scissors-and-taste job," as distinguished from a "scissors-and-paste job."

And then we explored the subject of thematic anthologies, especially that thankless endeavor, the pursuit of the

² Remember, this is an anthology of prose. Many poets have written poems in the crime-mystery-detective field. For example: Robert Frost's "The Witch of Coös" is a ghost-and-murder story — but it is poetry, not prose. And T. S. Eliot's "Macavity: The Mystery Cat" is certainly in the crime genre, but it too is poetry, not prose. Eliot's "Macavity" is also, by extension, in the detective genre — for could Eliot have written "Macavity" had not A. Conan Doyle first created Sherlock Holmes and The Great Detective's archenemy, Professor Moriarty?

perfect anthology. We all agreed that no one had ever put together a truly definitive anthology, let alone a perfect one, and that no one had even edited an anthology with which he had not become unhappy or dissatisfied, sometimes within a slim year of its publication. And then Mr. Stern made a remark that we have never forgotten: every thematic anthology, Mr. Stern insisted, should have a foreword stating frankly that the book is probably guilty of unforgivable omissions, and pleading with readers to write to the editor and list those regrettable omissions; with the benefit of this kindly assistance the anthologist could then revise and expand, could then edit a new edition (repeating the original plea), could then be informed of his continuing omissions, old and new, could then proceed to edit still another new edition (again repeating the original plea) — and so *ad infinitum*.

Yes, the slogan, the shibboleth which identifies the anthological tribe, is “Our Book Is Never Done”; Sisyphus is the God of the Anthology, and the burden which every anthologist has borne, still bears, and will forever bear is the irrefutable fact that a perfect or definitive anthology is always “work in progress.”

And if this is true of even a mature anthology, how infinitely more true it is of a pioneering effort! The anthological theme which invades virgin territory, which hews a rough trail in a previously untrod forest, is particularly vulnerable. But even if the first blundering fails to reach its intended goal (did not Columbus discover America while seeking a passage to India?), who would deny the absolute necessity of taking the first step in the wilderness? *Someone* must challenge the unknown, and even if his step is halting and lame, even if his first attempt suffers the slings and arrows of outrageous critical disapproval, still any pioneering work is a consummation devoutly to be wish'd — if only for what it does for those who, playing the game more safely, come later.

This anthology, *Poetic Justice*, is such a pioneering effort, and if we seem to be apologizing, so be it. *Poetic Justice* — truly a first voyage into uncharted seas — is susceptible to incomplete research, to say nothing of the human, and therefore inevitable, margin of error. But when will research ever be complete? When will the margin of error, both of taste and judgment, ever be conquered? The sad truth is — never. No man in his lifetime, nor a host of men in a multitude of lifetimes, can hope to achieve the definitive or the perfect. But the work must go on, striving always to approach perfection or completion as a limit, as we hopelessly try in mathematics to approach infinity as a limit. The dream of perfection is for the future — and for most of us the future never comes.

And now — shall we join the poets?

— *Ellery Queen*

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Justice*

Geoffrey Chaucer

(?1340–1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer, usually considered England's first poet laureate, was born in London (exact date unknown), the son of a middle-class wine merchant. He was a man of impressive worldly affairs who had two separate but not unrelated careers — one, public, the other, private. As a servant of the Crown who was destined to attain wealth and high position, he began his public career at nineteen as a soldier in France in 1359, was captured and ransomed for £16, and before the end of 1368 had risen to be one of the King's esquires. In 1372 he was sent to Italy as one of three trade commissioners. Further service to the Crown brought him annuities and pensions, and in 1374 he was appointed Comptroller of the Custom and Subsidy of Wools, Hides and Woodfells, and also of the Petty Customs of Wine in the Port of London. Later came other political plums and windfalls, and under three Kings, other royal assignments, including diplomatic posts in Italy and France; in 1385 he was made justice of the peace for the county of Kent, and in 1389, Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster. Altogether, Chaucer had a long and honorable record of civil service — strange business indeed for a great poet! He died

in 1400, was buried in Westminster Abbey, and his tomb became, fittingly, the nucleus of what is now known as the Poets' Corner.

Chaucer's poetry — his other, and really major career — includes *Troilus and Criseyde* (1483), *Hous of Fame* (1484), *The Parlement of Foules* (?1526), and *The Canterbury Tales* (1478), the last written in his maturity. *The Canterbury Tales*, by far Chaucer's most popular work, reveals his enormous social and historical insight (how well his public service served him in his art!), his sympathy and affection for people of all types and stations, his deep appreciation of the pageantry and vitality of life, his wide range of understanding, and above all, his power of expression. It has been said that his artistic skill has never been surpassed, and surely *The Canterbury Tales* is the cornerstone of poetry in the English language.

It is from this imperishable masterpiece that we bring you, in "modern" English, an excerpt from "The Pardoner's Tale" — though no excerpt, no single tale, can do justice to the "series of stories within a story" which Chaucer worked on during the last twelve years of his life and which — an incalculable loss to the world — he never finished. He completed only 22 (plus "The Prologue") of an intended 120 tales.

The Pardoner, in Chaucer's age, was a clerical or lay preacher empowered by the Church to raise money for certain religious activities; he solicited payments for indulgences which promised to remit punishment for sins and to pardon guilt. Chaucer's Pardoner was a corrupt hanger-on of the Church who, through fraud and flattery, gulled the ignorant people with fake relics (in his bag he had a pillowcase which he said was the veil of Our Lady) and fake miracles ("the man who puts his hand in this mitten will see his grain multiply"). His sermon was always the same: *Radix malorum est cupiditas* (The root of all evil is avarice); and his preaching against greed was cleverly calculated to make

his hearers part with their hard-earned money — to the Pardoner's personal profit. He freely admitted that he preached against the same vice he practiced — avarice; but though he confessed he was himself a cheat, he insisted that he could tell a moral tale. The Pardoner's grim and grisly tale of murder is an example in miniature of Chaucer's worldly awareness and sharp irony . . .

An excerpt from

THE PARDONER'S TALE

Whilom in Flanders there was a company of young folk, that amidst riot and gambling gave themselves up to folly in the stews and taverns, where to harps, lutes and citterns day and night they danced and played at dice, and therewithal ate and drank to sad excess. In this cursed wise with abominable debauchery did they sacrifice to the devil in his temple, and made use of oaths so huge and damnable that it was grisly to hear them swear. . . .

These three revellers of whom I speak, long ere any bell had rung for prime, had set them down to their cups in a tavern; and as they sat, they heard a bell clink before a corpse that was being carried to his grave. Thereat one of them gan call to the inn-boy, "Off with thee," quoth he, "and ask what corpse this is that passes by; and look thou report his name aright."

"Sir," quoth this boy, "it needeth never a whit to ask. It was told me two hours ere ye came here. Pardee, he was an old fellow of yours; and he was slain to-night of a sudden, dead drunk, as he sat on a bench. There came a stealthy thief — men call him Death — that slayeth all the people in this countryside, and he smote him with his spear through the heart, and went his way without more words. He hath slain, in this pestilence, a thousand; and master, ere ye come before him, methinketh it were needful for to beware of such an adversary. 'Be ready for to meet

him ever and aye.' Thus my dame taught me; I say no more."

"By Saint Marie!" said the tavern-keeper, "the child saith sooth, for he hath slain this year, a mile hence in a great village, both man and woman, child, page and hind. I trow his habitation be there. To be wary were great wisdom in a man, lest this Death do him a dishonour."

"Yea, God's arms!" quoth the reveller, "is it then such peril for to meet him? I make a-vow to God's noble bones, I shall seek him highway and by-way. Hark, fellows; we three be of one mind. Let each of us hold up his hand and let us become sworn brethren among ourselves and we will slay this false traitor Death. He that slayeth so many — by God's dignity! — he shall be slain, ere it be night."

So together these three have plighted their troths to live and die for one another like brethren born, and in this rage, up they start all drunk, and forth they go toward that village of which the tavern-keeper had spoken, and with many a grisly oath have they sworn that Death shall be dead, if they may catch him.

When now they had gone half a mile or less, there met with them — right as they were about to step over a stile — an old poor man. This old man greeted them full meekly and said thus: "Now, lords, God you save." The proudest of these three revelers answered, "What, churl! The devil take thee! Why art thou all muffled save thy face? Why livest thou so long in great age?"

The old man looked him in the face and said thus: "Because I cannot find a man, yea though I walked to India, neither in town nor in city, that would exchange his youth for mine age. And therefore I must still keep mine age, for as long time as it is God's will. Neither will Death alas! neither will he have my life. Thus walk I like a restless caitiff; and on the ground, which is my mother's gate, both morn and eve I knock with my staff, and say: 'Dear mother, let me in! See how I wither, flesh and skin and blood. Alas! when shall my bones be at peace? Mother, I would exchange my chest with you, that hath been in my chamber long time; yea, even for a shroud of hair-cloth to wrap me.' Yet she will not do me that favour; wherefore my face is so pale and withered. But, sirs, it is not courtesy in you to speak in churlish

wise to an old man, unless he have trespassed in word or act. Ye may yourselves read in holy writ: 'In presence of an old man, whose head is hoar, ye shall arise.' Wherefore I counsel you do unto an old man no harm now more than ye would that men did to you in your old age, if ye tarry so long in this life. God be with you, whether ye walk or ride. Now must I go whither I have to go."

"Nay, old churl, that shalt thou not, by God!" answered then the second gambler. "By Saint John! thou partest not so lightly. Thou spakest right now of that traitor Death, that slayeth all our friends in these parts. By my troth, as thou art his spy, tell us where he is, or thou shalt rue it, by God and the holy sacrament! For soothly thou art leagued with him to slay us young folk, thou false thief."

"Now, sirs," quoth he, "if you would so fain find Death, turn up this crooked path, for by my fay I left him in yonder grove under a tree and there he will tarry; nay, not even for your boast will he hide himself. See ye that oak? Right there ye shall find him. God, that redeemed mankind, save you and amend you!"

Thus spake this old man. And all the revellers hasted till they came to that tree and there they found — coined in fine round gold — well nigh an eight bushel, as seemed to them, of florins. No longer then they sought after Death, for the florins were so bright and fair to see, and each was so glad of the sight, that down they sat by the precious hoard. The worst of them he spake the first: "Brethren," quoth he, "hearken what I say. Though I jest and make merry, yet my wisdom is great. This treasure hath fortune given unto us, to live our lives in jollity and mirth, and as lightly as it cometh so will we spend it. Eh, God's precious dignity! who had weened to-day that we should have so fair a grace? But now if this gold were but carried home to my house — or, if ye like, to yours — for well ye wot all this gold is ours, then were we in high felicity. But truly it may not be by day. Men would say that we were sturdy thieves, and would have us hanged for our own treasure. Nay, this treasure must be carried by night as wisely and as slily as may be. Wherefore I counsel that we draw cuts amongst us, and let see where

the cut will fall; and he that draweth the cut shall run with blithe heart — and that full fast — to the town, and bring us bread and wine by stealth; and two of us shall guard this treasure craftily and well; and if he tarry not we will, when it is night, carry this treasure wheresoever with one consent it seemeth best to us.”

Thereat one of them brought the cuts held in his fist, and bade them draw and watch where the cut would fall; and it fell upon the youngest; and forth he went anon towards the town. And even as soon as he was gone, the one of them spake thus to his fellow:

“Thou knowest well that thou art my brother, and I will tell thee somewhat to thy profit. Thou wotst well that our fellow is gone; and here is gold, and that a great sum, that shall be divided amongst us three. Natheless if I could so contrive that it were divided betwixt us two, had I not done thee a friendly turn?”

The other answered: “I wot not how that may be; he wot how that we twain have the gold. What shall we do? What shall we say to him?”

“Shall it be secret?” said the first rogue. “I will tell thee then in few words what we shall do, and I will bring it about.”

“I make thee my vow,” quoth the other, “by my truth, that I will not betray thee.”

“Now,” quoth the first, “thou wotst well that we be twain, and two of us shall be stronger than one. Watch when he shall be set down, and right anon rise up as though thou wouldst scuffle with him; and whiles that thou strugglest with him as in sport, I shall rive him through his two sides, and thou, with thy dagger, look thou do the same; and then shall all this gold be divided, my dear friend, betwixt me and thee. Then may we both fulfil all our pleasures, and play at dice right as we list.” And thus be these two rogues accorded to slay the third, as ye have heard me tell.

The youngest — he that went to the village — full oft he rolleth up and down in his heart the beauty of those bright, new

florins. "O Lord," quoth he, "if so I might have all this treasure to myself, there is no man that liveth under the throne of God should live so merry as I!" And at last the fiend, our foe, put it into his thought that he should buy poison, with which to slay his two companions. For the fiend had found him in such bad living that he had leave to bring him to perdition; for this rogue's design was utterly this, to slay his fellows both and never to repent.

No longer then he delayeth, but forth he goeth into the town unto an apothecary, and prayed him that he would sell him poison wherewith he might kill his rats; and eke in his yard there was a polecat, that (as he said) had slaughtered his capons; and fain, if he might, would he avenge him on the vermin that despoiled him by night. The apothecary answered: "Here thou shalt have a thing, and so may God save my soul! there is never a creature in all this world that shall eat or drink of this mixture, even the amount of a corn of wheat, but he shall yield up his life anon. Yea, die he shall, and that in less time than thou wilt go a mile at a walk; so strong and so violent is this poison."

This cursed reveller hath taken into his hand the poison in a box; and thereupon he ran unto a man in the next street and borrowed of him three large bottles; and into two poured he his poison. The third he kept clean for his own drink; for all that night he planned to toil in carrying away of the gold from that place. And when this reveller, sorrow betide him, had filled his three great bottles with wine, he repaireth to his fellows.

What needeth to discourse more of this? For even as they had devised his death at the first, right so have they slain him and that speedily.

And when this was done, thus spake one of them: "Now let us sit and drink and make joy, and afterward we will bury his body." And with that word it happed him perchance that he took the bottle wherein the poison was, and drank of it and gave his fellow also to drink, for which right anon they died both the two.

But certes I suppose that Avicenna wrote never in any canon

or any chapter more wondrous signs of empoisoning than had these two wretches before their end.

Thus be ended these two homicides and eke the false empoisoner.

*(except from the "modern" rendering into prose in
1904 by Percy MacKaye)*

Oliver Goldsmith

(?1728–1774)

Oliver Goldsmith's boyhood was not a happy one; ungainly, uncouth, his face disfigured by smallpox, he was ridiculed by his schoolmates and flogged as a dunce by his schoolmasters. Later, when he had become famous, he was remembered for his clever ripostes (probably apocryphal) to the taunts and derision that had plagued him.

After leaving Trinity College, Dublin, with the lowest degree and near the bottom of his class, he tried a half dozen or more professions, all without success. His young manhood was no happier than his boyhood: dissolute, irresponsible, an inveterate and unlucky gambler, a misfit and a flounderer, his life seemed destined for total failure. But at the age of thirty, penniless, friendless, vocationless, he turned in desperation to what he called "the lowest drudgery of literature." For years he was no more than a literary hack — journalist, writer of pseudonymous memoirs and biographies, translator, historian, editor, essayist; he finally became a popular author, with a highly readable style and a gift for the amusing and picturesque, and on occasion, for the sad; in fact, the natural grace of his writing style is surprising, emerging as it did from a life spent for the most

part, or so Goldsmith claimed, in the company of thieves, beggars, and streetwalkers.

Then, in poetry, came *The Traveller* (1765), acclaimed a noble philosophical poem, and *The Deserted Village* (1770), hailed as superior to *The Traveller*. He even tried his hand at playwriting, and after one failure wrote the incomparable farce, *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773).

It is from Goldsmith's enduring novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), that we bring you an excerpt — a self-contained story about the Vicar's son, Moses, a great bargain-buyer who would never be caught "selling his hen on a rainy day," and the Vicar himself embarked on his "first mercantile transaction"; and of one Ephraim Jenkinson, a sort of primitive con-man with a sweet line about, of all things, cosmogony . . .

THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD SELLS A HORSE

All this conversation, however, was only preparatory to another scheme; and indeed I dreaded as much. This was nothing less than that, as we were now to hold up our heads a little higher in the world, it would be proper to sell the colt, which was grown old, at a neighbouring fair, and buy us a horse that would carry a single or double upon an occasion, and make a pretty appearance at church, or upon a visit. This at first I opposed stoutly; but it was stoutly defended. However, as I weakened, my antagonist gained strength, till at last it was resolved to part with him.

As the fair happened on the following day, I had intentions of going myself; but my wife persuaded me that I had got a cold, and nothing could prevail upon her to permit me from home. "No, my dear," said she, "our son Moses is a discreet boy, and can

buy and sell to a very good advantage; you know all our great bargains are of his purchasing. He always stands out and higgles, and actually tires them till he gets a bargain."

As I had some opinion of my son's prudence, I was willing enough to entrust him with this commission; and the next morning I perceived his sisters mighty busy in fitting out Moses for the fair: trimming his hair, brushing his buckles, and cocking his hat with pins. The business of the toilet being over, we had at last the satisfaction of seeing him mounted upon the colt, with a deal box before him to bring home groceries in. He had on a coat made of that cloth they call thunder-and-lightning, which, though grown too short, was much too good to be thrown away. His waistcoat was of gosling green, and his sisters had tied his hair with a broad black ribbon. We all followed him several paces from the door bawling after him, "Good luck! good luck!" till we could see him no longer.

He was scarce gone, when Mr. Thornhill's butler came to congratulate us upon our good fortune, saying that he overheard his young master mention our names with great commendation.

Good fortune seemed not to come alone. Another footman from the same family followed, with a card for my daughters, importing that the two ladies had received such pleasing accounts from Mr. Thornhill of us all, that after a few previous inquiries they hoped to be perfectly satisfied.

"Ay," cried my wife, "I now see it is no easy matter to get into the families of the great; but when one once gets in, then, as Moses says, one may go to sleep." To this piece of humour, for she intended it for wit, my daughters assented with a loud laugh of pleasure. In short, such was her satisfaction at this message, that she actually put her hand in her pocket and gave the messenger sevenpence halfpenny.

This was to be our visiting day. The next that came was Mr. Burchell, who had been at the fair. He brought my little ones a pennyworth of gingerbread each, which my wife undertook to keep for them. He brought my daughters also a couple of boxes, in which they might keep wafers, snuff, patches, or even money, when they got it. My wife was usually fond of a weasel-skin purse,

as being the most lucky; but this by the by. We had still a regard for Mr. Burchell, though his late rude behaviour was in some measure displeasing; nor could we now avoid communicating our happiness to him, and asking his advice: although we seldom followed advice, we were all ready enough to ask it.

When he read the note from the two ladies, he shook his head, and observed, that an affair of this sort demanded the utmost circumspection. This air of diffidence highly displeased my wife. "I never doubted, sir," cried she, "your readiness to be against my daughters and me. You have more circumspection than is wanted. However, I fancy when we come to ask advice, we will apply to persons who seem to have made use of it themselves" — "Whatever my own conduct may have been, Madam," replied he, "is not the present question: though, as I have made no use of advice myself, I should in conscience give it to those that will."

As I was apprehensive this answer might draw on a repartee, making up by abuse what it wanted in wit, I changed the subject, by seeming to wonder what could keep our son so long at the fair, as it was now almost nightfall. "Never mind our son," cried my wife; "depend upon it he knows what he is about. I'll warrant we'll never see him selling his hen on a rainy day. I have seen him buy such bargains as would amaze one. I'll tell you a good story about that, that will make you split your sides with laughing. — But, as I live, yonder comes Moses, without a horse, and the box at his back."

As she spoke, Moses came slowly on foot, and sweating under the deal box, which he had strapt round his shoulders like a pedlar. "Welcome, welcome, Moses! well, my boy, what have you brought us from the fair?" — "I have brought you myself," cried Moses, with a sly look, and resting the box on the dresser. "Ay, Moses," cried my wife, "that we know; but where is the horse?" — "I have sold him," cried Moses, "for three pounds five shillings and twopence." — "Well done, my good boy," returned she; "I knew you would touch them off. Between ourselves, three pounds five shillings and twopence is no bad day's work. Come, let us have it then."

"I have brought back no money," cried Moses. "I have laid it all out in a bargain, and here it is," pulling out a bundle from his breast: "here they are; a gross of green spectacles, with silver rims and shagreen cases." — "A gross of green spectacles!" repeated my wife in a faint voice. "And you have parted with the colt, and brought us back nothing but a gross of green paltry spectacles!" — "Dear mother," cried the boy, "why won't you listen to reason? I had them a dead bargain, or I should not have bought them. The silver rims alone will sell for double the money." — "A fig for the silver rims," cried my wife, in a passion: "I dare swear they won't sell for above half the money at the rate of broken silver, five shillings an ounce."

"You need be under no uneasiness," cried I, "about selling the rims, for they are not worth sixpence; for I perceive they are only copper varnished over." — "What!" cried my wife, "not silver! the rims not silver!" — "No," cried I, "no more silver than your saucepan." — "And so," returned she, "we have parted with the colt, and have only got a gross of green spectacles, with copper rims and shagreen cases? A murrain take such trumpery! The blockhead has been imposed upon, and should have known his company better."

"There, my dear," cried I, "you are wrong; he should not have known them at all." — "Marry, hang the idiot!" returned she, "to bring me such stuff: if I had them, I would throw them in the fire." — "There again you are wrong, my dear," cried I; "for though they be copper, we will keep them by us, as copper spectacles are better than nothing."

By this time the unfortunate Moses was undeceived. He now saw that he had indeed been imposed upon by a prowling sharper, who, observing his figure, had marked him for an easy prey. I therefore asked the circumstances of his deception. He sold the horse, it seems, and walked the fair in search of another. A reverend-looking man brought him to a tent, under the pretence of having one to sell. "Here," continued Moses, "we met another man very well dressed, who desired to borrow twenty pounds upon these, saying that he wanted money, and would dispose of them for a third of the value. The first gentleman,

who pretended to be my friend, whispered me to buy them, and cautioned me not to let so good an offer pass. I sent for Mr. Solomon Flamborough, and they talked him up as finely as they did me; and so at last we were persuaded to buy the two gross between us."

The journey of my daughters to town was now resolved upon, Mr. Thornhill having kindly promised to inspect their conduct himself, and inform us by letter of their behaviour. But it was thought indispensably necessary that their appearance should equal the greatness of their expectations, which could not be done without expense. We debated therefore in full council what were the easiest methods of raising money, or, more properly speaking, what we could most conveniently sell.

The deliberation was soon finished: it was found that our remaining horse was utterly useless for the plough without his companion, and equally unfit for the road, as wanting an eye: it was therefore determined that we should dispose of him, for the purposes above mentioned, at the neighbouring fair; and to prevent imposition, I should go with him myself.

Though this was the first mercantile transaction of my life, yet I had no doubt about acquitting myself with reputation. The opinion a man forms of his own prudence is measured by that of the company he keeps: and as mine was most in the family way, I had conceived no unfavorable sentiments of my worldly wisdom. My wife, however, next morning, at parting, after I had got some paces from the door, called me back to advise me, in a whisper, to have all my eyes about me.

I had, in the usual forms, when I came to the fair, put my horse through all his paces, but for some time had no bidders. At last a chapman approached, and after he had for a good while examined the horse round, finding him blind of one eye, he would have nothing to say to him; a second came up, but observing that he had a spavin, declared he would not take him for the driving home; a third perceived he had a wind-gall, and would bid no money; a fourth knew by his eye that he had the botts; a fifth wondered what a plague I could do at the fair with a blind,

spavined, galled hack, that was only fit to be cut up for a dog kennel.

By this time, I began to have a most hearty contempt for the poor animal myself, and was almost ashamed at the approach of every customer; for though I did not entirely believe all the fellows told me, yet I reflected that the number of witnesses was a strong presumption they were right; and St. Gregory, upon Good Works, professes himself to be of the same opinion.

I was in this mortifying situation, when a brother clergyman, an old acquaintance, who had also business at the fair, came up, and, shaking me by the hand, proposed adjourning to a public-house, and taking a glass of whatever we could get. I readily closed with the offer, and entering an alehouse, we were shown into a little back room, where was only a venerable old man, who sat wholly intent over a large book, which he was reading.

I never in my life saw a figure that prepossessed me more favourably. His locks of silver grey venerably shaded his temples, and his green old age seemed to be the result of health and benevolence. However, his presence did not interrupt our conversation: my friend and I discoursed on the various turns of fortune we had met — the Whistonian controversy, my last pamphlet, the archdeacon's reply, and the hard measure that was dealt me. But our attention was in a short time taken off, by the appearance of a youth, who, entering the room, respectfully said something softly to the old stranger.

"Make no apologies, my child," said the old man; "to do good is a duty we owe to all our fellow-creatures. Take this, I wish it were more; but five pounds will relieve your distress, and you are welcome."

The modest youth shed tears of gratitude, and yet his gratitude was scarce equal to mine. I could have hugged the good old man in my arms, his benevolence pleased me so. He continued to read, and we resumed our conversation, until my companion, after some time, recollecting that he had business to transact in the fair, promised to be soon back, adding, that he always desired to have as much of Dr. Primrose's company as possible. The old gentleman, hearing my name mentioned, seemed to

look at me with attention for some time; and when my friend was gone, most respectfully demanded if I was any way related to the great Primrose, that courageous monogamist, who had been the bulwark of the Church. Never did my heart feel sincerer rapture than at that moment.

"Sir," cried I, "the applause of so good a man as I am sure you are, adds to that happiness in my breast which your benevolence has already excited. You behold before you, Sir, that Dr. Primrose, the monogamist, whom you have been pleased to call great. You here see that unfortunate divine, who has so long, and it would ill become me to say, successfully fought against the deuterogamy of the age." — "Sir," cried the stranger, struck with awe, "I fear I have been too familiar, but you'll forgive my curiosity, Sir, I beg pardon." — "Sir," cried I, grasping his hand, "you are so far from displeasing me by your familiarity, that I must beg you'll accept my friendship, as you have already my esteem." — "Then with gratitude I accept the offer," cried he, squeezing me by the hand, "thou glorious pillar of unshaken orthodoxy! and do I behold —"

I here interrupted what he was going to say; for though, as an author, I could digest no small share of flattery, yet now my modesty would permit no more. However, no lovers in romance ever cemented a more instantaneous friendship. We talked upon several subjects: at first I thought he seemed rather devout than learned, and began to think he despised all human doctrines as dross. Yet this no way lessened him in my esteem, for I had for some time begun privately to harbour such an opinion myself. I therefore took occasion to observe that the world in general began to be blameably indifferent as to doctrinal matters, and followed human speculations too much.

"Ay, Sir," replied he, as if he had reserved all his learning to that moment, "Ay, Sir, the world is in its dotage; and yet the cosmogony, or creation of the world, has puzzled philosophers of all ages. What a medley of opinions have they not broached upon the creation of the world! Sanchoniathon, Manetho, Berosus, and Ocellus Lucanus, have all attempted it in vain. The latter has these words, *Anarchon ara kai atelutaion to pan*,

which imply that all things have neither beginning nor end. Manetho also, who lived about the time of Nebuchadon-Asser — Asser being a Syriac word, usually applied as a surname to the kings of that country, as Teglat Prael-Asser, Nabon-Asser — he, I say, formed a conjecture equally absurd; for as we usually say, *ek to biblion kubernetes*, which implies that books will never teach the world; so he attempted to investigate — But, Sir, I ask pardon, I am straying from the question.”

That he actually was; nor could I, for my life, see how the creation of the world had anything to do with the business I was talking of; but it was sufficient to show me that he was a man of letters, and I now revered him the more. I was resolved, therefore, to bring him to the touchstone; but he was too mild and too gentle to contend for victory. Whenever I made an observation that looked like a challenge to controversy, he would smile, shake his head, and say nothing; by which I understood he could say much, if he thought proper. The subject, therefore, insensibly changed from the business of antiquity to that which brought us both to the fair: mine, I told him, was to sell a horse, and very luckily, indeed, his was to buy one for one of his tenants.

My horse was soon produced; and, in fine, we struck a bargain. Nothing now remained but to pay me, and he accordingly pulled out a thirty-pound note, and bid me change it. Not being in a capacity of complying with this demand, he ordered his footman to be called up, who made his appearance in a very genteel livery.

“Here, Abraham,” cried he, “go and get gold for this; you’ll do it at neighbour Jackson’s or anywhere.”

While the fellow was gone, he entertained me with a pathetic harangue on the great scarcity of silver, which I undertook to improve, by deploring also the great scarcity of gold; so that, by the time Abraham returned, we had both agreed that money was never so hard to be come at as now. Abraham returned to inform us that he had been over the whole fair, and could not get change, though he had offered half-a-crown for doing it. This was a very great disappointment to us all; but the

old gentleman, having paused a little, asked me if I knew one Solomon Flamborough in my part of the country.

Upon replying that he was my next-door neighbour: "If that be the case, then," returned he, "I believe we shall deal. You shall have a draft upon him, payable at sight; and, let me tell you, he is as warm a man as any within five miles round him. Honest Solomon and I have been acquainted for many years together. I remember I always beat him at three jumps; but he could hop on one leg further than I."

A draft upon my neighbour was to me the same as money; for I was sufficiently convinced of his ability. The draft was signed, and put into my hands, and Mr. Jenkinson, the old gentleman, his man Abraham, and my horse, old Blackberry, trotted off very well pleased with each other.

After a short interval, being left to reflection, I began to recollect that I had done wrong in taking a draft from a stranger, and so prudently resolved upon following the purchaser, and having back my horse. But this was now too late; I therefore made directly homewards, resolving to get the draft changed into money at my friend's as fast as possible.

I found my honest neighbour smoking his pipe at his own door, and informing him that I had a small bill upon him, he read it twice over. "You can read the name, I suppose," cried I — "Ephraim Jenkinson." — "Yes," returned he, "the name is written plain enough, and I know the gentleman too — the greatest rascal under the canopy of heaven. This is the very same rogue who sold us the spectacles. Was he not a venerable-looking man, with grey hair, and no flaps to his pocket-holes? And did he not talk a long string of learning about Greek, and cosmogony, and the world?" To this I replied with a groan.

"Ay," continued he, "he has but that one piece of learning in the world, and he always talks it away whenever he finds a scholar in company; but I know the rogue, and will catch him yet."

Though I was already sufficiently mortified, my greatest struggle was to come, in facing my wife and daughters. No truant was ever more afraid of returning to school, there to behold

the master's visage, than I was of going home. I was determined, however, to anticipate their fury, by first falling into a passion myself.

But, alas! upon entering, I found the family no way disposed for battle. My wife and girls were all in tears, Mr. Thornhill having been there that day to inform them that their journey to town was entirely over. The two ladies, having heard reports of us from some malicious person, were that day set out for London. He could neither discover the tendency nor the author of these; but whoever might have broached them, he continued to assure our family of his friendship and protection. I found, therefore, that they bore my disappointment with great resignation, as it was eclipsed in the greatness of their own. But what perplexed us most, was to think who could be so base as to asperse the character of a family so harmless as ours — too humble to excite envy and too inoffensive to create disgust.

Sir
Walter
Scott

(1771–1832)

Sir Walter Scott . . . strange that we think of him only with the *Sir* — the name Walter Scott does not look or sound familiar; yet we do not need the *Sir* to be familiar with A. Conan Doyle or James M. Barrie or so many other knighted literary figures . . .

Sir Walter Scott was a man of many hats — poet, novelist (“the father of the historical novel”), historian, antiquarian, lawyer, sheriff-deputy, publisher, editor, translator, biographer. Knowing how much he wrote and the nature of his novels and poetry, it is not surprising to learn that his grandfather told Scott, as a boy, stirring legends and wild adventures and exciting stories of the family’s Border ancestry, and “many a tale of merry men of the persuasion and calling of Robin Hood and Little John.” As a result, Scott, a born story-teller himself, began to improvise tales of derring-do in his Edinburgh High School days; and it indicates something of Scott’s proud and robust character that although lame all his life, he walked twenty to thirty miles a day and was an expert mountain climber.

Scott’s literary career was decided by the success of his poem, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). Then Mar-

mion (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) added to his poetic reputation. But his greatest success came with the *Waverley Novels*, which proved to be enormously popular — high school students read *Ivanhoe* (1820) to this very day. Ultimately Scott was to find himself hugely in debt, through no fault of his own, and refusing the easy way out by simply declaring himself bankrupt, he paid off his debts by “unparalleled exertions” — another indication of his undaunted and undeviating character; his struggle and courage anticipate what has happened to other famous writers — to Mark Twain, for one, who at the age of sixty embarked on a world-wide lecture tour that paid off his debts but ruined his health.

Remembering that Scott was “the father of the historical novel,” we ask that you approach this leisurely tale as if it were an historical novel in a nutshell, or an excerpt, complete in itself, from a longer narrative of panoply and daring action. This is a simple tale in its plot (it was first published nearly a century and a half ago), but as in all Scott’s tapestried work, it is full of colorful detail and stout-hearted men, and it gives an authentic picture of the time, the place, and especially of the people, their dress, their customs, and their fascinating speech.

Like Thomas Hardy’s “The Three Strangers” (also in this anthology, in its chronological position), Sir Walter Scott’s “The Two Drovers” is one of those famous British short stories that are seldom read — at least, seldom read these streamlined days. But it is worth your reading after all these years if only for its historical quality — this tale of “wild, untutored justice” . . .

THE TWO DROVERS

It was the day after Doune Fair when my story commences. It had been a brisk market: several dealers had attended from the northern and midland counties in England, and English money had flown so merrily about as to gladden the hearts of the Highland farmers. Many large droves were about to set off for England, under the protection of their owners, or of the topsmen whom they employed in the tedious, laborious, and responsible office of driving the cattle for many hundreds of miles.

The Highlanders in particular are masters of this difficult trade, which seems to suit them as well as the trade of war. It affords exercise for all their habits of patient endurance and active exertion. They are required to know perfectly the drove-roads, which lie over the wildest tracts of the country, and to avoid as much as possible the highways, which distress the feet of the bullocks, and the turnpikes, which annoy the spirit of the drovers; whereas on the broad green or grey track, which leads across the pathless moor, the herd not only move at ease, but, if they mind their business, may pick up a mouthful of food by the way.

At night the drovers usually sleep along with their cattle, let the weather be what it will; and many of these hardy men do not once rest under a roof during a journey on foot from Lochaber to Lincolnshire. They are paid very highly, for the trust reposed is of the last importance, as it depends on their prudence, vigilance, and honesty whether the cattle reach the final market in good order, and afford a profit to the grazier. But, as they maintain themselves at their own expense, they are especially economical in that particular.

At the period we speak of, a Highland drover was victualled for his long and toilsome journey with a few handfuls of oat-

meal and two or three onions, renewed from time to time, and a ram's horn filled with whisky, which he used regularly, but sparingly, every night and morning. His dirk, or skene-dhu (black knife), so worn as to be concealed beneath the arm, or by the folds of the plaid, was his only weapon, excepting the cudgel with which he directed the movements of the cattle. A Highlander was never so happy as on these occasions. There was a variety in the whole journey which exercised the Celt's natural curiosity and love of motion; there were the constant change of place and scene, the petty adventures incidental to the traffic, and the intercourse with the various farmers, graziers, and traders, intermingled with occasional merry-makings, not the less acceptable to Donald that they were void of expense; and there was the consciousness of superior skill, for the Highlander, a child amongst flocks, is a prince amongst herds, and his natural habits induce him to disdain the shepherd's slothful life, so that he feels himself nowhere more at home than when following a gallant drove of his country cattle.

Of the number who left Doune in the morning not a glunamie of them all cocked his bonnet more briskly, or gartered his tartan hose under knee over a pair of more promising spigs (legs), than did Robin Oig M'Combich, called familiarly Robin Oig, that is, Young, or the Lesser, Robin. Though small of stature, as the epithet Oig implies, and not very strongly limbed, he was as light and alert as one of the deer of his mountains. He had an elasticity of step which, in the course of a long march, made many a stout fellow envy him; and the manner in which he busked his plaid and adjusted his bonnet argued a consciousness that so smart a John Highlandman as himself would not pass unnoticed among the Lowland lasses. The ruddy cheek, red lips, and white teeth set off a countenance which had gained by exposure to the weather a healthful and hardy rather than a rugged hue. If Robin Oig did not laugh, or even smile, frequently, as indeed is not the practice among his countrymen, his bright eyes usually gleamed from under his bonnet with an expression of cheerfulness ready to be turned into mirth.

The departure of Robin Oig was an incident in the little

town, in and near which he had many friends, male and female. He was a topping person in his way, transacted considerable business on his own behalf, and was entrusted by the best farmers in the Highlands, in preference to any other drover in that district. He might have increased his business to any extent had he condescended to manage it by deputy; but, except for a lad or two, sister's sons, Robin rejected the idea of assistance, conscious, perhaps, how much his reputation depended upon his attending in person to the practical discharge of his duty in every instance. He remained, therefore, contented with the highest premium given to persons of his description, and comforted himself with the hopes that a few journeys to England might enable him to conduct business on his own account in a manner becoming his birth.

For Robin Oig's father, Lachlan M'Combich, or "son of my friend" (his actual clan-surname being M'Gregor), had been so called by the celebrated Rob Roy, because of the particular friendship which had subsisted between the grandsire of Robin and that renowned cateran. Some people even say that Robin Oig derived his Christian name from one as renowned in the wilds of Loch Lomond as ever was his namesake, Robin Hood, in the precincts of merry Sherwood. "Of such ancestry," as James Boswell says, "who would not be proud?" Robin Oig was proud accordingly; but his frequent visits to England and to the Lowlands had given him tact enough to know that pretensions which still gave him a little right to distinction in his own lonely glen might be both obnoxious and ridiculous elsewhere. The pride of birth, therefore, was like the miser's treasure, the secret subject of his contemplation, but never exhibited to strangers as a subject of boasting.

Many were the words of gratulation and good luck which were bestowed on Robin Oig. The judges commended his drove, especially Robin's own property, which were the best of them. Some thrust out their snuff-mulls for the parting pinch; others tendered the dochan-darroch, or parting cup. All cried: "Good luck travel out with you and come home with you. Give you luck in the Saxon market — brave notes in the leabhar-dhu

(black pocket-book) and plenty of English gold in the sporran" (pouch of goat-skin).

The bonny lasses made their adieus more modestly, and more than one, it was said, would have given her best brooch to be certain that it was upon her that his eye last rested as he turned towards the road.

Robin Oig had just given the preliminary "Hoo — hoo!" to urge forward the loiterers of the drove, when there was a cry behind him.

"Stay, Robin — bide a blink. Here is Janet of Tomahourich — auld Janet, your father's sister."

"Plague on her, for an auld Highland witch and spaewife," said a farmer from the Carse of Stirling; "she'll cast some of her cantrips on the cattle."

"She canna do that," said another. "Robin Oig is no the lad to leave any of them without tying St. Mungo's knot on their tails, and that will put to her speed the best witch that ever flew over Dimayet upon a broomstick."

It may not be indifferent to the reader to know that the Highland cattle are peculiarly liable to be "taken," or infected, by spells and witchcraft, which judicious people guard against by knitting knots of peculiar complexity on the tuft of hair which terminates the animal's tail.

But the old woman who was the object of the farmer's suspicion seemed only busied about the drover, without paying any attention to the drove. Robin, on the contrary, appeared rather impatient of her presence.

"What auld-world fancy," he said, "has brought you so early from the ingle-side this morning, muhme? I am sure I bid you good-even, and had your God-speed, last night."

"And left me more siller than the useless old woman will use till you come back again, bird of my bosom," said the sibyl. "But it is little I would care for the food that nourishes me, or the fire that warms me, or for God's blessed sun itself, if aught but weal should happen to the grandson of my father. So let me walk the deasil round you, that you may go safe out into the far foreign land, and come safe home."

Robin Oig stopped, half embarrassed, half laughing, signing to those around that he only complied with the old woman to soothe her humour. In the meantime she traced around him, with wavering steps, the propitiation, which some have thought has been derived from the Druidical mythology. It consists, as is well known, in the person who makes the deasil walking three times round the person who is the object of the ceremony, taking care to move according to the course of the sun. At once, however, she stopped short, and exclaimed, in a voice of alarm and horror: "Grandson of my father, there is blood on your hand."

"Hush, for God's sake, aunt," said Robin Oig; "you will bring more trouble on yourself with this taishataragh (second sight) than you will be able to get out of for many a day."

The old woman only repeated with a ghastly look: "There is blood on your hand, and it is English blood. The blood of the Gael is richer and redder. Let us see — let us —"

Ere Robin Oig could prevent her, which, indeed, could only have been by positive violence, so hasty and peremptory were her proceedings, she had drawn from his side the dirk which lodged in the folds of his plaid, and held it up, exclaiming, although the weapon gleamed clear and bright in the sun: "Blood, blood — Saxon blood again. Robin Oig M'Combich, go not this day to England!"

"Prudd, trudd," answered Robin Oig, "that will never do neither; it would be next thing to running the country. For shame, muhme, give me the dirk. You cannot tell by the colour the difference betwixt the blood of a black bullock and a white one, and you speak of knowing Saxon from Gaelic blood. All men have their blood from Adam, muhme. Give me my skene-dhu, and let me go on my road. I should have been half-way to Stirling brig by this time. Give me my dirk, and let me go."

"Never will I give it to you," said the old woman — "never will I quit my hold on your plaid, unless you promise me not to wear that unhappy weapon."

The women around him urged him also, saying few of his aunt's words fell to the ground; and as the Lowland farmers con-

tinued to look moodily on the scene, Robin Oig determined to close it at any sacrifice.

"Well, then," said the young drover, giving the scabbard of the weapon to Hugh Morrison, "you Lowlanders care nothing for these freats. Keep my dirk for me. I cannot give it you, because it was my father's; but your drove follows ours, and I am content it should be in your keeping, not in mine. Will this do, muhme?"

"It must," said the old woman — "that is, if the Lowlander is mad enough to carry the knife."

The strong Westlandman laughed aloud.

"Goodwife," said he, "I am Hugh Morrison from Glenae, come of the Manly Morrisons of auld lang syne, that never took short weapon against a man in their lives. And neither needed they: they had their broadswords, and I have this bit supple," showing a formidable cudgel; "as for dirking ower the board, I leave that to John Highlandman. Ye needna snort, none of you Highlanders and you in especial, Robin. I'll keep the bit knife, if you are feared for the auld spaewife's tale, and give it back to you whenever you want it."

Robin was not particularly pleased with some part of Hugh Morrison's speech; but he had learned in his travels more patience than belonged to his Highland constitution originally, and he accepted the service of the descendant of the Manly Morrisons, without finding fault with the rather depreciating manner in which it was offered.

"If he had not had his morning in his head, and been but a Dumfriesshire hog into the boot, he would have spoken more like a gentleman. But you cannot have more of a sow than a grumph. It's shame my father's knife should ever slash a haggis for the like of him."

Thus saying, but saying it in Gaelic, Robin drove on his cattle, and waved farewell to all behind him. He was in the greater haste, because he expected to join at Falkirk a comrade and brother in profession, with whom he proposed to travel in company.

Robin Oig's friend was a young Englishman, Harry Wakefield by name, well known at every northern market, and in his way as much famed and honoured as our Highland driver of bullocks. He was nearly six feet high, gallantly formed to keep the rounds at Smithfield, or maintain the ring at a wrestling-match; and although he might have been over-matched, perhaps, among the regular professors of the fancy, yet, as a yokel or rustic, or a chance customer, he was able to give a bellyful to any amateur of the pugilistic art. Doncaster races saw him in his glory, betting his guinea, and generally successfully; nor was there a main fought in Yorkshire, the feeders being persons of celebrity, at which he was not to be seen, if business permitted.

But though a "sprack" lad, and fond of pleasure and its haunts, Harry Wakefield was steady, and not the cautious Robin Oig M'Combich himself was more attentive to the main chance. His holdings were holdings indeed, but his days of work were dedicated to steady and persevering labour. In countenance and temper, Wakefield was the model of Old England's merry yeomen whose cloth-ward shafts, in so many hundred battles, asserted her superiority over the nations, and whose good sabres, in our own time, are her cheapest and most assured defense. His mirth was readily excited; for, strong in limb and constitution, and fortunate in circumstances, he was disposed to be pleased with everything about him; and such difficulties as he might occasionally encounter were, to a man of his energy, rather matter of amusement than serious annoyance. With all the merits of a sanguine temper, our young English drover was not without his defects. He was irascible, sometimes to the verge of being quarrelsome; and perhaps not the less inclined to bring his disputes to a pugilistic decision, because he found few antagonists able to stand up to him in the boxing-ring.

It is difficult to say how Harry Wakefield and Robin Oig first became intimates; but it is certain a close acquaintance had taken place betwixt them, although they had apparently few common subjects of conversation or of interest, so soon as their talk ceased to be of bullocks. Robin Oig, indeed, spoke the English language rather imperfectly upon any other topics but stots

and kyloes, and Harry Wakefield could never bring his broad Yorkshire tongue to utter a single word of Gaelic. It was in vain Robin spent a whole morning, during a walk over Minch Moor, in attempting to teach his companion to utter, with true precision, the shibboleth *llhu*, which is the Gaelic for a calf. From Traquair to Murder cairn, the hill rung with the discordant attempts of the Saxon upon the unmanageable monosyllable, and the heartfelt laugh which followed every failure.

They had, however, better modes of awakening the echoes; for Wakefield could sing many a ditty to the praise of Moll, Susan, and Cicely, and Robin Oig had a particular gift at whistling interminable pibrochs through all their involutions, and, what was more agreeable to his companion's southern ear, knew many of the northern airs, both lively and pathetic, to which Wakefield learned to pipe a bass. Thus, though Robin could hardly have comprehended his companion's stories about horse-racing, cock-fighting, and fox-hunting, and although his own legends of clan-fights and creaghs, varied with talk of Highland goblins and fairy folk, would have been caviare to his companion, they contrived nevertheless to find a degree of pleasure in each other's company, which had for three years back induced them to join company and travel together, when the direction of their journey permitted.

Each, indeed, found his advantage in this companionship; for where could the Englishman have found a guide through the Western Highlands like Robin Oig M'Combich? And when they were on what Harry called the *right* side of the Border, his patronage, which was extensive, and his purse, which was heavy, were at all times at the service of his Highland friend, and on many occasions his liberality did him genuine yeoman's service.

The pair of friends had traversed with their usual cordiality the grassy wilds of Liddesdale, and crossed the opposite part of Cumberland, emphatically called The Waste. In these solitary regions the cattle under the charge of our drovers derived their subsistence chiefly by picking their food as they went along the drove-road, or sometimes by the tempting oppor-

tunity of a "start and owerloup," or invasion of the neighbouring pasture, where an occasion presented itself. But now the scene changed before them; they were descending towards a fertile and inclosed country, where no such liberties could be taken with impunity, or without a previous arrangement and bargain with the possessors of the ground.

This was especially the case, as a great northern fair was upon the eve of taking place. Fields were therefore difficult to be obtained, and only upon high terms. This necessity occasioned a temporary separation betwixt the two friends who went to bargain, each as he could, for the separate accommodation of his herd. Unhappily it chanced that both of them, unknown to each other, thought of bargaining for the ground they wanted on the property of a country gentleman of some fortune, whose estate lay in the neighbourhood. The English drover applied to the bailiff on the property, who was known to him. It chanced that the Cumbrian squire, who had entertained some suspicions of his manager's honesty, was taking occasional measures to ascertain how far they were well founded, and had desired that any inquiries about his inclosures should be referred to himself. As, however, Mr. Ireby had gone the day before upon a journey of some miles' distance to the northward, the bailiff chose to consider the check upon his full powers as for the time removed, and concluded that he should best serve his master's interest, and perhaps his own, in making an agreement with Harry Wakefield.

Meanwhile, ignorant of what his comrade was doing, Robin Oig, on his side, chanced to be overtaken by a good-looking, smart little man upon a pony, most knowingly hogged and cropped, as was then the fashion, the rider wearing tight leather breeches and long-necked bright spurs. This cavalier asked one or two pertinent questions about markets and the price of stock. So Robin, seeing him a well-judging, civil gentleman, took the freedom to ask him whether he could let him know if there was any grass-land to be let in that neighbourhood, for the temporary accommodation of his drove. He could not have put the question to more willing ears. The gentleman of the buckskins

was the proprietor with whose bailiff Harry Wakefield had dealt, or was in the act of dealing.

"Thou art in good luck, my canny Scot," said Mr. Ireby, "to have spoken to me, for I see thy cattle have done their day's work, and I have at my disposal the only field within three miles that is to be let in these parts."

"The drove can pe gang two, three, four miles very pratty weel indeed," said the cautious Highlander; "put what would his honour pe axing for the peasts pe the head, if she was to tak the park for twa or three days?"

"We won't differ, Sawney, if you let me have six stots for winterers."

"And which peasts wad your honour pe for having?"

"Why, let me see — the two black — the dun one — yon doddy — him with the twisted horn — the brockit. How much by the head?"

"Ah," said Robin, "your honour is a shudge — a real shudge: I couldna have set off the pest six peasts petter mysell, me that ken them as if they were my pairns, puir things."

"Well, how much per head, Sawney," continued Mr. Ireby.

"It was high markets at Doune and Falkirk," answered Robin.

And thus the conversation proceeded, until they had agreed on the *prix juste* for the bullocks, the squire throwing in the temporary accommodation of the inclosure for the cattle into the boot, and Robin making, as he thought a very good bargain, provided the grass was but tolerable. The squire walked his pony alongside of the drove, partly to show him the way, and see him put into possession of the field, and partly to learn the latest news of the northern markets.

They arrived at the field, and the pasture seemed excellent. But what was their surprise when they saw the bailiff quietly inducting the cattle of Harry Wakefield into the grassy goshen which had just been assigned to those of Robin Oig M'Combich by the proprietor himself! Squire Ireby set spurs to his horse, dashed up to his servant, and learning what had passed between the parties, briefly informed the English drover that his bailiff

had let the ground without authority, and that he might seek grass for his cattle wherever he would, since he was to get none there. At the same time he rebuked his servant severely for having transgressed his commands, and ordered him instantly to assist in ejecting the hungry and weary cattle of Harry Wakefield, which were just beginning to enjoy a meal of unusual plenty, and to introduce those of his comrade, whom the English drover now began to consider as a rival.

The feelings which arose in Wakefield's mind would have induced him to resist Mr. Ireby's decision; but every Englishman has a tolerably accurate sense of law and justice, and John Fleecebumpkin, the bailiff, having acknowledged that he had exceeded his commission, Wakefield saw nothing else for it than to collect his hungry and disappointed charge and drive them on to seek quarters elsewhere.

Robin Oig saw what had happened with regret, and hastened to offer to his English friend to share with him the disputed possession. But Wakefield's pride was severely hurt, and he answered disdainfully, "Take it all, man — take it all; never make two bites of a cherry. Out upon you, man; I would not kiss any man's dirty latches for leave to bake in his oven."

Robin Oig, sorry but not surprised at his comrade's displeasure, hastened to entreat his friend to wait but an hour till he had gone to the squire's house to receive payment for the cattle he had sold, and he would come back and help him to drive the cattle into some convenient place of rest.

But the Englishman continued indignant. "Thou hast been selling, hast thou? Ay — ay, thou is a cunning lad for kenning the hours of bargaining. Go to the devil with thyself, for I will ne'er see they fause loon's visage again; thou should be ashamed to look me in the face."

"I am ashamed to look no man in the face," said Robin Oig, something moved; "and, moreover, I will look you in the face this blessed day, if you will bide at the clachan down yonder."

"Mayhap you had as well keep away," said his comrade; and turning his back on his former friend, he collected his unwilling

associates, assisted by the bailiff, who took some real and some affected interest in seeing Wakefield accommodated.

After spending some time in negotiating with more than one of the neighbouring farmers, who could not, or would not, afford the accommodation desired, Henry Wakefield at last, and in his necessity, accomplished his point by means of the landlord of the alehouse at which Robin Oig and he had agreed to pass the night, when they first separated from each other. Mine host was content to let him turn his cattle on a piece of barren moor, at a price little less than the bailiff had asked for the disputed inclosure; and the wretchedness of the pasture, as well as the price paid for it, were set down as exaggerations of the breach of faith and friendship of his Scottish crony.

This turn of Wakefield's passions was encouraged by the bailiff, who had his own reasons for being offended against poor Robin, as having been the unwitting cause of his falling into disgrace with his master, as well as by the innkeeper, and two or three chance guests, who stimulated the drover in his resentment against his quondam associate — some from the ancient grudge against the Scots, which, when it exists anywhere, is to be found lurking in the Border counties, and some from the general love of mischief, which characterises mankind in all ranks of life. Good John Barleycorn also, who always heightens and exaggerates the prevailing passions, be they angry or kindly, was not wanting in his offices on this occasion; and confusion to false friends and hard masters was pledged in more than one tankard.

In the meanwhile Mr. Ireby found some amusement in detaining the northern drover at his ancient hall. He caused a cold round of beef to be placed before the Scot in the butler's pantry, together with a foaming tankard of homebrewed, and took pleasure in seeing the hearty appetite with which these unwonted edibles were discussed by Robin Oig M'Combich. The squire himself, lighting his pipe, compounded between his patrician dignity and his love of agricultural gossip, by walking up and down while he conversed with his guest.

"I passed another drove," said the squire, "with one of your

countrymen behind them; they were something less beasts than your drove, doddies most of them; a big man was with them — none of your kilts though, but a decent pair of breeches. D'ye know who he may be?"

"Hout aye, that might, could, and would be Hughie Morrison; I didna think he could hae been sae weel up. He has made a day on us; but his Argyleshires will have wearied shanks. How far was he pehind?"

"I think about six or seven miles," answered the squire, "for I passed them at the Christenbury Crag, and I overtook you at the Hollan Bush. If his beasts be leg-weary, he will be maybe selling bargains."

"Na — na, Hughie Morrison is no the man for pargains; ye maun come to some Highland body like Robin Oig for the like of these. Put I maun pe wishing you goot-night, and twenty of them let alane ane, and I maun down to the clachan to see if the lad Harry Waakfelt is out of his humdudgeons yet."

The party at the alehouse were still in full talk, and the treachery of Robin Oig still the theme of conversation, when the supposed culprit entered. His arrival, as usually happens in such a case, put an instant stop to the discussion of which he had furnished the subject, and he was received by the company assembled with that chilling silence which, more than a thousand exclamations, tells an intruder that he is unwelcome.

Surprised and offended, but not appalled, by the reception which he experienced, Robin entered with an undaunted and even a haughty air, attempted no greeting, as he saw he was received with none, and placed himself by the side of the fire, a little apart from a table at which Harry Wakefield, the bailiff, and two or three other persons were seated. Robin then proceeded to light his pipe and call for a pint of twopenny.

"We have no twopence ale," answered Ralph Heskett, the landlord; "but, as thou find'st thy own tobacco, it's like thou mayst find thy own liquor too; it's the wont of thy country, I wot."

"Shame, goodman," said the landlady, a blythe, bustling housewife, hastening herself to supply the guest with liquor.

"Thou knowest well enow what the strange man wants, and it's thy trade to be civil, man. Thou shouldst know, that if the Scot likes a small pot, he pays a sure penny."

Without taking any notice of this dialogue, the Highlander took the flagon in his hand, and addressing the company generally, drank the toast of "Good markets," to the party assembled.

"The better that the wind blew fewer dealers from the north," said one of the farmers, "and fewer Highland runts to eat up the English meadows."

"Saul of my body, put you are wrang there, my friend," answered Robin, with composure; "it is your fat Englishmen that eat up our Scots cattle, puir things."

"I wish there was a summat to eat up their drovers," said another; "a plain Englishman canna make bread with a kenning of them."

"Or an honest servant keep his master's favour, but they will come sliding in between him and the sunshine," said the bailiff.

"If these pe jokes," said Robin Oig, with the same composure, "there is ower mony jokes upon one man."

"It is no joke, but downright earnest," said the bailiff. "Hark ye, Mr. Robin Ogg, or whatever is your name, it's right we should tell you that we are of one opinion, and that is, that you, Mr. Robin Ogg, have behaved to our friend, Mr. Harry Wakefield here, like a raff and a blackguard."

"Nae doubt — nae doubt," answered Robin; "and you are a set of very pretty judges, for whose prains of pehaviour I wad not gie a pinch of sneeshing. If Mr. Harry Waakfelt kens where he is wranged, he kens where he may be righted."

"He speaks truth," said Wakefield, who had listened to what passed, divided between the offence which he had taken at Robin's late behaviour and the revival of his habitual feelings of regard. He now rose and went towards Robin, who got up from his seat as he approached, and held out his hand.

"That's right, Harry — go it — serve him out," resounded on all sides — "tip him the nailer — show him the mill."

"Hold your peace all of you," said Wakefield, and then addressing his comrade, he took him by the extended hand, with

something alike of respect and defiance. "Robin," he said, "thou hast used me ill enough this day; but if you mean, like a frank fellow, to shake hands, and take a tussle for love on the sod, why, I'll forgive thee, man, and we shall be better friends than ever."

"And would it no pe petter to pe cood friends without more of the matter?" said Robin; "we will be much petter friendships with our panes hale than proken."

Harry Wakefield dropped the hand of his friend, or rather threw it from him.

"I did not think I had been keeping company for three years with a coward."

"Coward pelongs to none of my name," said Robin, whose eyes began to kindle, but keeping the command of his temper. "It was no coward's legs or hands, Harry Waakfelt, that drew you out of the fords of Frew when you was drifting over the plack rock, and every eel in the river expected his share of you."

"And that is true enough, too," said the Englishman, struck by the appeal.

"Adzooks!" exclaimed the bailiff; "sure Harry Wakefield, the nattiest lad at Whitson Tryste, Wooler Fair, Carlisle Sands, or Stagshaw Bank, is not going to show white feather? Ah, this comes of living so long with kilts and bonnets; men forget the use of their daddles."

"I may teach you, Master Fleecebumpkin, that I have not lost the use of mine," said Wakefield, and then went on, "This will never do, Robin. We must have a turn-up, or we shall be the talk of the countryside. I'll be damned if I hurt thee. I'll put on the gloves gin thou like. Come, stand forward like a man."

"To be peaten like a dog," said Robin; "is there any reason in that? If you think I have done you wrong, I'll go before your shudge, though I neither know his law nor his language."

A general cry of "No, no — no law, no lawyer! A bellyful and be friends!" was echoed by the bystanders.

"But," continued Robin, "if I am to fight, I have no skill to fight like a jackanapes, with hands and nails."

"How would you fight, then?" said his antagonist; "though I

am thinking it would be hard to bring you to the scratch anyhow."

"I would fight with broadswords, and sink point on the first plood drawn, like a gentlemans."

A loud shout of laughter followed the proposal, which indeed had rather escaped from poor Robin's swelling heart than been the dictate of his sober judgement.

"Gentleman, quotha!" was echoed on all sides, with a shout of unextinguishable laughter; "a very pretty gentleman, God wot. Canst get two swords for the gentleman to fight with, Ralph Heskett?"

"No, but I can send to the armoury at Carlisle, and lend them two forks, to be making shift with in the meantime."

"Tush, man," said another, "the bonny Scots come into the world with the blue bonnet on their heads, and dirk and pistol at their belt."

"Best send post," said Mr. Fleecebumpkin, "to the squire of Corby Castle, to come and stand second to the *gentleman*."

In the midst of this torrent of ridicule the Highlander instinctively gripped beneath the folds of his plaid.

"But it's better not," he said in his own language. "A hundred curses on the swine-eaters, who know neither decency nor civility!"

"Make room, the pack of you," he said, advancing to the door.

But his former friend interposed his sturdy bulk, and opposed his leaving the house; and when Robin Oig attempted to make his way by force, Wakefield hit him down on the floor, with as much ease as a boy bowls a ninepin.

"A ring — a ring!" was now shouted, until the dark rafters, and the hams that hung on them trembled again, and the very platters on the "bink" clattered against each other. "Well done, Harry" — "Give it him home, Harry" — "Take care of him now, he sees his own blood!"

Such were the exclamations, while the Highlander, starting from the ground, all his coldness and caution lost in frantic rage,

sprung at his antagonist with the fury, the activity, and the vindictive purpose of an incensed tiger-cat. But when could rage encounter science and temper? Robin Oig again went down in the unequal contest; and as the blow was a severe one, he lay motionless on the floor of the kitchen.

The landlady ran to offer some aid; but Mr. Fleecebumpkin would not permit her to approach. "Let him alone," he said, "he will come to within time, and come up to the scratch again. He has not got half his broth yet."

"He has got all I mean to give him, though," said his antagonist, whose heart began to relent towards his old associate; "and I would rather by half give the rest to yourself, Mr. Fleecebumpkin, for you pretend to know a thing or two, and Robin had not art enough even to peel before setting to, but fought with his plaid dangling about him. Stand up, Robin, my man, all friends now, and let me hear the man that will speak a word against you or your country."

Robin Oig was still under the dominion of his passion, and eager to renew the onset; but being withheld on the one side by the peacemaking Dame Heskett, and on the other aware that Wakefield no longer meant to renew the combat, his fury sunk into gloomy sullenness.

"Come — come, never grudge so much at it, man," said the Englishman, "shake hands, and we will be better friends than ever."

"Friends!" exclaimed Robin Oig with strong emphasis — "friends! Never. Look to yourself, Harry Waakfelt."

"Then the curse of Cromwell on your proud Scots stomach, as the man says in the play, and you may do your worst, and be damned; for one man can say nothing more to another after a tussle than that he is sorry for it."

On these terms the friends parted. Robin Oig drew out in silence a piece of money, threw it on the table, and then left the alehouse. But, turning at the door, he shook his hand at Wakefield, pointing with his forefinger upwards, in a manner which might imply either a threat or a caution. He then disappeared in the moonlight.

Some words passed after his departure between the bailiff, who piqued himself on being a little of a bully, and Harry Wakefield, who, with generous inconsistency, was now not indisposed to begin a new combat in defence of Robin Oig's reputation, "although he could not use his daddles like an Englishman, as it did not come natural to him."

But Dame Heskett prevented this second quarrel from coming to a head by her peremptory interference. "There should be no more fighting in this house," she said; "there had been too much already. And you, Mr. Wakefield, may live to learn," she added, "what it is to make a deadly enemy out of a good friend."

"Pshaw, dame! Robin Oig is an honest fellow, and will never keep malice."

"Do not trust to that: you do not know the dour temper of the Scots, though you have dealt with them so often. I have a right to know them, my mother being a Scot."

"And so is well seen on her daughter," said Ralph Heskett.

This sarcasm gave the discourse another turn; fresh customers entered the taproom, and others left it. The conversation turned on the expected markets, and the reports of prices from different parts of Scotland and England; treaties were commenced, and Harry Wakefield was lucky enough to find a chap for a part of his drove, and at a very considerable profit — an event of consequence more than sufficient to blot out all remembrances of the unpleasant scuffle.

But there remained one from whose mind that recollection could not have been wiped away by the possession of every head of cattle betwixt Esk and Eden. This was Robin Oig M'Combie. "That I should have had no weapon," he said, "and for the first time in my life! Blighted be the tongue that bids the Highlander part with the dirk. The dirk hae! the English blood! My muhme's word — when did her word fall to the ground?"

The recollection of the fatal prophecy confirmed the deadly intention which instantly sprang up in his mind.

"Ha! Morrison cannot be many miles behind; and if it were a hundred, what then?"

His impetuous spirit had now a fixed purpose and motive of

action, and he turned the light foot of his country towards the wilds, through which he knew by Mr. Ireby's report that Morrison was advancing. His mind was wholly engrossed by the sense of injury — injury sustained from a friend — and by the desire of vengeance on one whom he now accounted his most bitter enemy.

The treasured ideas of self-importance and self-opinion had become more precious to him, like the hoard to the miser, because he could only enjoy them in secret. But the hoard was pillaged; the idols which he had secretly worshipped had been desecrated and profaned. Insulted, abused, and beaten, he was no longer worthy, in his own opinion, of the name he bore, or the lineage which he belonged to; nothing was left to him — nothing but revenge; and as the reflection added a galling spur to every step, he determined it should be as sudden and signal as the offence.

When Robin Oig left the door of the alehouse, seven or eight English miles lay betwixt Morrison and him. The advance of the former was slow, limited by the sluggish pace of his cattle; the last left behind him stubble-field and hedgerow, crag and dark heath, all glittering with frostrime in the broad November moonlight. And now the distant lowing of Morrison's cattle is heard; and now they are seen creeping like moles in size and slowness of motion on the broad face of the moor; and now he meets them, passes them, and stops their conductor.

"May good betide us," said the Southlander. "Is this you, Robin M'Combich, or your wraith?"

"It is Robin Oig M'Combich," answered the Highlander, "and it is not. But never mind that, put pe giving me the skenedhu."

"What, you are for back to the Highlands! The devil! Have you selt all off before the fair? This beats all for quick markets."

"I have not sold — I am not going north. Give me pack my dirk, Hugh Morrison, or there will pe words between us."

"Indeed, Robin, I'll be better advised before I gie it back to you; it is a wanchancy weapon in a Highlandman's hand, and I am thinking you will be about some barns-breaking."

"Prutt, trutt! let me have my weapon," said Robin Oig impatiently.

"Hooly and fairly," said his well-meaning friend. "I'll tell you what will do better than these dirking doings. Ye ken Highlander, and Lowlander, and Bordermen are a' ae man's bairns when you are over the Scots dyke. See, the Eskdale callants, and fighting Charlie of Liddesdale, and the Lockerby lads, and the four Dandies of Lustruther, and a ween mair grey plaids are coming up behind; and if you are wranged, there is the hand of a Manly Morrison, we'll see you righted, if Carlisle and Stanwix baith took up the feud."

"To tell you the truth," said Robin Oig, desirous of eluding the suspicion of his friend, "I have enlisted with a party of the Black Watch, and must march of tomorrow morning."

"Enlisted! Were you mad or drunk? You must buy yourself off. I can lend you twenty notes, and twenty to that, if the drove sell."

"I thank you — thank ye, Hughie; but I go with good-will the gate that I am going; so the dirk — the dirk!"

"There it is for you then, since less wunna serve. But think on what I was saying. Waes me, it will be sair news in the braes of Balquidder that Robin Oig M'Combich should have run an ill gate, and ta'en on."

"Ill news in Balquidder, indeed!" echoed poor Robin; "but Cot speed you, Hughie, and send you good marcats."

So saying, he shook hastily the hand of his acquaintance, and set out in the direction from which he had advanced, with the spirit of his former pace.

"There is something wrang with the lad," muttered the Morrison to himself; "but we will maybe see better into it the morn's morning."

But long ere the morning dawned, the catastrophe of our tale had taken place. It was two hours after the affray had happened, and it was totally forgotten by almost everyone, when Robin Oig returned to Heskett's inn. The place was filled by various sorts of men and with noises corresponding to their character. There were the grave low sounds of men engaged in

busy traffic, with the laugh, the song, and the riotous jest of those who had nothing to do but to enjoy themselves. Among the last was Harry Wakefield, who, amidst a grinning group of smock-frocks, hobnailed shoes, and jolly English physiognomies, was trolling forth the old ditty.

“What though my name be Roger,
Who drives the plough and cart —”

when he was interrupted by a well-known voice saying in a high and stern voice, marked by the sharp Highland accent, “Harry Waakfelt, if you be a man stand up!”

“What is the matter? — what is it?” the guests demanded of each other.

“It is only a damned Scotsman,” said Fleecebumpkin, who was by this time very drunk, “whom Harry Wakefield helped to his broth to-day, who is now come to have his cauld kail het again.”

“Harry Waakfelt,” repeated the same ominous summons, “stand up, if you be a man!”

There is something in the tone of deep and concentrated passion which attracts attention and imposes awe, even by the very sound. The guests shrunk back on every side, and gazed at the Highlander as he stood in the middle of them, his brows bent, and his features rigid with resolution.

“I will stand up with all my heart, Robin, my boy, but it shall be to shake hands with you, and drink down all unkindness. It is not the fault of your heart, man, that you don’t know how to clench your hands.”

By this time he stood opposite to his antagonist; his open and unsuspecting look strangely contrasted with the stern purpose which gleamed wild, dark, and vindictive in the eyes of the Highlander.

“’Tis not thy fault, man, that, not having the luck to be an Englishman, thou canst not fight more than a school-girl.”

“I *can* fight,” answered Robin Oig, “and you shall know it. You, Harry Waakfelt, showed me to-day how the Saxon churls fight; I show you now how the Highlander duiniè-wassel fights.”

He seconded the word with the action and plunged the dagger, which he suddenly displayed, into the broad breast of the English yeoman, with such fatal certainty and force that the hilt made a hollow sound against the breast-bone, and the double-edged point split the very heart of his victim.

Harry Wakefield fell and expired with a single groan. His assassin next seized the bailiff by the collar, and offered the bloody poniard to his throat, whilst dread and surprise rendered the man incapable of defence.

"It were very just to lay you beside him," Robin said, "but the blood of a base pickthank shall never mix on my father's dirk with that of a brave man."

As he spoke, he cast the man from him with so much force that he fell on the floor, while Robin, with his other hand, threw the fatal weapon into the blazing turf-fire.

"There," he said, "take me who likes, and let fire cleanse blood if it can."

The cause of astonishment still continuing, Robin Oig asked for a peace-officer, and a constable having stepped out, he surrendered himself to his custody.

"A bloody night's work you have made of it," said the constable.

"Your own fault," said the Highlander. "Had you kept his hands off me twa hours since, he would have been now as well and merry as he was twa minutes since."

"It must be sorely answered," said the peace-officer.

"Never you mind that. Death pays all debts; I will pay that too."

The horror of the bystanders began now to give way to indignation; and the sight of a favourite companion murdered in the midst of them, the provocation being, in their opinion, so utterly inadequate to the vengeance, might have induced them to kill the perpetrator of the deed even upon the very spot. The constable, however, did his duty, and, with the assistance of some of the more reasonable persons present, procured horses to guard the prisoner to Carlisle, to abide his doom at the next assizes.

While the escort was preparing, the prisoner neither expressed the least interest nor attempted the slightest reply. Only, before he was carried from the fatal room, he desired to look at the dead body, which, raised from the floor, had been deposited upon the large table (at the head of which Harry Wakefield had presided but a few minutes before, full of life, vigour, and animation), until the surgeons should examine the mortal wound. The face of the corpse was decently covered with a napkin.

To the surprise and horror of the bystanders, which displayed itself in a general "Ah!" drawn through clenched teeth and half-shut lips, Robin Oig removed the cloth and gazed with a mournful but steady eye on the lifeless visage, which had been so lately animated, that the smile of good-humoured confidence in his own strength, of conciliation at once and contempt towards his enemy, still curled his lip. While those present expected that the wound, which had so lately flooded the room with gore, would send forth fresh streams at the touch of the homicide, Robin Oig replaced the covering with the brief exclamation, "He was a pretty man!"

My story is nearly ended. The unfortunate Highlander stood his trial at Carlisle. I was myself present, and as a young Scottish lawyer, and reputed a man of some quality, the politeness of the Sheriff of Cumberland offered me a place on the bench. The facts of the case were proved in the manner I have related them; and whatever might be at first the prejudice of the audience against a crime so un-English as that of assassination from revenge, yet when the rooted national prejudices of the prisoner had been explained, which made him consider himself as stained with indelible dishonour when subjected to personal violence, when his previous patience, moderation, and endurance were considered, the generosity of the English audience was inclined to regard his crime as the wayward aberration of a false idea of honour rather than as flowing from a heart naturally savage, or perverted by habitual vice.

I shall never forget the charge of the venerable judge to the jury, although not at that time liable to be much affected either by that which was eloquent or pathetic.

"We have had," he said, "in the previous part of our duty (alluding to some former trials) to discuss crimes which infer disgust and abhorrence, while they call down the well-merited vengeance of the law. It is now our still more melancholy task to apply its salutary though severe enactments to a case of a very singular character, in which the crime, for a crime it is, and a deep one, arose less out of the malevolence of the heart than the error of the understanding — less from any idea of committing wrong than from an unhappily perverted notion of that which is right.

"Here we have two men, highly esteemed, it has been stated, in their rank of life, and attached, it seems, to each other as friends, one of whose lives has been already sacrificed to a punctilio, and the other is about to prove the vengeance of the offended law; and yet both may claim our commiseration at least, as men acting in ignorance of each other's national prejudices, and unhappily misguided rather than voluntarily erring from the path of right conduct.

"In the original cause of the misunderstanding we must in justice give the right to the prisoner at the bar. He had acquired possession of the inclosure, which was the object of competition, by a legal contract with the proprietor, Mr. Ireby; and yet, when accosted with reproaches undeserved in themselves, and galling doubtless to a temper at least sufficiently susceptible of passion, he offered notwithstanding to yield up half his acquisition, for the sake of peace and good neighbourhood, and his amicable proposal was rejected with scorn.

"Then follows the scene at Mr. Heskett the publican's, and you will observe how the stranger was treated by the deceased, and, I am sorry to observe, by those around, who seem to have urged him in a manner which was aggravating in the highest degree. While he asked for peace the prisoner was insulted by a whole company, who seem on this occasion to have forgotten the national maxim of 'fair play'; and while attempting to escape from the place in peace, he was intercepted, struck down, and beaten to the effusion of his blood.

"Gentlemen of the jury, it was with some impatience that I

heard my learned brother, who opened the case for the Crown, give an unfavourable turn to the prisoner's conduct on this occasion. He said the prisoner was afraid to encounter his antagonist in fair fight, or to submit to the laws of the ring; and that, therefore, like a coward, he had recourse to his fatal dirk to murder the man whom he dared not meet in manly encounter. I observed the prisoner shrink from this part of the accusation with the abhorrence natural to a brave man; and as I would wish to make my words impressive when I point his real crime, I must secure his opinion of my impartiality by rebutting everything that seems to me a false accusation. There can be no doubt that the prisoner is a man of resolution — too much resolution. I wish to Heaven that he had less.

“Gentlemen, as to the laws my brother talks of, they may be known in the bull-ring or the bear-garden or the cock-pit, but they are not known here. Or, if they should be so far admitted as furnishing a species of proof that no malice was intended in this sort of combat, from which fatal accidents do sometimes arise, it can only be so admitted when both parties are in *pari casu*, equally acquainted with, and equally willing to refer themselves to, that species of arbitrament. But will it be contended that a man of superior rank is to be subjected, or is obliged to subject himself, to this coarse and brutal strife, perhaps in opposition to a younger, stronger, or more skilful opponent? Certainly even the pugilistic code, if founded upon the fair play of Merry Old England, as my brother alleges it to be, can contain nothing so preposterous.

“And, gentlemen of the jury, if the laws would support an English gentleman, wearing, we will suppose, his sword, in defending himself by force against a violent personal aggression of the nature offered to this prisoner they will not less protect a foreigner and a stranger, involved in the same unpleasing circumstances. If, therefore, gentlemen of the jury, when thus pressed by a *vis major*, the object of obloquy to a whole company, and of direct violence from one at least, and, as he might reasonably apprehend, from more, the panel had produced the weapon which his countrymen, as we are informed, generally

carry about their persons, and the same unhappy circumstance had ensued which you have heard detailed in evidence, I could not in my conscience have asked from you a verdict of murder.

“The prisoner’s personal defence might indeed, even in that case have gone more or less beyond the *moderamen inculpatæ tutelæ* spoken of by lawyers, but the punishment incurred would have been that of manslaughter, not of murder. I beg leave to add, that I should have thought this milder species of charge was demanded in the case supposed, notwithstanding the statute of James I. cap. 8, which takes the case of slaughter by stabbing with a short weapon, even without malice *prepense*, out of the benefit of clergy.

“But, gentlemen of the jury, the pinch of the case lies in the interval of two hours interposed betwixt the reception of the injury and the fatal retaliation. In the heat of affray and *chaude mêlée*, law, compassionating the infirmities of humanity, makes allowance for the passions which rule such a stormy moment — for the sense of present pain, for the apprehension of further injury, for the difficulty of ascertaining with due accuracy the precise degree of violence which is necessary to protect the person of the individual, without annoying or injuring the assailant more than is absolutely necessary.

“But the time necessary to walk twelve miles, however speedily performed, was an interval sufficient for the prisoner to have recollected himself, and the violence with which he carried his purpose into effect, with so many circumstances of deliberate determination, could neither be induced by the passion of anger nor that of fear. It was the purpose and the act of predetermined revenge, for which law neither can, will, nor ought to have sympathy or allowance.

“It is true, we may repeat to ourselves, in alleviation of this poor man’s unhappy action, that his case is a very peculiar one. The country which he inhabits was, in the days of many now alive, inaccessible to the laws not only of England, which have not even yet penetrated thither, but to those to which our neighbours of Scotland are subjected, and which must be supposed to be, and no doubt actually are, founded upon the gen-

eral principles of justice and equity which pervade every civilised country. Amongst their mountains, as among the North American Indians, the various tribes were wont to make war upon each other, so that each man was obliged to go armed for his own protection. These men, from the ideas which they entertained of their own descent, regarded themselves as so many cavaliers or men-at-arms, rather than as the peasantry of a peaceful country. Those laws of the ring, as my brother terms them, were unknown to the race of warlike mountaineers; that decision of quarrels by no other weapons than those which nature has given every man must to them have seemed as vulgar and as preposterous as to the *noblesse* of France.

“Revenge, on the other hand, must have been as familiar to their habits of society as to those of the Cherokees or Mohawks. It is indeed, as described by Bacon, at bottom a kind of wild untutored justice; for the fear of retaliation must withhold the hands of the oppressor where there is no regular law to check daring violence. But though all this may be granted, and though we may allow that, such having been the case of the Highlands in the days of the prisoner’s fathers, it cannot, and ought not, even in this most painful case, alter the administration of the law, either in your hands, gentlemen of the jury, or in mine.

“The first object of civilisation is to place the general protection of the law, equally administered, in the room of that wild justice which every man cut and carved for himself, according to the length of his sword and the strength of his arm. The law says to the subjects, with a voice only inferior to that of the Deity, ‘vengeance is mine.’ The instant that there is time for passion to cool and reason to interpose, an injured party must become aware that the law assumes the exclusive cognizance of the right and wrong betwixt the parties, and opposes her inviolable buckler to every attempt of the private party to right himself.

“I repeat, this unhappy man ought personally to be the object rather of our pity than our abhorrence, for he failed in his ignorance and from mistaken notions of honour. But his crime is not the less that of murder, gentlemen, and, in your high and important office, it is your duty so to find. Englishmen have

their angry passions as well as Scots; and should this man's action remain unpunished, you may unsheath, under various pretences, a thousand daggers betwixt the Land's End and the Orkneys."

The venerable judge thus ended what, by his apparent emotion, and by the tears which filled his eyes, was really a painful task. The jury, according to his instructions, brought in a verdict of guilty; and Robin Oig M'Combich, alias M'Gregor, was sentenced to death, and left for execution, which took place accordingly. He met his fate with great firmness, and acknowledged the justice of his sentence. But he repelled indignantly the observations of those who accused him of attacking an unarmed man.

"I give a life for the life I took," he said, "and what can I do more?"

*George
Gordon,
Lord Byron*

(1788–1824)

How many poets have become so famous or so notorious in their own lifetimes that their very names have turned into words? We all know what the adjective Byronic means or connotes — romance, melancholy, melodrama, and dissoluteness. In Byron's case it might be said that "blood will tell," for there was a long history of wildness in his forebears; his paternal grandfather was called "Foulweather Jack"; his great-uncle, "the wicked Lord"; and his father, "Mad Jack." And the romanticism and theatricality were not in the least diminished by Byron's lameness — he was born with a deformity in one foot.

Byron succeeded to the peerage in 1798, when he was only ten years old. Love, if you can call it that, had entered his life even earlier, when a nurse initiated Byron into the mysteries of sex when he was only nine; then at sixteen he became overwhelmingly infatuated with a cousin and this young passion was converted into five poems and led to his almost-forgotten first volume of poetry, *Fugitive Pieces* (1806), published in his nineteenth year. In Trinity College, Cambridge, he was a conspicuous man-of-fashion and man-about-town, interested in riding, shooting, boxing,

swimming, fencing, and gambling, all of which he did well except the last — and the Byronic legend was budding.

After Cambridge there were fabulous flings of dissipation — and the Byronic legend blossomed. With the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), at the age of twenty-four, Byron “woke one morning and found himself famous.” His renown was immediate and immense; he was sought by celebrities and lionized at fashionable receptions. After that the Byronic legend grew and grew — notorious love affairs, charges of incest and other perversions, and a scandalous separation from his wife, all culminating in his leaving England, never to return. It was not so much that he pursued women; women pursued him. Finally, the years of excess and self-indulgence took their toll, and Byron, still restless and reckless, decided in 1823 to join the Greek rebellion against the Turks, and died at Missolonghi on April 19, 1824, not in battle but of a complication of illnesses.

Byron was, in a sense, the glorification of defiance and revolt, of the shocking and the unconventional; he was capable of extreme cruelty, unbridled rudeness, and towering rage, and was consumed with a “constant desire of creating a sensation” (his wife’s perceptive words). He has been ranked as “one of the six greatest poets in English literature,” and his supreme achievement, *Don Juan* (1819–24) — how romantically appropriate in theme! — has been called “the best comic poem in English” — how ironically appropriate in style!

Now, to Byron’s single prose contribution to the field of mystery: in 1816, at the Villa Diodati on the south shore of Lake Geneva, Switzerland, four people — Byron, Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (Shelley’s mistress and later his wife), and Byron’s personal physician, John Polidori (uncle of the yet-to-be-born Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti) — indulged in a sort of ghost-soirée, reading stories of the supernatural and discussing the scientific va-

lidity of galvanism. Byron suggested that each of them write a ghost story, which resulted most importantly in Mary Shelley's writing of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Byron began a tale but never finished it; the fragment was later printed with *Mazeppa, A Poem* (1819). It is this fragment that we now give to you — with further editorial comment at the end. The title (your Editors' choice) is in the spirit of such one-name classics as *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* . . .

DARVELL

“June 17, 1816

“In the year 17—, having for some time determined on a journey through countries not hitherto much frequented by travellers, I set out, accompanied by a friend, whom I shall designate by the name of Augustus Darvell. He was a few years my elder, and a man of considerable fortune and ancient family: advantages which an extensive capacity prevented him alike from undervaluing or overrating. Some peculiar circumstances in his private history had rendered him to me an object of attention, of interest, and even of regard, which neither the reserve of his manners, nor occasional indications of an inquietude at times nearly approaching to alienation of mind, could extinguish.

“I was yet young in life, which I had begun early; but my intimacy with him was of a recent date: we had been educated at the same schools and university; but his progress through these had preceded mine, and he had been deeply initiated into what is called the world, while I was yet in my novitiate. While thus engaged, I heard much both of his past and present life; and, although in these accounts there were many and irreconcilable contradictions, I could still gather from the whole that he was a

being of no common order, and one who, whatever pains he might take to avoid remark, would still be remarkable. I had cultivated his acquaintance subsequently, and endeavoured to obtain his friendship, but this last appeared to be unattainable; whatever affections he might have possessed seemed now, some to have been extinguished, and others to be concentrated: that his feelings were acute, I had sufficient opportunities of observing; for, although he could control, he could not altogether disguise them: still he had a power of giving to one passion the appearance of another, in such a manner that it was difficult to define the nature of what was working within him; and the expressions of his features would vary so rapidly, though slightly, that it was useless to trace them to their sources.

“It was evident that he was a prey to some cureless disquiet; but whether it arose from ambition, love, remorse, grief, from one or all of these, or merely from a morbid temperament akin to disease, I could not discover: there were circumstances alleged which might have justified the application to each of these causes; but, as I have before said, these were so contradictory and contradicted, that none could be fixed upon with accuracy. Where there is mystery, it is generally supposed that there must also be evil: I know not how this may be, but in him there certainly was the one, though I could not ascertain the extent of the other — and felt loth, as far as regarded himself, to believe in its existence. My advances were received with sufficient coldness: but I was young, and not easily discouraged, and at length succeeded in obtaining, to a certain degree, that common-place intercourse and moderate confidence of common and every-day concerns, created and cemented by similarity of pursuit and frequency of meeting, which is called intimacy, or friendship, according to the ideas of him who uses those words to express them.

“Darvell had already travelled extensively; and to him I had applied for information with regard to the conduct of my intended journey. It was my secret wish that he might be prevailed on to accompany me; it was also a probable hope, founded upon the shadowy restlessness which I observed in him, and to which

the animation which he appeared to feel on such subjects, and his apparent indifference to all by which he was more immediately surrounded, gave fresh strength. This wish I first hinted, and then expressed: his answer, though I had partly expected it, gave me all the pleasure of surprise — he consented; and, after the requisite arrangement, we commenced our voyages. After journeying through various countries of the south of Europe, our attention was turned towards the East, according to our original destination; and it was in my progress through these regions that the incident occurred upon which will turn what I may have to relate.

“The constitution of Darvell, which must from his appearance have been in early life more than usually robust, had been for some time gradually giving away, without the intervention of any apparent disease: he had neither cough nor hectic, yet he became daily more enfeebled; his habits were temperate, and he neither declined nor complained of fatigue; yet he was evidently wasting away: he became more and more silent and sleepless, and at length so seriously altered, that my alarm grew proportionate to what I conceived to be his danger.

“We had determined, on our arrival at Smyrna, on an excursion to the ruins of Ephesus and Sardis, from which I endeavoured to dissuade him in his present state of indisposition — but in vain: there appeared to be an oppression on his mind, and a solemnity in his manner, which ill corresponded with his eagerness to proceed on what I regarded as a mere party of pleasure little suited to a valetudinarian; but I opposed him no longer — and in a few days we set off together, accompanied only by a serrugee and a single janizary.

“We had passed half-way towards the remains of Ephesus, leaving behind us the more fertile environs of Smyrna, and were entering upon that wild and tenantless tract through the marshes and defiles which lead to the few huts yet lingering over the broken columns of Diana — the roofless walls of expelled Christianity, and the still more recent but complete desolation of abandoned mosques — when the sudden and rapid illness of my companion obliged us to halt at a Turkish cemetery, the tur-

baned tombstones of which were the sole indication that human life had ever been a sojourner in this wilderness. The only caravansera we had seen was left some hours behind us, not a vestige of a town or even cottage was within sight or hope, and this 'city of the dead' appeared to be the sole refuge of my unfortunate friend, who seemed on the verge of becoming the last of its inhabitants.

"In this situation, I looked round for a place where he might most conveniently repose: — contrary to the usual aspect of Mahometan burial-grounds, the cypresses were in this few in number, and these thinly scattered over its extent; the tombstones were mostly fallen, and worn with age: — upon one of the most considerable of these, and beneath one of the most spreading trees, Darvell supported himself, in a half-reclining posture, with great difficulty. He asked for water. I had some doubts of our being able to find any, and prepared to go in search of it with hesitating despondency: but he desired me to remain; and turning to Suleiman, our janizary, who stood by us smoking with great tranquillity, he said, 'Suleiman, *verbana su*,' (i.e. 'bring some water,') and went on describing the spot where it was to be found with great minuteness, at a small well for camels, a few hundred yards to the right: the janizary obeyed. I said to Darvell, 'How did you know this?' — He replied, 'From our situation; you must perceive that this place was once inhabited, and could not have been so without springs: I have also been here before.'

"'You have been here before! — How came you never to mention this to me? and what could you be doing in a place where no one would remain a moment longer than they could help it?'

"To this question I received no answer. In the mean time Suleiman returned with the water, leaving the serrugee and the horses at the fountain. The quenching of his thirst had the appearance of reviving him for a moment; and I conceived hopes of his being able to proceed, or at least to return, and I urged the attempt. He was silent — and appeared to be collecting his spirits for an effort to speak. He began —

“ ‘This is the end of my journey, and of my life; — I came here to die; but I have a request to make, a command — for such my last words must be. — You will observe it?’

“ ‘Most certainly; but I have better hopes.’

“ ‘I have no hopes, nor wishes, but this — conceal my death from every human being.’

“ ‘I hope there will be no occasion; that you will recover, and ——’

“ ‘Peace! — it must be so: promise this.’

“ ‘I do.’

“ ‘Swear it, by all that ——’ He here dictated an oath of great solemnity.

“ ‘There is no occasion for this. I will observe your request; and to doubt me is ——’

“ ‘It cannot be helped — you must swear.’

“ ‘I took the oath, it appeared to relieve him. He removed a seal ring from his finger, on which were some Arabic characters, and presented it to me. He proceeded —

“ ‘On the ninth day of the month, at noon precisely (what month you please, but this must be the day), you must fling this ring into the salt springs which run into the Bay of Eleusis; the day after, at the same hour, you must repair to the ruins of the temple of Ceres, and wait one hour.’

“ ‘Why?’

“ ‘You will see.’

“ ‘The ninth day of the month, you say?’

“ ‘The ninth.’

“As I observed that the present was the ninth day of the month, his countenance changed, and he paused. As he sat, evidently becoming more feeble, a stork, with a snake in her beak, perched upon a tombstone near us; and, without devouring her prey, appeared to be steadfastly regarding us. I know not what impelled me to drive it away, but the attempt was useless; she made a few circles in the air, and returned exactly to the same spot. Darvell pointed to it, and smiled — he spoke — I know not whether to himself or to me — but the words were only, ‘ ’Tis well!’

“ ‘What is well? What do you mean?’

“ ‘No matter; you must bury me here this evening, and exactly where that bird is now perched. You know the rest of my injunctions.’

“He then proceeded to give me several directions as to the manner in which his death might be best concealed. After these were finished, he exclaimed, ‘You perceive that bird?’

“ ‘Certainly.’

“ ‘And the serpent writhing in her beak?’

“ ‘Doubtless: there is nothing uncommon in it; it is her natural prey. But it is odd that she does not devour it.’

“He smiled in a ghastly manner, and said faintly, ‘It is not yet time!’ As he spoke, the stork flew away. My eyes followed it for a moment — it could hardly be longer than ten might be counted. I felt Darvell’s weight, as it were, increase upon my shoulder, and, turning to look upon his face, perceived that he was dead!

“I was shocked with the sudden certainty which could not be mistaken — his countenance in a few minutes became nearly black. I should have attributed so rapid a change to poison, had I not been aware that he had no opportunity of receiving it unperceived. The day was declining, the body was rapidly altering, and nothing remained but to fulfil his request. With the aid of Suleiman’s ataghan and my own sabre, we scooped a shallow grave upon the spot which Darvell had indicated: the earth easily gave way, having already received some Mahometan tenant. We dug as deeply as the time permitted us, and throwing the dry earth upon all that remained of the singular being so lately departed, we cut a few sods of greener turf from the less withered soil around us, and laid them upon his sepulchre.

“Between astonishment and grief, I was tearless.” . . .

EDITORIAL COMMENT: You will find this fragment with an interesting and informative introduction, in E. F. Bleiler’s anthology-omnibus, *Three Gothic Novels* (New York:

Dover Publications, 1966). According to Mr. Bleiler, "Byron seems to have worked on his (projected) novel for several days, writing it down in full text in a notebook. Polidori summarizes Byron's tale: after swearing his travelling companion to secrecy, a vampire, in modern Greece, undergoes a mock death and is buried. Some time later, the travelling companion returns to London and finds the vampire alive, preying on society. Bound by his oath, the traveller can say nothing."

For the fascinating story of how Polidori "appropriated" Byron's fragment and enlarged it to *The Vampyre*, first published as by Lord Byron, and for the full text of *The Vampyre*, see Mr. Bleiler's excellent omnibus.

*Henry
Wadsworth
Longfellow*

(1807–1882)

To whatever poetic plane future critics may assign (or reassign) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, certain of his poems will never die — which is immortality enough for any poet. So long as there are schools, young students will not be permitted to forget *Evangeline* (1847) or *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855, the same year as *Leaves of Grass*) or *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858) — to say nothing of “The Village Blacksmith” or “The Wreck of the Hesperus” or “Paul Revere’s Ride.” Longfellow has been characterized, perhaps unfairly, as “the household poet” — a poet of sad sentiment and romantic rapture, yet one who has given us such phrases as “a boy’s will,” “the Children’s Hour,” “ships that pass in the night,” “Life is real! Life is earnest!” and “Listen, my children, and you shall hear” and “Why don’t you speak for yourself, John?” — and so many others that have passed into our quotable language, their source almost forgotten, their creator seldom acknowledged.

Longfellow had his first poem published at the tender age of thirteen. He became one of the most popular American poets of his time, if not the most popular — at least, from the standpoint of world-wide renown. At no period in

his career was he a starving bard in a cold attic; for the most part, he was that phenomenon of letters, the financially successful poet who led (in bitter contrast with, say, Edgar Allan Poe) a golden life of requited love, of friendship with the great, especially with New England writers as famous as Nathaniel Hawthorne and James Russell Lowell, of ever-growing repute and international adulation, of academic honors from Oxford and Cambridge, and of supreme ease and luxury — although none of this (except perhaps the academic honors) explains why Longfellow is the only American poet whose bust stands in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. It is interesting to speculate: could Longfellow have achieved true greatness as a poet if his life had not been, for most of its years, so sweet and pure and gentle and prosperous? Would prolonged adversity have sharpened his poetic sensibility, aroused his deeply buried passions? Did relatively "soft living" deprive America of, potentially, one of her strongest and most imaginative voices? Who can say? Walt Whitman may have hinted the answer when he wrote: "Longfellow is the poet of the mellow twilight of the past" . . .

Now, read Longfellow's lone venture into the field of "suspense." Predictably, it is not a tale of brutal murder or even of a lesser crime; predictably, it is a tale of sweet and pure and gentle mystery . . .

THE NOTARY OF PERIGUEUX

You must know, gentlemen, that there lived some years ago, in the city of Perigueux, an honest notary public, the descendant of a very ancient and broken-down family, and the occupant of one of those old weather-beaten tenements which remind you of times of your great-grandfather. He was a

man of an unoffending, quiet disposition; the father of a family, though not the head of it, for in that family "the hen overcrowned the cock," and the neighbors when they spoke of the notary, shrugged their shoulders and exclaimed, "Poor fellow, his spurs need sharpening." In fine, you understand me, gentlemen, he was henpecked.

Well, finding no peace at home, he sought it elsewhere, as was very natural for him to do, and at last discovered a place of rest, far beyond the cares and clamors of domestic life. This was a little *Café Estaminet*, a short way out of the city, whither he repaired every evening to smoke his pipe, drink sugar-water, and play his favorite game of dominoes. There he met the boon companions he most loved; heard all the floating chit-chat of the day; laughed when he was in merry mood; found consolation when he was sad; and at all times gave vent to his opinions, without fear of being snubbed short by a flat contradiction.

Now the notary's bosom friend was a dealer in claret and cognac, who lived about a league from the city, and always passed his evenings at *Estaminet*. He was a gross, corpulent fellow, raised from a full-blooded Gascon breed and sired by a comic actor of some reputation in his way. He was remarkable for nothing but his good-humor, his love of cards, and strong propensity to test the quality of his own liquors by comparing them with those sold at other places.

As evil communications corrupt good manners, the bad practises of the wine-dealer won insensibly upon the worthy notary; and before he was aware of it, he found himself weaned from domino and sugar-water and addicted to piquet and spiced wine. Indeed, it not infrequently happened that, after a long session at *Estaminet*, the two friends grew so urbane that they would waste a full half-hour at the door in a friendly dispute as to which should conduct the other home.

Though this course of life agreed well enough with the sluggish, phlegmatic temperament of the dealer in wines, it soon began to play the very deuce with the more sensitive organization of the notary, and finally put his nervous system completely out of tune. He lost his appetite, became gaunt and haggard,

and could not get to sleep. Legions of blue devils haunted him by day, and by night strange faces peeped through his bed curtains, and the nightmare snorted in his ear. The worse he grew, the more he smoked and tiddled; and the more he smoked and tiddled, why, as a matter of course, the worse he grew. His wife alternately stormed, remonstrated, entreated; but all in vain. She made the house too hot for him, he retreated to the tavern; she broke his long-stemmed pipes upon the andirons, he substituted a short-stemmed one, which, for safe keeping, he carried in his waistcoat pocket.

Thus the unhappy notary ran gradually down at the heel. What with his bad habits and his domestic grievances, he became completely hipped. He imagined he was going to die, and suffered in quick succession all the diseases that ever beset mortal man. Every shooting pain was an alarming symptom, every uneasy feeling after dinner a sure prognostic of some mortal disease. In vain did his friends endeavor to reason and then to laugh him out of his strange whims, for when did ever jest or reason cure a sick imagination? His only answer was, "Do let me alone; I know better than you what ails me."

Well, gentlemen, things were in this state when one afternoon in December, as he was moping in his office, wrapped in an overcoat, with a cap on his head and his feet thrust into a pair of furred slippers, a cabriolet stopped at the door and a loud knocking from without aroused him from his gloomy reverie. It was a message from his friend, the wine-dealer, who had been suddenly attacked with a violent fever, and as it grew worse and worse, had now sent in the greatest haste for the notary to draw up his last will and testament. The case was urgent and admitted neither excuse nor delay; and the notary, tying a handkerchief around his face and buttoning up to the chin, jumped into the cabriolet, and suffered himself, though not without some dismal presentiments and misgivings of heart, to be driven to the wine-dealer's house.

When he arrived, he found everything in the greatest confusion. On entering the house, he ran against the apothecary, who

was coming downstairs with a face as long as your arm; and a few steps farther, he met the housekeeper — for the wine-dealer was an old bachelor — running up and down and wringing her hands, for fear the good man should die without making his will. He soon reached the chamber of his sick friend and found him tossing about in a paroxysm of fever and calling aloud for a draught of cold water. The notary shook his head; he thought this a fatal symptom, for ten years back the wine-dealer had been suffering under a species of hydrophobia, which seemed suddenly to have left him.

When the sick man saw who stood by his bedside, he stretched out his hand and exclaimed:

“Ah, my dear friend, have you come at last? You see it is all over with me. You have arrived just in time to draw up that — that passport of mine. Ah, *grand diable*, how hot it is here. Water — water — water. Will nobody give me a drink of cold water?”

As the case was an urgent one, the notary made no delay in getting his papers in readiness; and in a short time the last will and testament of the wine-dealer was drawn up in due form, the notary guiding the sick man’s hand as he scrawled his signature at the bottom.

As the evening wore away, the wine-dealer grew worse and worse and at length expired. Meanwhile, the notary sat cowering over the fire, striving to keep up his courage with a glass of cognac. Already his fears were on the alert; and the idea of contagion flitted to and fro through his mind. In order to quiet these thoughts of evil import, he lighted his clay pipe and began to prepare for returning home. At that moment the apothecary turned and said:

“Dreadful sickly time this. The disorder seems to be spreading.”

“What disorder?” exclaimed the notary in surprise.

“Two died yesterday and three today,” continued the apothecary, without answering the question. “Very sickly time, sir, very.”

"But what disorder is it? What disease has carried off my friend here so suddenly?"

"What disease? Why, scarlet fever, of course."

"And is it contagious?"

"Certainly."

"Then I am a dead man," exclaimed the notary, putting his pipe into his waistcoat pocket and beginning to walk up and down the room in despair. "I am a dead man. Now don't deceive me, don't, will you? What — what are the symptoms?"

"A sharp burning pain in the right side," said the apothecary.

"Oh, what a fool I was to come here."

In vain did the apothecary and housekeeper strive to pacify him; he was not a man to be reasoned with. He answered that he knew his own constitution better than they did and insisted on going home without delay. Unfortunately, the vehicle he came in had returned to the city. What was to be done? Nothing in the world but to take the apothecary's horse, which stood hitched at the door, patiently waiting.

Well, gentlemen, as there was no remedy, our notary mounted this raw-boned steed and set forth upon his homeward journey. The night was cold and gusty and the wind right in his teeth. Overhead the leaden clouds were beating to and fro, and through them the newly risen moon seemed to be tossing and drifting along like a cockboat in the surf, now swallowed up in a huge billow of cloud and now lifted upon its bosom and dashed with silvery spray. The trees by the roadside groaned with a sound of evil omen, and before him lay three mortal miles, beset with a thousand imaginary perils. Obedient to the whip and spur, the steed leaped forward while the rider, filled with symptoms of disease and dire presentiments of death, urged him on as if he were fleeing before the pestilence.

In this way, by dint of whistling and shouting and beating right and left, one mile of the fatal three was safely passed. The apprehensions of the notary had so far subsided that he even suffered the poor horse to walk up hill; but these apprehensions were suddenly revived again with tenfold violence by a

sharp pain in the right side, which seemed to pierce him like a needle.

"It is upon me at last," groaned the fear-stricken man. "Heaven be merciful to me, the greatest of sinners. And must I die in a ditch after all? Hee, get up, get up."

And away went horse and rider at full speed, hurry-scurry, up hill and down, panting and blowing like a whirlwind. At every leap the pain in the rider's side seemed to increase. At first it was a little point like the prick of a needle, then it spread to the size of a half-franc piece, then covered a place as large as the palm of your hand. It gained upon him fast.

The poor man groaned in agony. At length, he knew not how, more dead than alive, he reached his own door. There was a light in his wife's bedroom. The good woman came to the window, alarmed at such a knocking and howling and clattering at her door so late at night.

"Let me in, let me in' quick, quick," he exclaimed.

"Who are you, that come to disturb a lone woman at this hour of the night?" cried a sharp voice from above. "Begone about your business and let quiet people sleep."

"Come down and let me in; I am your husband. Don't you know my voice? Quick, I beseech you, for I am dying here in the street."

After a few moments of delay and a few more words of parley, the door was opened and the notary stalked into his domicile, pale and haggard in aspect and as stiff and straight as a ghost. Cased from head to heel in an armor of ice, as the glare of the lamp fell on him, he looked like a knight errant mailed in steel. But in one place his armor was broken. On his right side was a circular spot as large as the crown of your hat and about as black.

"My dear wife," he exclaimed with more tenderness than he had exhibited in many years, "reach me a chair. My hours are numbered. I am a dead man."

Alarmed at these exclamations, his wife stripped off his overcoat. Something fell from beneath it and was dashed to pieces on the hearth. It was the notary's clay pipe. He placed his hand upon

his side, and lo! it was bare to the skin. Coat, waistcoat, and linen were burnt through and through, and there was a blister on his side as large as your hand.

The mystery was soon explained, symptoms and all. The notary had put his pipe into his pocket without knocking out the ashes.

*Edgar
Allan
Poe*

(1809–1849)

Most of us are familiar with the recurring and seemingly inescapable tragedies in Edgar Allan Poe's life. For the second half of his nearly forty-one years he lived in shadow and darkness — the shadow of fear, the darkness of nightmare, alternating between anguish and despair, usually in unbelievable poverty and nearly always in profound misery. He was a tortured and tormented man, a haunted man who "still haunts our memory and our literature." He was possibly a dipsomaniac, possibly a maniac; he was either neglected or vilified, and certainly misunderstood; he was a failure in his own time — the highest salary he was ever paid as an editor was at the rate of \$800 a year, and his stories earned so little that a single letter by Poe of even small literary interest is now likely to fetch at auction more than Poe earned in his entire literary career; indeed, some of Poe's books were published without royalties to him, his only payment having been "twenty copies for distribution to friends,"¹ and today first editions of his *Tamerlane* and

¹ Quoted from Poe's letter of August 13, 1841, to his Philadelphia publishers, Lea & Blanchard.

Other Poems (1827), *Poems* (1831), and *The Raven and Other Poems* (1845) are rare and precious books . . .

Is it any wonder that his morbidity and maladjustments, his persistent "evil fortune," caused him mental, physical, and emotional breakdowns? Yet his short life was one of intense creativity, full of imagination, originality, and otherworldliness. George Bernard Shaw called him "this finest of finest of artists," and Poe's influence, both as a creator and a critic, has been immeasurable . . .

The great problem in selecting a Poe story for this anthology was to choose one not already well-known to readers. For poets such as Chaucer, Longfellow, Whitman, Masfield, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Dylan Thomas we had no problem of choice: each wrote only one story in the crime-mystery field. But with Poe, the acknowledged inventor of the detective story, we had a true embarrassment of riches. The natural selection would have been a tale of C. Auguste Dupin — "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (historically the most important, since it was the world's first detective story in a modern sense), or "The Purloined Letter" (Poe's finest balance of the two great 'tec tributaries — the "Intellectual" and the "Sensational"), or "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (which shows how Poe applied his new literary technique to the solution of a real-life case and which, in the opinion of so discerning a professional as Rex Stout, is not only Poe's outstanding achievement in the genre but also one of the ten best detective stories ever written). But all three Dupin stories have been anthologized numerous times.

A non-Dupin story? "The Gold-Bug" and even "Thou Art the Man" are also too familiar. One of Poe's tales of murder? Who does not know "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," even that lesser favorite, "Hop-Frog"?

No, for this anthology we needed something "different." So we dug into Poe's relatively "unknown" stories and

we came up with a “discovery” — a story by Poe whose detective-crime significance has been unaccountably overlooked. The story is “The Man of the Crowd,” and of it the perceptive and penetrating Philip Van Doren Stern has written: “It is one of Poe’s least appreciated stories. It is almost never commented on in any critical review of his work, yet it is one of his most unusual stories, curiously modern in its psychology, and far more original than some of his better-known tales.”

And even Mr. Stern did not realize, or fully realize, the story’s importance in the history of the detective story!

Further comments after you have read this “unhonored and unsung” tale — a tale of unusual “detection” . . .

THE MAN OF THE CROWD

Ce grand malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul.

LA BRUYÈRE.

It was well said of a certain German book that “*es lässt sich nicht lesen*” — it does not permit itself to be read. There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes — die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed. Now and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burthen so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave. And thus the essence of all crime is undivulged.

Not long ago, about the closing in of an evening in autumn, I sat at the large bow window of the D — Coffee-House in London. For some months I had been ill in health, but was now convalescent, and, with returning strength, found myself in one of those happy moods which are so precisely the converse of *ennui* — moods of the keenest appetency, when the film from

the mental vision departs — the ἀλλὸς ἢ πρὶν ἐπῆεν — and the intellect, electrified, surpasses as greatly its everyday condition as does the vivid yet candid reason of Leibnitz, the mad and flimsy rhetoric of Gorgias.

Merely to breathe was enjoyment; and I derived positive pleasure even from many of the legitimate sources of pain. I felt a calm but inquisitive interest in everything. With a cigar in my mouth and a newspaper in my lap, I had been amusing myself for the greater part of the afternoon, now in poring over advertisements, now in observing the promiscuous company in the room, and now in peering through the smoky panes into the street.

This latter is one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, and had been very much crowded during the whole day. But, as the darkness came on, the throng momentarily increased; and by the time the lamps were well lighted, two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door. At this particular period of the evening I had never before been in a similar situation, and the tumultuous sea of human heads filled me, therefore, with a delicious novelty of emotion. I gave up, at length, all care of things within the hotel, and became absorbed in contemplation of the scene without.

At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance.

By far the greater number of those who went by had a satisfied business-like demeanor, and seemed to be thinking only of making their way through the press. Their brows were knit, and their eyes rolled quickly; when pushed against by fellow-wayfarers they evinced no symptom of impatience, but adjusted their clothes and hurried on. Others, still a numerous class, were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around. When im-

peded in their progress, these people suddenly ceased muttering, but redoubled their gesticulations, and awaited, with an absent and overdone smile upon the lips, the course of the person impeding them. If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers, and appeared overwhelmed with confusion.

There was nothing very distinctive about these two large classes beyond what I have noted. Their habiliments belonged to that order which is pointedly termed the decent. They were undoubtedly noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stock-jobbers — the Eupatrids and the commonplaces of society — men of leisure and men actively engaged in affairs of their own — conducting business upon their own responsibility. They did not greatly excite my attention.

The tribe of clerks was an obvious one; and here I discerned two remarkable divisions. There were the junior clerks of flash houses — young gentlemen with tight coats, bright boots, well-oiled hair, and supercilious lips. Setting aside a certain dapper-ness of carriage, which may be termed *deskism* for want of a better word, the manner of these persons seemed to me an exact facsimile of what had been the perfection of *bon ton* about twelve or eighteen months before. They wore the cast-off graces of the gentry; — and this, I believe, involves the best definition of the class.

The division of the upper clerks of staunch firms, or of the “steady old fellows,” it was not possible to mistake. These were known by their coats and pantaloons of black or brown, made to sit comfortably, with white cravats and waistcoats, broad solid-looking shoes, and thick hose or gaiters. — They had all slightly bald heads, from which the right ears, long used to pen-holding, had an odd habit of standing off on end. I observed that they always removed or settled their hats with both hands, and wore watches, with short gold chains of a substantial and ancient pattern. Theirs was the affectation of respectability; — if indeed there be an affectation so honorable.

There were many individuals of dashing appearance, whom I easily understood as belonging to the race of swell pickpockets, with which all great cities are infested. I watched these gentry

with much inquisitiveness, and found it difficult to imagine how they should ever be mistaken for gentlemen by gentlemen themselves. Their voluminousness of wristband, with an air of excessive frankness, should betray them at once.

The gamblers, of whom I descried not a few, were still more easily recognizable. They wore every variety of dress, from that of the desperate thimble-rig bully, with velvet waistcoat, fancy neckerchief, gilt chains, and filigreed buttons, to that of the scrupulously inornate clergyman than which nothing could be less liable to suspicion. Still all were distinguished by a certain sodden swarthiness of complexion, a filmy dimness of eye, and pallor and compression of lip. There were two other traits, moreover, by which I could always detect them — a guarded lowness of tone in conversation, and a more than ordinary extension of the thumb in a direction at right angles with the fingers.

Very often, in company with these sharpers, I observed an order of men somewhat different in habits, but still birds of a kindred feather. They may be defined as the gentlemen who live by their wits. They seem to prey upon the public in two battalions — that of the dandies and that of the military men. Of the first grade the leading features are long locks and smiles; of the second frogged coats and frowns.

Descending in the scale of what is termed gentility, I found darker and deeper themes for speculation. I saw peddlers, with hawk eyes flashing from countenances whose every other feature wore only an expression of abject humility; sturdy professional street beggars scowling upon mendicants of a better stamp, whom despair alone had driven forth into the night for charity; feeble and ghastly invalids, upon whom death had placed a sure hand, and who sidled and tottered through the mob, looking everyone beseechingly in the face, as if in search of some chance consolation, some lost hope; modest young girls returning from long and late labor to a cheerless home, and shrinking more tearfully than indignantly from the glances of ruffians, whose direct contact, even, could not be avoided; women of the town of all kinds and of all ages — the unequivocal beauty in the

prime of her womanhood, putting one in mind of the statue in Lucian, with the surface of Parian marble, and the interior filled with filth; the loathsome and utterly lost leper in rags — the wrinkled, bejeweled, and paint-begrimed beldame, making a last effort at youth — the mere child of immature form, yet, from long association, an adept in the dreadful coquetries of her trade, and burning with a rabid ambition to be ranked the equal of her elders in vice; drunkards innumerable and indescribable — some in shreds and patches, reeling, inarticulate, with bruised visage and lack-luster eyes — some in whole although filthy garments, with a slightly unsteady swagger, thick sensual lips, and hearty-looking rubicund faces — others clothed in materials which had once been good, and which even now were scrupulously well brushed — men who walked with a more than naturally firm and springy step, but whose countenances were fearfully pale, whose eyes were hideously wild and red, and who clutched with quivering fingers, as they strode through the crowd, at every object which came within their reach; beside these, pie-men, porters, coal-heavers, sweeps; organ-grinders, monkey-exhibitors, and ballad-mongers, those who vended with those who sang; ragged artisans and exhausted laborers of every description, and all full of a noisy and inordinate vivacity which jarred discordantly upon the ear, and gave an aching sensation to the eye.

As the night deepened, so deepened to me the interest of the scene; for not only did the general character of the crowd materially alter (its gentler features retiring in the gradual withdrawal of the more orderly portion of the people, and its harsher ones coming out into bolder relief as the late hour brought forth every species of infamy from its den), but the rays of the gas-lamps, feeble at first in their struggle with the dying day, had now at length gained ascendancy, and threw over everything a fitful and garish luster. All was dark yet splendid — as that ebony to which has been likened the style of Tertullian.

The wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, prevented me from

casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in their brief interval of a glance, the history of long years.

With my brow to the glass, I was thus occupied in scrutinizing the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepit man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age) — a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. Anything even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before. I well remember that my first thought, upon beholding it, was that Retsch, had he viewed it, would have greatly preferred it to his own pictural incarnation of the fiend.

As I endeavored, during the brief minute of my original survey, to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense — of extreme despair. I felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated.

“How wild a history,” I said to myself, “is written within that bosom!”

Then came a craving desire to keep the man in view — to know more of him. Hurriedly putting on an overcoat, and seizing my hat and cane, I made my way into the street, and pushed through the crowd in the direction which I had seen him take; for he had already disappeared. With some little difficulty I at length came within sight of him, approached, and followed him closely, yet cautiously, so as not to attract his attention.

I had now a good opportunity of examining his person. He was short in stature, very thin, and apparently very feeble. His clothes, generally, were filthy and ragged; but as he came, now and then, within the strong glare of a lamp, I perceived that his linen, although dirty, was of beautiful texture; and my vision deceived me, or, through a rent in a closely buttoned and evidently second-handed *roquelaure* which enveloped him, I caught a glimpse both of a diamond and of a dagger. These ob-

servations heightened my curiosity, and I resolved to follow the stranger whithersoever he should go.

It was now fully nightfall, and a thick humid fog hung over the city, soon ending in a settled and heavy rain. This change of weather had an odd effect upon the crowd, the whole of which was at once put into new commotion, and overshadowed by a world of umbrellas. The waver, the jostle, and the hum increased in a tenfold degree. For my own part I did not much regard the rain — the lurking of an old fever in my system rendering the moisture somewhat too dangerously pleasant. Tying a handkerchief about my mouth, I kept on.

For half an hour the old man held his way with difficulty along the great thoroughfare; and I here walked close at his elbow through fear of losing sight of him. Never once turning his head to look back, he did not observe me. By and by he passed into a cross street which, although densely filled with people, was not quite so much thronged as the main one he had quitted. Here a change in his demeanor became evident. He walked more slowly and with less object than before — more hesitatingly. He crossed and re-crossed the way repeatedly without apparent aim; and the press was still so thick that, at every such movement, I was obliged to follow him closely.

The street was a narrow and long one, and his course lay within it for nearly an hour, during which the passengers had gradually diminished to about that number which is ordinarily seen at noon in Broadway near the Park — so vast a difference is there between a London populace and that of the most frequented American city. A second turn brought us into a square, brilliantly lighted, and overflowing with life. The old manner of the stranger reappeared. His chin fell upon his breast, while his eyes rolled wildly from under his knit brows, in every direction, upon those who hemmed him in. He urged his way steadily and perseveringly. I was surprised, however, to find, upon his having made the circuit of the square, that he turned and retraced his steps. Still more was I astonished to see him repeat the same walk several times — once nearly detecting me as he came round with a sudden movement.

In this exercise he spent another hour, at the end of which we met with far less interruption from passengers than at first. The rain fell fast; the air grew cool; and the people were retiring to their homes. With a gesture of impatience the wanderer passed into a by-street comparatively deserted. Down this, some quarter of a mile long, he rushed with an activity I could not have dreamed of seeing in one so aged, and which put me to much trouble in pursuit. A few minutes brought us to a large and busy bazaar, with the localities of which the stranger appeared well acquainted, and where his original demeanor again became apparent as he forced his way to and fro, without aim, among the host of buyers and sellers.

During the hour and a half, or thereabouts which we passed in this place, it required much caution on my part to keep him within reach without attracting his observation. Luckily I wore a pair of caoutchouc over-shoes, and could move about in perfect silence. At no moment did he see that I watched him. He entered shop after shop, priced nothing, spoke no word, and looked at all objects with a wild and vacant stare. I was now utterly amazed at his behavior, and firmly resolved that we should not part until I had satisfied myself in some measure respecting him.

A loud-toned clock struck eleven, and the company were fast deserting the bazaar. A shop-keeper, in putting up a shutter, jostled the old man, and at the instant I saw a strong shudder come over his frame. He hurried into the street, looked anxiously around him for an instant, and then ran with incredible swiftness through many crooked and peopleless lanes, until we emerged once more upon the great thoroughfare whence we had started — the street of the D — Hotel. It no longer wore, however, the same aspect. It was still brilliant with gas; but the rain fell fiercely, and there were few persons to be seen.

The stranger grew pale. He walked moodily some paces up the once populous avenue, then, with a heavy sigh, turned in the direction of the river, and plunging through a great variety of devious ways, came out, at length, in view of one of the principal theatres. It was about being closed, and the audience were

thronging from the doors. I saw the old man gasp as if for breath while he threw himself amid the crowd; but I thought that the intense agony of his countenance had, in some measure, abated. His head again fell upon his breast; he appeared as I had seen him at first. I observed that he now took the course in which had gone the greater number of the audience — but, upon the whole, I was at a loss to comprehend the waywardness of his actions.

As he proceeded, the company grew more scattered, and his old uneasiness and vacillation were resumed. For some time he followed closely a party of some ten or twelve roisterers; but from this number one by one dropped off, until three only remained together, in a narrow and gloomy lane little frequented.

The stranger paused, and, for a moment, seemed lost in thought; then, with every mark of agitation, pursued rapidly a route which brought us to the verge of the city, amid regions very different from those we had hitherto traversed. It was the most noisome quarter of London, where everything wore the worst impress of the most deplorable poverty, and of the most desperate crime. By the dim light of an accidental lamp, tall, antique, worm-eaten, wooden tenements were seen tottering to their fall, in directions so many and capricious that scarce the semblance of a passage was discernible between them. The paving-stones lay at random, displaced from their beds by the rankly growing grass. Horrible filth festered in the dammed-up gutters. The whole atmosphere teemed with desolation.

Yet, as we proceeded, the sounds of human life revived by sure degrees, and at length large bands of the most abandoned of a London populace were seen reeling to and fro. The spirits of the old man again flickered up, as a lamp which is near its death-hour. Once more he strode onward with elastic tread. Suddenly a corner was turned, a blaze of light burst upon our sight, and we stood before one of the huge suburban temples of Intemperance — one of the palaces of the fiend, Gin.

It was now nearly daybreak; but a number of wretched inebriates still pressed in and out of the flaunting entrance. With a half shriek of joy the old man forced a passage within, resumed

at once his original bearing, and stalked backward and forward, without apparent object, among the throng. He had not been thus long occupied, however, before a rush to the doors gave token that the host was closing them for the night.

It was something even more intense than despair that I then observed upon the countenance of the singular being whom I had watched so pertinaciously. Yet he did not hesitate in his career, but, with a mad energy, retraced his steps at once, to the heart of the mighty London. Long and swiftly he fled, while I followed him in the wildest amazement, resolute not to abandon a scrutiny in which I now felt an interest all-absorbing.

The sun arose while we proceeded, and, when we had once again reached that most thronged mart of the populous town, the street of the D —— Hotel, it presented an appearance of human bustle and activity scarcely inferior to what I had seen on the evening before. And here, long, amid the momentarily increasing confusion, did I persist in my pursuit of the stranger. But, as usual, he walked to and fro, and during the day did not pass from out the turmoil of that street. And, as the shades of the second evening came on, I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation.

“This old man,” I said at length, “is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is a grosser book than the *Hortulus Animæ*, and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that *es lässt sich nicht lesen*.”

EDITORIAL COMMENT: “The Man of the Crowd” was first published in December 1840 — simultaneously in Burton’s *The Gentleman’s Magazine* and in *The Casket*, the contents of which were identical because the two magazines were

about to be combined into Graham's *Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*. But mark the date — December 1840 — *preceding* the first appearance in print of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in the April 1841 issue of *Graham's Magazine*.

In other words, "The Man of the Crowd" *antedated* the world's first detective story!

Was it a trial balloon? An experiment by Poe on the eve of his inventing the detective story? Does "The Man of the Crowd" foreshadow the first detective story?

Let us examine the internal evidence.

Surely the anonymous narrator begins as an armchair detective. He is interested in mystery and crime. He is an acute and accurate observer. He analyzes and deduces. Note the "ear" deduction identifying upper clerks: "They had all slightly bald heads, from which the right ears, long used to pen-holding, had an odd habit of standing off on end." Note the "thumb" deduction identifying gamblers: "I could always detect [significant word!] them . . . a more than ordinary extension of the thumb in a direction at right angles with the fingers" — the sign of a "sharper." Surely here is a detective (Poe almost uses the word) at work! Surely here are deductions of exactly the sort that Sherlock Holmes was to toss off so startlingly nearly half a century later!

But that is not all. The armchair detective changes to an *active* detective — when "the game is afoot." He follows his man; he tracks, trails (wearing "caoutchouc over-shoes" — Poe's phrase for gumshoes), pursuing a tantalizing and baffling mystery; and as surely as the anonymous narrator is a detective, the man pursued is a criminal. And what of the detective's attitude, his point of view, during the chase? He describes himself as being in a "peculiar mental state" (how detective-like!) and he speaks of "darker and deeper themes for speculation" (how equally detective-like!).

Do you object, perhaps, that the mystery, except for

psychological insight (how modern!), remains impenetrable, unsolved? But does this make the detective less of a detective? There is no principle in the genre, even in the fully developed technique of today, that *insists* the detective must always succeed . . . Yes, in "The Man of the Crowd" the detective fails — but that was not only a new variation in 1840, it would be a comparatively new one by current standards. The mystery genre is still the most moral of all literary forms, since justice — legal as well as poetic — nearly always triumphs.

Here, then, in our opinion, is Poe's embryonic detective — the seed of C. Auguste Dupin, the world's first detective; here is the prototype — Poe's own prototype — of the private eye . . .

There are, of course, other interpretations of "The Man of the Crowd." On a different level, one could theorize that the pursuer was pursuing *himself*. This would be a typically Poesque conception — an imaginative extension and variation of "William Wilson," and another of Poe's anticipations of the "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" theme. The pursuer and the pursued are two halves of the same person, one half representing "good," the other half "evil."

If it were not for the disturbing fact (disturbing in a story by Poe) that the action is continuous and lasts longer than a full night — that is, occurs also in the daytime — the pursuer and the pursued could also be interpreted as the worldly mortal-self pursuing the unworldly dream-self (or vice versa!), with one self never catching the other. Or — and this too is typically Poesque — the entire story could be interpreted as a dream, or nightmare, an unsuccessful attempt (as unsuccessful as Poe's own attempts) of a human being to free himself from the chains of earthly living, to reach that "wild weird clime that lieth, sublime, / Out of SPACE — out of TIME."

But these additional speculations are meant only to stimulate your imagination. Our main interest in “The Man of the Crowd” concerns its detective meanings, its historical and originative significance in the mystery genre . . .

Walt Whitman

(1819–1892)

Walt Whitman might be called a one-book poet — but what a book! In the most complimentary sense imaginable, *Leaves of Grass* grew like grass. The book grew naturally, organically, luxuriantly, joyfully, until the blades withered and browned . . . to become, in another season, green again. The first edition, printed at Whitman's own expense (how many great books of poetry were born in print at the poets' own expense!) and at least partly hand-set by the poet himself, appeared in 1855, supposedly on the Fourth of July — a slim volume of twelve untitled poems; and for the rest of his creative life Whitman added and changed, and the *Leaves* grew and renewed themselves — and they keep growing and renewing themselves for each new reader who first discovers the “rhythmic chants” of the “father of free verse,” the “prophet of democracy” — the “masculine, affectionate, contemplative, sensual” (Whitman's own adjectives) poet so often drunk on his own rhetoric. (“First discovers” is not a redundancy: *Leaves of Grass* can be re-discovered as many times as you open the book.) Twelve editions were to be published during Whitman's lifetime, each new edition longer than the one before. And the final

book of more than three hundred poems, now in hundreds, if not thousands, of different printings, with all its imagistic and cataloguistic magnificence, with its all-embracing, all-loving hunger for empathy and the common touch, is the journeywork and the masterwork of, in Mark Van Doren's description, "the most original and passionate American poet" . . .

Now we give you Walt Whitman's story of murder and conscience. Undoubtedly you will find this tale of violence old-fashioned; but in these days of so much plain prose it may do your literary heart good to indulge in a few pages of old-fashioned story-telling. The oratorical style, with its symbolism of the "all-seeing eye" and the "warning from above," is peculiarly nostalgic — and peculiarly satisfying. For, to paraphrase Keats, should not mystery surprise by a fine excess?

Please pay special attention to the last paragraph, and when you have finished reading Walt Whitman's murder story, we have another surprise for you . . .

ONE WICKED IMPULSE!

That section of Nassau Street which runs into the great mart of New York brokers and stock-jobbers has for a long time been much occupied by practitioners of the law. Tolerably well-known amid this class some years since was Adam Covert, a middle-aged man of rather limited means, who, to tell the truth, gained more by trickery than he did in the legitimate and honorable exercise of his profession.

He was a tall, bilious-faced widower; the father of two children; and had lately been seeking to better his fortunes by a rich marriage. But somehow or other his wooing did not seem to

thrive well, and, with perhaps one exception, the lawyer's prospects in the matrimonial way were hopelessly gloomy.

Among the early clients of Mr. Covert had been a distant relative named Marsh, who, dying somewhat suddenly, left his son and daughter, and some little property, to the care of Covert, under a will drawn by that gentleman himself. At no time caught without his eyes open, the cunning lawyer, aided by much sad confusion in the emergency which had caused his services to be called for, and disguising his object under a cloud of technicalities, inserted provisions in the will giving him an almost arbitrary control over the property and over those for whom it was designed.

This control was even made to extend beyond the time when the children would arrive at mature age. The son, Philip, a spirited and high-tempered fellow, had some time since passed that age. Esther, the girl, a plain, and somewhat devotional young woman, was in her nineteenth year.

Having such power over his wards, Covert did not scruple openly to use his advantage, in pressing his claims as a suitor for Esther's hand. Since the death of Marsh, the property he left, which had been in real estate, and was to be divided equally between the brother and sister, had risen to very considerable value; and Esther's share was to a man in Covert's situation a prize very well worth seeking. All this time, while really owning a respectable income, the young orphans often felt the want of the smallest sum of money — and Esther, on Philip's account, was more than once driven to various contrivances — the pawnshop, sales of her own little luxuries, and the like, to furnish him with means.

Though she had frequently shown her guardian unequivocal evidence of her aversion, Esther continued to suffer from his persecutions, until one day he proceeded further and was more pressing than usual. She possessed some of her brother's mettlesome temper, and gave him an abrupt and most decided refusal. With dignity, she exposed the baseness of his conduct, and forbade him ever again mentioning marriage to her.

He retorted bitterly, vaunted his hold on her and Philip, and swore an oath that unless she became his wife, they should both thenceforward become penniless. Losing his habitual self-control in his exasperation, he even added insults such as woman never receives from anyone deserving the name of man, and at his own convenience left the house. That day, Philip returned to New York, after an absence of several weeks on the business of a mercantile house in whose employment he had lately engaged.

Toward the latter part of the same afternoon Mr. Covert was sitting in his office in Nassau Street, busily at work, when a knock at the door announced a visitor, and directly afterward young Marsh entered the room. His face exhibited a peculiar pallid appearance that did not strike Covert at all agreeably, and he called his clerk from an adjoining room, and gave him something to do at a desk nearby.

"I wish to see you alone, Mr. Covert, if convenient," said the newcomer.

"We can talk quite well enough where we are," answered the lawyer. "Indeed, I don't know that I have any leisure to talk at all, for just now I am very much pressed with business."

"But I *must* speak to you," rejoined Philip sternly, "at least I must say one thing, and that is, Mr. Covert, that you are a villain!"

"Insolent!" exclaimed the lawyer, rising behind the table and pointing to the door. "Do you see that, sir! Let one minute longer find you the other side, or your feet may reach the landing by quicker method. Begone, sir!"

Such a threat was the more harsh to Philip, for he had rather high-strung feelings of honor. He grew almost livid with suppressed agitation.

"I will see you again very soon," said he, in a low but distinct manner, his lips trembling as he spoke; and left the office.

The incidents of the rest of that pleasant summer day left little impression on the young man's mind. He roamed to and fro without any object or destination. Along South Street and by Whitehall, he watched with curious eyes the movements of the

shipping, and the loading and unloading of cargoes; and listened to the merry heave-ho of the sailors and stevedores. There are some minds upon which great excitement produces the singular effect of uniting two utterly inconsistent faculties — a sort of cold apathy and a sharp sensitiveness to all that is going on at the same time.

Philip's was one of this sort; he noticed the various differences in the apparel of a gang of wharf-laborers — turned over in his brain whether they received wages enough to keep them comfortable, and their families also — and if they had families or not, which he tried to tell by their looks. In such petty reflections the daylight passed away. And all the while the master wish of Philip's thoughts was a desire to see the lawyer Covert. For what purpose he himself was by no means clear.

Nightfall came at last. Still, however, the young man did not direct his steps homeward. He felt more calm, however, and entering an eating house, ordered something for his supper, which, when it was brought to him, he merely tasted, and strolled forth again.

There was a kind of gnawing sensation of thirst within him yet and as he passed a hotel, he bethought him that one little glass of spirits would perhaps be just the thing. He drank, and hour after hour wore away unconsciously; he drank not one glass but three or four, and strong glasses they were to him, for he was habitually abstemious.

It had been a hot day and evening, and when Philip, at an advanced period of the night, emerged from the bar-room into the street, he found that a thunderstorm had just commenced. He resolutely walked on, however, although at every step it grew more and more blustering.

The rain now poured down a cataract; the shops were all shut; few of the street lamps were lighted; and there was little except the frequent flashes of lightning to show him his way. When about half the length of Chatham Street, which lay in the direction he had to take, the momentary fury of the tempest forced him to turn aside into a sort of shelter formed by the

corners of the deep entrance to a pawnbroker's shop there. He had hardly drawn himself in as closely as possible, when the lightning revealed to him that the opposite corner of the nook was tenanted also.

"A sharp rain, this," said the other occupant, who simultaneously beheld Philip.

The voice sounded to the young man's ears a note which almost made him sober again. It was certainly the voice of Adam Covert. He made some commonplace reply, and waited for another flash of lightning to show him the stranger's face. It came, and he saw that his companion was indeed his guardian.

Philip Marsh had drunk deeply — (let us plead all that may be possible to you, stern moralist). Upon his mind came swarming, and he could not drive them away, thoughts of all those insults his sister had told him of, and the bitter words Covert had spoken to her; he reflected, too, on the injuries Esther as well as himself had received, and were still likely to receive, at the hands of that bold, bad man; how mean, selfish, and unprincipled was his character — what base and cruel advantages he had taken of many poor people, entangled in his power, and of how much wrong and suffering he had been the author, and might be again through future years.

The very turmoil of the elements, the harsh roll of the thunder, the vindictive beating of the rain, and the fierce glare of the wild fluid that seemed to riot in the ferocity of the storm around him, kindled a strange sympathetic fury in the young man's mind. Heaven itself (so deranged were his imaginations) appeared to have provided a fitting scene and time for a deed of retribution, which to his disordered passion half wore the semblance of a divine justice. He remembered not the ready solution to be found in Covert's pressure of business, which had no doubt kept him later than usual; but fancied some mysterious intent in the ordaining that he should be there, and that they two should meet at that untimely hour. All this whirl of influence came over Philip with startling quickness at that horrid moment. He stepped to the side of his guardian.

"Ho!" said he, "have we met so soon, Mr. Covert? You traitor to my dead father — robber of his children! I fear to think on *what* I think now!"

The lawyer's natural effrontery did not desert him.

"Unless you'd like to spend a night in the watch-house, young gentleman," said he, after a short pause, "move on. Your father was a weak man, I remember; as for his son, his own wicked heart is his worst foe. I have never done wrong to either — that I can say, and swear it!"

"Insolent liar!" exclaimed Philip, his eye flashing out sparks of fire in the darkness.

Covert made no reply except a cool, contemptuous laugh, which stung the excited young man to double fury. He sprang upon the lawyer, and clutched him by the neckcloth.

"Take it, then!" he cried hoarsely, for his throat was impeded by the fiendish rage which in that black hour possessed him. "You are not fit to live!"

He dragged his guardian to the earth and fell crushingly upon him, choking the shriek the poor victim but just began to utter. Then, with monstrous imprecations, he twisted a tight knot around the gasping creature's neck, drew a clasp knife from his pocket, and touching the spring, the long sharp blade, too eager for its bloody work, flew open.

During the lull of the storm the last strength of the prostrate man burst forth into one short loud cry of agony. At the same instant the arm of the murderer thrust the blade, once, twice, thrice, deep in his enemy's bosom! Not a minute had passed since that fatal exasperating laugh — but the deed was done, and the instinctive thought which came at once to the guilty one was a thought of fear and escape.

In the unearthly pause which followed, Philip's eyes gave one long searching sweep in every direction, above and around him. *Above!* God of the all-seeing eye! What, and who was that figure there?

"Forbear! In Jehovah's name forbear!" cried a shrill, but clear and melodious voice.

It was as if some accusing spirit had come down to bear wit-

ness against the deed of blood. Leaning far out of an open window, appeared a white draperied shape, its face possessed of a wonderful youthful beauty. Long vivid glows of lightning gave Philip a full opportunity to see as clearly as though the sun had been shining at noonday. One hand of the figure was raised upward in a deprecating attitude, and his large bright black eyes bent down upon the scene below with an expression of horror and shrinking pain. Such heavenly looks, and the peculiar circumstances of the time, filled Philip's heart with awe.

"Oh, if it is not yet too late," spoke the youth again, "spare him. In God's voice, I command, 'Thou shalt do no murder!'"

The words rang like a knell in the ear of the terror-stricken and already remorseful Philip. Springing from the body, he gave a second glance up and down the walk, which was totally lonesome and deserted; then crossing into Reade Street, he made his fearful way in a half state of stupor, half bewilderment, by the nearest avenues to his home.

When the corpse of the murdered lawyer was found in the morning, and the officers of justice commenced their inquiry, suspicion immediately fell upon Philip, and he was arrested. The most rigorous search, however, brought to light nothing at all implicating the young man, except his visit to Covert's office the evening before, and his angry language there. That was by no means enough to fix so heavy a charge upon him.

The second day afterward, the whole business came before the ordinary judicial tribunal, in order that Philip might either be committed for the crime, or discharged. The testimony of Mr. Covert's clerk stood alone. One of his employers, who, believing in his innocence, had deserted him not in this crisis, had provided him with the ablest criminal counsel in New York. The proof was declared entirely insufficient, and Philip was discharged.

The crowded courtroom made way for him as he came out; hundreds of curious looks fixed upon his features, and many a jibe passed upon him. But of all that arena of human faces, he saw only *one* — a sad, pale, black-eyed one, cowering in the center of the rest. He had seen that face twice before — the first

time as a warning specter — the second time in prison, immediately after his arrest — now for the *last* time.

This young stranger — the son of a scorned race — coming to the courtroom to perform an unhappy duty, with the intention of testifying to what he had seen, melted at the sight of Philip's bloodless cheek, and of his sister's convulsive sobs, and forbore witnessing against the murderer. Shall we applaud or condemn him? Let every reader answer the question for himself.

That afternoon Philip left New York. His friendly employer owned a small farm some miles up the Hudson, and until the excitement of the affair was over, he advised the young man to go thither. Philip thankfully accepted the proposal, made a few preparations, took a hurried leave of Esther, and by nightfall was settled in his new abode.

And how, think you, rested Philip Marsh that night? *Rested* indeed! O, if those who clamor so much for the halter and the scaffold to punish crime could have seen that sight, they might have learned a lesson then! Four days had elapsed since he that lay tossing upon the bed there had slumbered. Not the slightest intermission had come to his awakened and tensely strung sense during those frightful days.

Disturbed waking dreams came to him, as he thought what he might do to gain his lost peace. Far, far away would he go! The cold roll of the murdered man's eye, as it turned up its last glance into his face — the shrill exclamation of pain — all the unearthly vividness of the posture, motions, and looks of the dead — the warning voice from above — pursued him like tormenting furies, and were never absent from his mind, asleep or awake, that long weary night.

Anything, any place, to escape such horrid companionship! He would travel inland — hire himself to do hard drudgery upon some farm — work incessantly through the wide summer days, and thus force nature to bestow oblivion upon his senses, at least a little while now and then. He would fly on, on, on, until amid different scenes and a new life the old memories were rubbed entirely out. He would fight bravely in himself for peace

of mind. For peace he would labor and struggle — for peace he would pray!

At length after a feverish slumber of some thirty or forty minutes, the unhappy youth, waking with a nervous start, raised himself in bed, and saw the blessed daylight beginning to dawn. He felt the sweat trickling down his naked breast; the sheet where he had lain was quite wet with it.

Dragging himself wearily, he opened the window. Ah! that good morning air — how it refreshed him — how he leaned out and drank in the fragrance of the blossoms below, and almost for the first time in his life felt how beautifully indeed God had made the earth, and that there was wonderful sweetness in mere existence. And amidst the thousand mute mouths and eloquent eyes, which appeared as it were to look up and speak in every direction, he fancied so many invitations to come among them. Not without effort, for he was very weak, he dressed himself, and issued forth into the open air.

Clouds of pale gold and transparent crimson draperied the eastern sky, but the sun, whose face gladdened them into glory, was not yet above the horizon. It was a time and place of such rare, such Eden-like beauty!

Philip paused at the summit of an upward slope, and gazed around him. Some few miles off he could see a gleam of the Hudson River, and above it a spur of those rugged cliffs scattered along its western shores. Nearer by were cultivated fields. The clover grew richly there, the young grain bent to the early breeze, and the air was filled with an intoxicating perfume. At his side was the large well-kept garden of his host, in which were many pretty flowers, grass plots, and a wide avenue of noble trees.

As Philip gazed, the holy calming power of Nature — the invisible spirit of so much beauty and so much innocence, melted into his soul. The disturbed passions and the feverish conflict subsided. He even felt something like envied peace of mind — a sort of joy even in the presence of all the unmarred goodness. It was as fair to him, guilty though he had been, as to

the purest of the pure. No accusing frowns showed in the face of the flowers, or in the green shrubs, or the branches of the trees. They, more forgiving than mankind, and distinguishing not between the children of darkness and the children of light — they at least treated him with gentleness. Was he, then, a being so accursed?

Involuntarily, he bent over a branch of red roses, and took them softly between his hands — those murderous, bloody hands! But the red roses neither withered nor smelled less fragrant. And as the young man kissed them, and dropped a tear upon them, it seemed to him that he had found pity and sympathy from Heaven itself.

Though against all the rules of story-writing, we continue our narrative of these mainly true incidents (for such they are) no further. Only to say that *the murderer* soon departed for a new field of action — that he is still living — and that this is but one of thousands of cases of unraveled, unpunished crime — left, not to the tribunals of man, but to a wider power and judgment.

EDITORIAL COMMENT: One of the most interesting things about Walt Whitman's murder story is the relatively "unknown" fact that the poet wrote two endings for it. When the story first appeared in print (in the *Democratic Review*, July–August 1845) it was titled "Revenge and Requital; A Tale of a Murderer Escaped," by Walter Whitman (then twenty-six years old). In this first version the ending was much longer and altogether different from the ending you have just read.

Let us synopsize the earlier ending. It begins: "After desolating the cities of the eastern world, the dreaded Cholera" struck New York City. Among the "small and sacred band" of good samaritans "who went out amid the diseased, the destitute, and the dying," one person was "more ardent and devoted than the rest . . . This messenger of health to

many, and peace to all, this unwearied, unterrified angel of mercy and charity, was Philip Marsh." His motive, of course, was "to cancel, as far as he could, the great outrage he had committed on society by taking the life of one of its members."

One night Philip came upon a sick boy and discovered that the boy's name was Adam Covert, whose father was killed a year before by "a bad man." Philip learned that as a result of his murder of lawyer Covert, the victim's "two children were left without any protector." When the cholera epidemic hit the city, the two orphan brothers were too poor to leave New York and find safety "in the neighboring country districts."

Philip became "the nurse, the friend, and the physician" of the sick boy. "Heaven blessed his exertions, and the boy recovered his health again . . . Philip's crowning act of recompense."

But once the "young patient was beyond danger," Philip himself succumbed. He "bequeathed his property to the boys whom he had made fatherless," and died.

Walt Whitman ends with this paragraph: "Some of my friends may, perhaps, think that he ought to have been hung at the time of the crime. I must be pardoned if I think differently."

The story—with some minor changes, a new ending, and a new title, "One Wicked Impulse!" — was first published in book form in Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days and Collect* (1882–83). Now, why did Walt Whitman delete the earlier ending and substitute a single new paragraph of entirely different meaning? Nearly forty years had passed since the first appearance of the story. In those forty years did Walt Whitman come to regret the moralistic philosophy of his earlier ending? — that even a murderer could atone for his crime. Surely the ending you read in the story — the second and later ending — is more cynical; in this later ending

Walt Whitman permits the murderer to remain alive, apparently to prosper in “a new field of action,” and to go unpunished until he is tried by a “wider power” than “the tribunals of man.” (Poetic justice rather than legal justice?)

Yes, in the years between 1845 and 1883 Walt Whitman (to judge from the new ending he gave to his murder story) seems to have lost his earlier poetic idealism. But that is not really surprising: enough had happened in his life to cause such a change in heart and mind — the silence that first greeted his *Leaves of Grass*, the vicious attacks that followed the second edition, the veil that must have lifted from his eyes during the Civil War, the bitter enemies he continued to make, the total rejection (Whitman spoke of being “contemptuously ignored”) that he suffered at the hands of the common people whose voice and champion he tried so desperately to be . . .

It is said that in his invalid years “the good gray poet” mellowed. Judging only by the new ending, published less than ten years before his death, would you agree that Walt Whitman mellowed with old age? We wonder . . .

W. S.
Gilbert

(1836–1911)

W. S. Gilbert? A world-famous poet? Yes, the librettist of the Gilbert-and-Sullivan operettas certainly qualifies as a world-famous poet — for who has not heard and loved the delightful lyrics of *H. M. S. Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), and *The Mikado* (1885)?

By the time Gilbert was twenty-four he had written fifteen plays — a prolific and prodigious achievement. At the age of forty-one, now a well-known playwright, he met the composer Sir Arthur Sullivan — a momentous meeting which gave birth to one of the most remarkable collaborations in literary-and-musical history. With producer Richard D'Oyly Carte, Gilbert and Sullivan began their immortal series at The Savoy Theater in London. Gilbert's librettos, especially his brilliant songs, are as satirical and witty today as they were nearly a century ago.

As perfect as their artistic collaboration proved to be, the personal relationship between Gilbert and Sullivan had the air of an interminable quarrel, interrupted periodically by short-lived reconciliations. Sullivan was dreamy and sentimental, and Gilbert was a terrible-tempered, hypersensitive, irascible tyrant — so it was inevitable that their tem-

peraments should clash; yet some of their finest work was done while the two men were not even on speaking terms. But it is their joint work, not their personalities, that counts for posterity; the Gilbert-and-Sullivan operettas are revived annually all over the world, and their popularity is almost unrivaled — indeed, every revival receives the serious critical attention usually accorded to grand opera.

Now we give you a charming and delicious legal-crime story by W. S. Gilbert. The first of the great comic operas was *Trial by Jury*, first performed in 1875; in it Gilbert mocked and ridiculed the law. Gilbert knew pettifoggery from realistic contact. After college he studied for the bar, and practiced law for four years, earning less than \$100 a year. In “My Maiden Brief,” poet Gilbert pokes prose fun at the profession of his youth — in a tale of a barrister’s first Old Bailey brief in which he is called upon to defend a dear, kind, sweet old soul accused of pickpocketing — a *cause célèbre*, complete with wigs and gowns and, of course, circumstantial evidence . . .

MY MAIDEN BRIEF

Late on a certain May morning, as I was sitting at a modest breakfast in my “residence chambers,” Pump Court, Temple, my attention was claimed by a single knock at an outer door, common to the chambers of Felix Polter and of myself, Horace Penditton, both barristers-at-law of the Inner Temple.

The outer door was not the only article common to Polter and myself. We also shared what Polter (who wrote farces) was pleased to term a “property” clerk, who did nothing at all, and a “practicable” laundress, who did everything. There existed also a communion of interest in tea cups, razors, gridirons, candlesticks, et cetera; for although neither of us was particularly well

supplied with the necessities of domestic life, each happened to possess the very articles in which the other was deficient. So we got on uncommonly well together, each regarding his friend in the light of an indispensable other self. We had both embraced the "higher walk" of the legal profession, and were patiently waiting for the legal profession to return the compliment.

The single knock raised some well-founded fears in both our minds.

"Walker," said I to the property clerk.

"Sir?"

"If that knock is for me, I'm out, you know."

"Of course, sir."

"And Walker," cried Polter.

"Sir?"

"If it's for me, I'm not at home."

Walker opened the door. "Mr. Penditton's a-breakfasting with the Master of the Rolls, if it's him you want; and if it isn't, Mr. Polter's with the Attorney-General."

"You don't say so!" remarked the visitor; "then you'll give this to Mr. Penditton, as soon as the Master can make up his mind to part with him."

And so saying, the visitor handed Walker a lovely parcel of brief paper, tied up neatly with a piece of red tape, and minuted—

Central Criminal Court, May Sessions, 187-. — The Queen on the prosecution of Ann Black v. Elizabeth Briggs. Brief for the prisoner. Mr. Penditton, one guinea. — Poddle and Shaddery, Brompton Square.

So it had come at last! Only an Old Bailey brief, it is true — but still a brief. We scarcely knew what to make of it. Polter looked at me, and I looked at Polter, and then we both looked at the brief.

It turned out to be a charge against Elizabeth Briggs, widow, of picking pockets in an omnibus. It appeared from my "instructions," that my client was an elderly lady, and religious. On the 2nd of April last, she entered an Islington omnibus, with the view of attending a tea and prayer meeting in Bell Court, Isling-

ton. A woman in the omnibus missed her purse, and accused Mrs. Briggs, who sat on her right, of having stolen it. The poor soul, speechless with horror at the charge, was dragged out of the omnibus, and as the purse was found in a pocket in the left-hand side of her dress, she was given into custody. As it was stated by the police that she had been "in trouble" before, the magistrate committed her for trial.

"There, my boy, your fortune's made," said Polter.

"But I don't see the use of my taking it," said I. "There's nothing to be said for her."

"Not take it? Won't you though? I'll see about that. You *shall* take it, and you shall get her off, too! Highly respectable old lady — attentive member of well-known congregation — parson to speak for her character, no doubt. As honest as you are!"

"But the purse was found on her!"

"Well, sir, and what of that? Poor woman left-handed, and pocket in left side of her dress. Robbed woman right-handed, and pocket in right side of her dress. Poor woman sat on right of robbed woman. Robbed woman, replacing her purse, slipped it accidentally into poor woman's pocket. Ample folds of dress, you know — crinolines overlapping, and all that. Splendid defence for you!"

"Well, but she's an old hand, it seems. The police know her."

"Police always do. 'Always know everybody' — police maxim. Swear anything, they will."

Polter really seemed so sanguine about it that I began to look at the case hopefully, and to think that something *might* be done with it. He talked to me with such effect that he not only convinced me that there was a good deal to be said in Mrs. Briggs's favour, but I actually began to look upon her as an innocent victim of circumstantial evidence, and determined that no effort should be wanting on my part to procure her release from a degrading but unmerited confinement.

Of the firm of Poddle and Shaddery I knew nothing whatever, and how they came to entrust Mrs. Briggs's case to me I

could form no conception. As we (for Polter took so deep a personal interest in the success of Mrs. Briggs's case that he completely identified himself, in my mind, with her fallen fortunes) resolved to go to work in a thoroughly businesslike manner, we determined to commence operations by searching for the firm of Poddle and Shaddery in the *Law List*.

To our dismay the *Law List* of that year had no record of Poddle, neither did Shaddery find a place in its pages. This was serious, and Polter did not improve matters by suddenly recollecting that he once heard an old Q.C. say that, as a rule, the further west of Temple Bar, the shadier the attorney; so that assuming Polter's friend to have been correct on this point, a firm from Brompton Square whose name did not appear in Mr. Dalbiac's *Law List* was a legitimate object of suspicion.

But Polter, who took a hopeful view of anything which he thought might lead to good farce "situations," and who probably imagined that my first appearance on any stage as counsel for the defence was likely to be rich in suggestions, remarked that they might possibly have been certificated since the publishing of the last *Law List*; and as for the *dictum* about Temple Bar, why, the case of Poddle and Shaddery might be one of those very exceptions whose existence is necessary to the proof of every general rule. So Polter and I determined to treat the firm in a spirit of charity, and accept their brief.

As the May sessions did not commence until the 8th, I had four clear days in which to study my brief and prepare my defence. Besides, there was a murder case, and a desperate burglary or two, which would probably be taken first, so that it was unlikely that the case of the poor soul whose cause I had espoused would be tried before the 12th. So I had plenty of time to master what Polter and I agreed was one of the most painful cases of circumstantial evidence ever submitted to a British jury; and I really believe that by the first day of the May sessions I was intimately acquainted with the details of every case of pocket-picking reported in *Cox's Criminal Cases* and *Buckler's Shorthand Reports*.

On the night of the 11th I asked Bodger of Brasenose, Nor-

ton of Gray's Inn, Cadbury of the Lancers, and three or four other men, college chums principally, to drop in at Pump Court and hear a rehearsal of my speech for the defence, in the forthcoming *cause célèbre* of the Queen on the prosecution of Ann Black v. Elizabeth Briggs.

At nine o'clock they began to appear, and by ten all were assembled. Pipes and strong waters were produced, and Norton of Gray's was forthwith raised to the Bench by the style and dignity of Sir Joseph Norton, one of the Barons of Her Majesty's Court of Exchequer; Cadbury, Bodger, and another represented the jury; Wilkinson of Lincoln's Inn was counsel for the prosecution, Polter was clerk of arraigns, and Walker, my clerk, was the prosecutrix.

Everything went satisfactorily; Wilkinson broke down in his speech for the prosecution; his witness prevaricated and contradicted himself in a preposterous manner; and my speech for the defence was voted to be one of the most masterly specimens of forensic ingenuity that had ever come before the notice of the Court; and the consequence was that the prisoner (inadequately represented by a statuette of the Greek slave) was discharged, and Norton, who would have looked more like a Baron of the Exchequer if he had looked less like a tipsy churchwarden, remarked that she left the Court without a stain on her character.

The Court then adjourned for refreshment, and the conversation took a general turn, after canvassing the respective merits of "May it please your ludship," and "May it please you, my lud," as an introduction to a counsel's speech—a discussion which ended in favour of the latter form, as being a trifle more independent in its character. I remember proposing that the health of Elizabeth Briggs should be drunk in a solemn and respectful bumper; and as the evening wore on, I am afraid I became exceedingly indignant with Cadbury, because he had taken the liberty of holding up to public ridicule an imaginary (and highly undignified) *carte de visite* of my unfortunate client.

The 12th of May, big with the fate of Penditton and of Briggs, dawned in the usual manner. At ten o'clock Polter and I

drove up in wigs and gowns to the Old Bailey. Impressed with a sense of the propriety of the occasion, I had taken remarkable pains with my toilet. I had the previous morning shaved off a flourishing moustache, and sent Walker out for half a dozen serious collars, as substitutes for the unprofessional "lay-downs" I usually wore. I was dressed in a correct evening suit and wore a pair of thin gold spectacles; and Polter remarked that I looked "the sucking Benchman to the life." Polter, whose interest in the accuracy of my "get-up" was almost fatherly, had totally neglected his own: he made his appearance in the raggedest of beards and moustaches under his wig, and the sloppiest of cheap drab lounging-coats under his gown.

I modestly took my place in the back row of the seats allotted to the Bar; Polter took his in the very front in order to have an opportunity, at the close of the case, of telling the leading counsel, in the hearing of the attorneys, the name and address of the young and rising barrister who had just electrified the Court. In various parts of the building I detected Cadbury, Wilkinson, and others, who had represented judge, jury, and counsel on the previous evening. They had been instructed by Polter (who had had some experience in "packing" a house) to distribute themselves about the Court and at the termination of the speech for the defence, to give vent to their feelings in that applause which is always so quickly suppressed by the officers of a court of justice.

I was rather annoyed at this, as I did not consider it altogether legitimate; and my annoyance was immensely increased when I found that my three elderly maiden aunts, to whom I had been foolish enough to confide, were seated in state in that portion of the room allotted to friends of the Bench and Bar, and busied themselves by informing everybody within whisper-shot that I was to defend Elizabeth Briggs, and that this was my first brief.

At length the clerk called the case of Briggs, and with my heart in my mouth I began to try to recollect the opening words of my speech for the defence; but I was interrupted in that hopeless task by the appearance of Elizabeth in the dock.

She was a pale, elderly widow, rather buxom, and neatly dressed in slightly rusty mourning. Her hair was arranged in two sausage curls, one on each side of her head, and looped in two festoons over the forehead. She appeared to feel her position acutely, and although she did not weep, her red eyes showed evident traces of recent tears. She grasped the edge of the dock, and rocked backwards and forwards, accompanying the motion with a low moaning sound that was extremely touching. Polter looked back at me with an expression which plainly said, "If ever an innocent woman appeared in that dock, that woman is Elizabeth Briggs!"

The clerk now proceeded to charge the jury. "Gentlemen of the jury, the prisoner at the bar, Elizabeth Briggs, is indicted for that she did, on the second of April last, steal from the person of Ann Black a purse containing ten shillings and fourpence, the moneys of the said Ann Black. There is another count to the indictment, charging her with having received the same, knowing it to have been stolen. To both of these counts the prisoner has pleaded 'Not Guilty,' and it is your charge to try whether she is guilty or not guilty." Then to the Bar, "Who appears in this case?"

Nobody replying on behalf of the Crown, I rose and remarked that I appeared for the defence.

A counsel here said that he believed that the brief for the prosecution was entrusted to Mr. Porter, but that that gentleman was engaged at the Middlesex Sessions in a case which was likely to occupy several hours, and that he (Mr. Porter) did not expect that Briggs's case would come on that day.

A consultation then took place between the judge and the clerk. At its termination, the latter functionary said, "Who is the junior counsel present?"

To my horror, up jumped Polter, and said, "I think it's very likely that I am the junior counsel in court. My name is Polter, and I was only called last term!"

A titter ran through the crowd, but Polter, whose least fault was bashfulness, only smiled benignly at those around him.

Another whispering between judge and clerk. At its conclu-

sion the clerk handed a bundle of papers to Polter, saying, at the same time:

"Mr. Polter, his lordship wishes you to conduct the prosecution."

"Certainly," said Polter; and he opened the papers, glanced at them, and rose to address the court.

He began by requesting that the jury would take into consideration the fact that he had only that moment been placed in possession of the brief for the prosecution of the prisoner, who appeared from what he had gathered from a glance at his instructions to have been guilty of as heartless a robbery as ever disgraced humanity. He would endeavour to do his duty, but he feared that, at so short a notice, he should scarcely be able to do justice to the brief with which he had been most unexpectedly entrusted.

He then went on to state the case in a masterly manner, appearing to gather the facts (with which, of course, he was perfectly intimate) from the papers in his hand. He commented on the growing frequency of omnibus robberies, and then went on to say:

"Gentlemen, I am at no loss to anticipate the defence on which my learned friend will base his hope of inducing you to acquit that wretched woman. I don't know whether it has ever been your misfortune to try criminal cases before, but if it has, you will be able to anticipate his defence as certainly as I can. He will probably tell you, because the purse was found in the left-hand pocket of that miserable woman's dress, that she is left-handed, and on that account wears her pocket on the left side; and he will then, if I am not very much mistaken, ask the prosecutrix if she is not right-handed; and lastly, he will ask you to believe that the prosecutrix, sitting on the prisoner's left, slipped the purse accidentally into the prisoner's pocket.

"But gentlemen, I need not remind you that the facts of these omnibus robberies are always identical. The prisoner always *is* left-handed, the prosecutrix always *is* right-handed, and the prosecutrix always *does* slip the purse accidentally into the prisoner's pocket instead of her own. My lord will tell you that

this is so, and you will know how much faith to place upon such a defence, should my friend think proper to set it up."

He ended by entreating the jury to give the case their attentive consideration, and stated that he relied confidently on an immediate verdict of "Guilty." He then sat down, saying to the usher, "Call Ann Black."

Ann Black, who was in court, shuffled up into the witness box, and was duly sworn. Polter then drew out her evidence, bit by bit, helping her with leading questions of the most flagrant description. I knew that I ought not to allow this, but I was too horrified at the turn matters had taken to interfere. At the conclusion of the examination Polter sat down triumphantly, and I rose to cross-examine.

"You are right-handed, Mrs. Black?" (*Laughter.*)

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Very good. I've nothing else to ask you."

So Mrs. Black stood down, and the omnibus conductor took her place. His evidence was not material, and I declined to cross-examine. The policeman who had charge of the case followed the conductor, and his evidence was to the effect that the purse was found in Elizabeth Briggs's pocket.

I felt that this witness ought to be cross-examined, but not having anything ready, I allowed him to stand down. A question, I am sorry to say, then occurred to me, and I requested his lordship to allow the witness to be recalled.

"You say you found the purse in her pocket, my man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you find anything else?"

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"Two other purses, a watch, three handkerchiefs, two silver pencil cases, and a hymn book." (*Roars of laughter.*)

"You may stand down."

"This is the case, my lord," said Polter.

It was now my turn to address the court. What could I say? I believe I observed that, undeterred by my learned friend's opening speech, I did intend to set up the defence he had anticipated.

I set it up, but I don't think it did much good. The jury, who were perfectly well aware that this was Polter's first case, had no idea but that I was an old hand at it; and no doubt thought me an uncommonly clumsy one. They had made every allowance for Polter, who needed nothing of the kind, and they made none at all for me, who needed all they had at their disposal.

I soon relinquished my original line of defence, and endeavoured to influence the jury by vehement assertions of my personal conviction of the prisoner's innocence. I warmed with my subject (for Polter had not anticipated me here), and I believe I grew really eloquent. I think I staked my professional reputation on her innocence, and I sat down expressing my confidence in a verdict that would restore the unfortunate lady to a circle of private friends, several of whom were waiting in the court to testify to her excellent character.

"Call witnesses to Mrs. Briggs's character," said I.

"Witnesses to the character of Briggs!" shouted the crier.

The cry was repeated three or four times outside the court; but there was no response.

"No witnesses to Briggs's character here, my lord!" said the crier.

Of course I knew this very well; but it sounded respectable to expect them.

"Dear, dear," said I, "this is really most unfortunate. They must have mistaken the day."

"Shouldn't wonder," observed Polter, rather drily.

I was not altogether sorry that I had no character witnesses, as I am afraid that they would scarcely have borne the test of Polter's cross-examination.

Mr. Baron Bounderby then proceeded to sum up, grossly against the prisoner, as I thought at the time, but, as I have since had reason to believe, most impartially. He went carefully over the evidence and told the jury that if they believed the witnesses for the prosecution, they should find the prisoner guilty, and if they did not — why, they should acquit her.

The jury were then directed by the crier to "consider their verdict," which they couldn't possibly have done, for they im-

mediately returned the verdict of "Guilty." The prisoner not having anything to say in arrest of judgement, the learned judge proceeded to pronounce sentence — inquiring, first of all, whether anything was known about her?

A policeman stepped forward and stated that she had twice been convicted of felony in this court, and once at the Middlesex Sessions.

Mr. Baron Bounderby, addressing the prisoner, told her that she had been most properly convicted, on the clearest possible evidence; that she was an accomplished and dangerous thief; and that the sentence of the court was that she be imprisoned and kept at hard labour for the space of eighteen calendar months.

No sooner had the learned judge pronounced this sentence than the poor soul stooped down, and taking off a heavy boot, flung it at my head, as a reward for my eloquence on her behalf; accompanying the assault with a torrent of invective against my abilities as a counsel, and my line of defence. The language in which her oration was couched was perfectly shocking. The boot missed me, but hit a reporter on the head, and to this fact I am disposed to attribute the unfavourable light in which my speech for the defence was placed in a leading daily paper next morning.

I hurried out of court as quickly as I could, and hailing a hansom, I dashed back to chambers, pitched my wig at a bust of Lord Brougham, bowled over Mrs. Briggs's prototype with my gown, packed up, and started that evening for the west coast of Cornwall. Polter, on the other hand, remained in town, and got plenty of business in that and the ensuing session, and afterwards on circuit. He is now a flourishing Old Bailey counsel, doing very well, while I am as briefless as ever.

Thomas Hardy

(1840–1928)

Most readers think of Thomas Hardy as a famous novelist, the author of the “shocking” (for their time) *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1896); but poetry was Hardy’s first, last, and enduring literary love, and it was as a poet that he really wanted to be remembered; indeed, some critics believe that ultimately Hardy’s fame will rest on his tough, tart poetry — on the “elemental power” and “hawk’s vision” of such books as *Wessex Poems* (1898) and *Satires of Circumstance* (1914). Perhaps time erodes the monuments of prose more than the pleasure-domes of poetry; perhaps great poetry outlives even great prose . . .

Because of the abuse and scathing criticism that were heaped on him for his “sensational” novels (denounced by the conventional as mere pornography — *Jude the Obscure* was referred to as *Jude the Obscene*), Hardy decided in 1898 to give up writing fiction, and turned, never to be swerved again, to his beloved poetry. And where earlier he had been censured and persecuted, later in life — after he was seventy — universities and other institutions lavished him with awards and medals and honorary degrees. He died in his eighty-eighth year, a grand old man of letters, with no

visible diminution of his alertness and keen-mindedness; even on the very last day of his life his mind was clear and luminous.

And now we give you one of the most famous, and paradoxically one of the most unread, short stories in the English language. Join some simple country folk in a cozy, comfortable, candlelit shepherd's house, a lonely domicile, with boisterous weather outside, a gloomy and violent night of heavy rain and wind; and meet the three strangers, particularly the "stranger of the terrible trade," a sinister and formidable "officer of justice," and take part in a Wessex man-hunt. The tale is highly descriptive — a style now somewhat out of fashion — but it has the "stamp of truth" . . .

THE THREE STRANGERS

Among the few features of agricultural England which retain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries, may be reckoned the high, grassy, and furzy downs, coombs, or ewe-leases, as they are indifferently called, that fill a large area of certain counties in the south and southwest. If any mark of human occupation is met with hereon it usually takes the form of the solitary cottage of some shepherd.

Fifty years ago such a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and may possibly be standing there now. In spite of its loneliness, however, the spot, by actual measurement, was not more than five miles from a county town. Yet, what of that? Five miles of irregular upland, during the long inimical seasons, with their sleets, snows, rains, and mists, afford withdrawing space enough to isolate a Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar; much less, in fair weather, to please that less repellent tribe, the poets, philosophers, artists, and others who "conceive and meditate of pleasant things."

Some old earthen camp or barrow, some clump of trees, at least some starved fragment of ancient hedge, is usually taken advantage of in the erection of these forlorn dwellings. But, in the present case, such a kind of shelter had been disregarded. Higher Crowstairs, as the house was called, stood quite detached and undefended. The only reason for its precise situation seemed to be the crossing of two footpaths at right angles hard by, which may have crossed there and thus for a good five hundred years.

The house was thus exposed to the elements on all sides. But, though the wind up here blew unmistakably when it did blow, and the rain hit hard whenever it fell, the various weathers of the winter season were not quite so formidable on the coomb as they were imagined to be by dwellers on low ground. The raw rimes were not so pernicious as in the hollows, and the frosts were scarcely so severe. When the shepherd and his family who tenanted the house were pitied for their sufferings from the exposure, they said that upon the whole they were less inconvenienced by "wuzzes and flames" (hoarses and phlegms) than when they had lived by the stream of a snug neighbouring valley.

The night of March 28, 182—, was precisely one of the nights that were wont to call forth these expressions of commiseration. The level rainstorm smote walls, slopes, and hedges like the clothyard shafts of Senlac and Crecy. Such sheep and outdoor animals as had no shelter stood with their buttocks to the wind; while the tails of little birds trying to roost on some scraggy thorn were blown inside-out like umbrellas. The gable-end of the cottage was stained with wet, and the eaves-droppings flapped against the wall. Yet never was commiseration for the shepherd more misplaced. For that cheerful rustic was entertaining a large party in glorification of the christening of his second girl.

The guests had arrived before the rain began to fall, and they were all now assembled in the chief or living-room of the dwelling. A glance into the apartment at eight o'clock on this eventful evening would have resulted in the opinion that it was

as cozy and comfortable a nook as could be wished for in boisterous weather. The calling of its inhabitant was proclaimed by a number of highly polished sheep-crooks without stems that were hung ornamentally over the fireplace, the curl of each shining crook varying from the antiquated type engraved in the patriarchal pictures of old family Bibles to the most approved fashion of the last local sheep-fair.

The room was lighted by half a dozen candles, having wicks only a trifle smaller than the grease which enveloped them, in candlesticks that were never used but at high-days, holy-days, and family feasts. The lights were scattered about the room, two of them standing on the chimney-piece. This position of candles was in itself significant. Candles on the chimney-piece always meant a party.

On the hearth, in front of a back-brand to give substance, blazed a fire of thorns, that crackled "like the laughter of the fool."

Nineteen persons were gathered here. Of these, five women, wearing gowns of various bright hues, sat in chairs along the wall; girls shy and not shy filled the window-bench; four men, including Charley Jake the hedge-carpenter, Elijah New the parish clerk, and John Pitcher, a neighbouring dairyman, the shepherd's father-in-law, lolled in the settle; a young man and maid, who were blushing over tentative *pourparlers* on a life-companionship, sat beneath the corner-cupboard; and an elderly engaged man of fifty or upward moved restlessly about from spots where his betrothed was not to the spot where she was.

Enjoyment was pretty general, and so much the more prevailed in being unhampered by conventional restrictions. Absolute confidence in each other's good opinion begat perfect ease, while the finishing stroke of manner, amounting to a truly princely serenity, was lent to the majority by the absence of any expression or trait denoting that they wished to get on in the world, enlarge their minds, or do any eclipsing thing whatever — which nowadays so generally nips the bloom and *bonhomie* of all except the two extremes of the social scale.

Shepherd Fennel had married well, his wife being a dairy-

man's daughter from the valley below, who brought fifty guineas in her pocket — and kept them there, till they should be required for ministering to the needs of a coming family. This frugal woman had been somewhat exercised as to the character that should be given to the gathering. A sit-still party had its advantages; but an undisturbed position of ease in chairs and settles was apt to lead on the men to such an unconscionable deal of toping that they would sometimes fairly drink the house dry. A dancing-party was the alternative; but this, while avoiding the foregoing objection on the score of good drink, had a counterbalancing disadvantage in the matter of good victuals, the ravenous appetites engendered by the exercise causing immense havoc in the buttery.

Shepherdess Fennel fell back upon the intermediate plan of mingling short dances with short periods of talk and singing, so as to hinder any ungovernable rage in either. But this scheme was entirely confined to her own gentle mind: the shepherd himself was in the mood to exhibit the most reckless phases of hospitality.

The fiddler was a boy of those parts, about twelve years of age, who had a wonderful dexterity in jigs and reels, though his fingers were so small and short as to necessitate a constant shifting for the high notes, from which he scrambled back to the first position with sounds not of unmixed purity of tone. At seven the shrill tweedle-dee of this youngster had begun, accompanied by a booming ground-bass from Elijah New, the parish clerk, who had thoughtfully brought with him his favourite musical instrument, the serpent. Dancing was instantaneous, Mrs. Fennel privately enjoining the players on no account to let the dance exceed the length of a quarter of an hour.

But Elijah and the boy, in the excitement of their position, quite forgot the injunction. Moreover, Oliver Giles, a man of seventeen, one of the dancers, who was enamoured of his partner, a fair girl of thirty-three rolling years, had recklessly handed a new crown-piece to the musicians, as a bribe to keep going as long as they had muscle and wind. Mrs. Fennel, seeing the steam begin to generate on the countenances of her guests, crossed

over and touched the fiddler's elbow and put her hand on the serpent's mouth. But they took no notice, and fearing she might lose her character of genial hostess if she were to interfere too markedly, she retired and sat down helpless. And so the dance whizzed on with cumulative fury, the performers moving in their planet-like courses, direct and retrograde from apogee to perigee, till the hand of the well-kicked clock at the bottom of the room had travelled over the circumference of an hour.

While these cheerful events were in course of enactment within Fennel's pastoral dwelling, an incident having considerable bearing on the party had occurred in the gloomy night without. Mrs. Fennel's concern about the growing fierceness of the dance corresponded in point of time with the ascent of a human figure to the solitary hill of Higher Crowstairs from the direction of the distant town. This personage strode on through the rain without a pause, following the little-worn path which, further on in its course, skirted the shepherd's cottage.

It was nearly the time of full moon, and on this account, though the sky was lined with a uniform sheet of dripping cloud, ordinary objects out of doors were readily visible. The sad wan light revealed the lonely pedestrian to be a man of supple frame; his gait suggested that he had somewhat passed the period of perfect and instinctive agility, though not so far as to be otherwise than rapid of motion when occasion required. In point of fact he might have been about forty years of age. He appeared tall, but a recruiting sergeant, or other person accustomed to the judging of men's heights by the eye, would have discerned that this was chiefly owing to his gauntness, and that he was not more than five feet eight or nine.

Notwithstanding the regularity of his tread, there was caution in it, as in that of one who mentally feels his way; and despite the fact that it was not a black coat nor a dark garment of any sort that he wore, there was something about him which suggested that he naturally belonged to the black-coated tribes of men. His clothes were of fustian, and his boots hobnailed, yet in his progress he showed not the mud-accustomed bearing of hobnailed and fustianed peasantry.

By the time that he had arrived abreast of the shepherd's premises the rain came down, or rather came along, with yet more determined violence. The outskirts of the little homestead partially broke the force of wind and rain, and this induced him to stand still. The most salient of the shepherd's domestic erections was an empty sty at the forward corner of his hedgeless garden, for in these latitudes the principle of masking the homelier features of your establishment by a conventional frontage was unknown. The traveller's eye was attracted to this small building by the pallid shine of the wet slates that covered it. He turned aside, and, finding it empty, stood under the pent-roof for shelter.

While he stood, the boom of the serpent within, and the lesser strains of the fiddler, reached the spot as an accompaniment to the surging hiss of the flying rain on the sod, its louder beating on the cabbage-leaves of the garden, on the eight or ten bee-hives just discernible by the path, and its dripping from the eaves into a row of buckets and pans that had been placed under the walls of the cottage. For at Higher Crowstairs, as at all such elevated domiciles, the grand difficulty of housekeeping was an insufficiency of water; and a casual rainfall was utilised by turning out, as catchers, every utensil that the house contained. Some queer stories might be told of the contrivances for economy in suds and dish-waters that are absolutely necessitated in upland habitations during the droughts of summer. But at this season there were no such exigencies: a mere acceptance of what the skies bestowed was sufficient for an abundant store.

At last the notes of the serpent ceased and the house was silent. This cessation of activity aroused the solitary pedestrian from the reverie into which he had lapsed, and, emerging from the shed, with an apparently new intention, he walked up the path to the house-door. Arrived here, his first act was to kneel down on a large stone beside the row of vessels, and to drink a copious draught from one of them. Having quenched his thirst, he rose and lifted his hand to knock, but paused with his eye upon the panel. Since the dark surface of the wood revealed absolutely nothing, it was evident that he must be mentally look-

ing through the door, as if he wished to measure thereby all the possibilities that a house of this sort might include, and how they might bear upon the question of his entry.

In his indecision he turned and surveyed the scene around. Not a soul was anywhere visible. The garden-path stretched downward from his feet, gleaming like the track of a snail; the roof of the little well, the well cover, the top rail of the garden-gate, were varnished with the same dull liquid glaze; while, far away in the vale, a faint whiteness of more than usual extent showed that the rivers were high in the meads. Beyond all this winked a few bleared lamplights through the beating drops, lights that denoted the situation of the country-town from which he had appeared to come. The absence of all notes of life in that direction seemed to clinch his intentions, and he knocked at the door.

Within, a desultory chat had taken the place of movement and musical sound. The hedge-carpenter was suggesting a song to the company, which nobody just then was inclined to undertake, so that the knock afforded a not unwelcome diversion.

"Walk in!" said the shepherd promptly.

The latch clicked upward, and out of the night our pedestrian appeared upon the door-mat. The shepherd arose, lifted two of the nearest candles, and turned to look at him.

Their light disclosed that the stranger was dark in complexion, and not unprepossessing as to feature. His hat, which for a moment he did not remove, hung low over his eyes, without concealing that they were large, open, and determined, moving with a flash rather than a glance round the room. He seemed pleased with the survey, and, baring his shaggy head, said, in a rich deep voice, "The rain is so heavy, friends, that I ask leave to come in and rest awhile."

"To be sure, stranger," said the shepherd. "And faith, you've been lucky in choosing your time, for we are having a bit of a fling for a glad cause — though to be sure a man could hardly wish that glad cause to happen more than once a year."

"Nor less," spoke up a woman. "For 'tis best to get your fam-

ily over and done with, as soon as you can, so to be all the earlier out of the fag o't."

"And what may be this glad cause?" asked the stranger.

"A birth and christening," said the shepherd.

The stranger hoped his host might not be made unhappy either by too many or too few of such episodes, and being invited by a gesture to a pull at the mug, he readily acquiesced. His manner which, before entering, had been so dubious, was now altogether that of a carefree and candid man.

"Late to be traipsing athwart this coomb — hey?" said the engaged man of fifty.

"Late it is, master, as you say.—I'll take a seat in the chimney-corner, if you have nothing to urge against it, ma'am; for I am a little moist on the side that was next the rain."

Mrs. Shepherd Fennel assented, and made room for the self-invited comer, who, having got completely inside the chimney-corner, stretched out his legs and his arms with the expansiveness of a person quite at home.

"Yes, I am rather thin in the vamp," he said freely, seeing that the eyes of the shepherd's wife fell upon his boots, "and I am not well-fitted, either. I have had some rough times lately, and have been forced to pick up what I can get in the way of wearing, but I must find a suit better fit for working-days when I reach home."

"One of hereabouts?" she inquired.

"Not quite that — further up the country."

"I thought so. And so am I; and by your tongue you come from my neighbourhood."

"But you would hardly have heard of me," he said quickly. "My time would be long before yours, ma'am, you see."

This testimony to the youthfulness of his hostess had the effect of stopping her cross-examination.

"There is only one thing more wanted to make me happy," continued the new comer. "And that is a little baccy, which I am sorry to say I am out of."

"I'll fill your pipe," said the shepherd.

"I must ask you to lend me a pipe likewise."

"A smoker, and no pipe about ye?"

"I have dropped it somewhere on the road."

The shepherd filled and handed him a new clay pipe, saying, as he did so, "Hand me your baccy-box — I'll fill that too, now I am about it."

The man went through the movement of searching his pockets.

"Lost that too?" said his entertainer, with some surprise.

"I am afraid so," said the man with some confusion. "Give it to me in a screw of paper."

Lighting his pipe at the candle with a suction that drew the whole flame into the bowl, he resettled himself in the corner, and bent his looks upon the faint steam from his damp legs, as if he wished to say no more.

Meanwhile the general body of guests had been taking little notice of this visitor by reason of an absorbing discussion in which they were engaged with the band about a tune for the next dance. The matter being settled, they were about to stand up, when an interruption came in the shape of another knock at the door.

At the sound the man in the chimney-corner took up the poker and began stirring the fire as if doing it thoroughly were the one aim of his existence; and a second time the shepherd said, "Walk in!"

In a moment another man stood upon the straw-woven doormat. He too was a stranger.

This individual was one of a type radically different from the first. There was more of the commonplace in his manner, and a certain jovial cosmopolitanism sat upon his features. He was several years older than the first arrival, his hair being slightly frosted, his eyebrows bristly, and his whiskers cut back from his cheeks. His face was rather full and flabby, and yet it was not altogether a face without power. A few grog-blossoms marked the neighbourhood of his nose.

He flung back his long drab greatcoat, revealing that beneath it he wore a suit of cinder-grey shade throughout, large

heavy seals, of some metal or other that would take a polish, dangling from his fob as his only personal ornament. Shaking the water-drops from his low-crowned glazed hat, he said, "I must ask for a few minutes' shelter, comrades, or I shall be wetted to my skin before I get to Casterbridge."

"Make yerself at home, master," said the shepherd, perhaps a trifle less heartily than on the first occasion. Not that Fennel had the least tinge of niggardliness in his composition; but the room was far from large, spare chairs were not numerous, and damp companions were not altogether comfortable at close quarters for the women and girls in their bright-coloured gowns.

However, the second comer, after taking off his greatcoat, and hanging his hat on a nail in one of the ceiling beams as if he had been specially invited to put it there, advanced and sat down at the table. This had been pushed so closely into the chimney-corner, to give all available room to the dancers, that its inner edge grazed the elbow of the man who had ensconced himself by the fire; and thus the two strangers were brought into close companionship.

They nodded to each other by way of breaking the ice of unacquaintance, and the first stranger handed his neighbour the large mug — a huge vessel of brown ware, having its upper edge worn away like a threshold by the rub of whole genealogies of thirsty lips that had gone the way of all flesh, and bearing the following inscription burnt upon its rotund side in yellow letters:

THERE IS NO FUN
UNTILL I CUM.

The other man, nothing loth, raised the mug to his lips, and drank on, and on, and on — till a curious blueness overspread the countenance of the shepherd's wife, who had regarded with no little surprise the first stranger's free offer to the second of what did not belong to him to dispense.

"I knew it!" said the toper to the shepherd with much satisfaction. "When I walked up your garden afore coming in, and saw the hives all of a row, I said to myself, 'Where there's bees

there's honey, and where there's honey there's mead.' But mead of such a truly comfortable sort as this I really didn't expect to meet in my older days." He took yet another pull at the mug, till it assumed an ominous horizontality.

"Glad you enjoy it!" said the shepherd warmly.

"It is goodish mead," assented Mrs. Fennel with an absence of enthusiasm, which seemed to say that it was possible to buy praise for one's cellar at too heavy a price. "It is trouble enough to make — and really I hardly think we shall make any more. For honey sells well, and we can make shift with a drop o' small mead and metheglin for common use from the comb-washings."

"Oh, but you'll never have the heart!" reproachfully cried the stranger in cinder-grey, after taking up the mug a third time and setting it down empty. "I love mead, when 'tis old like this, as I love to go to church o' Sundays, or to relieve the needy any day of the week."

"Ha, ha, ha!" said the man in the chimney-corner, who, in spite of the taciturnity induced by the pipe of tobacco, could not or would not refrain from this slight testimony to his comrade's humour.

Now the old mead of those days, brewed of the purest first-year or maiden honey, four pounds to the gallon — with its due complement of whites of eggs, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, mace, rosemary, yeast, and processes of working, bottling, and cellar-ing — tasted remarkably strong; but it did not taste so strong as it actually was. Hence, presently, the stranger in cinder-grey at the table, moved by its creeping influence, unbuttoned his waistcoat, threw himself back in his chair, spread his legs, and made his presence felt in various ways.

"Well, well, as I say," he resumed, "I am going to Casterbridge, and to Casterbridge I must go. I should have been almost there by this time; but the rain drove me into ye; and I'm not sorry for it."

"You don't live in Casterbridge?" said the shepherd.

"Not as yet; though I shortly mean to move there."

"Going to set up in trade, perhaps?"

"No, no," said the shepherd's wife. "It is easy to see that

the gentleman is rich, and don't want to work at anything."

The cinder-grey stranger paused, as if to consider whether he would accept that definition of himself. He presently rejected it by answering, "Rich is not quite the word for me, dame. I do work, and I must work. And even if I only get to Casterbridge by midnight I must begin work there at eight to-morrow morning. Yes, het or wet, blow or snow, famine or sword, my day's work to-morrow must be done."

"Poor man! Then, in spite o' seeming, you be worse off than we?" replied the shepherd's wife.

"'Tis the nature of my trade, men and maidens. 'Tis the nature of my trade more than my poverty . . . But really and truly I must up and off, or I shan't get a lodging in the town." However, the speaker did not move, and directly added, "There's time for one more draught of friendship before I go; and I'd perform it at once if the mug were not dry."

"Here's a mug o' small," said Mrs. Fennel. "Small, we call it, though to be sure 'tis only the first wash o' the combs."

"No," said the stranger disdainfully. "I won't spoil your first kindness by partaking o' your second."

"Certainly not," broke in Fennel. "We don't increase and multiply every day, and I'll fill the mug again." He went away to the dark place under the stairs where the barrel stood. The shepherdess followed him.

"Why should you do this?" she said reproachfully, as soon as they were alone. "He's emptied it once, though it held enough for ten people; and now he's not contented wi' the small, but must needs call for more o' the strong! And a stranger unbeknown to any of us. For my part I don't like the look o' the man at all."

"But he's in the house, my honey; and 'tis a wet night, and a christening. Daze it, what's a cup of mead more or less? There'll be plenty more next bee-burning."

"Very well — this time, then," she answered, looking wistfully at the barrel. "But what is the man's calling, and where is he one of, that he should come in and join us like this!"

"I don't know. I'll ask him again."

The catastrophe of having the mug drained dry at one pull by the stranger in cinder-grey was effectually guarded against this time by Mrs. Fennel. She poured out his allowance in a small cup, keeping the large one at a discreet distance from him. When he had tossed off his portion the shepherd renewed his inquiry about the stranger's occupation.

The latter did not immediately reply, and the man in the chimney-corner, with a sudden demonstrativeness, said, "Anybody may know my trade — I'm a wheelwright."

"A very good trade for these parts," said the shepherd.

"And anybody may know mine — if they've the sense to find it out," said the stranger in cinder-grey.

"You may generally tell what a man is by his claws," observed the hedge-carpenter, looking at his hands. "My fingers be as full of thorns as an old pincushion is of pins."

The hands of the man in the chimney-corner instinctively sought the shade, and he gazed into the fire as he resumed his pipe. The man at the table took up the hedge-carpenter's remark, and added smartly, "True; but the oddity of my trade is that, instead of setting a mark upon me, it sets a mark upon my customers."

No observation being offered by anybody in elucidation of this enigma, the shepherd's wife once more called for a song. The same obstacles presented themselves as at the former time — one had no voice, another had forgotten the first verse. The stranger at the table, whose soul had now risen to a good working temperature, relieved the difficulty by exclaiming that, to start the company, he would sing himself. Thrusting one thumb into the arm-hole of his waistcoat, he waved the other hand in the air, and, with an extemporising gaze at the shining sheep-crooks above the mantel-piece, began:

Oh my trade it is the rarest one,

Simple shepherds all —

My trade is a sight to see;

For my customers I tie, and take them up on high,

And waft 'em to a far countree.

The room was silent when he had finished the verse — with one exception, that of the man in the chimney-corner, who, at the singer's word, "Chorus!" joined him in a deep bass voice of musical relish —

And waft 'em to a far countree.

Oliver Giles, John Pitcher the dairyman, the parish clerk, the engaged man of fifty, the row of young women against the wall, seemed lost in thought not of the gayest kind. The shepherd looked meditatively on the ground, the shepherdess gazed keenly at the singer, and with some suspicion; she was doubting whether this stranger was merely singing an old song from recollection, or was composing one there and then for the occasion. All were as perplexed at the obscure revelation as the guests at Belshazzar's Feast, except the man in the chimney-corner, who quietly said, "Second verse, stranger," and smoked on.

The singer thoroughly moistened himself from his lips inwards, and went on with the next stanza as requested:

My tools are but common ones,
Simple shepherds all,

My tools are no sight to see:

A little hempen string, and a post whereon to swing,
Are implements enough for me.

Shepherd Fennel glanced round. There was no longer any doubt that the stranger was answering his question rhythmically. The guests one and all started back with suppressed exclamations. The young woman engaged to the man of fifty fainted half-way, and would have proceeded, but finding him wanting in alacrity for catching her she sat down trembling.

"Oh, he's the —— !" whispered the people in the background, mentioning the name of an ominous public officer. "He's come to do it. 'Tis to be at Casterbridge gaol to-morrow — the man for sheep-stealing — the poor clock-maker we heard of, who used to live away at Anglebury and had no work to do — Timothy Sommers, whose family were a-starving, and so he went out of Anglebury by the high-road, and took a sheep in

The stranger in the chimney-corner, waving cups with the singer so heartily that his mead splashed over on the hearth, repeated in his bass voice as before:

And on his soul may God ha' merc-y!

All this time the third stranger had been standing in the door-way. Finding now that he did not come forward or go on speaking, the guests particularly regarded him. They noticed to their surprise that he stood before them the picture of abject terror — his knees trembling, his hand shaking so violently that the door-latch by which he supported himself rattled audibly; his white lips were parted, and his eyes fixed on the merry officer of justice in the middle of the room. A moment more and he had turned, closed the door, and fled.

"What man can it be?" said the shepherd.

The rest, between the awfulness of their late discovery and the odd conduct of this third visitor, looked as if they knew not what to think, and said nothing. Instinctively they withdrew further and further from the grim gentleman in their midst, whom some of them seemed to take for the Prince of Darkness himself, till they formed a remote circle, an empty space of floor being left between them and him —

— *circulus, cujus centrum diabolus.*

The room was so silent — though there were more than twenty people in it — that nothing could be heard but the pattering of the rain against the window-shutters, accompanied by the occasional hiss of a stray drop that fell down the chimney into the fire, and the steady puffing of the man in the corner, who had now resumed his pipe of long clay.

The stillness was unexpectedly broken. The distant sound of a gun reverberated through the air — apparently from the direction of the county town.

"Be jiggered!" cried the stranger who had sung the song, jumping up.

"What does that mean?" asked several.

"A prisoner escaped from the gaol — that's what it means."

All listened. The sound was repeated, and none of them spoke but the man in the chimney-corner, who said quietly, "I've often been told that in this county they fire a gun at such times; but I never heard it till now."

"I wonder if it is *my* man?" murmured the personage in cinder-grey.

"Surely it is!" said the shepherd involuntarily. "And surely we've seen him! That little man who looked in at the door by now, and quivered like a leaf when he seed ye and heard your song!"

"His teeth chattered, and the breath went out of his body," said the dairyman.

"And his heart seemed to sink within him like a stone," said Oliver Giles.

"And he bolted as if he'd been shot at," said the hedge-car-penter.

"True — his teeth chattered, and his heart seemed to sink; and he bolted as if he'd been shot at," slowly summed up the man in the chimney-corner.

"I didn't notice it," remarked the grim songster.

"We were all a-wondering what made him run off in such a fright," faltered one of the women against the wall, "and now 'tis explained."

The firing of the alarm-gun went on at intervals, low and sullenly, and their suspicions became a certainty. The sinister gentleman in cinder-grey roused himself. "Is there a constable here?" he asked in thick tones. "If so, let him step forward."

The engaged man of fifty stepped quavering out of the corner, his betrothed beginning to sob on the back of the chair.

"You are a sworn constable?"

"I be, sir."

"Then pursue the criminal at once, with assistance, and bring him back here. He can't have gone far."

"I will, sir, I will — when I've got my staff. I'll go home and get it, and come sharp here, and start in a body."

"Staff! Never mind your staff; the man'll be gone!"

"But I can't do nothing without my staff — can I, William, and John, and Charles Jake? No; for there's the king's royal crown a-painted on en in yaller and gold, and the lion and the unicorn, so as when I raise en up and hit my prisoner, 'tis made a lawful blow thereby. I wouldn't 'tempt to take up a man without my staff — no, not I. If I hadn't the law to gie me courage, why, instead o' my taking up him he might take up me!"

"Now, I'm a king's man myself, and can give you authority enough for this," said the formidable person in cinder-grey. "Now, then, all of ye, be ready. Have ye any lanterns?"

"Yes — have ye any lanterns? — I demand it," said the constable.

"And the rest of you able-bodied ——"

"Able-bodied men — yes — the rest of ye," said the constable.

"Have you some good stout staves and pitchforks ——"

"Staves and pitchforks — in the name o' the law. And take 'em in yer hands and go in quest, and do as we in authority tell ye."

Thus aroused, the men prepared to give chase. The evidence was, indeed, though circumstantial, so convincing, that but little argument was needed to show the shepherd's guests that after what they had seen it would look very much like connivance if they did not instantly pursue the unhappy third stranger, who could not as yet have gone more than a few hundred yards over such uneven country.

A shepherd is always well provided with lanterns; and, lighting these hastily, and with hurdle-staves in their hands, they poured out of the door, taking a direction along the crest of the hill, away from the town, the rain having fortunately a little abated.

Disturbed by the noise, or possibly by unpleasant dreams of her baptism, the child who had been christened began to cry heartbrokenly in the room overhead. These notes of grief came down through the chinks of the floor to the ears of the women below, who jumped up one by one, and seemed glad of the ex-

cuse to ascend and comfort the baby, for the incidents of the last half hour greatly oppressed them. Thus in the space of two or three minutes the room on the ground floor was deserted.

But it was not for long. Hardly had the sound of footsteps died away when a man returned round the corner of the house from the direction the pursuers had taken. Peeping in at the door, and seeing nobody there, he entered leisurely. It was the stranger of the chimney-corner, who had gone out with the rest. The motive of his return was shown by his helping himself to a cut piece of skimmer-cake that lay on a ledge beside where he had sat, and which he had apparently forgotten to take with him. He also poured out half a cup more mead from the quantity that remained, ravenously eating and drinking these as he stood. He had not finished when another figure came in just as quietly — the stranger in cinder-grey.

“Oh — you here?” said the latter smiling. “I thought you had gone to help in the capture.” And this speaker also revealed the object of his return by looking solicitously round for the fascinating mug of old mead.

“And I thought you had gone,” said the other, continuing his skimmer-cake with some effort.

“Well, on second thoughts, I felt there were enough without me,” said the other, confidentially, “and such a night as it is, too. Besides, ’tis the business o’ the Government to take care of its criminals — not mine.”

“True; so it is. And I felt as you did, that there were enough without me.”

“I don’t want to break my limbs running over the humps and hollows of this wild country.”

“Nor I neither, between you and me.”

“These shepherd-people are used to it — simple-minded souls, you know, stirred up to anything in a moment. They’ll have him ready for me before the morning, and no trouble to me at all.”

“They’ll have him, and we shall have saved ourselves all labour in the matter.”

"True, true. Well, my way is to Casterbridge; and 'tis as much as my legs will do to take me that far. Going the same way?"

"No, I am sorry to say. I have to get home over there" — he nodded indefinitely to the right — "and I feel as you do, that it is quite enough for my legs to do before bedtime."

The other had by this time finished the mead in the mug, after which, shaking hands at the door, and wishing each other well, they went their several ways.

In the meantime the company of pursuers had reached the end of the hog's back elevation which dominated this part of the coomb. They had decided on no particular plan of action; and, finding that the man of the baleful trade was no longer in their company, they seemed quite unable to form any such plan now. They descended in all directions down the hill, and straightway several of the party fell into the snare set by Nature for all misguided midnight ramblers over the lower cretaceous formation. The "lynchets," or flint slopes, which belted the escarpment at intervals of a dozen yards, took the less cautious ones unawares, and losing their footing on the rubbly steep they slid sharply downwards, the lanterns rolling from their hands to the bottom, and there lying on their sides till the horn was scorched through.

When they had again gathered themselves together, the shepherd, as the man who knew the country best, took the lead, and guided them round these treacherous inclines. The lanterns, which seemed rather to dazzle their eyes and warn the fugitive than to assist them in the exploration, were extinguished, due silence was observed; and in this more rational order they plunged into the vale. It was a grassy, briary, moist channel, affording some shelter to any person who had sought it; but the party perambulated it in vain, and ascended on the other side.

Here they wandered apart, and after an interval closed together again to report progress. At the second time of closing in they found themselves near a lonely oak, the single tree on this part of the upland, probably sown there by a passing bird some hundred years before. And here, standing a little to one side of

the trunk, as motionless as the trunk itself, appeared the man they were in quest of, his outline being well defined against the sky beyond. The band noiselessly drew up and faced him.

"Your money or your life!" said the constable sternly to the tall figure.

"No, no," whispered John Pitcher. "'Tisn't our side ought to say that. That's the doctrine of vagabonds like him, and we be on the side of the law."

"Well, well," replied the constable impatiently; "I must say something, mustn't I? And if you had all the weight o' this undertaking upon your mind, perhaps you'd say the wrong thing too. — Prisoner at the bar, surrender, in the name of the Fath — the Crown, I mane!"

The man under the tree seemed now to notice them for the first time, and, giving them no opportunity whatever for exhibiting their courage, he strolled slowly towards them. He was, indeed, the little man, the third stranger; but his trepidation had in a great measure gone.

"Well, travellers," he said, "did I hear ye speak to me?"

"You did: you've got to come and be our prisoner at once," said the constable. "We arrest ye on the charge of not biding in Casterbridge gaol in a decent proper manner to be hung to-morrow morning. Neighbours, do your duty, and seize the culprit!"

On hearing the charge, the man seemed enlightened, and, saying not another word, resigned himself with preternatural civility to the search-party, who, with their staves in their hands, surrounded him on all sides, and marched him back towards the shepherd's cottage.

It was eleven o'clock by the time they arrived. The light shining from the open door, a sound of men's voices within, proclaimed to them as they approached the house that some new events had arisen in their absence. On entering they discovered the shepherd's living-room to be invaded by two officers from Casterbridge gaol, and a well-known magistrate who lived at the nearest county seat, intelligence of the escape having become generally circulated.

"Gentlemen," said the constable, "I have brought back your man — not without risk and danger; but every one must do his duty. He is inside this circle of able-bodied persons, who have lent me useful aid considering their ignorance of Crown work. Men, bring forward your prisoner." And the third stranger was led to the light.

"Who is this?" said one of the officials.

"The man," said the constable.

"Certainly not," said the other turnkey; and the first corroborated his statement.

"But how can it be otherwise?" asked the constable. "Or why was he so terrified at sight o' the singing instrument of the law?" Here he related the strange behaviour of the third stranger on entering the house.

"Can't understand it," said the officer coolly. "All I know is that it is not the condemned man. He's quite a different character from this one; a gauntish fellow, with dark hair and eyes, rather good-looking, and with a musical bass voice that if you heard it once you'd never mistake as long as you lived."

"Why, souls — 'twas the man in the chimney-corner!"

"Hey — what?" said the magistrate, coming forward after inquiring particulars from the shepherd in the background. "Haven't you got the man after all?"

"Well, sir," said the constable, "he's the man we were in search of, that's true; and yet he's not the man we were in search of. For the man we were in search of was not the man we wanted, sir, if you understand my everyday way; for 'twas the man in the chimney-corner."

"A pretty kettle of fish altogether!" said the magistrate. "You had better start for the other man at once."

The prisoner now spoke for the first time. The mention of the man in the chimney-corner seemed to have moved him as nothing else could do.

"Sir," he said, stepping forward to the magistrate, "take no more trouble about me. The time is come when I may as well speak. I have done nothing; my crime is that the condemned man is my brother. Early this afternoon I left home at Angle-

bury to tramp it all the way to Casterbridge gaol to bid him farewell. I was benighted, and called here to rest and ask the way. When I opened the door I saw before me the very man, my brother, that I thought to see in the condemned cell at Casterbridge. He was in this chimney-corner; and jammed close to him, so that he could not have got out if he had tried, was the executioner who'd come to take his life, singing a song about it and not knowing that it was his victim who was close by, joining in to save appearances. My brother looked a glance of agony at me, and I knew he meant, 'Don't reveal what you see; my life depends on it.' I was so terror-struck that I could hardly stand, and, not knowing what I did, I turned and hurried away."

The narrator's manner and tone had the stamp of truth, and his story made a great impression on all around. "And do you know where your brother is at the present time?" asked the magistrate.

"I do not. I have never seen him since I closed this door."

"I can testify to that, for we've been between ye ever since," said the constable.

"Where does he think to fly to? — what is his occupation?"

"He's a watch-and-clock maker, sir."

"'A said 'a was a wheelwright — a wicked rogue," said the constable.

"The wheels o' clocks and watches he meant, no doubt," said Shepherd Fennel. "I thought his hands were palish for's trade."

"Well, it appears to me that nothing can be gained by retaining this poor man in custody," said the magistrate; "your business lies with the other, unquestionably."

And so the little man was released off-hand; but he looked nothing the less sad on that account, it being beyond the power of magistrate or constable to raze out the written troubles in his brain, for they concerned another whom he regarded with more solicitude than himself. When this was done, and the man had gone his way, the night was found to be so far advanced that it was deemed useless to renew the search before the next morning.

Next day, accordingly, the quest for the clever sheep-stealer became general and keen, to all appearance at least. But the in-

tended punishment was cruelly disproportioned to the transgression, and the sympathy of a great many country folk in that district was strongly on the side of the fugitive. Moreover, his marvelous coolness and daring under the unprecedented circumstances of the shepherd's party won their admiration. So that it may be questioned if all those who ostensibly made themselves so busy in exploring woods and fields and lanes were quite so thorough when it came to the private examination of their own lofts and outhouses. Stories were afloat of a mysterious figure being occasionally seen in some old overgrown trackway or other, remote from turnpike roads; but when a search was instituted in any of these suspected quarters nobody was found. Thus the days and weeks passed without tidings.

In brief, the bass-voiced man of the chimney-corner was never recaptured. Some said that he went across the sea, others that he did not, but buried himself in the depths of a populous city. At any rate, the gentleman in cinder-grey never did his morning's work at Casterbridge, nor met anywhere at all, for business purposes, the comrade with whom he had passed an hour of relaxation in the lonely house on the coomb.

The grass has long been green on the graves of Shepherd Fennel and his frugal wife; the guests who made up the christening party have mainly followed their entertainers to the tomb; the baby in whose honour they all had met is a matron in the sere and yellow leaf. But the arrival of the three strangers at the shepherd's that night, and the details connected therewith, is a story as well known as ever in the country about Higher Crowstairs.

*Robert
Louis
Stevenson*

(1850–1894)

We doubt if Robert Louis Stevenson shared Thomas Hardy's wish to be remembered chiefly as a poet — not after bequeathing us such prose works as *Treasure Island* (1883), *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and *Kidnapped* (1886). Yet Stevenson's most famous book of poetry, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, so deeply revealing of his love and understanding of children, appeared first in 1885 and has been in print, in one edition or another, ever since.

Stevenson fought ill health virtually all his life, his lung trouble having shown itself even when he was a baby. There were times, between attacks and relapses, when he was completely incapacitated, and even when his health was at its best, he seldom could work for more than a few consecutive hours at a time. It is literally true that he did most of his writing in bed.

He was destined almost from the beginning to be a writer, and his life was full of significant omens and symbols — ghost stories told to him as a child by his nurse, bohemianism in his early youth, friendships with scholars and literary men, residence in artists' colonies, romance and travel

— and always the search for health. In 1888 he sailed for the South Seas on “what was only intended to be a pleasure excursion but turned into a voluntary exile prolonged until the hour of his death.” He spent the last four years of his life in Samoa, and when he died, in 1894, the Samoans, who called him Tusitala (Teller of Tales) and who had revered him as their chief, buried his body on the peak of Vaea, high above the Pacific Ocean which he had grown to love.

Stevenson’s prose has been called “mannered”; it is, we think, more accurately described as mellifluous, even though he was an acknowledged master of the macabre and the eerie. Like Poe, and yet so much unlike him, Stevenson’s life was one of too little appreciated courage in the face of colossal odds. They both led doomed lives and they both died young — Poe in his forty-first year, and Stevenson at the age of forty-four. Poe traveled to far places of his mind, seeking to die; Stevenson not only traveled to far places of his mind but also to far places of the earth, seeking to live. Paradoxically, and in different ways, they both succeeded and failed . . .

Here is the poet Robert Louis Stevenson’s most memorable short story — a tale of murder and conscience (but how different from Walt Whitman’s tale of murder and conscience!). It is a classic story of its genre, distinguished by its *sheer writing* . . .

MARKHEIM

“Yes,” said the dealer, “our windfalls are of various kinds. Some customers are ignorant, and then I touch a dividend on my superior knowledge. Some are dishonest,” and here he held up the candle, so that the light fell strongly on his visitor, “and in that case,” he continued, “I profit by my virtue.”

Markheim had but just entered from the daylight streets, and his eyes had not yet grown familiar with the mingled shine and darkness in the shop. At these pointed words, and before the near presence of the flame, he blinked painfully and looked aside.

The dealer chuckled. "You come to me on Christmas Day," he resumed, "when you know that I am alone in my house, put up my shutters, and make a point of refusing business. Well, you will have to pay for that; you will have to pay for my loss of time, when I should be balancing my books; you will have to pay, besides, for a kind of manner that I remark in you to-day very strongly. I am the essence of discretion, and ask no awkward questions; but when a customer cannot look me in the eye, he has to pay for it."

The dealer once more chuckled; and then, changing to his usual business voice, though still with a note of irony, "You can give, as usual, a clear account of how you came into the possession of the object?" he continued. "Still your uncle's cabinet? A remarkable collector, sir!"

And the little pale, round-shouldered dealer stood almost on tip-toe, looking over the top of his gold spectacles, and nodding his head with every mark of disbelief. Markheim returned his gaze with one of infinite pity, and a touch of horror.

"This time," said he, "you are in error. I have not come to sell, but to buy. I have no curios to dispose of; my uncle's cabinet is bare to the wainscot; even were it still intact, I have done well on the Stock Exchange, and should more likely add to it than otherwise, and my errand to-day is simplicity itself. I seek a Christmas present for a lady," he continued, waxing more fluent as he struck into the speech he had prepared; "and certainly I owe you every excuse for thus disturbing you upon so small a matter. But the thing was neglected yesterday; I must produce my little compliment at dinner; and, as you very well know, a rich marriage is not a thing to be neglected."

There followed a pause, during which the dealer seemed to weigh this statement incredulously. The ticking of many clocks among the curious lumber of the shop, and the faint rushing of

the cabs in a near thoroughfare, filled up the interval of silence.

"Well, sir," said the dealer, "be it so. You are an old customer after all; and if, as you say, you have the chance of a good marriage, far be it from me to be an obstacle. Here is a nice thing for a lady now," he went on, "this hand glass — fifteenth century, warranted; comes from a good collection, too; but I reserve the name, in the interests of my customer, who was just like yourself, my dear sir, the nephew and sole heir of a remarkable collector."

The dealer, while he thus ran on in his dry and biting voice, had stooped to take the object from its place; and, as he had done so, a shock had passed through Markheim, a start both of hand and foot, a sudden leap of many tumultuous passions to the face. It passed as swiftly as it came, and left no trace beyond a certain trembling of the hand that now received the glass.

"A glass," he said hoarsely, and then paused, and repeated it more clearly. "A glass? For Christmas? Surely not?"

"And why not?" cried the dealer. "Why not a glass?"

Markheim was looking upon him with an indefinable expression. "You ask me why not?" he said. "Why, look here — look in it — look at yourself! Do you like to see it? No! nor — nor any man."

The little man had jumped back when Markheim had so suddenly confronted him with the mirror; but now, perceiving there was nothing worse on hand, he chuckled. "Your future lady, sir, must be pretty hard-favoured," said he.

"I ask you," said Markheim, "for a Christmas present, and you give me this — this damned reminder of years, and sins and follies — this hand-conscience? Did you mean it? Had you a thought in your mind? Tell me. It will be better for you if you do. Come, tell me about yourself. I hazard a guess now, that you are in secret a very charitable man?"

The dealer looked closely at his companion. It was very odd, Markheim did not appear to be laughing; there was something in his face like an eager sparkle of hope, but nothing of mirth.

"What are you driving at?" the dealer asked.

"Not charitable?" returned the other gloomily. "Not chari-

table; not pious; not scrupulous; unloving, unbeloved; a hand to get money, a safe to keep it. Is that all? Dear God, man, is that all?"

"I will tell you what it is," began the dealer, with some sharpness, and then broke off again into a chuckle. "But I see this is a love match of yours, and you have been drinking the lady's health."

"Ah!" cried Markheim, with a strange curiosity. "Ah, have you been in love? Tell me about that."

"I," cried the dealer. "I in love! I never had the time, nor have I the time to-day for all this nonsense. Will you take the glass?"

"Where is the hurry?" returned Markheim. "It is very pleasant to stand here talking; and life is so short and insecure that I would not hurry away from any pleasure — no, not even from so mild a one as this. We should rather cling, cling to what little we can get, like a man at a cliff's edge. Every second is a cliff, if you think upon it — a cliff a mile high — high enough, if we fall, to dash us out of every feature of humanity. Hence it is best to talk pleasantly. Let us talk of each other: why should we wear this mask? Let us be confidential. Who knows, we might become friends?"

"I have just one word to say to you," said the dealer. "Either make your purchase, or walk out of my shop!"

"True, true," said Markheim. "Enough fooling. To business. Show me something else."

The dealer stooped once more, this time to replace the glass upon the shelf, his thin blond hair falling over his eyes as he did so. Markheim moved a little nearer, with one hand in the pocket of his greatcoat; he drew himself up and filled his lungs; at the same time many different emotions were depicted together on his face — terror, horror, and resolve, fascination and a physical repulsion; and through a haggard lift of his upper lip, his teeth looked out.

"This, perhaps, may suit," observed the dealer: and then, as he began to re-arise, Markheim bounded from behind upon his

victim. The long, skewerlike dagger flashed and fell. The dealer struggled like a hen, striking his temple on the shelf, and then tumbled on the floor in a heap.

Time had some score of small voices in that shop, some stately and slow as was becoming to their great age; others garrulous and hurried. All these told out the seconds in an intricate chorus of tickings. Then the passage of a lad's feet, heavily running on the pavement, broke in upon these smaller voices and startled Markheim into the consciousness of his surroundings.

He looked about him awfully. The candle stood on the counter, its flame solemnly wagging in a draught; and by that inconsiderable movement, the whole room was filled with noiseless bustle and kept heaving like a sea: the tall shadows nodding, the gross blots of darkness swelling and dwindling as with respiration, the faces of the portraits and the china gods changing and wavering like images in water. The inner door stood ajar, and peered into that leaguer of shadows with a long slit of daylight like a pointing finger.

From these fear-stricken roving, Markheim's eyes returned to the body of his victim, where it lay both humped and sprawling, incredibly small and strangely meaner than in life. In these poor, miserly clothes, in that ungainly attitude, the dealer lay like so much sawdust. Markheim had feared to see it, and, lo! it was nothing. And yet, as he gazed, this bundle of old clothes and pool of blood began to find eloquent voices. There it must lie; there was none to work the cunning hinges or direct the miracle of locomotion — there it must lie till it was found. Found! ay, and then? Then would this dead flesh lift up a cry that would ring over England, and fill the world with the echoes of pursuit. Ay, dead or not, this was still the enemy.

"Time was that when the brains were out," he thought; and the first word struck into his mind. Time, now that the deed was accomplished — time, which had closed for the victim, had become instant and momentous for the slayer.

The thought was yet in his mind, when, first one and then another, with every variety of pace and voice — one deep as the

bell from a cathedral turret, another ringing on its treble notes the prelude of a waltz — the clocks began to strike the hour of three in the afternoon.

The sudden outbreak of so many tongues in that dumb chamber staggered him. He began to bestir himself, going to and fro with the candle, beleaguered by moving shadows, and startled to the soul by chance reflections. In many rich mirrors, some of home designs, some from Venice or Amsterdam, he saw his face repeated and repeated, as it were an army of spies; his own eyes met and detected him; and the sound of his own steps, lightly as they fell, vexed the surrounding quiet.

And still, as he continued to fill his pockets, his mind accused him with a sickening iteration, of the thousand faults of his design. He should have chosen a more quiet hour; he should have prepared an alibi; he should not have used a knife; he should have been more cautious, and only bound and gagged the dealer, and not killed him; he should have been more bold, and killed the servant also; he should have done all things otherwise — poignant regrets, weary, incessant toiling of the mind to change what was unchangeable, to plan what was now useless, to be the architect of the irrevocable past.

Meanwhile, and behind all this activity, brute terrors, like the scurrying of rats in a deserted attic, filled the more remote chambers of his brain with riot; the hand of the constable would fall heavy on his shoulder, and his nerves would jerk like a hooked fish; or he beheld, in galloping defile, the dock, the prison, the gallows, and the black coffin.

Terror of the people in the street sat down before his mind like a besieging army. It was impossible, he thought, but that some rumour of the struggle must have reached their ears and set on edge their curiosity; and now, in all the neighbouring houses, he divined them sitting motionless and with uplifted ear — solitary people, condemned to spend Christmas dwelling alone on memories of the past, and now startingly recalled from that tender exercise; happy family parties, struck into silence round the table, the mother still with raised finger: every degree

and age and humour, but all, by their own hearths, prying and hearkening and weaving the rope that was to hang him.

Sometimes it seemed to him he could not move too softly; the clink of the tall Bohemian goblets rang out loudly like a bell; and alarmed by the bigness of the ticking, he was tempted to stop the clocks. And then, again, with a swift transition of his terrors, the very silence of the place appeared a source of peril, and a thing to strike and freeze the passer-by; and he would step more boldly, and bustle aloud among the contents of the shop, and imitate, with elaborate bravado, the movements of a busy man at ease in his own house.

But he was now so pulled about by different alarms that, while one portion of his mind was still alert and cunning, another trembled on the brink of lunacy. One hallucination in particular took a strong hold on his credulity. The neighbour hearkening with white face beside his window, the passer-by arrested by a horrible surmise on the pavement — these could at worst suspect, they could not know; through the brick walls and shuttered windows only sounds could penetrate.

But here, within the house, was he alone? He knew he was; he had watched the servant set forth sweet-hearting, in her poor best, "out for the day" written in every ribbon and smile. Yes, he was alone, of course; and yet, in the bulk of empty house above him, he could surely hear a stir of delicate footing — he was surely conscious, inexplicably conscious of some presence. Ay, surely; to every room and corner of the house his imagination followed it; and now it was a faceless thing, and yet had eyes to see with; and again it was a shadow of himself; and yet again behold the image of the dead dealer, reinspired with cunning and hatred.

At times, with a strong effort, he would glance at the open door which still seemed to repel his eyes. The house was tall, the skylight small and dirty, the day blind with fog; and the light that filtered down to the ground story was exceedingly faint, and showed dimly on the threshold of the shop. And yet, in that strip of doubtful brightness, did there not hang wavering a shadow?

Suddenly, from the street outside, a very jovial gentleman began to beat with a staff on the shop-door, accompanying his blows with shouts and raileries in which the dealer was continually called upon by name. Markheim, smitten into ice, glanced at the dead man. But no! he lay quite still; he was fled away far beyond earshot of these blows and shoutings; he was sunk beneath seas of silence; and his name, which would once have caught his notice above the howling of a storm, had become an empty sound. And presently the jovial gentleman desisted from his knocking and departed.

Here was a broad hint to hurry what remained to be done, to get forth from this accusing neighbourhood, to plunge into a bath of London multitudes, and to reach, on the other side of day, that haven of safety and apparent innocence — his bed. One visitor had come; at any moment another might follow and be more obstinate. To have done the deed, and yet not to reap the profit, would be too abhorrent a failure. The money, that was now Markheim's concern; and as a means to that, the keys.

He glanced over his shoulder at the open door, where the shadow was still lingering and shivering; and with no conscious repugnance of the mind, yet with a tremor of the belly, he drew near the body of his victim. The human character had quite departed. Like a suit half-stuffed with bran, the limbs lay scattered, the trunk doubled, on the floor; and yet the thing repelled him. Although so dingy and inconsiderable to the eye, he feared it might have more significance to the touch.

He took the body by the shoulders, and turned it on its back. It was strangely light and supple, and the limbs, as if they had been broken, fell into the oddest postures. The face was robbed of all expression; but it was as pale as wax, and shockingly smeared with blood about one temple. That was, for Markheim, the one displeasing circumstance. It carried him back, upon the instant, to a certain fair-day in a fishers' village: a gray day, a piping wind, a crowd upon the street, the blare of the brasses, the booming of drums, the nasal voice of a ballad singer; and a boy going to and fro, buried over head in the crowd and divided

between interest and fear, until, coming out upon the chief place of concourse, he beheld a booth and a great screen with pictures, dismally designed, garishly coloured: Brownrigg with her apprentice; the Mannings with their murdered guest; Weare in the death-grip of Thurtell; and a score besides of famous crimes.

The thing was as clear as an illusion; he was once again that little boy; he was looking once again, and with the same sense of physical revolt, at these vile pictures; he was still stunned by the thumping of the drums. A bar of that day's music returned upon his memory; and at that, for the first time, a qualm came over him, a breath of nausea, a sudden weakness of the joints, which he must instantly resist and conquer.

He judged it more prudent to confront than to flee from these considerations; looking the more hardily in the dead face, bending his mind to realise the nature and greatness of his crime. So little a while ago that face had moved with every change of sentiment, that pale mouth had spoken, that body had been on fire with governable energies; and now, and by his act, that piece of life had been arrested, as the horologist, with interjected finger, arrests the beating of the clock. So he reasoned in vain; he could rise to no more remorseful consciousness; the same heart which had shuddered before the painted effigies of crime, looked on its reality unmoved. At best, he felt a gleam of pity for one who had been endowed in vain with all those faculties that can make the world a garden of enchantment, one who had never lived and who was now dead. But of penitence, no, not a tremor.

With that, shaking himself clear of these considerations, he found the keys and advanced towards the open door of the shop. Outside, it had begun to rain smartly; and the sound of the shower upon the roof had banished silence. Like some dripping cavern, the chambers of the house were haunted by an incessant echoing, which filled the ear and mingled with the ticking of the clocks. And, as Markheim approached the door, he seemed to hear, in answer to his own cautious tread, the steps of another

foot withdrawing up the stair. The shadow still palpitated loosely on the threshold. He threw a ton's weight of resolve upon his muscles, and drew back the door.

The faint, foggy daylight glimmered dimly on the bare floor and stairs; on the bright suit of armour posted, halberd in hand, upon the landing; and on the dark wood-carvings, and framed pictures that hung against the yellow panels of the wainscot. So loud was the beating of the rain through all the house that, in Markheim's ears, it began to be distinguished into many different sounds. Footsteps and sighs, the tread of regiments marching in the distance, the chink of money in the counting, and the creaking of doors held stealthily ajar, appeared to mingle with the patter of the drops upon the cupola and the gushing of the water in the pipes.

The sense that he was not alone grew upon him to the verge of madness. On every side he was haunted and begirt by presences. He heard them moving in the upper chambers; from the shop, he heard the dead man getting to his legs; and as he began with a great effort to mount the stairs, feet fled quietly before him and followed stealthily behind. If he were but deaf, he thought, how tranquilly he would possess his soul! And then again, and hearkening with ever fresh attention, he blessed himself for that unresting sense which held the outposts and stood a trusty sentinel upon his life. His head turned continually on his neck; his eyes, which seemed starting from their orbits, scouted on every side, and on every side were half-rewarded as with the tail of something nameless vanishing. The four-and-twenty steps to the first floor were four-and-twenty agonies.

On that first story, the doors stood ajar, three of them like three ambushes, shaking his nerves like the throats of cannon. He could never again, he felt, be sufficiently immured and fortified from men's observing eyes; he longed to be home, girt in by walls, buried among bedclothes, and invisible to all but God. And at that thought he wondered a little, recollecting tales of other murderers and the fear they were said to entertain of heavenly avengers. It was not so, at least, with him. He feared the laws of nature, lest, in their callous and immutable proce-

ture, they should preserve some damning evidence of his crime. He feared tenfold more, with a slavish, superstitious terror, some scission in the continuity of man's experience, some wilful illegality of nature. He played a game of skill, depending on the rules, calculating consequence from cause; and what if nature, as the defeated tyrant overthrew the chessboard, should break the mould of their succession?

The like had befallen Napoleon (so writers said) when the winter changed the time of its appearance. The like might befall Markheim: the solid walls might become transparent and reveal his doings like those of bees in a glass hive; the stout planks might yield under his foot like quicksands and detain him in their clutch; ay, and there were soberer accidents that might destroy him: if, for instance, the house should fall and imprison him beside the body of his victim; or the house next door should fly on fire, and the firemen invade him from all sides. These things he feared; and, in a sense, these things might be called the hands of God reached forth against sin. But about God Himself he was at ease; his act was doubtless exceptional, but so were his excuses, which God knew; it was there, and not among men, that he felt sure of justice.

When he had got safe into the drawing-room, and shut the door behind him, he was aware of a respite from alarms. The room was quite dismantled, uncarpeted besides, and strewn with packing cases and incongruous furniture; several great pier-glasses, in which he beheld himself at various angles, like an actor on a stage; many pictures, framed and unframed, standing, with their faces to the wall, a fine Sheraton sideboard, a cabinet of marquetry, and a great old bed, with tapestry hangings. The windows opened to the floors; but by great good fortune the lower part of the shutters had been closed, and this concealed him from the neighbours. Here, then, Markheim drew in a packing case before the cabinet, and began to search among the keys.

It was a long business, for there were many; and it was irksome, besides; for, after all there might be nothing in the cabinet, and time was on the wing. But the closeness of the occupa-

tion sobered him. With the tail of his eye he saw the door — even glanced at it from time to time directly, like a besieged commander pleased to verify the good estate of his defences. But in truth he was at peace. The rain falling in the street sounded natural and pleasant. Presently, on the other side, the notes of a piano were wakened to the music of a hymn, and the voices of many children took up the air and words. How stately, how comfortable was the melody! How fresh the youthful voices!

Markheim gave ear to it smilingly, as he sorted out the keys; and his mind was thronged with answerable ideas and images; church-going children and the pealing of the high organ; children afield, bathers by the brookside, ramblers on the brambly common, kite-flyers in the windy and cloud-navigated sky; and then, at another cadence of the hymn, back again to church, and the somnolence of summer Sundays, and the high genteel voice of the parson (which he smiled a little to recall) and the painted Jacobean tombs, and the dim lettering of the Ten Commandments in the chancel.

And as he sat thus, at once busy and absent, he was startled to his feet. A flash of ice, a flash of fire, a bursting gush of blood, went over him, and then he stood transfixed and thrilling. A step mounted the stair slowly and steadily and presently a hand was laid upon the knob, and the lock clicked, and the door opened.

Fear held Markheim in a vice. What to expect he knew not, whether the dead man walking, or the official ministers of human justice, or some chance witness blindly stumbling in to consign him to the gallows. But when a face thrust into the aperture, glanced round the room, looked at him, nodded and smiled as if in friendly recognition, and then withdrew again, and the door closed behind it, his fear broke loose from his control in a hoarse cry. At the sound of this the visitant returned.

“Did you call me?” he asked pleasantly, and with that he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Markheim stood and gazed at him with all his eyes. Perhaps there was a film upon his sight, but the outlines of the newcomer seemed to change and waver like those of the idols in the waver-

ing candlelight of the shop; and at times he thought he knew him; and at times he thought he bore a likeness to himself; and always, like a lump of living terror, there lay in his bosom the conviction that this thing was not of the earth and not of God.

And yet the creature had a strange air of the commonplace, as he stood looking on Markheim with a smile; and when he added: "You are looking for the money, I believe?" it was in the tones of everyday politeness.

Markheim made no answer.

"I should warn you," resumed the other, "that the maid has left her sweetheart earlier than usual and will soon be here. If Mr. Markheim be found in this house, I need not describe to him the consequences."

"You know me?" cried the murderer.

The visitor smiled. "You have long been a favourite of mine," he said; "and I have long observed and often sought to help you."

"What are you?" cried Markheim; "the devil?"

"What I may be," returned the other, "cannot affect the service I propose to render you."

"It can," cried Markheim; "it does! Be helped by you? No, never; not by you! You do not know me yet; thank God, you do not know me!"

"I know you," replied the visitant, with a sort of kind severity or rather firmness. "I know you to the soul."

"Know me!" cried Markheim. "Who can do so? My life is but a travesty and slander on myself. I have lived to belie my nature. All men do, all men are better than this disguise that grows about and stifles them. You see each dragged away by life, like one whom bravos have seized and muffled in a cloak. If they had their own control — if you could see their faces, they would be altogether different, they would shine out for heroes and saints! I am worse than most; myself is more overlaid; my excuse is known to men and God. But, had I the time, I could disclose myself."

"To me?" inquired the visitant.

"To you before all," returned the murderer. "I supposed

you were intelligent. I thought — since you exist — you could prove a reader of the heart. And yet you would propose to judge me by my acts! Think of it; my acts! I was born and I have lived in a land of giants; giants have dragged me by the wrists since I was born out of my mother — the giants of circumstance. And you would judge me by my acts! But can you not look within? Can you not understand that evil is hateful to me? Can you not see within me the clear writing of conscience, never blurred by any wilful sophistry, although too often disregarded? Can you not read me for a thing that surely must be common as humanity — the unwilling sinner?"

"All this is very feelingly expressed," was the reply, "but it regards me not. These points of consistency are beyond my province, and I care not in the least by what compulsion you may have been dragged away, so as you are but carried in the right direction. But time flies; the servant delays, looking in the faces of the crowd and at the pictures on the hoardings, but still she keeps moving nearer; and remember, it is as if the gallows itself was striding towards you through the Christmas streets! Shall I help you; I, who know all? Shall I tell you where to find the money?"

"For what price?" asked Markheim.

"I offer you the service for a Christmas gift," returned the other.

Markheim could not refrain from smiling with a kind of bitter triumph. "No," said he, "I will take nothing at your hands; if I were dying of thirst, and it was your hand that put the pitcher to my lips, I should find the courage to refuse. It may be credulous, but I will do nothing to commit myself to evil."

"I have no objection to a deathbed repentance," observed the visitant.

"Because you disbelieve their efficacy!" Markheim cried.

"I do not say so," returned the other; "but I look on these things from a different side, and when the life is done my interest falls. The man has lived to serve me, to spread black looks under colour of religion, or to sow tares in the wheatfield, as you do, in a course of weak compliance with desire. Now that he

draws so near to his deliverance, he can add but one act of service — to repent, to die smiling, and thus to build up in confidence and hope the more timorous of my surviving followers. I am not so hard a master. Try me. Accept my help. Please yourself in life as you have done hitherto; please yourself more amply, spread your elbows at the board; and when the night begins to fall and the curtains to be drawn, I tell you, for your greater comfort, that you will find it even easy to compound your quarrel with your conscience, and to make a truckling peace with God. I came but now from such a deathbed, and the room was full of sincere mourners, listening to the man's last words; and when I looked into that face, which had been set as a flint against mercy, I found it smiling with hope."

"And do you, then, suppose me such a creature?" asked Markheim. "Do you think I have no more generous aspirations than to sin, and sin, and sin, and, at the last, sneak into heaven? My heart rises at the thought. Is this, then, your experience of mankind? Or is it because you find me with red hands that you presume such baseness? And is this crime of murder indeed so impious as to dry up the very springs of good?"

"Murder is to me no special category," replied the other. "All sins are murder, even as all life is war. I behold your race, like starving mariners on a raft, plucking crusts out of the hands of famine and feeding on each other's lives. I follow sins beyond the moment of their acting; I find in all that the last consequence is death; and to my eyes, the pretty maid who thwarts her mother with such taking graces on a question of a ball, drips no less visibly with human gore than such a murderer as yourself. Do I say that I follow sins? I follow virtues also; they differ not by the thickness of a nail, they are both scythes for the reaping angel of Death. Evil, for which I live, consists not in action but in character. The bad man is dear to me; not the bad act, whose fruits, if we could follow them far enough down the hurtling cataract of the ages, might yet be found more blessed than those of the rarest virtues. And it is not because you have killed a dealer, but because you are Markheim, that I offer to forward your escape."

"I will lay my heart open to you," answered Markheim. "This crime on which you find me is my last. On my way to it I have learned many lessons; itself is a lesson, a momentous lesson. Hitherto I have been driven with revolt to what I would not; I was a bond-slave to poverty, driven and scourged. There are robust virtues that can stand in these temptations; mine are not so: I had a thirst of pleasure. But to-day, and out of this deed, I pluck both warning and riches — both the power and a fresh resolve to be myself. I become in all things a free actor in the world; I begin to see myself all changed, hands the agents of good, this heart at peace. Something comes over me out of the past; something of what I have dreamed on Sabbath evenings to the sound of the church organ, of what I forecast when I shed tears over noble books, or talked, an innocent child, with my mother. There lies my life; I have wandered a few years, but now I see once more my city of destination."

"You are to use this money on the Stock Exchange, I think?" remarked the visitor; "and there, if I mistake not, you have already lost some thousands?"

"Ah," said Markheim, "but this time I have a sure thing."

"This time, again, you will lose," replied the visitor quietly.

"Ah, but I keep back the half!" cried Markheim.

"That also you will lose," said the other.

The sweat started upon Markheim's brow. "Well, then, what matter?" he exclaimed. "Say it be lost, say I am plunged again in poverty, shall one part of me, and that the worst, continue until the end to override the better? Evil and good run strong in me, haling me both ways. I do not love the one thing, I love all. I can conceive great deeds, renunciations, martyrdoms; and though I be fallen to such a crime as murder, pity is no stranger to my thoughts. I pity the poor; who knows their trials better than myself? I pity and help them; I prize love, I love honest laughter; there is no good thing nor true thing on earth but I love it from my heart. And are my vices only to direct my life, and my virtues without effect, like some passive lumber of the mind? Not so; good, also, is a spring of acts."

But the visitant raised his finger. "For six-and-thirty years

that you have been in this world," said he, "through many changes of fortune and varieties of humour, I have watched you steadily fall. Fifteen years ago you would have started at a theft. Three years back you would have blenched at the name of murder. Is there any crime, is there any cruelty or meanness, from which you still recoil? — five years from now I shall detect you in the fact! Downward, downward, lies your way; nor can anything but death avail to stop you."

"It is true," Markheim said huskily, "I have in some degree complied with evil. But it is so with all; the very saints, in the mere exercise of living, grow less dainty, and take on the tone of their surroundings."

"I will propound to you one simple question," said the other; "and as you answer, I shall read to you your moral horoscope. You have grown in many things more lax; possibly you do right to be so; and at any account, it is the same with all men. But granting that, are you in any one particular, however trifling, more difficult to please with your own conduct, or do you go in all things with a looser rein?"

"In any one?" repeated Markheim, with an anguish of consideration. "No," he added, with despair, "in none! I have gone down in all."

"Then," said the visitor, "content yourself with what you are, for you will never change; and the words of your part on this stage are irrevocably written down."

Markheim stood for a long while silent, and indeed it was the visitor who first broke the silence. "That being so," he said, "shall I show you the money?"

"And grace?" cried Markheim.

"Have you not tried it?" returned the other. "Two or three years ago did I not see you on the platform of revival meetings, and was not your voice the loudest in the hymn?"

"It is true," said Markheim; "and I see clearly what remains for me by way of duty. I thank you for these lessons from my soul; my eyes are opened, and I behold myself at last for what I am."

At this moment, the sharp note of the door-bell rang

through the house; and the visitant, as though this were some concerted signal for which he had been waiting, changed at once in his demeanour.

"The maid!" he cried. "She has returned, as I forewarned you, and there is now before you one more difficult passage. Her master, you must say, is ill; you must let her in, with an assured but rather serious countenance — no smiles, no over-acting, and I promise you success! Once the girl within, and the door closed, the same dexterity that has already rid you of the dealer will relieve you of this last danger in your path. Thenceforward you have the whole evening — the whole night, if needful — to ransack the treasures of the house and to make good your safety. This is help that comes to you with the mask of danger. Up!" he cried; "up, friend; your life hangs trembling in the scales: up, and act!"

Markheim steadily regarded his counsellor. "If I be condemned to evil acts," he said, "there is still one door of freedom open — I can cease from action. If my life be an ill thing, I can lay it down. Though I be, as you say truly, at the beck of every small temptation, I can yet, by one decisive gesture, place myself beyond the reach of all. My love of good is damned to barrenness; it may, and let it be! But I have still my hatred of evil; and from that, to your galling disappointment, you shall see that I can draw both energy and courage."

The features of the visitor began to undergo a wonderful and lovely change: they brightened and softened with a tender triumph, and, even as they brightened, faded and dislimned. But Markheim did not pause to watch or understand the transformation. He opened the door and went downstairs very slowly, thinking to himself. His past went soberly before him; he beheld it as it was, ugly and strenuous like a dream, random as chance-medley — a scene of defeat. Life, as he thus reviewed it, tempted him no longer; but on the farther side he perceived a quiet haven for his bark.

He paused in the passage, and looked into the shop, where the candle still burned by the dead body. It was strangely silent. Thoughts of the dealer swarmed into his mind, as he stood gaz-

ing. And then the bell once more broke out into impatient clamour.

He confronted the maid upon the threshold with something like a smile.

"You had better go for the police," said he. "I have killed your master."

*William
Butler
Yeats*

(1865–1939)

Slightly more than a century has passed since William Butler Yeats was born, and although he devoted nearly sixty years of his life to the most intense and concentrated creativity, the depth and scope of his literary accomplishments, and especially of his literary influence, in drama and essays as well as in poetry, are just beginning to be fully realized.

It has been written that Yeats “fell in love with Ireland and with literature, and the love affair lasted his whole life.” The “love affair” had three clearly divisible periods: first, there was the “Celtic twilight” of mysticism and the occult — “embroideries”; second (after he and Lady Gregory founded the Irish Academy and the Irish Literary Theatre, which became the Abbey Theatre), the “Celtic revival” — a period of writing and producing plays in which mysticism was replaced by reality; and third, another “Celtic revival” — the period which resurrected mysticism (always at least dormant in Yeats); and when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923, in his late fifties, his work was at its peak of literary importance in his own lifetime — taut, sharp, objective, meaningful, austere, intellectual, uncompromising, and most of all, beautiful. *The New Republic*,

on Yeats's death at the age of seventy-three, said that "he died like Shelley at the height of his powers and with half his work unwritten."

Yeats's work — the half he had written — was "so varied and so developed" that critics tend to choose different titles to represent the poet's "best." For the Catalogue based on the extraordinary exhibition of English Poetry in 1947, John Hayward listed *Mosada* (1886) — probably because of its historical importance and extreme rarity, since this was Yeats's first published work and so rare that even the British Museum had no copy; *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889); and *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems* (1932). Cyril Connolly in his *The Modern Movement* selected *Responsibilities* (1914), *Later Poems* (1922), *The Tower* (1927), and *The Winding Stair* (1929); other critics have still other choices, depending perhaps on which period of Yeats's work the critic is most susceptible to.

It has also been written that Yeats's prose is "as memorable as his verse, and interprets it." Here is an early short story by Yeats which takes place in County Sligo where the poet spent much of his childhood and for which, when he was away from Ireland, he was always homesick. It is a strange tale of a strange crime, and its mystery will haunt you . . .

THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE OUTCAST

A man, with thin brown hair and a pale face, half ran, half walked, along the road that wound from the south to the town of Sligo. Many called him Cumhal, the son of Cormac, and many called him the Swift, Wild Horse; and he was a

gleeman, and he wore a short parti-coloured doublet, and had pointed shoes, and a bulging wallet. Also he was of the blood of the Ernaans, and his birth-place was the Field of Gold; but his eating and sleeping places were the four provinces of Eri, and his abiding place was not upon the ridge of the earth.

His eyes strayed from the Abbey tower of the White Friars and the town battlements to a row of crosses which stood out against the sky upon a hill a little to the eastward of the town, and he clenched his fist, and shook it at the crosses. He knew they were not empty, for the birds were fluttering about them; and he thought how, as like as not, just such another vagabond as himself was hanged on one of them; and he muttered: "If it were hanging or bowstringing, or stoning or beheading, it would be bad enough. But to have the birds pecking your eyes and the wolves eating your feet! I would that the red wind of the Druids had withered in his cradle the soldier of Dathi, who brought the tree of death out of barbarous lands, or that the lightning, when it smote Dathi at the foot of the mountain, had smitten him also, or that his grave had been dug by the green-haired and green-toothed merrows deep at the roots of the deep sea."

While he spoke, he shivered from head to foot, and the sweat came out upon his face, and he knew not why, for he had looked upon many crosses. He passed over two hills and under the battlemented gate, and then round by a left-hand way to the door of the Abbey. It was studded with great nails, and when he knocked at it, he roused the lay brother who was the porter, and of him he asked a place in the guest-house. Then the lay brother took a glowing turf on a shovel, and led the way to a big and naked outhouse strewn with very dirty rushes; and lighted a rush-candle fixed between two of the stones of the wall, and set the glowing turf upon the hearth and gave him two unlighted sods and a wisp of straw, and showed him a blanket hanging from a nail, and a shelf with a loaf of bread and a jug of water, and a tub in a far corner.

Then the lay brother left him and went back to his place by

the door. And Cumhal the son of Cormac began to blow upon the glowing turf that he might light the two sods and the wisp of straw; but the sods and the straw would not light, for they were damp. So he took off his pointed shoes, and drew the tub out of the corner with the thought of washing the dust of the highway from his feet; but the water was so dirty that he could not see the bottom. He was very hungry, for he had not eaten all that day; so he did not waste much anger upon the tub, but took up the black loaf, and bit into it, and then spat out the bite, for the bread was hard and mouldy.

Still he did not give way to his anger, for he had not drunken these many hours; having a hope of heath beer or wine at his day's end, he had left the brooks untasted, to make his supper the more delightful. Now he put the jug to his lips, but he flung it from him straightway, for the water was bitter and ill-smelling. Then he gave the jug a kick, so that it broke against the opposite wall, and he took down the blanket to wrap it about him for the night. But no sooner did he touch it than it was alive with skipping fleas.

At this, beside himself with anger, he rushed to the door of the guest-house, but the lay brother, being well accustomed to such outcries, had locked it on the outside; so he emptied the tub and began to beat the door with it, till the lay brother came to the door and asked what ailed him, and why he woke him out of sleep.

"What ails me!" shouted Cumhal; "are not the sods as wet as the sands of the Three Rosses? And are not the fleas in the blanket as many as the waves of the sea and as lively? And is not the bread as hard as the heart of a lay brother who has forgotten God? And is not the water in the jug as bitter and as ill-smelling as his soul? And is not the foot-water the colour that shall be upon him when he has been charred in the Undying Fires?"

The lay brother saw that the lock was fast, and went back to his niche, for he was too sleepy to talk with comfort. And Cumhal went on beating at the door, and presently he heard the lay brother's foot once more, and cried out at him, "O cowardly

and tyrannous race of friars, persecutors of the bard and the gleeman, haters of life and joy! O race that does not draw the sword and tell the truth! O race that melts the bones of the people with cowardice and with deceit!"

"Gleeman," said the lay brother, "I also make rhymes; I make many while I sit in my niche by the door, and I sorrow to hear the bards railing upon the friars. Brother, I would sleep, and therefore I make known to you that it is the head of the monastery, our gracious abbot, who orders all things concerning the lodging of travellers."

"You may sleep," said Cumhal, "I will sing a bard's curse on the abbot." And he set the tub upside down under the window, and stood upon it, and began to sing in a very loud voice. The singing awoke the abbot, so that he sat up in bed and blew a silver whistle until the lay brother came to him.

"I cannot get a wink of sleep with that noise," said the abbot. "What is happening?"

"It is a gleeman," said the lay brother, "who complains of the sods, of the bread, of the water in the jug, of the foot-water, and of the blanket. And now he is singing a bard's curse upon you, O brother abbot, and upon your father and your mother, and your grandfather and your grandmother, and upon all your relations."

"Is he cursing in rhyme?"

"He is cursing in rhyme, and with two assonances in every line of his curse."

The abbot pulled his night-cap off and crumpled it in his hands, and the circular brown patch of hair in the middle of his bald head looked like an island in the midst of a pond, for in Connaught they had not yet abandoned the ancient tonsure for the style then coming into use.

"Unless we do not somewhat," he said, "he will teach his curses to the children in the street, and the girls spinning at the doors, and to the robbers upon Ben Bulbin."

"Shall I go, then," said the other, "and give him dry sods, a fresh loaf, clean water in a jug, clean foot-water, and a new blan-

ket, and make him swear by the blessed Saint Benignus, and by the sun and moon, that no bond be lacking, not to tell his rhymes to the children in the street, and the girls spinning at the doors, and the robbers upon Ben Bulben?"

"Neither our Blessed Patron nor the sun and moon would avail at all," said the abbot; "for to-morrow or the next day the mood to curse would come upon him, or a pride in those rhymes would move him, and he would teach his lines to the children, and the girls, and the robbers. Or else he would tell another of his craft how he fared in the guest-house, and he in his turn would begin to curse, and my name would wither. For learn there is no steadfastness of purpose upon the roads, but only under roofs and between four walls. Therefore I bid you go and awaken Brother Kevin, Brother Dove, Brother Little Wolf, Brother Bald Patrick, Brother Bald Brandon, Brother James, and Brother Peter. And they shall take the man, and bind him with ropes, and dip him in the river that he shall cease to sing. And in the morning, lest this but make him curse the louder, we will crucify him."

"The crosses are all full," said the lay brother.

"Then we must make another cross. If we do not make an end of him another will, for who can eat and sleep in peace while men like him are going about the world? Ill should we stand before blessed Saint Benignus, and sour would be his face when he comes to judge us at the Last Day, were we to spare an enemy of his when we had him under our thumb! Brother, the bards and the gleemen are an evil race, ever cursing and ever stirring up the people, and immoral and immoderate in all things, and heathen in their hearts, always longing after the Son of Lir, and Aengus, and Bridget, and the Dagda, and Dana the Mother, and all the false gods of the old days; always making poems in praise of those kings and queens of the demons, Fin-varagh, whose home is under Cruachmaa, and Red Aodh of Cnocna-Sidhe, and Cleena of the Wave, and Aoibhell of the Grey Rock, and him they call Donn of the Vats of the Sea; and railing against God and Christ and the blessed Saints."

While he was speaking he crossed himself, and when he had finished he drew the night-cap over his ears, to shut out the noise, and closed his eyes, and composed himself to sleep.

The lay brother found Brother Kevin, Brother Dove, Brother Little Wolf, Brother Bald Patrick, Brother Bald Brandon, Brother James, and Brother Peter sitting up in bed, and he made them get up. Then they bound Cumhal, and they dragged him to the river, and they dipped him in it at the place which was afterwards called Buckley's Ford.

"Gleeman," said the lay brother, as they led him back to the guest-house, "why do you ever use the wit which God has given you to make blasphemous and immoral tales and verses? For such is the way of your craft. I have, indeed, many such tales and verses well nigh by rote, and so I know that I speak true! And why do you praise with rhyme those demons, Finvaragh, Red Aodh, Cleena, Aoibhell and Donn? I, too, am a man of great wit and learning, but I ever glorify our gracious abbot, and Benignus our Patron, and the princes of the province. My soul is decent and orderly, but yours is like the wind among the salley gardens. I said what I could for you, being also a man of many thoughts, but who could help such a one as you?"

"Friend," answered the gleeman, "my soul is indeed like the wind, and it blows me to and fro, and up and down, and puts many things into my mind and out of my mind, and therefore am I called the Swift, Wild Horse." And he spoke no more that night, for his teeth were chattering with the cold.

The abbot and the friars came to him in the morning, and bade him get ready to be crucified, and led him out of the guest-house. And while he still stood upon the step a flock of great grass-barnacles passed high above him with clanking cries.

He lifted his arms to them and said, "O great grass-barnacles, tarry a little, and mayhap my soul will travel with you to the waste places of the shore and to the ungovernable sea!"

At the gate a crowd of beggars gathered about them, being come there to beg from any traveller or pilgrim who might have spent the night in the guest-house. The abbot and the friars led the gleeman to a place in the woods at some distance, where

many straight young trees were growing, and they made him cut one down and fashion it to the right length, while the beggars stood round them in a ring, talking and gesticulating. The abbot then bade him cut off another and shorter piece of wood, and nail it upon the first. So there was his cross for him; and they put it upon his shoulder, for his crucifixion was to be on the top of the hill where the others were.

A half-mile on the way he asked them to stop and see him juggle for them; for he knew, he said, all the tricks of Aengus the Subtle-Hearted. The old friars were for pressing on, but the young friars would see him: so he did many wonders for them, even to the drawing of live frogs out of his ears. But after a while they turned on him, and said his tricks were dull and a shade unholy, and set the cross on his shoulders again.

Another half-mile on the way, and he asked them to stop and hear him jest for them, for he knew, he said, all the jests of Conan the Bald, upon whose back a sheep's wool grew. And the young friars, when they had heard his merry tales, again bade him take up his cross, for it ill became them to listen to such follies.

Another half-mile on the way, he asked them to stop and hear him sing the story of White-Breasted Deirdre, and how she endured many sorrows, and how the sons of Usna died to serve her. And the young friars were mad to hear him, but when he had ended they grew angry, and beat him for waking forgotten longings in their hearts. So they set the cross upon his back and hurried him to the hill.

When he was come to the top, they took the cross from him, and began to dig a hole to stand it in, while the beggars gathered round, and talked among themselves.

"I ask a favour before I die," says Cumhal.

"We will grant you no more delays," says the abbot.

"I ask no more delays, for I have drawn the sword, and told the truth, and lived my vision, and am content."

"Would you, then, confess?"

"By sun and moon, not I; I ask but to be let eat the food I carry in my wallet. I carry food in my wallet whenever I go upon

a journey, but I do not taste of it unless I am well-nigh starved. I have not eaten now these two days."

"You may eat, then," says the abbot, and he turned to help the friars dig the hole.

The gleeman took a loaf and some strips of cold fried bacon out of his wallet and laid them upon the ground. "I will give a tithe to the poor," says he, and he cut a tenth part from the loaf and the bacon. "Who among you is the poorest?"

And thereupon was a great clamour, for the beggars began the history of their sorrows and their poverty, and their yellow faces swayed like Gara Lough when the floods have filled it with water from the bogs.

He listened for a little, and, says he, "I am myself the poorest, for I have travelled the bare road, and by the edges of the sea; and the tattered doublet of parti-coloured cloth upon my back and the torn pointed shoes upon my feet have ever irked me, because of the towered city full of noble raiment which was in my heart. And I have been the more alone upon the roads and by the sea because I heard in my heart the rustling of the rose-bordered dress of her who is more subtle than Aengus, the Subtle-Hearted, and more full of the beauty of laughter than Conan the Bald, and more full of the wisdom of tears than White-Breasted Deirdre, and more lovely than a bursting dawn to them that are lost in the darkness. Therefore, I award the tithe to myself; but yet, because I am done with all things, I give it unto you."

So he flung the bread and the strips of bacon among the beggars, and they fought with many cries until the last scrap was eaten. But meanwhile the friars nailed the gleeman to his cross, and set it upright in the hole, and shovelled the earth in at the foot, and trampled it level and hard.

So then they went away, but the beggars stayed on, sitting round the cross. But when the sun was sinking, they also got up to go, for the air was getting chilly. And as soon as they had gone a little way, the wolves, who had been showing themselves on the edge of a neighbouring coppice, came nearer, and the birds wheeled closer and closer.

"Stay, outcasts, yet a little while," the crucified one called in a weak voice to the beggars, "and keep the beasts and the birds from me."

But the beggars were angry because he had called them outcasts, so they threw stones and mud at him, and went their way. Then the wolves gathered at the foot of the cross, and the birds flew lower and lower. And presently the birds lighted all at once upon his head and arms and shoulders, and began to peck at him, and the wolves began to eat his feet.

"Outcasts," he moaned, "have you also turned against the outcast?"

Rudyard Kipling

(1865–1936)

Rudyard Kipling was a superb short-story writer — one of the greatest of all time — but it became fashionable after his early fame and when his popularity had declined to disparage his work, especially his poetry. The so-called “serious” or “highbrow” critics did not (and still do not) think highly of such poems as “Danny Deever,” “Fuzzy-Wuzzy,” “Gunga Din,” and “Mandalay” (from *Barrack-Room Ballads*, 1890), and “Boots” (from *The Five Nations*, 1903); but the people have always judged otherwise — another case of poetic justice. Kipling’s poetry, especially his earlier lusty, boisterous verse, was irresistible to the “average man,” to the “working man” — and still is.

Rudyard Kipling came out of India in 1889 as if he were the dawn coming up like thunder, and all he had to offer the reading public was a positive genius for telling robust stories — *Soldiers Three* (1888), *Many Inventions*, introducing Mowgli (1893), *The Jungle Books* (1894–95), *Captains Courageous* (1897), *Kim* (1901), *Just So Stories* (1902), and so many others. His style was vivid, sonorous, vigorous in its colorful and authentic detail; he could combine wit and whimsy (especially in the stories of children

and animals), and could end a tale just as easily with a gust of humor as with a thrust of horror. He was the first English writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1907, and in the last decades of his lifetime he received many honors and degrees from all over the world . . .

Our selection of a Kipling story is one of the tales about Strickland "of the Police," whom Frank Wadleigh Chandler described in *The Literature of Roguery* (1907) as "a mild Sherlock Holmes." Strickland may be "mild," but the story is decidedly not. Strickland is a detective "to whom unpleasantness arrived as do dinners to ordinary people." This tale of murder has a chilling, haunting atmosphere — a tale that could almost have brought the narrator "to the doors of a lunatic asylum" . . .

THE RETURN OF IMRAY

Imray achieved the impossible. Without warning, for no conceivable motive, in his youth, at the threshold of his career he chose to disappear from the world — which is to say, the little Indian station where he lived.

Upon a day he was alive, well, happy, and in great evidence among the billiard-tables at his Club. Upon a morning, he was not, and no manner of search could make sure where he might be. He had stepped out of his place; he had not appeared at his office at the proper time, and his dog-cart was not upon the public roads. For these reasons, and because he was hampering, in a microscopical degree, the administration of the Indian Empire, that Empire paused for one microscopical moment to make inquiry into the fate of Imray.

Ponds were dragged, wells were plumbed, telegrams were despatched down the lines of railways and to the nearest seaport town — 1200 miles away; but Imray was not at the end of the

drag-ropes nor the telegraph wires. He was gone, and his place knew him no more. Then the work of the great Indian Empire swept forward, because it could not be delayed, and Imray from being a man became a mystery — such a thing as men talk over at their tables in the Club for a month, and then forget utterly. His guns, horses, and carts were sold to the highest bidder. His superior officer wrote an altogether absurd letter to his mother, saying that Imray had unaccountably disappeared, and his bungalow stood empty.

After three or four months of the scorching hot weather had gone by, my friend Strickland, of the Police, saw fit to rent the bungalow from the native landlord. This was before he was engaged to Miss Youghal — an affair which has been described in another place — and while he was pursuing his investigations into native life. His own life was sufficiently peculiar, and men complained of his manners and customs. There was always food in his house, but there were no regular times for meals. He ate, standing up and walking about, whatever he might find at the sideboard, and this is not good for human beings. His domestic equipment was limited to six rifles, three shotguns, five saddles, and a collection of stiff-jointed mahseer-rods, bigger and stronger than the largest salmon-rods. These occupied one-half of his bungalow, and the other half was given up to Strickland and his dog Tietjens — an enormous Rampur slut who devoured daily the rations of two men. She spoke to Strickland in a language of her own; and whenever, walking abroad, she saw things calculated to destroy the peace of Her Majesty the Queen-Empress, she returned to her master and laid information.

Strickland would take steps at once, and the end of his labours was trouble and fine and imprisonment for other people. The natives believed that Tietjens was a familiar spirit, and treated her with the great reverence that is born of hate and fear. One room in the bungalow was set apart for her special use. She owned a bedstead, a blanket, and a drinking-trough, and if anyone came into Strickland's room at night her custom was to knock down the invader and give tongue till someone came with a light. Strickland owed his life to her, when he was on the

Frontier, in search of a local murderer, who came in the grey dawn to send Strickland much farther than the Andaman Islands. Tietjens caught the man as he was crawling into Strickland's tent with a dagger between his teeth; and after his record of iniquity was established in the eyes of the law he was hanged. From that date Tietjens wore a collar of rough silver, and employed a monogram on her night-blanket; and the blanket was of double woven Kashmir cloth, for she was a delicate dog.

Under no circumstances would she be separated from Strickland; and once, when he was ill with fever, made great trouble for the doctors, because she did not know how to help her master and would not allow another creature to attempt aid. Macarnaght, of the Indian Medical Service, beat her over her head with a gun-butt before she could understand that she must give room for those who could give quinine.

A short time after Strickland had taken Imray's bungalow, my business took me through that Station, and naturally, the Club quarters being full, I quartered myself upon Strickland. It was a desirable bungalow, eight-roomed and heavily thatched against any chance of leakage from rain. Under the pitch of the roof ran a ceiling-cloth which looked just as neat as a white-washed ceiling. The landlord had repainted it when Strickland took the bungalow. Unless you knew how Indian bungalows were built you would never have suspected that above the cloth lay the dark three-cornered cavern of the roof, where the beams and the underside of the thatch harboured all manner of rats, bats, ants, and foul things.

Tietjens met me in the verandah with a bay like the boom of the bell of St. Paul's, putting her paws on my shoulder to show she was glad to see me. Strickland had contrived to claw together a sort of meal which he called lunch, and immediately after it was finished went out about his business. I was left alone with Tietjens and my own affairs. The heat of the summer had broken up and turned to the warm damp of the rains. There was no motion in the heated air, but the rain fell like ramrods on the earth, and flung up a blue mist when it splashed back. The bam-

boos, and the custard-apples, the poinsettias, and the mango-trees in the garden stood still while the warm water lashed through them, and the frogs began to sing among the aloe hedges.

A little before the light failed, and when the rain was at its worst, I sat in the back verandah and heard the water roar from the eaves, and scratched myself because I was covered with the thing called prickly-heat. Tietjens came out with me and put her head in my lap and was very sorrowful; so I gave her biscuits when tea was ready, and I took tea in the back verandah on account of the little coolness found there. The rooms of the house were dark behind me. I could smell Strickland's saddlery and the oil on his guns, and I had no desire to sit among these things. My own servant came to me in the twilight, the muslin of his clothes clinging tightly to his drenched body, and told me that a gentleman had called and wished to see someone.

Very much against my will, but only because of the darkness of the rooms, I went into the naked drawing-room, telling my man to bring the lights. There might or might not have been a caller waiting — it seemed to me that I saw a figure by one of the windows — but when the lights came, there was nothing save the spikes of the rain without, and the smell of the drinking earth in my nostrils. I explained to my servant that he was no wiser than he ought to be, and went back to the verandah to talk to Tietjens. She had gone out into the wet, and I could hardly coax her back to me; even with biscuits with sugar tops.

Strickland came home, dripping wet, just before dinner, and the first thing he said was: "Has anyone called?"

I explained, with apologies, that my servant had summoned me into the drawing-room on a false alarm; or that some loafer had tried to call on Strickland, and thinking better of it had fled after giving his name. Strickland ordered dinner, without comment, and since it was a real dinner with a white tablecloth attached, we sat down.

At nine o'clock Strickland wanted to go to bed, and I was tired too. Tietjens, who had been lying underneath the table, rose up, and swung into the least exposed verandah as soon as

her master moved to his own room, which was next to the stately chamber set apart for Tietjens. If a mere wife had wished to sleep out of doors in that pelting rain it would not have mattered; but Tietjens was a dog, and therefore the better animal.

I looked at Strickland, expecting to see him flay her with a whip. He smiled queerly, as a man would smile after telling some unpleasant domestic tragedy. "She has done this ever since I moved in here," said he. "Let her go."

The dog was Strickland's dog, so I said nothing, but I felt all that Strickland felt in being thus made light of. Tietjens encamped outside my bedroom window, and storm after storm came up, thundered on the thatch, and died away. The lightning spattered the sky as a thrown egg spatters a barn-door, but the light was pale blue, not yellow; and, looking through my split bamboo blinds, I could see the great dog standing, not sleeping, in the verandah, the hackles alift on her back and her feet anchored as tensely as the drawn wire-rope of a suspension bridge.

In the very short pauses of the thunder I tried to sleep, but it seemed that someone wanted me very urgently. He, whoever he was, was trying to call me by name, but his voice was no more than a husky whisper. The thunder ceased, and Tietjens went into the garden and howled at the low moon. Somebody tried to open my door, walked about and about through the house and stood breathing heavily in the verandahs, and just when I was falling asleep I fancied that I heard a wild hammering and clamouring above my head or on the door.

I ran into Strickland's room and asked him whether he was ill, and had been calling for me. He was lying on his bed half dressed, a pipe in his mouth. "I thought you'd come," he said. "Have I been walking round the house recently?"

I explained that he had been tramping in the dining-room and the smoking-room and two or three other places, and he laughed and told me to go back to bed. I went back to bed and slept till the morning, but through all my mixed dreams I was sure I was doing someone an injustice in not attending to his wants. What those wants were I could not tell; but a fluttering,

whispering, bolt-fumbling, lurking, loitering Someone was reproaching me for my slackness, and, half awake, I heard the howling of Tietjens in the garden and the threshing of the rain.

I lived in that house for two days. Strickland went to his office daily, leaving me alone for eight or ten hours with Tietjens for my only companion. As long as the full light lasted I was comfortable, and so was Tietjens; but in the twilight she and I moved into the back verandah and cuddled each other for company. We were alone in the house, but nonetheless it was much too fully occupied by a tenant with whom I did not wish to interfere. I never saw him, but I could see the curtains between the rooms quivering where he had just passed through; I could hear the chairs creaking as the bamboos sprung under a weight that had just quitted them; and I could feel when I went to get a book from the dining-room that somebody was waiting in the shadows of the front verandah till I should have gone away.

Tietjens made the twilight more interesting by glaring into the darkened rooms with every hair erect, and following the motions of something that I could not see. She never entered the rooms, but her eyes moved interestedly: that was quite sufficient. Only when my servant came to trim the lamps and make all light and habitable she would come in with me and spend her time sitting on her haunches, watching an invisible extra man as he moved about behind my shoulder. Dogs are cheerful companions.

I explained to Strickland, gently as might be, that I would go over to the Club and find for myself quarters there. I admired his hospitality, was pleased with his guns and rods, but I did not much care for his house and its atmosphere. He heard me out to the end, and then smiled very wearily, but without contempt, for he is a man who understands things.

"Stay on," he said, "and see what this thing means. All you have talked about I have known since I took the bungalow. Stay on and wait. Tietjens has left me. Are you going too?"

I had seen him through one little affair, connected with a heathen idol, that had brought me to the doors of a lunatic asy-

lum, and I had no desire to help him through further experiences. He was a man to whom unpleasantnesses arrived as do dinners to ordinary people.

Therefore I explained more clearly than ever that I liked him immensely, and would be happy to see him in the daytime; but that I did not care to sleep under his roof. This was after dinner, when Tietjens had gone out to lie in the verandah.

"'Pon my soul, I don't wonder," said Strickland, with his eyes on the ceiling-cloth. "Look at that!"

The tails of two brown snakes were hanging between the cloth and the cornice of the wall. They threw long shadows in the lamplight.

"If you are afraid of snakes, of course —" said Strickland.

I hate and fear snakes, because if you look into the eyes of any snake you will see that it knows all and more of the mystery of man's fall, and that it feels all the contempt that the Devil felt when Adam was evicted from Eden. Besides which its bite is generally fatal, and it twists up trouser legs.

"You ought to get your thatch overhauled," I said. "Give me a mahseer-rod, and we'll poke 'em down."

"They'll hide among the roof-beams," said Strickland. "I can't stand snakes overhead. I'm going up into the roof. If I shake 'em down, stand by with a cleaning-rod and break their backs."

I was not anxious to assist Strickland in his work, but I took the cleaning-rod and waited in the dining-room while Strickland brought a gardener's ladder from the verandah, and set it against the side of the room. The snake-tails drew themselves up and disappeared. We could hear the dry rushing scuttle of long bodies running over the baggy ceiling-cloth. Strickland took a lamp with him, while I tried to make clear to him the danger of hunting roof-snakes between a ceiling-cloth and a thatch, apart from the deterioration of property caused by ripping out ceiling-cloths.

"Nonsensel" said Strickland. "They're sure to hide near the walls by the cloth. The bricks are too cold for 'em, and the heat

of the room is just what they like." He put his hand to the corner of the stuff and ripped it from the cornice. It gave with a great sound of tearing, and Strickland put his head through the opening into the dark of the angle of the roof-beams. I set my teeth and lifted the cleaning-rod.

"H'm!" said Strickland, and his voice rolled and rumbled in the roof. "There's room for another set of rooms up here, and, by Jove, someone is occupying 'em!"

"Snakes?" I said from below.

"No. It's a buffalo. Hand me up the two last joints of a mahseer-rod, and I'll prod it. It's lying on the main roof-beam."

I handed up the rod.

"What a nest for owls and serpents! No wonder the snakes live here," said Strickland, climbing farther into the roof. I could see his elbow thrusting with the rod. "Come out of that, whatever you are! Heads below there! It's falling."

I saw the ceiling-cloth nearly in the centre of the room bag with a shape that was pressing it downwards and downwards towards the lighted lamp on the table. I snatched the lamp out of danger and stood back. Then the cloth ripped out from the walls, tore, split, swayed, and shot down upon the table something that I dared not look at, till Strickland had slid down the ladder and was standing by my side.

He did not say much, being a man of few words; but he picked up the loose end of the tablecloth and threw it over the remnants on the table.

"It strikes me," said he, putting down the lamp, "our friend Imray has come back. Oh, you would, would you?"

There was a movement under the cloth, and a little snake wriggled out, to be back-broken by the butt of the mahseer-rod. I was sufficiently sick to make no remarks worth recording.

Strickland meditated, and helped himself to drinks. The arrangement under the cloth made no more signs of life.

"Is it Imray?" I said.

Strickland turned back the cloth for a moment, and looked.

"It is Imray," he said; "and his throat is cut from ear to ear."

Then we spoke, both together and to ourselves: "That's why he whispered about the house."

Tietjens, in the garden, began to bay furiously. A little later her great nose heaved open the dining-room door.

She sniffed and was still. The tattered ceiling-cloth hung down almost to the level of the table, and there was hardly room to move away from the discovery.

Tietjens came in and sat down; her teeth bared under her lip and her forepaws planted. She looked at Strickland.

"It's a bad business, old lady," said he. "Men don't climb up into the roofs of their bungalows to die, and they don't fasten up the ceiling-cloth behind 'em. Let's think it out."

"Let's think it out somewhere else," I said.

"Excellent idea! Turn the lamps out. We'll get into my room."

I did not turn the lamps out. I went into Strickland's room first, and allowed him to make the darkness. Then he followed me, and we lit tobacco and thought. Strickland thought. I smoked furiously, because I was afraid.

"Imray is back," said Strickland. "The question is — who killed Imray? Don't talk, I've a notion of my own. When I took this bungalow I took over most of Imray's servants. Imray was guileless and inoffensive, wasn't he?"

I agreed; though the heap under the cloth had looked neither one thing nor the other.

"If I call in all the servants they will stand fast in a crowd and lie like Aryans. What do you suggest?"

"Call 'em in one by one," I said.

"They'll run away and give the news to all their fellows," said Strickland. "We must segregate 'em. Do you suppose your servant knows anything about it?"

"He may, for aught I know; but I don't think it's likely. He has only been here two or three days," I answered. "What's your notion?"

"I can't quite tell. How the dickens did the man get the wrong side of the ceiling-cloth?"

There was a heavy coughing outside Strickland's bedroom door. This showed that Bahadur Khan, his body-servant, had waked from sleep and wished to put Strickland to bed.

"Come in," said Strickland. "It's a very warm night, isn't it?"

Bahadur Khan, a great, green-turbaned, six-foot Mahomedan, said that it was a very warm night; but that there was more rain pending, which, by his Honour's favour, would bring relief to the country.

"It will be so, if God pleases," said Strickland, tugging off his boots. "It is in my mind, Bahadur Khan, that I have worked thee remorselessly for many days — ever since that time when thou first camest into my service. What time was that?"

"Has the Heaven-born forgotten? It was when Imray Sahib went secretly to Europe without warning given; and I — even I — came into the honoured service of the protector of the poor."

"And Imray Sahib went to Europe?"

"It is so said among those who were his servants."

"And thou wilt take service with him when he returns?"

"Assuredly, Sahib. He was a good master, and cherished his dependents."

"That is true. I am very tired, but I go buck-shooting to-morrow. Give me the little sharp rifle that I use for black-buck; it is in the case yonder."

The man stooped over the case; handed barrels, stock, and fore-end to Strickland, who fitted all together, yawning dolefully. Then he reached down to the gun-case, took a solid-drawn cartridge, and slipped it into the breech of the .360 Express.

"And Imray Sahib has gone to Europe secretly! That is very strange, Bahadur Khan, is it not?"

"What do I know of the ways of the white man, Heaven-born?"

"Very little, truly. But thou shalt know more anon. It has reached me that Imray Sahib has returned from his so long journeys, and that even now he lies in the next room, waiting his servant."

"Sahib!"

The lamplight slid along the barrels of the rifle as they levelled themselves at Bahadur Khan's broad breast.

"Go and look!" said Strickland. "Take a lamp. Thy master is tired, and he waits thee. Go!"

The man picked up a lamp, and went into the dining-room, Strickland following, and almost pushing him with the muzzle of the rifle. He looked for a moment at the black depths behind the ceiling-cloth; at the writhing snake underfoot; and last, a grey glaze settling on his face, at the thing under the tablecloth.

"Hast thou seen?" said Strickland after a pause.

"I have seen. I am clay in the white man's hands. What does the Presence do?"

"Hang thee within the month. What else?"

"For killing him? Nay, Sahib, consider. Walking among us, his servants, he cast his eyes upon my child, who was four years old. Him he bewitched, and in ten days he died of the fever — my child!"

"What said Imray Sahib?"

"He said he was a handsome child, and patted him on the head; wherefore my child died. Wherefore I killed Imray Sahib in the twilight, when he had come back from office, and was sleeping. Wherefore I dragged him up into the roof-beams and made all fast behind him. The Heaven-born knows all things. I am the servant of the Heaven-born."

Strickland looked at me above the rifle, and said, in the vernacular, "Thou art witness to this saying? He has killed."

Bahadur Khan stood ashen grey in the light of the one lamp. The need for justification came upon him very swiftly. "I am trapped," he said, "but the offence was that man's. He cast an evil eye upon my child, and I killed and hid him. Only such as are served by devils," he glared at Tietjens, crouched stolidly before him, "only such could know what I did."

"It was clever. But thou shouldst have lashed him to the beam with a rope. Now, thou thyself wilt hang by a rope. Orderly!"

A drowsy policeman answered Strickland's call. He was followed by another, and Tietjens sat wondrous still.

"Take him to the police-station," said Strickland. "There is a case toward."

"Do I hang, then?" said Bahadur Khan, making no attempt to escape, and keeping his eyes on the ground.

"If the sun shines or the water runs — yes!" said Strickland.

Bahadur Khan stepped back one long pace, quivered, and stood still. The two policemen waited further orders.

"Go!" said Strickland.

"Nay; but I go very swiftly," said Bahadur Khan. "Look! I am even now a dead man."

He lifted his foot, and to the little toe there clung the head of the half-killed snake, firm fixed in the agony of death.

"I come of land-holding stock," said Bahadur Khan, rocking where he stood. "It were a disgrace to me to go to the public scaffold: therefore I take this way. Be it remembered that the Sahib's shirts are correctly enumerated, and that there is an extra piece of soap in his washbasin. My child was bewitched, and I slew the wizard. Why should you seek to slay me with the rope? My honour is saved, and — and — I die."

At the end of an hour he died, as they die who are bitten by the little brown *karait*, and the policemen bore him and the thing under the tablecloth to their appointed places.

"This," said Strickland, very calmly, as he climbed into bed, "is called the Nineteenth Century. Did you hear what that man said?"

"I heard," I answered. "Imray made a mistake."

"Simply and solely through not knowing the nature of the Oriental, and the coincidence of a little seasonal fever. Bahadur Khan had been with him for four years."

I shuddered. My own servant had been with me for exactly that length of time. When I went over to my own room I found my man waiting, impassive as the copper head on a penny, to pull off my boots.

"What has befallen Bahadur Khan?" said I.

"He was bitten by a snake and died. The rest the Sahib knows," was the answer.

"And how much of this matter hast thou known?"

“As much as might be gathered from One coming in in the twilight to seek satisfaction. Gently, Sahib. Let me pull off those boots.”

I had just settled to the sleep of exhaustion when I heard Strickland shouting from his side of the house —

“Tietjens has come back to her place!”

And so she had. The great deerhound was couched stately on her own bedstead on her own blanket, while, in the next room, the idle, empty, ceiling-cloth waggled as it trailed on the table.

G. K.
Chesterton

(1874–1936)

Gilbert Keith Chesterton once wrote a book of short stories titled *Tales of the Long Bow* — and, indeed, his creative talent was a long bow, with many strings. He wrote essays, criticism, travel books, novels, short stories, poetry, plays, polemical works, biographies, and history, and his brilliance of expression shone in everything he wrote. Perhaps, to his astonishment and dismay, he became most celebrated for his detective stories, and here too his bow had many strings. First and foremost, of course, was his creation of the incomparable Father Brown; but there were also the omniscient Horne Fisher, the poetic Gabriel Gale, the paradoxical Mr. Pond, the hypocritical Dr. Hyde, the transcendental Mr. Traill, and the foxy Philip Swayne.

To represent in this anthology the poet who wrote *The Wild Knight and Other Poems* (1900), *The Ballad of the White Horse* (1911), and his most stirring poem, “Le-panto,” in *Poems* (1915), only a Father Brown detective story would do. The question was which one — for as in the case of Poe, we were once again embarrassed by riches. Surely the famous Father Brown stories are too famous — they have been anthologized so often — such favorite tales

as "The Invisible Man," "The Honour of Israel Gow," "The Hammer of God," "The Oracle of the Dog," "The Blue Cross," "The Queer Feet," "The Secret Garden," and "The Man in the Passage." And yet we needed a story that fully delineated the spirit of the meek, modest, moon-faced, highly intuitive, almost metaphysical, and spunky little priest — just as the very titles of the five Father Brown volumes (alas, no more!) have fully characterized Mr. Chesterton's unorthodox investigator of crime — innocence, wisdom, incredulity, secretiveness, and his scandalous behavior as an amateur detective.

We finally chose "The Blast of the Book" as illustrative of Chesterton's fantastic ingenuity of plot, his charming and zestful style, his dazzling counterpoint of the supernatural and the natural — indeed, in a purely critical sense, "The Blast of the Book" might be called the "perfect" Father Brown story. It is the queer tale of the disappearance of Five Men — a tale full of psychic phenomena, of magic and apparitions. It reminds us of what Chesterton, with his rapier wit, once wrote about poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning: "She gives the reader the impression that she never declined a fancy." This is a poetic (and prose) condition that Chesterton had deep personal knowledge of . . .

THE BLAST OF THE BOOK

Professor Openshaw always lost his temper, with a loud bang, if anybody called him a Spiritualist; or a believer in Spiritualism. This, however, did not exhaust his explosive elements; for he also lost his temper if anybody called him a disbeliever in Spiritualism. It was his pride to have given his whole life to investigating Psychic Phenomena; it was also his pride never to have given a hint of whether he thought they were re-

ally psychic or merely phenomenal. He enjoyed nothing so much as to sit in a circle of devout Spiritualists and give devastating descriptions of how he had exposed medium after medium and detected fraud after fraud: for indeed he was a man of much detective talent and insight, when once he had fixed his eye on an object, and he always fixed his eye on a medium, as a highly suspicious object.

There was a story of his having spotted the same Spiritualistic mountebank under three different disguises: dressed as a woman, a white-bearded old man, and a Brahmin of a rich chocolate brown. These recitals made the true believers rather restless, as indeed they were intended to do; but they could hardly complain, for no Spiritualist denies the existence of fraudulent mediums; only the Professor's flowing narrative might well seem to indicate that all mediums were fraudulent.

But woe to the simple-minded and innocent Materialist (and Materialists as a race are rather innocent and simple-minded) who, presuming on this narrative tendency, should advance the thesis that ghosts were against the laws of nature, or that such things were only old superstitions; or that it was all tosh, or, alternatively, bunk. Him would the Professor, suddenly reversing all his scientific batteries, sweep from the field with a cannonade of unquestionable cases and unexplained phenomena, of which the wretched rationalist had never heard in his life, giving all the dates and details, stating all the attempted and abandoned natural explanations; stating everything, indeed, except whether he, John Oliver Openshaw, did or did not believe in Spirits; and that neither Spiritualist nor Materialist could ever boast of finding out.

Professor Openshaw, a lean figure with palleonine hair and hypnotic blue eyes, stood exchanging a few words with Father Brown, who was a friend of his, on the steps outside the hotel where both had been breakfasting that morning and sleeping the night before. The Professor had come back rather late from one of his grand experiments in general exasperation, and was still tingling with the fight that he always waged alone and against both sides.

"Oh, I don't mind you," he said laughing. "You don't believe in it even if it's true. But all these people are perpetually asking me what I'm trying to prove. They don't seem to understand that I'm a man of science. A man of science isn't trying to prove anything. He's trying to find out what will prove itself."

"But he hasn't found out yet," said Father Brown.

"Well, I have some little notions of my own, that are not quite so negative as most people think," answered the Professor, after an instant of frowning silence; "anyhow, I've begun to fancy that if there is something to be found, they're looking for it along the wrong line. It's all too theatrical; it's showing off, all their shiny ectoplasm and trumpets and voices and the rest; all on the model of old melodramas and mouldy historical novels about the Family Ghost. If they'd go to history instead of historical novels, I'm beginning to think they'd really find something. But not Apparitions."

"After all," said Father Brown, "Apparitions are only Appearances. I suppose you'd say the Family Ghost is only keeping up appearances."

The Professor's gaze, which had commonly a fine abstracted character, suddenly fixed and focussed itself as it did on a dubious medium. It had rather the air of a man screwing a strong magnifying-glass into his eye. Not that he thought the priest was in the least like a dubious medium; but he was startled into attention by his friend's thought following so closely on his own.

"Appearances!" he muttered, "crikey, but it's odd you should say that just now. The more I learn, the more I fancy they lose by merely looking for Appearances. Now if they'd look a little into Disappearances —"

"Yes," said Father Brown, "after all, the real fairy legends weren't so very much about the appearance of famous fairies; calling up Titania or exhibiting Oberon by moonlight. But there were no end of legends about people *disappearing*, because they were stolen by the fairies. Are you on the track of Kilmeny or Thomas the Rhymer?"

"I'm on the track of ordinary modern people you've read of in the newspapers," answered Openshaw. "You may well stare;

but that's my game just now; and I've been on it for a long time. Frankly, I think a lot of psychic appearances could be explained away. It's the disappearances I can't explain, unless they're psychic. These people in the newspapers who vanish and are never found — if you knew the details as I do . . . and now only this morning I got confirmation; an extraordinary letter from an old missionary, quite a respectable old boy. He's coming to see me at my office this morning. Perhaps you'd lunch with me or something; and I'd tell the results — in confidence."

"Thanks; I will — unless," said Father Brown modestly, "the fairies have stolen me by then."

With that they parted and Openshaw walked round the corner to a small office he rented in the neighbourhood; chiefly for the publication of a small periodical, of psychical and psychological notes of the driest and most agnostic sort. He had only one clerk, who sat at a desk in the outer office, totting up figures and facts for the purposes of the printed report; and the Professor paused to ask if Mr. Pringle had called. The clerk answered mechanically in the negative and went on mechanically adding up figures; and the Professor turned towards the inner room that was his study.

"Oh, by the way, Berridge," he added, without turning round, "if Mr. Pringle comes, send him straight in to me. You needn't interrupt your work; I rather want those notes finished tonight if possible. You might leave them on my desk tomorrow, if I am late."

And he went into his private office, still brooding on the problem which the name of Pringle had raised; or rather, perhaps, had ratified and confirmed in his mind. Even the most perfectly balanced of agnostics is partially human; and it is possible that the missionary's letter seemed to have greater weight as promising to support his private and still tentative hypothesis. He sat down in his large and comfortable chair, opposite the engraving of Montaigne; and read once more the short letter from the Rev. Luke Pringle, making the appointment for that morning.

No man knew better than Professor Openshaw the marks of

the letter of the crank; the crowded details; the spidery handwriting; the unnecessary length and repetition. There were none of these things in this case; but a brief and businesslike typewritten statement that the writer had encountered some curious cases of Disappearance, which seemed to fall within the province of the Professor as a student of psychic problems. The Professor was favourably impressed; nor had he any unfavourable impression, in spite of a slight movement of surprise, when he looked up and saw that the Rev. Luke Pringle was already in the room.

"Your clerk told me I was to come straight in," said Mr. Pringle apologetically, but with a broad and rather agreeable grin. The grin was partly masked by masses of reddish-grey beard and whiskers; a perfect jungle of a beard, such as is sometimes grown by white men living in the jungles; but the eyes above the snub nose had nothing about them in the least wild or outlandish.

Openshaw had instantly turned on them that concentrated spotlight or burning-glass of sceptical scrutiny which he turned on many men to see if they were mountebanks or maniacs; and, in this case, he had a rather unusual sense of reassurance. The wild beard might have belonged to a crank, but the eyes completely contradicted the beard; they were full of that quite frank and friendly laughter which is never found in the faces of those who are serious frauds or serious lunatics. He would have expected a man with those eyes to be a Philistine, a jolly sceptic, a man who shouted out shallow but hearty contempt for ghosts and spirits; but anyhow, no professional humbug could afford to look as frivolous as that. The man was buttoned up to the throat in a shabby old cape, and only his broad limp hat suggested the cleric; but missionaries from wild places do not always bother to dress like clerics.

"You probably think all this is another hoax, Professor," said Mr. Pringle, with a sort of abstract enjoyment, "and I hope you will forgive my laughing at your very natural air of disapproval. All the same, I've got to tell my story to somebody who knows, because it's true. And, all joking apart, it's tragic as well as true. Well, to cut it short, I was missionary in Nya-Nya, a station in

West Africa, in the thick of the forests, where almost the only other white man was the officer in command of the district, Captain Wales; and he and I grew rather thick. Not that he liked missions; he was, if I may say so, thick in many ways; one of those square-headed, square-shouldered men of action who hardly need to think, let alone believe. That's what makes it all the queerer.

"One day he came back to his tent in the forest, after a short leave, and said he had gone through a jolly rum experience, and didn't know what to do about it. He was holding a rusty old book in a leather binding, and he put it down on a table beside his revolver and an old Arab sword he kept, probably as a curiosity. He said this book had belonged to a man on the boat he had just come off; and the man swore that nobody must open the book, or look inside it; or else they would be carried off by the devil, or disappear, or something. Wales said this was all nonsense, of course; and they had a quarrel; and the upshot seems to have been that this man, taunted with cowardice or superstition, actually did look into the book; and instantly dropped it; walked to the side of the boat —"

"One moment," said the Professor, who had made one or two notes. "Before you tell me anything else. Did this man tell Wales where he had got the book, or who it originally belonged to?"

"Yes," replied Pringle, now entirely grave. "It seems he said he was bringing it back to Dr. Hankey, the Oriental traveller now in England, to whom it originally belonged, and who had warned him of its strange properties. Well, Hankey is an able man and a rather crabbed and sneering sort of man; which makes it queerer still. But the point of Wales's story is much simpler. It is that the man who had looked into the book walked straight over the side of the ship, and was never seen again."

"Do you believe it yourself?" asked Openshaw after a pause.

"Well, I do," replied Pringle. "I believe it for two reasons. First, that Wales was an entirely unimaginative man; and he added one touch that only an imaginative man could have

added. He said that the man walked straight over the side on a still and calm day; but there was no splash."

The Professor looked at his notes for some seconds in silence; and then said: "And your other reason for believing it?"

"My other reason," answered the Rev. Luke Pringle, "is what I saw myself."

There was another silence, until he continued in the same matter-of-fact way. Whatever he had, he had nothing of the eagerness with which the crank, or even the believer, tries to convince others.

"I told you that Wales put down the book on the table beside the sword. There was only one entrance to the tent; and it happened that I was standing in it, looking out into the forest, with my back to my companion. He was standing by the table grumbling and growling about the whole business; saying it was tomfoolery in the twentieth century to be frightened of opening a book; asking why the devil he shouldn't open it himself. Then some instinct stirred in me and I said that he had better not do that, it had better be returned to Dr. Hankey.

" 'What harm could it do?' he said restlessly. 'What harm did it do?' I answered obstinately. 'What happened to your friend on the boat?' He didn't answer; indeed I didn't know what he could answer; but I pressed my logical advantage in mere vanity. 'If it comes to that,' I said, 'what is your version of what really happened on the boat?' Still he didn't answer; and I looked round and saw that he wasn't there.

"The tent was empty. The book was lying on the table; open, but on its face, as if he had turned it downwards. But the sword was lying on the ground near the other side of the tent; and the canvas of the tent showed a great slash, as if somebody had hacked his way out with the sword. The gash in the tent gaped at me; but showed only the dark glimmer of the forest outside. And when I went across and looked through the rent I could not be certain whether the tangle of the tall plants and the undergrowth had been bent or broken; at least not farther than a few feet. I have never seen or heard of Captain Wales from that day.

"I wrapped the book up in brown paper, taking good care not to look in it; and I brought it back to England, intending at first to return it to Dr. Hankey. Then I saw some notes in your paper suggesting a hypothesis about such things; and I decided to stop on the way and put the matter before you, as you have a name for being balanced and having an open mind."

Professor Openshaw laid down his pen and looked steadily at the man on the other side of the table; concentrating in that single stare all his long experience of many entirely different types of humbug, and even some eccentric and extraordinary types of honest men. In the ordinary way, he would have begun with the healthy hypothesis that the story was a pack of lies. On the whole he did incline to assume that it was a pack of lies. And yet he could not fit the man into his story; if it were only that he could not see that sort of liar telling that sort of lie. The man was not trying to look honest on the surface, as most quacks and impostors do; somehow, it seemed all the other way; as if the man was honest, in spite of something else that was merely on the surface. He thought of a good man with one innocent delusion; but again the symptoms were not the same; there was even a sort of virile indifference; as if the man did not care much about his delusion, if it was a delusion.

"Mr. Pringle," he said sharply, like a barrister making a witness jump, "where is this book of yours now?"

The grin reappeared on the bearded face which had grown grave during the recital.

"I left it outside," said Mr. Pringle. "I mean in the outer office. It was a risk, perhaps; but the lesser risk of the two."

"What do you mean?" demanded the Professor. "Why didn't you bring it straight in here?"

"Because," answered the missionary, "I knew that as soon as you saw it, you'd open it — before you had heard the story. I thought it possible you might think twice about opening it — after you'd heard the story."

Then after a silence he added: "There was nobody out there but your clerk; and he looked a stolid steady-going specimen, immersed in business calculations."

Openshaw laughed unaffectedly. "Oh, Babbage," he cried, "your magic tomes are safe enough with him, I assure you. His name's Berridge — but I often call him Babbage; because he's so exactly like a Calculating Machine. No human being, if you can call him a human being, would be less likely to open other people's brown-paper parcels. Well, we may as well go and bring it in now; though I assure you I will consider seriously the course to be taken with it. Indeed, I tell you frankly," and he stared at the man again, "that I'm not quite sure whether we ought to open it here and now, or send it to this Dr. Hankey."

The two had passed together out of the inner into the outer office; and even as they did so, Mr. Pringle gave a cry and ran forward towards the clerk's desk. For the clerk's desk was there; but not the clerk. On the clerk's desk lay a faded old leather book, torn out of its brown-paper wrappings, and lying closed, but as if it had just been opened. The clerk's desk stood against the wide window that looked out into the street; and the window was shattered with a huge ragged hole in the glass; as if a human body had been shot through it into the world without. There was no other trace of Mr. Berridge.

Both the two men left in the office stood as still as statues; and then it was the Professor who slowly came to life. He looked even more judicial than he had ever looked in his life, as he slowly turned and held out his hand to the missionary.

"Mr. Pringle," he said, "I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon only for thoughts that I have had; and half-thoughts at that. But nobody could call himself a scientific man and not face a fact like this."

"I suppose," said Pringle doubtfully, "that we ought to make some inquiries. Can you ring up his house and find out if he has gone home?"

"I don't know that he's on the telephone," answered Openshaw, rather absently; "he lives somewhere up Hampstead way, I think. But I suppose somebody will inquire here, if his friends or family miss him."

"Could we furnish a description," asked the other, "if the police want it?"

"The police!" said the Professor, starting from his reverie. "A description. . . . Well, he looked awfully like everybody else, I'm afraid, except for goggles. One of those clean-shaven chaps. But the police . . . look here, what *are* we to do about this mad business?"

"I know what I ought to do," said the Rev. Mr. Pringle firmly, "I am going to take this book straight to the only original Dr. Hankey, and ask him what the devil it's all about. He lives not very far from here, and I'll come straight back and tell you what he says."

"Oh, very well," said the Professor at last, as he sat down rather wearily; perhaps relieved for the moment to be rid of the responsibility. But long after the brisk and ringing footsteps of the little missionary had died away down the street, the Professor sat in the same posture, staring into vacancy like a man in a trance.

He was still in the same seat and almost in the same attitude, when the same brisk footsteps were heard on the pavement without and the missionary entered, this time, as a glance assured him, with empty hands.

"Dr. Hankey," said Pringle gravely, "wants to keep the book for an hour and consider the point. Then he asks us both to call, and he will give us his decision. He specially desired, Professor, that you should accompany me on the second visit."

Openshaw continued to stare in silence; then he said, suddenly: "Who the devil is Dr. Hankey?"

"You sound rather as if you meant he was the devil," said Pringle, smiling, "and I fancy some people have thought so. He had quite a reputation in your own line; but he gained it mostly in India, studying local magic and so on, so perhaps he's not so well known here. He is a yellow skinny little devil with a lame leg, and a doubtful temper; but he seems to have set up in an ordinary respectable practice in these parts, and I don't know anything definitely wrong about him — unless it's wrong to be the only person who can possibly know anything about all this crazy affair."

Professor Openshaw rose heavily and went to the telephone;

he rang up Father Brown, changing the luncheon engagement to a dinner, that he might hold himself free for the expedition to the house of the Anglo-Indian doctor; after that he sat down again, lit a cigar, and sank once more into his own unfathomable thoughts.

Father Brown went round to the restaurant appointed for dinner, and kicked his heels for some time in a vestibule full of mirrors and palms in pots; he had been informed of Openshaw's afternoon engagement, and, as the evening closed in dark and stormy round the glass and the green plants, guessed that it had produced something unexpected and unduly prolonged. He even wondered for a moment whether the Professor would turn up at all; but when the Professor eventually did, it was clear that his own more general guesses had been justified. For it was a very wild-eyed and even wild-haired Professor who eventually drove back with Mr. Pringle from the expedition to the north of London, where suburbs are still fringed with heathy wastes and scraps of common, looking more sombre under the rather thunderous sunset.

Nevertheless, they had apparently found the house, standing a little apart though within hail of other houses; they had verified the brass-plate duly engraved: "J. D. Hankey, M.D., M.R.C.S." Only they did not find J. D. Hankey, M.D., M.R.C.S. They found only what a nightmare whisper had already subconsciously prepared them to find: a commonplace parlour with the accursed volume lying on the table, as if it had just been read; and beyond, a back door burst open and a faint trail of footsteps that ran a little way up so steep a garden-path that it seemed that no lame man could have run up so lightly. But it was a lame man who had run; for those few steps there was the misshapen unequal mark of some sort of surgical boot; then two marks of that boot alone (as if the creature had hopped) and then nothing. There was nothing further to be learnt from Dr. J. D. Hankey, except that he had made his decision. He had read the oracle and received the doom.

When the two came into the entrance under the palms,

Pringle put the book down suddenly on a small table, as if it burned his fingers. The priest glanced at it curiously; there was only some rude lettering on the front with a couplet:

*They that looked into this book
Them the Flying Terror took;*

and underneath, as he afterwards discovered, similar warnings in Greek, Latin, and French. The other two had turned away with a natural impulsion towards drinks, after their exhaustion and bewilderment; and Openshaw had called to the waiter, who brought cocktails on a tray.

"You will dine with us, I hope," said the Professor to the missionary; but Mr. Pringle amiably shook his head.

"If you'll forgive me," he said, "I'm going off to wrestle with this book and this business by myself somewhere. I suppose I couldn't use your office for an hour or so?"

"I suppose — I'm afraid it's locked," said Openshaw in some surprise.

"You forget there's a hole in the window." The Rev. Luke Pringle gave the very broadest of all his broad grins and vanished into the darkness without.

"A rather odd fellow, that, after all," said the Professor, frowning.

He was rather surprised to find Father Brown talking to the waiter who had brought the cocktails, apparently about the waiter's most private affairs; for there was some mention of a baby who was now out of danger. He commented on the fact with some surprise, wondering how the priest came to know the man; but the former only said, "Oh, I dine here every two or three months, and I've talked to him now and then."

The Professor, who himself dined there about five times a week, was conscious that he had never thought of talking to the man; but his thoughts were interrupted by a strident ringing and a summons to the telephone. The voice on the telephone said it was Pringle; it was rather a muffled voice, but it might

well be muffled in all those bushes of beard and whisker. Its message was enough to establish identity.

"Professor," said the voice, "I can't stand it any longer. I'm going to look for myself. I'm speaking from your office and the book is in front of me. If anything happens to me, this is to say good-bye. No — it's no good trying to stop me. You wouldn't be in time, anyhow. I'm opening the book now. I . . ."

Openshaw thought he heard something like a sort of thrilling or shivering yet almost soundless crash; then he shouted the name of Pringle again and again; but he heard no more. He hung up the receiver, and, restored to a superb academic calm, rather like the calm of despair, went back and quietly took his seat at the dinner-table. Then, as coolly as if he were describing the failure of some small silly trick at a séance, he told the priest every detail of this monstrous mystery.

"Five men have now vanished in this impossible way," he said. "Every one is extraordinary; and yet the one case I simply can't get over is my clerk, Berridge. It's just because he was the quietest creature that he's the queerest case."

"Yes," replied Father Brown, "it was a queer thing for Berridge to do, anyway. He was awfully conscientious. He was always so jolly careful to keep all the office business separate from any fun of his own. Why, hardly anybody knew he was quite a humorist at home and —"

"Berridge!" cried the Professor. "What on earth are you talking about? Did you know him?"

"Oh, no," said Father Brown carelessly, "only as you say I know the waiter. I've often had to wait in your office, till you turned up; and of course I passed the time of day with poor Berridge. He was rather a card. I remember he once said he would like to collect valueless things, as collectors did the silly things they thought valuable. You know the old story about the woman who collected valueless things."

"I'm not sure I know what you're talking about," said Openshaw. "But even if my clerk was eccentric — and I never knew a man I should have thought less so — it wouldn't explain what

happened to him; and it certainly wouldn't explain the others."

"What others?" asked the priest.

The Professor stared at him and spoke distinctly, as if to a child.

"My dear Father Brown, Five Men have disappeared."

"My dear Professor Openshaw, no men have disappeared."

Father Brown gazed back at his host with equal steadiness and spoke with equal distinctness. Nevertheless, the Professor required the words repeated, and they were repeated as distinctly.

"I say that no men have disappeared."

After a moment's silence he added, "I suppose the hardest thing is to convince anybody that zero plus zero plus zero equals zero. Men believe the oddest things if they are in a series; that is why Macbeth believed the three words of the three witches; though the first was something he knew himself; and the last something he could only bring about himself. But in your case the middle term is the weakest of all."

"What do you mean?"

"You saw nobody vanish. You did not see the man vanish from the boat. You did not see the man vanish from the tent. All that rests on the word of Mr. Pringle, which I will not discuss just now. But you'll admit this; you would never have taken his word yourself, *unless* you had seen it confirmed by your clerk's disappearance; just as Macbeth would never have believed he would be king, if he had not been confirmed in believing he would be Cawdor."

"That may be true," said the Professor, nodding slowly. "But *when* it was confirmed, I knew it was the truth. You say I saw nothing myself. But I did; I saw my own clerk disappear. Berridge did disappear."

"Berridge did not disappear," said Father Brown. "On the contrary."

"What the devil do you mean by 'on the contrary'?"

"I mean," said Father Brown, "that he never disappeared. He appeared."

Openshaw stared across at his friend, but the eyes had al-

ready altered in his head, as they did when they concentrated on a new presentation of a problem. The priest went on: "He appeared in your study, disguised in a bushy red beard and buttoned up in a clumsy cape, and announced himself as the Rev. Luke Pringle. And you had never noticed your own clerk enough to know him again, when he was in so rough-and-ready a disguise."

"But surely," began the Professor.

"Could you describe him for the police?" asked Father Brown. "Not you. You probably knew he was clean-shaven and wore tinted glasses; and merely taking off those glasses was a better disguise than putting on anything else. You had never seen his eyes any more than his soul; jolly laughing eyes. He had planted his absurd book and all the properties; then he calmly smashed the window, put on the beard and cape, and walked into your study; knowing that you had never looked at him in your life."

"But why should he play me such an insane trick?" demanded Openshaw.

"Why, *because* you had never looked at him in your life," said Father Brown; and his hand slightly curled and clinched, as if he might have struck the table, if he had been given to gesture. "You called him the Calculating Machine, because that was all you ever used him for. You never found out even what a stranger strolling into your office could find out, in five minutes' chat: that he was a character; that he was full of antics; that he had all sorts of views on you and your theories and your reputation for 'spotting' people. Can't you understand his itching to prove that you couldn't spot your own clerk? He has nonsense notions of all sorts. About collecting useless things, for instance. Don't you know the story of the woman who bought the two most useless things — an old doctor's brass-plate and a wooden leg? With those your ingenious clerk created the character of the remarkable Dr. Hankey; as easily as the visionary Captain Wales. Planting them in his own house —"

"Do you mean that place we visited beyond Hampstead was Berridge's own house?" asked Openshaw.

"Did *you* know his house — or even his address?" retorted the priest. "Look here, don't think I'm speaking disrespectfully of you or your work. You are a great servant of truth and you know I could never be disrespectful to that. You've seen through a lot of liars, when you put your mind to it. But don't *only* look at liars. Do, just occasionally, look at honest men — like the waiter."

"Where is Berridge now?" asked the Professor, after a long silence.

"I haven't the least doubt," said Father Brown, "that he is back in your office. In fact, he came back into your office at the exact moment when the Rev. Luke Pringle read the awful volume and faded into the void."

There was another long silence and then Professor Openshaw laughed; with the laugh of a great man who is great enough to look small. Then he said abruptly: "I suppose I do deserve it; for not noticing the nearest helpers I have. But you must admit the accumulation of incidents was rather formidable. Did you *never* feel just a momentary awe of the awful volume?"

"Oh, that," said Father Brown. "I opened it as soon as I saw it lying there. It's all blank pages. You see, I am not superstitious."

John Masefield

(1878–1967)

John Masefield was better known throughout the world for his sea stories than for his plays, critical and biographical works, essays, historical novels, books for boys, or even his poetry. Yet he was poet laureate of England for thirty-seven years, from 1930 to 1967, and surely some of his poetry — *Salt-Water Ballads*, including his most popular poem, “Sea-Fever” (1902), and perhaps *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911), *Dauber* (1913), and *Reynard the Fox* (1919) — will long be remembered.

John Masefield’s knowledge of the sea and of seamen was first-hand. At the age of thirteen he was “learning the ropes” on the famous training ship, “Conway”; before he was sixteen he was an apprentice on a windjammer that sailed round Cape Horn to Iquique, Chile. Abandoning the sea in 1895, he worked for about three years in and around New York City — in a bakery, livery stable, Greenwich Village saloon (in the Columbia Hotel, the scene of the Masefield story in this anthology), and in a Yonkers carpet factory; it was during this period that he began to write — chiefly, poems and essays.

He served as hard an apprenticeship in letters as he did

at sea, but by the time the first shot was fired in World War I, he had earned a distinguished literary reputation. In addition to the poet laureateship and honorary degrees from universities, he received England's most coveted civilian honor, the Order of Merit.

Here is an early story by John Masefield that is obviously based on one of his real-life experiences. It is a crime story that anticipates the "speakeasies" of the 1920's and makes one wonder how much a certain kind of crime has changed in more than half a century . . .

A RAINES LAW ARREST

When I was working in a New York saloon I saw something of the city police. I was there shortly after the Lexow Commission, at a time when the city was groaning beneath the yoke of an unaccustomed purity. The old, happy, sinful days, when a man might do as he pleased as long as he kept the police squared, were over. Theodore Roosevelt had reformed the force and made it fairly efficient, so that saloon-keepers, who had once kept open "all day long and every day," were compelled to close on Sundays, in compliance with the Raines Law.

The saloon in which I worked had been accustomed to serve drinks on Sunday ever since its opening. When the Raines Law came into operation it continued its ancient custom, with the result that the police entered one Sunday morning and "pulled the joint" — that is, they arrested and fined the proprietor. Shortly after the raid I became a bartender in this saloon, and had a good opportunity of noting how a law might be evaded.

On Sunday mornings, at about eight o'clock, the bar was carefully darkened, so that no one could view the interior from without. A vast number of beer bottles was brought up from the

cellars. The ice-boxes were packed with as much ice as they would hold. A dumb cash register was produced, in order that no one in the street might hear the ringing of a bell as the bartender stored the cash.

The main door was then curtained off and barricaded. A side door which opened onto a porch, which opened, through a second door, onto the street, was then "put upon the chain" with a trusty guard beside it. The porch door, opening on the street, was locked, and Johnna, the Italian lunchman, was placed in charge of it. It had a little square of glass in the upper panel, like the slit in a conning-tower. Johnna had orders to look through this glass at those who knocked before admitting them. If he knew them he was to admit them. If he did not know them he was to ask them angrily, through the keyhole, "What-a you want? No get-a trinka here," and to pay no further attention to them.

As soon as the customer had passed within the second door, into the bar, he was served with his heart's desire, in the semi-darkness; but the bottles were removed from sight directly the glass was filled, lest a cop should enter and find "drink exposed for sale" within the meaning of the Act.

It was a curious sight, that silent bar, with its nervous ministrants filling glasses for the greatly venturous. From behind the bar I could see Johnna sitting on the porch in his black Sunday clothes, with a cigar between his lips and an Italian paper on his knees. Sometimes he would grin across at me as I hulled strawberries or sliced pineapples for cocktails. He would open his mouth and beckon to me; and then, if the boss were not looking, I would fling a berry or a scrap of pineapple to him. He used to catch them in his mouth with wonderful dexterity, much as a terrier would catch flies. This, and the making of potato salad, were Johnna's two accomplishments.

I remember wishing that I possessed some art like this of Johnna's, for I was always stupid at amusing people, and have always envied those with some little trick or skill to cover a natural lack of parts.

Then sometimes, as the guests came or went, we heard the

alarm. The bottles were rushed under cover. The proprietor and the bartenders scattered upstairs to the hotel. The chain clattered as the inner door was shut, and then we heard the challenge from the patrolman on the street and the rattling of Johnna's door as he tried to get in.

One Sunday, when the bar was full of people, a friend of mine brought in a purser from one of the Cunard steamers. He was one of the thirstiest of men, this purser, with more money than was good for one so thirsty. He had been in the saloon the night before standing champagne to all comers, with the result that he had had to leave his watch behind as a sort of promise to pay. He had now come to redeem the watch and to stand some more champagne.

It chanced that in his apportionment of the drink Johnna received about a pint of champagne, together with a quantity of old Manhattan. The mixture was disastrous, and about half an hour later, when the fusion was complete, he allowed two tall, dark men to enter, neither one of whom was known as a frequenter of the house. It happened that the inner door was open at the moment, for the guard was at the bar drinking to the purser's health.

The bar was crowded with drinkers. The counter was littered with champagne bottles. Jack, the red-headed bartender, was not quite sober. I had my back turned, and was stacking ice in the ice-box. The hotel proprietor chanced to see them as they asked for whiskey.

"Don't serve them, Jack," he cried; but the caution came too late. Jack put the four little glasses on the bar, and gave them the bottle, together with the jug of ice-water. The other customers, who had heard the boss's caution, at once guessed who the two men were. They fell away to right and left in dead silence. One of them leaned across to me with a grin.

"You're gone up, my son," he said. "You're pulled for fair."

The two men drank their whiskey, and turned to Jack and to me. "Put on your coats and come along," they said. "You're pulled. Where's the proprietor?"

I put on my coat and walked out to them. Jack followed,

fumbling with his buttons. The proprietor rose from his chair, swearing softly at his ill-fortune. He walked up to the two men and looked at them very straight, much as a doctor looks at a patient. The two men looked at him very straight, and shifted on their feet as though expecting something. Jack and I, their prisoners, stood waiting to be haled to prison.

At last the proprietor spoke. "Say," he said, "won't you come upstairs?"

The two men did not answer, but as the boss opened the door they left with him. We saw then that they had regulation boots upon their feet, a bit of observation which served me in good stead later.

"Take off your coats, boys," said one of the drinkers round the bar. "Them cops is on the make. You ain't going to be pulled."

I took my coat off and went back to my place behind the bar. Almost directly afterwards the electric bell rang from the boss's sitting-room upstairs. I went to see what he wanted, but as I started Jack called me back to get my tray.

"Take the special cigar box with you," he said, "and a pack of cigarettes, and some chew'n' tobacker." So I did as I was bid.

When I got upstairs I found the boss and the two detectives sitting at a table. I put the cigars and other things on the table, with a box of matches.

"Put a quart of champagne on ice and bring it up here," said the boss. "See you don't *frappé* it too cold."

So I returned to the bar to cool a bottle, while Jack sliced a few cucumber sandwiches, put out a little dish of olives and a plate of dry biscuits rather like cheese-sticks, of the sort called pretzels. When the wine was cold I decked my tray and bore it in to the trio in their sitting-room.

As I entered I saw that one of the detectives was folding up a thick wad of greenbacks which the boss had just handed to him. The other, who probably shared in the money as soon as they reached the police station, had gutted the cigar box and stored his pockets with twenty-five-cent cigars. I put down the wine and poured out three creaming glasses.

"Here's happy days," said the boss.

"Drink hearty," said one dectective.

"Let her go, boys," said the other.

"Fill them up again," said the boss. "You may go now," he added to me. "Have another pint on ice in case I ring."

That was all we heard of the matter. Our case never came before the magistrates.

*Joyce
Kilmer*

(1886–1918)

Certain poems catch the public's fancy and virtually become a part of folklore. Joyce Kilmer wrote such a poem. We do not have to tell you its title — who has not read or has not heard (recited or sung) “Trees”? We have often speculated how many times this immensely popular poem has been reprinted, or has appeared in anthologies; the number must be astronomical.

Joyce Kilmer, in his short life, was a teacher-editor-essayist, and much-sought-after women's club lecturer. His literary aim was to combine “piety with mirth,” but before he could realize his more mature ambitions as a poet he enlisted as a private in World War I and died in action while scouting for a machine-gun nest. (How many poets have been cut off before their prime by a bullet through the brain or heart?) Kilmer's fame has persisted — almost entirely because of the continuing popularity of “Trees” in *Trees and Other Poems* (1914) — and in World War II a staging area in New Jersey, Kilmer's home state, was named Camp Kilmer in honor of the soldier-poet.

Kilmer wrote very little fiction — perhaps the short story we now give you is the only one he ever wrote. It is a

tale of craven crime and blackguardly blackmail — and the manner of its telling will remind you of the O. Henry tradition in the American short story . . .

WHITEMAIL

Spike Ritchie and I worked together on the *Daily News* from 1904 to 1907, and I always liked him. He was bright, hard-working, companionable, and — I thought — perfectly straight. The other day he told me about a pretty crooked deal he was mixed up in. In fact, he told me that he was an unrepentant blackmailer and traitor. And I like him more than I ever did before.

When I got back to New York last week I looked over the pictures I had bought in Turkey and decided that I had the material for some Sunday stories. So I went around to the *News* office. The elevator man didn't know me — he had been on the job only two years — but he knew Spike.

"Mr. Ritchie is assistant Sunday editor now," he said. "But I don't think you'll find him in his office. Today's Thursday, so I guess he's in the composing room."

I made him let me off at the composing room and went in. There was Spike, telling the foreman that Matty had a glass arm, and making up the fashion page. He had grown much balder, but otherwise he had changed very little since I saw him six years before. He was the same little stoop-shouldered fellow, with the same rat-tail mustache, and apparently the same cigar butt fixed in the corner of his mouth. Also, I discovered in a few minutes, he had the same alcoholic breath.

"Hello, John!" he said. "Wait till I fix this up and I'll go out with you."

Soon we were comfortably seated at a table in Jimmy's bar. Jimmy, I was absurdly pleased to notice, remembered me and put a few drops of syrup in my Irish as if I were still a daily

visitor. Spike looked at my pictures and told me to go ahead with the stories. Then — of course — we both grew reminiscent, and after the third drink and a little lunch came his confession. That is, if you'd call it a confession . . .

"You're not the only globetrotter," he said, lighting for the fourth time his amorphous cigar butt. "I went abroad two summers ago."

I expressed interest — without much enthusiasm, for I wanted to talk about Turkey.

"Yes," he said, "I had a little money saved up — I wasn't married then — and I was feeling pretty rotten, so I decided to knock off for a while. I traveled around the Continent for a few weeks and then I went to London. I wanted to see something of the country, so I bought a knapsack and made a leisurely walking tour of the Midland counties.

"The result of that walking tour was a mighty queer experience. And, in spite of the fact that you are bursting with the desire to tell me how you matched pennies with the Sultan and chucked the harem under its chin, I am now going to take up some minutes of the *News's* time in telling you about that experience. It has never been used as a news story, and it never will. But the villain — unless you call me the villain — is dead now, and I guess it wouldn't do any harm if you fixed it up with different names and made a fiction story out of it. Then if you sell it you can split with me fifty-fifty."

"Go ahead," I said.

"Well [began Spike], I struck a little bit of a market town called Ashbourne that I liked pretty well. So I got a room at an inn entertainingly called The Green Man and Black's Head and settled down for a week's stay. There were very few other guests, so the proprietor and I got rather friendly. Of course, like all Englishmen, he was surprised that I didn't know his cousin who was on a ranch in Texas and his nephew who was manager of a grocery store in Milwaukee.

" 'There's one of your fellow countrymen I can't say that I care for,' he said one evening. 'There was a Mr. James Rodney who came here from New York City, and we all wish we'd never

seen him, sir. Perhaps you know him — he's a tall thin gentleman with a sort of a mole over his right eye. He told us that he owned a big flour mill, but I don't know as he told the truth. Do you know a man of that name?'

"I told him that I had never before heard of James Rodney, and by asking a few questions I heard a story that was unpleasant though not particularly strange. Two summers before, an American calling himself James Rodney had come to Ashbourne and stopped with Mrs. Clarke, the widow of the old vicar. She had very little money, and made a living by taking lodgers. He was on his way up north, and he had a two hours' wait between trains in Ashbourne. He took a walk through the town, stopped to get a drink of water at Mrs. Clarke's house, found that she took lodgers, and by that night he had given up all idea of going north. He said that he liked Ashbourne and the Clarke cottage but, said the innkeeper, 'what really attracted him was Mary Clarke. She was an amazingly pretty girl in those days, sir; in fact, she is still, though she's had a hard time.'

"It did not take Rodney long to make Mrs. Clarke and Mary believe that he was a person of some importance in New York. He seemed to have plenty of money, his manners were those of a gentleman, and he became popular in local society. In fact, everyone was pleased when, after a tempestuous courtship, Mary and he were married in the beautiful old parish church.

"Mary thought that her husband would take her to America at once, but he said that he would prefer to see a little more of Europe. So they went to Switzerland for a couple of weeks and then returned to Mrs. Clarke's cottage. Rodney had received a cable from New York, he said. He must go back to his mill for a little while. It was an urgent matter — he must get the boat sailing from Liverpool on the very next day. He would send a letter by every mail and within a month he would come back for his wife and her mother.

"Of course you have guessed what happened. James Rodney, or whatever his real name was, never came back. He did not write and, what is more important, he did not send any money. Letters sent to James Rodney, The Rodney Flour and Grain

Company, 13 West 98th Street, New York City, U.S.A., were returned. His name did not appear on the passenger list of the steamer on which he said he intended to sail.

"For a while Mrs. Clarke and Mary thought that he had met with some fatal accident, but after a friend of theirs, visiting America, had found that no such concern as The Rodney Flour and Grain Company had ever existed and that there were no mills on 98th Street, they knew that they had been cruelly deceived. In the course of time Mary had a baby, a very nice baby. It was a little boy, as pretty as Mary herself and resembling her strikingly. In only one respect he resembled his father — there was a small but unmistakable mole over his right eye.

"This story interested me very much, and I took the liberty of calling on Mrs. Clarke the next day, on the pretense of looking for lodgings. Indeed, it became more than a pretext, for Mrs. Clarke was such a charming old gentlewoman and the cottage and Mary — it was hard for me to call her Mrs. Rodney — were so attractive that I took a room and stayed for three weeks.

"Of course I got from them all that they knew about the mysterious James Rodney, and that was little more than the inn-keeper had told me. But just before I left, Mrs. Rodney gave me a little Kodak picture of her husband and herself, taken by her mother on the porch of the cottage.

"I went back to America with a fixed determination to find this Rodney person, smash his face, and make him send every cent that he possessed back to Ashbourne. You see, I knew the suffering that his little game had inflicted on Mary and her mother and I was pretty angry about it. I confess I didn't have much hope of finding the fellow, but I was going to make a good try at it, anyway.

"Well, I didn't have to try very hard. I never was much good at this suspense business, so I'll spring my sensation on you right away. James Rodney was Andrew Judd. Yes — don't spill your whiskey — Andrew Judd, president of the Judd Iron Works, philanthropist and reformer.

"Two days after I got back, Boss Ridder sent me out to interview Judd for the Sunday edition. Judd had just invented a very

fancy sort of model tenement with a gymnasium and swimming pool on every floor. In order to understand just what improvements were needed in the housing of the poor he had lived two days in a tenement house on the lower East Side, and was very eager to talk about it. As soon as I saw him I recognized him, and you can readily understand that my first desire was for a large encouraging slug of the beverage known as whiskey. And, by the way, ring that bell, will you? Jimmy, two more of the same.

“Well, of course I thought right away just what you thought — here is one scoop of a story! In spite of the fact that we were running this page interview in the Sunday, the *News* had no particular friendship for Judd. In fact, we were going to oppose him in the fall, when he was planning to run for Mayor.

“I had all the facts and there was plenty of time to get the story in next morning’s paper. All I had to do was to flash that little Kodak picture, which I always carried with me, on Judd, tell him what I knew of his little European jaunt, and let him throw me out of the office. Then back to the *News* to grab all the space I wanted for the biggest sensation that the paper ever had.

“Think what a story like that would have meant to me, an absolutely exclusive story with a picture to prove it! I saw myself getting a whopping bonus and a regular job to boot. Then, too, you know that I’m not talking sentiment when I say that I was — always have been — loyal to the *News*. You were long enough in the game to find out what a newspaperman’s loyalty is — how his first idea when anything big happens is to hammer it out on his typewriter and get it in before the first edition goes to press.

“But I had sense enough to hold on to myself for a while. I shook hands with Judd — I guess I stared pretty hard at that mole over his right eye — and I went ahead with the interview as had been arranged. Judd was feeling expansive that day, and he really knew how to talk. He gave me a great story, full of human interest, and with a lot of new stuff in it, but all the while I was listening to him I was thinking harder than I ever thought before. There were three different plans in my mind — I couldn’t, to save my life, think just what I ought to do. After a

while Judd felt that he'd given me all I needed and he stopped talking.

" 'Mr. Judd,' I said, almost involuntarily, 'when were you married?'

" 'Why, my dear boy, I don't see what that has to do with what we've been talking about; but I was married five years ago. In St. Marmaduke's Church, of which I am junior warden, if you wish the full particulars. My wife was Miss Emily Lindsay, and here is a picture of her.'

"He took from his desk a framed photograph of a very lovely woman with a little girl on her lap.

" 'I see,' I said vaguely. 'And when was it that you went abroad?'

" 'Well, I really don't think that the public will be interested in matters like this,' he said, 'but I have been abroad several times. Two years ago I spent the summer in England, and then made a somewhat extensive tour of Germany. But I think that I must ask you to excuse me now. I've given you all you need, have I not? Oh, yes!' he added. 'I suppose you will want a picture of me. I think I have some in my desk drawer. I'll look and see.'

" 'No,' I said, in a voice which seemed strange to me. 'I've got a picture already.'

"His back was turned to me and he was rummaging in his desk. 'But I'm afraid that's been used before. I think I can find some new ones for you.'

" 'This picture has never been used before,' I said. 'It was taken two years ago in Ashbourne.'

"At the word 'Ashbourne' he turned suddenly and looked at the little square of cardboard in my hands. Then he grew very white and stood perfectly still.

"For a minute neither of us spoke.

"Then, with a self-control for which I could not help admiring him, he pushed his chair to the desk, sat down, turned his back to me and wrote.

"I heard the rip of torn paper. He whirled his chair and stretched out his hands to me. In his left hand was an oblong of

green paper with his name written in the lower right-hand corner. His right hand was empty.

“ ‘Here is a blank check, which I have signed,’ he said. ‘Give me the photograph, please.’

“ ‘I admit I hesitated for a moment. I am not so devoted to my job that I would hate an independent fortune. But I didn’t hesitate long.

“ ‘It was a ridiculously theatrical thing to do, but I took the check, tore it into four pieces, and dropped them on the blotter on his desk.

“ ‘To hell with your check!’ I said, in a quiet conversational tone of voice. ‘You’ll need that money when you start defending yourself against the charge of bigamy.’

“ ‘Judd deliberately lit a cigar and sat looking at me.

“ ‘So you’ve got an interesting item for tomorrow’s paper, have you?’ he said. ‘But what’s the idea? Just what do you gain by attacking me? That little picture is interesting, but it proves absolutely nothing.’

“ ‘I rose to go. ‘In the first place,’ I said, with my hand on the doorknob, ‘I know the girl whom you illegally married two years ago, and the *News* will bring her over here — with her child. We will gain two things — we will be purveyors of a very interesting story and we will bring punishment on a damned hypocrite.’

“ ‘He was perfectly calm. ‘I see your first point,’ he answered reflectively. ‘You can publish a very sensational story — there is no doubt of that. But I doubt very much your ability to substantiate your charge, and I fail to see why you are so bitterly enraged at me. There must be some motive . . . I think I see. Yes, I think I see. But what earthly good will it do the young woman to drag her name into this scandal? You cannot carry out your amiable design of ruining me without also ruining two women.’

“ ‘All right,’ I said, ‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do. You’ve got to square yourself, and I’ll keep quiet about this business.’

“ ‘Just what do you mean by “square myself”?’ he said.

“ ‘James Rodney must die.’

“ ‘My God!’ he exclaimed. ‘Do you want me to kill myself?’

“ ‘You must kill James Rodney,’ I said. ‘See here, Mary Clarke has never heard of Andrew Judd. What you’ve got to do is write her a letter signing your own name, saying that James Rodney was Tom Smith, John Jones, or anything you like. Anyway, you must say that he was a friend of yours and that he is dead. Say that he confessed to you on his deathbed that he had married and deserted a girl named Mary Clarke in Ashbourne, England, and that he asked you to notify her of his death and to send her all his money.’

“ ‘I’ll do it,’ he said. ‘I’ll do it this afternoon. I’ll send her ten thousand dollars — fifty thousand dollars — all the money you say.’

“ ‘You certainly will do it today,’ I said, ‘for I’m going to stick around and watch you do it. You will write the letter at my dictation and I will mail it myself. But as to the money that you are sending, you’ve got the wrong idea. You will send Miss Clarke enough money to buy that little cottage so that they won’t have to earn the rent by taking lodgers and enough to pay for a trip abroad for her and her mother. They need a little holiday after the trouble you got them into. Then you must add enough to send your son through school and through the university. I guess we’ll put it at twenty-five thousand dollars — that’s letting you off pretty cheap, but I don’t want to burden them with a lot of your dirty money.’

“ ‘I suppose you know,’ Mr. Judd said to me, ‘that what you are doing is blackmail.’

“ ‘Today,’ I answered, ‘in suppressing this story I am breaking the commandment of the newspaper business — violating a code of ethics which you could not possibly understand. I am a traitor to the *News* and to my profession. After being that I don’t mind a little blackmail.’ ”

Jimmy had taken away our empty glasses and was ostentatiously wiping the table with a gray napkin. Spike looked at his watch and got up to go. As we walked down the street I turned to him and said, “But didn’t Mary What-you-may-call-her ever get wise? When Judd died last year she must have seen his pic-

ture in some English paper and known that he was the fellow that fooled her. I should think she'd sue his estate and get a substantial settlement."

"Sure she got wise," said Spike. "But she wouldn't start anything now. She's perfectly comfortable, I guess."

"What is she doing?" I asked.

"Why," said Spike, lighting his cigar butt for the ninth time, "she's married to the assistant Sunday editor of the *Daily News*."

Conrad Aiken

(1889—)

Conrad Aiken wrote his first poem at the age of nine — one year before his brilliant but erratic father killed Conrad Aiken's mother and then committed suicide, a double tragedy which must have traumatized the boy-poet's life. Four years later, at thirteen, Aiken fell in love with Poe's poems, another event (though not a tragedy) which must have influenced the teen-age poet. And still other influences ignited his creative spirit — for example, his being a member of the extraordinary Harvard class of 1911 which included T. S. Eliot, Van Wyck Brooks, John Reed, Heywood Broun, Robert Benchley, Alan Seeger, Robert Edmond Jones, and Walter Lippmann — what a goodly company to inspire a young man dedicated to speculative psychology and stimulative literature! While some of Aiken's later work was to show the influence of T. S. Eliot, it should be pointed out that Aiken's *The House of Dust* (1920), "a poem of the soul of a city," was published two years before Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and may well have influenced Eliot's masterpiece. Indeed, influences and counterinfluences have dominated Aiken's literary life, with Aiken both receiving and projecting, transmuting and transmitting.

In 1930 Aiken won the Pulitzer Prize for his *Selected Poems* (1929), in 1950–51 he held the Library of Congress's Chair of Poetry, in 1953 his *Collected Poems* won the National Book Award as the most distinguished volume of poetry published that year, and in 1958 he received the Gold Medal for Poetry from the Institute of Arts and Letters. Conrad Aiken's position in letters is firm — he is acknowledged to be one of America's leading poets.

Still another influence in Conrad Aiken's work is psychiatry — the study of "the inhibited soul." Much of his poetry makes use of the theories of Freud, Havelock Ellis, and Bergson, the psychoanalytical principles illuminating the subjective (and the symphonic) in his work. This is also true of some of Aiken's remarkable short stories in which characterization is based on psychiatric understanding, on preoccupation with the subconscious. One of these unusual short stories is "Smith and Jones" (a far more original story, in our opinion, than Aiken's much-anthologized "Impulse"). A crime story in the truly modern sense, "Smith and Jones" explores "the soul's landscape" — partly by reviving the art of conversation! — and illustrates what has been said of Conrad Aiken's best stories — that they fascinate "with their subtle, imaginative and sometimes horrifying probing of the human spirit." The last five words of the story are stunning . . .

SMITH AND JONES

Smith and Jones, as far as one could tell in the darkness, looked almost exactly alike. Their names might have been interchangeable. So might their clothes, which were apparently rather shabby, though, as they walked quickly and the night was cloudy, it was difficult to be sure. Both of them were

extraordinarily articulate. They were walking along the muddy road that led away from a large city and they talked as they went.

"As far as I'm concerned," said Smith, "it's all over. No more women for me. There's nothing in it. It's a damned swindle. Walk right up, gentlemen, and make your bets! The hand is quicker than the eye. Where is the elusive little pea? Ha ha! Both ends against the middle."

He struck a match and lit his pipe; his large pale unshaven face started out of the night.

Jones grumbled to himself. Then turning his head slightly toward Smith, in a somewhat aggressive way, as if he were showing a fang, he began to laugh in a peculiar soft insolent manner.

"Jesus! One would think you were an adolescent. No more women! If there aren't it'll be because you're dead. You were born to be made a fool of by women. You'll buzz round the honey-pot all your days. You have no sense in these matters, you've never had the courage or the intelligence once and for all to *realize* a woman. Look! here's a parable for you. There are an infinite number of little white clouds stretching one after another across blue space, just like sweet little stepping stones. To each of them is tethered a different-colored child's balloon — I know that would rather badly fracture the spectrum, but never mind. And behold, our angel-child, beautiful and trustful, flies to the first little cloud-island, and seizes the first balloon, enraptured. It's pink. But then he sees the next island, and the next balloon, which is orange. So he lets the first one go, which sails away, and flies vigorously to the next little island. From there he catches sight of a different shade of pink — sublime! intoxicating! and again dashes across an abyss . . . This lovely process goes on forever. It will never stop."

Smith splashed into a puddle and swore.

"Don't be so damned patronizing, with your little angel-child and toy balloons. I know what I'm talking about. Adolescent? Of course I am — who isn't? The point is, exactly, that I *have* at last realized a woman. That's more, I'll bet, than you've done — you, with your damned negativism!"

"Negativism! — how? But never mind that. Tell me about your woman."

"It must be experienced to be understood."

"Of course — so must death."

"What can I tell you then? You, who have always made it a principle to experience as little as possible! Your language doesn't, therefore, extend to the present subject. You are still crawling on your hands and knees, bumping into chairs, and mistaking your feet for a part of the floor, or your hands for a part of the ceiling. Stand up! Be a man! It's glorious."

"Was she blonde or brunette?"

"If you insist, she was a woman tattooed with gold and silver. Instead of earrings, she wore brass alarm clocks in her ears, and for some unexplained reason she had an ivory thimble in her left nostril."

Jones laughed; there was a shade of annoyance in his laughter.

"I see . . . I forgot to mention, by the way, that when the angel-child flew so vigorously from cloud to cloud his wings made a kind of whimpering sound . . . But go on."

"No, she was neither blonde nor brunette, but, as you suggested, imaginary. She didn't really exist. I thought she did, of course — I had seen her several times quite clearly. She had a voice, hands, eyes, feet — in short, the usual equipment. In point of size she was colossal; in point of speed, totally incommensurable. She walked, like Fama, with her head knocking about among the stars. She stepped casually, with one step, from town to town, making with the swish of her skirts so violent a whirlwind that men everywhere were sucked out of houses."

"I recognize the lady. It was Helen of Troy."

"Not at all. Her name, as it happened, was Gleason."

Jones sighed. The two men walked rapidly for some time in silence. The moon, like a pale crab, pulled clouds over itself, buried itself in clouds with a sort of awkward precision, and a few drops of rain fell.

"Rain!" said Jones, putting up one hand.

"To put out the fires of conscience."

"Gleason? She must be — if your description is accurate — in the theatrical profession? A lady acrobat, a trapeze artist?"

"Wrong again, Jones — if error were, as it ought to be, punishable by death, you'd be a corpse . . . Suffice it to say that Gleason loved me. It was like being loved by a planet."

"Venus?"

"Mars. She crushed me, consumed me. Her love was a profounder and more fiery abyss than the inferno which Dante, in the same sense, explored. It took me days of circuitous descent to get even within sight of the bottom; and then, as there were no ladders provided, I plunged headlong. I was at once ignited, and became a tiny luminous spark, which, on being cast forth to the upper world again on a fiery exhalation, became an undistinguished cinder."

"To think a person named Gleason could do all that!"

"Yes, it's a good deal, certainly. I feel disinclined for further explorations of the sort."

"Temporarily, you mean . . . You disliked the adventure?"

"Oh, no — not altogether! Does one dislike life altogether? Do we hate this walk, this road, the rain, ourselves, the current of blood which, as we walk and talk, our hearts keep pumping and pumping? We like and dislike at the same time. It's like an organism with a malignant fetid cancer growing in it. Cut out the cancer, which has interlaced its treacherous fibers throughout every part, and you extinguish life. What's to be done? In birth, love, and death, in all acts of violence, all abrupt beginnings and abrupt cessations, one can detect the very essence of the business — there one sees, in all its ambiguous nakedness, the beautiful obscene."

Jones reflected; one could make out that his head was bowed. Smith walked beside him with happy alacrity. It began to rain harder, the trees dripped loudly, but the two men paid no attention.

"The beautiful obscene!" said Jones, suddenly lifting his head. "Certainly that's something to have learned *chez* Gleason! . . . It suggests a good deal. It's like this road — it's dark, but it certainly leads somewhere."

"Where?"

"That's what we'll discover. Is it centrifugal or centripetal? The road is the former, of course. It leads, as we know, away from civilization into the wilderness, the unknown. But that's no reason for supposing the same to be true of your diagnosis — is it? And yet I wonder."

He wondered visibly, holding his coat collar about his throat with one hand, and showed a disposition to slacken his pace. But Smith goaded him.

"Look here, we've got to keep moving, you know."

"Yes, we've got to keep moving."

They walked for a mile in complete silence. The rain kept up a steady murmur among the leaves of trees, the vague heaving shoulders of which they could see at right and left, and they heard the tinkling of water in a ditch. Their shoes bubbled and squelched, but they seemed to be indifferent to matters so unimportant. However, from time to time they inclined their heads forward and allowed small reservoirs of rain to slide heavily off their felt hats.

It was Jones, finally, who began talking again. After a preliminary mutter or two, and a hostile covert glance at his companion, he said, "Like all very great discoveries, this discovery of yours affords opportunities for a new principle of behavior. You are not a particularly intelligent man, as I've often told you, and as you yourself admit; so you probably don't at all see the implications of your casual observation. As often occurs to you, in the course of your foolish, violent, undirected activity, you have accidentally bumped your head and seen a star. You would never think, however, of hitching your wagon to such a star — which is what I propose to do."

Smith glanced sharply at his companion, and then began laughing on a low meditative note which gradually became shrill and derisive; he even lifted one knee and slapped it. It was obviously a tremendous joke.

"Just like you, Jones. You're all brain to the soles of your feet. *What* do you propose to do?"

"Don't be a simpleton, or I'll begin by murdering you — instead of ending by doing so."

This peculiar remark was delivered, and received, with the utmost sobriety.

"Of course," said Smith. "You needn't dwell on that, as it's an unpleasant necessity which is fully recognized between us. It doesn't in the least matter whether the event is early or late, does it?"

"What I mean is, that if you are right, and the beautiful obscene is the essence of the business, then obviously one should pursue that course of life which would give one the maximum number of — what shall I say? — perfumed baths of that description . . . You say that this essence is most clearly to be detected in the simpler violences. In love, birth, death, all abrupt cessations and beginnings. Very good. Then if one is to live completely, to realize life in the last shred of one's consciousness, to become properly incandescent, or *identical* with life, one must put oneself in contact with the strongest currents. One should love savagely, kill frequently, eat the raw, and even, I suppose, be born as often as possible."

"A good ideal!"

"I propose to do all these things. It has long been tacitly understood that sooner or later I will murder you, so, as you tactfully suggest, I won't dwell on that. But I shall be glad to have Gleason's address . . . beforehand."

"Certainly; whenever you like. Telephone Main 220-W — I always liked that W — and ask for Mary."

"The question is: what's to be done about thought? . . . You see, this road of reflection is, after all, centripetal. It involves, inevitably, a return to the center, an identification of one's self with the All, with the unconscious *primum mobile*. But thought, in its very nature, involves a separation of one's self from the — from the ——"

"Unconscious?"

"From the unconscious . . . We must be careful not to go astray at this point. One shouldn't begin by trying to *be* uncon-

scious — not at all! One might as well be dead. What one should try to get rid of is consciousness of *self*. Isn't that it?"

Smith gave a short laugh, at the same time tilting his head to let the rain run off onto his feet. "Anything you say, professor. I trust you blindly. Anyway, I know that my pleasantest moments with Gleason were those in which I most completely lost my awareness of personality, of personal identity. Yes, it's beautiful and horrible, the way one loses, at such moments, everything but a feeling of animal force . . . Analogously, one should never permit conversation at meals. And it was decidedly decadent of Cyrano to carry on an elaborate monologue in couplets while committing a murder — oh, decidedly. Quite the wrong thing! One's awareness, on such occasions, should be of nothing, nothing but murder — there should be no overlapping fringe which could busy itself with such boyisms as poetry or epigram. One should, in short, *be* a murder . . . Do I interpret you correctly?"

Jones, at this, looked at Smith with a quick uneasiness. Smith appeared to be unconscious of this regard, and was as usual walking with jaunty alacrity. The way he threw out his feet was extremely provocative — the angle of his elbows was offensive. His whole bearing was a deliberate, a calculated insult.

"Quite correctly," said Jones sharply, keeping his eye on Smith.

"Here's a haystack," replied the latter equably, but also a little sneeringly. "Shall we begin with arson? We can go on, by degrees, to murder."

"By all means."

The two men could be seen jumping the ditch, and laboriously climbing over a slippery stone wall. Several matches sputtered and went out, and then a little blaze lighted the outstretched hands and solemn intent faces of Jones and Smith. They drew out and spread the dry hay over the blaze, the flames fed eagerly, and the stone wall and the black trunk of an elm tree appeared to stagger toward them out of the darkness.

"I think that will do," observed Smith cheerfully.

They climbed back over the wall and resumed their walk.

The rain had become a drizzle, and the moon, in a crack between the clouds, showed for a second the white of an eye. Behind them, the fire began to spout, and they observed that they were preceded, on the puddled road, by oblique drunken shadows. They walked rapidly.

"A mere bagatelle," Smith went on after a time. "But there's a farm at the top of the hill, so we can, as it were, build more stately mansions . . . Were you aware, at the moment of ignition, of a kind of co-awareness with the infinite?"

"Don't be frivolous."

"Personally, I found it a little disappointing . . . I don't like these deliberate actions. Give me the spontaneous, every time. That's one thing I particularly like about Gleason. The dear thing hasn't the least idea what she's doing, or what she's going to do next. If she decided to kill you, you'd never know it, because you'd be dead . . . Not at all like you, Jones. You've got a devil of a lot to unlearn!"

Jones reflected. He took off his hat and shook it. His air was profoundly philosophical.

"True. I have. I'll put off a decision about the farm till we get to it. I suppose, by the same token, you'd like me to give up my habit of strict meditation on the subject of *your* death?"

"Oh, just as you like about that!" Smith laughed pleasantly. "I assure you it's not of the smallest consequence . . . It occurs to me, by the way, somewhat irrelevantly, that in your philosophy of incandescent sensation one must allow a place for the merely horrible. I never, I swear, felt more brilliantly alive than when I saw, once, a man sitting in a cab with his throat cut. He unwound a bloody towel for the doctor, and I saw, in the skin of the throat, three parallel red smiles — no, gills. It was amazing."

"A domestic scene? . . . *Crime passionnelle*?"

"No — a trifling misunderstanding in a barber shop. This chap started to take out a handkerchief; the other chap thought it was a revolver; and the razor was quicker than the handkerchief . . . The safety razor ought to be abolished, don't you think?"

Jones, without answer, jumped the ditch and disappeared in

the direction of the farm. Smith leaned against the wall, laughing softly to himself. After a while there were six little spurts of light one after another in the darkness, hinting each time at a nose and fingers, and then four more. Nothing further happened. The darkness remained self-possessed, and presently Jones reappeared, muttering.

"No use! It's too wet, and I couldn't find any kindling."

"Don't let that balk you, my dear Jones! Ring the doorbell and ask for a little kerosene. Why not kill the old man, ravish his daughter, and then burn up the lot? It would be a good night's work."

"Damn you! You've done enough harm already."

There was something a little menacing in this, but Smith was unperturbed.

"What the devil do you mean?" he answered. "Intellectually I'm a child by comparison with you. I'm an adolescent."

"You know perfectly well what I mean — all this," and Jones gave a short ugly sweep of his arm toward the blazing haystack and, beyond that, the city. The moon came out, resting her perfect chin on a tawny cloud. The two men regarded each other strangely.

"Nonsense!" Smith then exclaimed. "Besides you'll have the satisfaction of killing me. That ought to compensate. And Gleason, think of Gleason! She'll be glad to see you. She'll revel in the details of my death."

"Will she?"

"Of course, she will . . . She's a kind of sadist, or something of the sort . . . How, by the way, do you propose to do it? We've never — come to think of it — had an understanding on that point. Would you mind telling me, or do you regard it as a sort of trade secret? . . . Just as you like!"

Jones seemed to be breathing a little quickly.

"No trouble at all — but I don't know! I shall simply, as you suggest, wait for an inspiration."

"How damned disquieting! Also, Jones, it's wholly out of character, and you'll have to forgive me if, for once, I refuse to believe you. What the deuce is this walk for, if not for your op-

portunity? You're bound to admit that I was most compliant. I accepted your suggestion without so much as a twitter — didn't I? Very unselfish of me, I think! . . . But, of course, it had to come."

The two men were walking, by tacit agreement, at opposite sides of the road; they had to raise their voices. Still, one would not have said that it was a quarrel.

"Oh, yes, it had to come. It was clearly impossible that both of us should live!"

"Quite . . . At the same time this affair is so exquisitely complex, and so dislocated, if I may put it so, into the world of the fourth dimension, that I'm bound to admit that while I recognize the necessity I don't quite grasp the cause . . ."

"You're vulgar, Smith."

"Am I? . . . Ah, so that's it — I'm vulgar, I seize life by the forelock! . . . I go about fornicating, thieving, card cheating and murdering, in my persistent, unreflective, low-grade sort of way, and it makes life unsupportable for you. Here, now, is Gleason. How that must simply infuriate you! Three days in town and I have a magnificent planetary love affair like that — burnt to a crisp! Ha ha! And you, all the while, drinking tea and reading Willard Gibbs. I must say it's damned funny."

Jones made no reply. His head was thrust forward — he seemed to be brooding. His heavy breathing was quite audible, and Smith, after an amused glance toward him, went on talking.

"Lots of lights suddenly occur to me — lights on this extraordinary, impenetrable subject — take down my words, Jones, this is my deathbed speech! . . . I spoke, didn't I, of the beautiful obscene, and of the inextricable manner in which the two qualities are everywhere bound up together? The beautiful and the obscene. The desirable and the disgusting. I also compared this state of things with an organism in which a cancer was growing — which one tries to excise . . . Well, Jones, you're the beautiful and I'm the obscene; you're the desirable and I'm the disgusting; and in some rotten way we've got tangled up together . . . You, being the healthy organism, insist on having the cancer removed. But remember: I warned you! If you do so,

it's at your own peril . . . However, it's silly to warn you, for of course you have no more control over the situation than I have, or Gleason has. The bloody conclusion lies there, and we walk soberly toward it . . . Are you sorry?"

"No!"

"Well then, neither am I. Let's move a little faster! . . . Damn it all, I *would* like to see Gleason again! You were perfectly right about that . . . Do you know what she said to me?"

Smith, at this point, suddenly stopped, as if to enjoy the recollection at leisure. He opened his mouth and stared before him, in the moonlight, with an odd bright fixity. Jones, with the scantiest turn of his head, plodded on, so that Smith had, perforce, to follow.

"She said she'd like to live with me — that she'd support me. By George! What do you think of that? . . . 'You're a dear boy,' she said, 'you fascinate me!' 'Fascinate!' That's the best thing I do. Don't I fascinate you, Jones? Look at my eyes! Don't I fascinate you? . . . Ha ha! . . . Yes, I have the morals of a snake. I'm graceful, I'm all curves, there's nothing straight about me. Gleason got dizzy looking at me, her head swayed from side to side, her eyes were lost in a sort of mist, and then she fell clutching at me like a paralytic, and talking the wildest nonsense. Could you do that, Jones, do you think? . . . Never! It's all a joke to think of your going to see Gleason. And if you told her what had happened she'd kill you. Yes, you'd look like St. Sebastian when Gleason got through with you . . . Say something! Don't be so damned glum. Anybody'd suppose it was *your* funeral."

"Oh, go on talking! I like the sound of your voice."

"And then to think of your pitiful attempt to set that barn on fire! Good Lord, with half a dozen matches . . . That's what comes of studying symbolic logic and the rule of phase . . . Really, I don't know what you'll do without me, Jones! You're like a child, and when I'm dead, who's going to show you, as the wit said, how to greet the obscene with a cheer? . . . However, I wouldn't bother about that rock if I were you — aren't you premature?"

This last observation sounded a little sharp.

Jones had certainly appeared to be stooping toward a small loose fragment of rock by the roadside, but he straightened up with smiling alacrity.

"My shoelace," he said cynically. "It's loose. I think I'll retie it."

"Pray do! Why not?"

"Very well! If you don't mind waiting!"

Jones gave a little laugh. He stooped again, fumbled for a second at his shoe, then suddenly shot out a snakelike hand toward the rock. But Smith meanwhile had made a gleaming gesture which seemed to involve Jones's back.

"Ah!" said Jones, and slid softly forward into a puddle.

"Are you there?"

Smith's query was almost humorous. As it received no reply, and Jones lay motionless in his puddle, Smith took him by the coat collar, dragged him to the edge of the ditch, and rolled him in. The moon poured a clear green light on this singular occurrence. It showed Smith examining his hands with care, and then wiping them repeatedly on the wet grass and rank jewel-weed. It showed him relighting his pipe — which had gone out during the rain — with infinite leisure. One would have said, at the moment, that he looked like a tramp. And, finally, it showed him turning back in the direction he had come from, and setting off cheerfully toward the city; alone, but with an amazing air, somehow, of having always been alone.

Edna
St. Vincent
Millay

(1892-1950)

Edna St. Vincent Millay — a magical name, a name of quality and distinction, a name that connotes the artistic mind, the esthetic spirit . . .

Edna St. Vincent Millay held an almost unique position in American literature. Her poetry of rebellious youth flouting conformity and flaunting nonconformity, her love poems so often breathless and vibrant, so often gay (of love found) and sad (of love lost), satisfied both the proletariat and the intelligentsia, the commoners and the cognoscenti, the “four million” and the “four hundred.” She was one of a handful of passionate poets whose slim volumes have been, at one and the same time, best-sellers and collectors’ items.

Like so many other gifted writers through the ages, she began to practice her craft in childhood. Her first major poem (“Renascence” — “ecstasy made articulate”) was published in 1912, when she was nineteen, and her first volume of poetry, *Renascence and Other Poems* (1917), appeared in print the year she was graduated from Vassar. She was a celebrity in Greenwich Village in that Golden Renascence when the Village was the American counterpart of the Latin Quarter in Paris, when poets and painters lived in

cold-water flats which were the American counterpart of Left Bank attics, when sculptors and scribblers on both sides of the Atlantic starved with bohemian nobility. Ah, those dear dead days! — when, to quote Miss Millay herself, the artists and authors were all “very, very poor and very, very merry.”

Miss Millay's career has been a literary legend. She joined the Provincetown Players as a playwright and performer, published three plays in verse, and later wrote the libretto of one of the few American grand operas, *The King's Henchman*, by Deems Taylor. In 1923 she won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems* (1923) . . .

We discovered Edna St. Vincent Millay's only mystery short story early in 1949, and wrote to Miss Millay offering a suitable fee for reprinting the story in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. Miss Millay's response was amazing: she said she could not remember having written the story, and would we kindly send her evidence of it. We promptly mailed the text to her, and she promptly approved the reprinting in *EQMM* (it appeared in the May 1950 issue). On August 4, 1949, Miss Millay wrote to us again, from her home called Steepletop, near Austerlitz, New York, giving us the origin and background of the story: “I wrote it in Paris. I was sitting alone having lunch outdoors at just such a restaurant as I describe. I was not only alone at my table; there was nobody else at any table. I turned my head and saw over my left shoulder, and very near to me, just inside the window of the restaurant, a large glass tank containing water in which eels were swimming. I wished they were not there.

“The rest was all imagination. Except, of course, that when you have lived in a place for a long time, you are able to describe things about it in a fairly accurate way.”

In Miss Millay's prose you will find the qualities of both herself and her poetry — the clear, precise voice, and the

delicate, almost fragile, image; the intensely personal style which is of simple beauty and of beautiful simplicity; the psychological probing of loneliness and mental fatigue (and murder), with their twisting emotional crosscurrents and undercurrents . . .

THE MURDER IN THE FISHING CAT

Nobody came any more to the Restaurant du Chat qui Pêche. It was difficult to say just why.

The popularity of a restaurant does not depend on the excellence of its cuisine or the cobwebs on the bottles in its cellar. And you might have in the window ten glass tanks instead of one in which moved obscurely shadowy eels and shrimps, yet you could be no surer of success. Jean-Pierre knew this, and he did not reproach himself for his failure. It is something that may happen to the best of us.

For fourteen years he had served as good *lapin sauté* as was to be found in Paris; and if the *petits pois* were rather big and hard, and the Vouvray rather like thin cider, and you got no more than a teaspoonful of sugar with your strawberries, well, what could you expect for seven francs, all told? Not the world, surely. As for the rest, where else might you, while sitting comfortably at your table under a red-and-white awning, choose your eel, and see it captured for you deftly in a napkin, and borne off, writhing muscularly, to the kitchen, to be delivered to you five minutes later on a platter, fried? That was more than you could do at *Ciro's*.

It might be, of course, because Margot had scolded him much too audibly. But where was the man among his clients whose wife had not at some time or other addressed him as *saligaud*, or *espèce de soupe au lait*? Let him stand forth.

And, anyway, she had gone now. After fourteen years at his side, stamping the butter, whacking the long loaves of bread, sitting down with a sigh to a bowl of onion soup after nine o'clock, she had gone. She had run off with a taxi driver who had red mustaches that curled naturally. And the place was very still.

Jean-Pierre stood in the doorway with a damp cloth in his hand, and watched the people go by. They all went by. Once he had been sure that all were coming in, but now he knew better. They were going to the Rendezvous des Cochers et Camion-neurs, next door.

"*J'ai pas la veine,*" said Jean-Pierre. He stepped out upon the pavement and busily passed the damp cloth over a table which was not yet dry.

A man and a girl went by. Two men went by. A woman went past, selling papers: "*L'Intran'! L'Intransigeant! La Liberté — troisième édition! L'Intran'! L'Intransigeant!*" Two young men went by; one was wearing a smock, the other had a painted picture under his arm. A man and a girl went past with their arms about each other. The man was saying, "*Si, si, c'est vrai.*" A very little girl came along, carrying a basket of small fringe-petaled pinks and fading roses. She had a serious face. She held out the flowers earnestly to a woman, with a coat over her arm, pushing a baby carriage; to an old man reading a newspaper as he walked; to two young women, dressed precisely alike, who were hurrying somewhere, chattering.

A priest went by, taking long steps, his black gown flapping about his large shoes, his stiff, shallow hat on the back of his head. He was trying to catch a bus. He began to run. The little girl watched him go by, seriously. Still watching him, she held out her flowers to a soldier in a uniform of horizon-blue. Then she went to the restaurant next door and moved among the tables.

"*Sentez, madame,*" she said without emotion, and impassively thrust a bunch of pinks under the nose of a young woman, with a very red mouth, whose fork dangled languidly from her hand as she conversed with the man across from her.

"*Merci, merci,*" said the woman, and motioned her away without looking at her.

An American boy was dining alone, reading from a yellow book. He looked up from his book, and followed the little girl with his eyes as she moved about the terrace. As she approached him he spoke to her.

"*C'est combien, ça ma petite?*" he asked.

She came up to him, and pressed her small stomach against the table.

"*Dix sous,*" she answered lispingly, staring at his forehead.

He put an arm about her while he selected a nosegay from the basket, stood it up in his empty wineglass, and poured Vichy for it. Then he gave her a franc and told her to keep the change.

She stared at him, and went off up the street, holding out her basket to the passers-by.

Jean-Pierre came to himself with a start: the proprietor of a flourishing café does not stand all the afternoon gaping at the goings-on in the café next door. No wonder people did not come to the Restaurant du Chat: it had an absent-minded *patron*. He hurriedly passed the damp cloth over two of the iron-legged tables, plucked a brown leaf from the laurel which hedged the terrace from the pavement proper, and went back into the restaurant.

"*Ça, va, Philippe?*" he questioned jovially of the large eel which was now the sole occupant of the tank.

Not for the life of him could Jean-Pierre have told you why he had addressed the eel as Philippe; but having done so, he was glad. For from the moment he had given the creature a name, it possessed an identity, it was a person, something he could talk to.

He went to the kitchen, and returned with a morsel of lobster from a salad of the night before and tossed it into the pool.

Two men and two women, finding the Rendezvous des Cochers crowded, turned in at the Restaurant du Chat qui Pêche and seated themselves.

They heard Jean-Pierre singing:

*"Oh, madame, voilà du bon fromage!
 Oh, madame, voilà du bon fromage!
 Voilà du bon fromage au lait!"*

One of the men rapped on the table with his stick. Jean-Pierre stopped short in his song, caught up the *carte du jour*, smoothed down his black beard, and hurried out.

"Very good, the rabbit," he suggested. And, "What will you have, sirs, in the way of wine?"

For half a year there had been only three of them to do the work — he, his wife, and Maurice, the waiter. Maurice had come to them when he was sixteen; but very soon he was nineteen, and the War Department, which knows about everything, had found out about that also, and had taken him away to put him into the army.

Then for two months there had been only two of them, but it was quite enough. Now Margot was gone, and he was alone. But business was worse and worse; and very rarely was he hurried with all the cooking and the serving and the cleaning up.

Jean-Pierre had made few friends in Paris in these fourteen years. He had dealt pleasantly with his clients, his neighbors, and the tradespeople with whom he had to do; but he had been content with his wife. She was a pretty woman from the frontier of Spain and more Spanish than French. He had met her for the first time right over there, in the Luxembourg Gardens. He could almost see from his doorway the very tree under which she had been sitting. She was wearing a hat of pink straw sloping down over her forehead, with many little roses piled high under the back of it; and she was very small about the waist. She was embroidering something white.

Several times he passed the chair in which she was sitting, and every time she looked up, and then looked down again. When she arose to go, he fell into step beside her.

"Mademoiselle, may I accompany you?" he asked.

"No, please," she answered hurriedly, without looking at him, and quickened her step.

He kept pace with her, however, and bent over her and spoke again more softly.

"It is wrong for one so beautiful to be so cruel."

"*Veux-tu me laisser!*" she scolded, tossing her head, and hastened out of sight.

But the next afternoon she was there again.

"You remember my wife, Philippe?" said Jean-Pierre. "Margot of the naughty eyes and the pretty ankles?"

Philippe said nothing.

"You do, all the same," Jean-Pierre averred. "She used to stir the water to make you mad." After a moment he said again, "Philippe, you remember Margot, don't you?"

Philippe said nothing.

"Well, anyhow," said Jean-Pierre, "she's gone."

For three months now Philippe had been alone in the tank. Nobody ate eels any more. The few customers that came ordered rabbit, mutton, or beefsteak and potatoes. It would be foolish to have more eels sent in from the basin in the country. Jean-Pierre had explained that he would need for a time no more eels or shrimps, that he was making some changes.

Every morning when the proprietor of the Chat qui Pêche came down to open the door and put the tables and chairs out upon the pavement, Philippe lay sluggishly on the green bottom of his tank, the sunshine bringing out colors on his back that one had not known were there.

It was an oblong glass tank with brass edges. Fresh water came up through a little spout in the middle of it, and the stale water was sucked away through a pipe in one corner, which was covered with a bubble-shaped piece of netting. Looking into the tank one day, Jean-Pierre wondered why the netting was shaped like that; then he reflected that if the wire had been flat over the mouth of the pipe, it would have been clogged always with bits of dirt and food, which would float up to settle on it. He felt very proud when he had come to this conclusion.

Philippe had been at one time gray-green in color, and thin and very active. Now he was green-black, with a valance standing up along his spine of transparent purple, and with two little pale-green fins behind his head. He was big now, but as lithe as ever.

Jean-Pierre had heard queer tales about eels; he did not know how much truth there was in them. He had heard that their mothers came ashore to give birth to them; that they were born, like little animals, not laid, like eggs. And when they were small they were called "elvers." And he had been told that after they were born, their mothers left them, and went away. And in a little while the elvers started out for themselves in search of pools to live in. And if it so happened that the pools nearby had dried up with the heat, they went farther. And it was said that they have gone as far as twenty miles, across the land, in search of water, thousands of them, an army of little eels. And no human eye had witnessed their sinuous migration. Only from time to time there was found a dead elver in the grass, and people knew the eels had passed that way.

"*Dis-moi un peu, Philippe,*" said Jean-Pierre. "You are a droll one, aren't you?"

The days went by, and nothing happened in them. Every day a few people came to eat there. Once there had been ten at a time, and Jean-Pierre had said to himself that if this kept on, he would have to get a waiter. But it did not keep on.

Every day he missed his wife more keenly. One day he went across the rue de Médicis into the Luxembourg Gardens, and walked up and down past the place where he had first seen her. A young woman was sitting under the tree, embroidering, but she was not Margot. She had two children with her, two little girls, dressed just alike, in very short dresses made all of pale blue silk ruffles. They were chasing one another up and down the walk and calling in shrill voices. One of them lost her hair ribbon, a pale blue silk bow, and ran sidewise up to her mother,

holding in one hand the ribbon and lifting with the other a lock of straight blonde hair at the top of her head; but all the time calling to her sister, and pawing the earth with brown, impatient legs.

Jean-Pierre wished very much that his only child, his and Margot's, had not died of diphtheria. She would have been much prettier than either of these little girls; she had looked like her mother. And she would be a companion for him now. If she were here this afternoon, he would take her to the Jardin des Plantes and show her all the different-colored birds. And after that they would go to the Café des Deux Magots and sit outside, and he would have a half-blond beer, and she would have a grenadine. And he would buy her one of those small white-and-brown rabbits made all of real fur that hop when you press a bulb, such as old men are always peddling along the pavement from trays suspended in front of their stomachs by a cord about their necks.

The days went by and went by. May passed, and June passed. One day there came a post card from Maurice, a picture bearing the title, *Panorama de Metz*. On it was written carefully in pencil, *Bon souvenir d'un nouveau poilu aviateur*. Jean-Pierre was very excited about the post card. Four times that day he drew it from his pocket and read it aloud, then turned it over and read with happiness his own name on the front of it. Late in the afternoon it occurred to him with pleasure that he had not yet read it to Philippe, and he hastened to do so. But from his wife there had come no word.

It seemed to Jean-Pierre that he would give everything he had in the world if he might once again hear Margot wail from the terrace, "*Un-e sou-u-u-u-pe!*" And, oh, to be called once more a dirty camel, a robber, or a species of dog!

He went to the tank and leaned over the quivering water.

"You are my wife, Philippe. You know?" said Jean-Pierre. "You are a *salope!*"

Having delivered himself of this genial insult, he felt happier, and stood for some moments in his doorway with his arms folded, looking boldly out upon the world.



"*Ga va, mon vieux?*" he accosted the eel one morning, and stirred the top of the water with a lobster claw. But Philippe scarcely moved. Jean-Pierre reached down with the lobster claw and tickled his back. The flat tail flapped slightly, but that was all. Jean-Pierre straightened up and pulled at his beard in astonishment. Then he leaned far over, so that his head made a shadow in which the eel was clearly visible, and shouted down to him.

"Philippe, Philippe, my friend, you are not sick, are you?"

He waited eagerly, but there was no responsive motion. The eel lay still.

"Oh, my God!" cried the *patron* of the Chat qui Pêche, and clutched his hair in his hands. Then for the first time he noticed that the surface of the water was unusually quiet. No fresh water bubbled up from the tap in the middle.

"Oh, my God!" cried Jean-Pierre again, and rushed to the kitchen.

There was nothing there with which to clean a clogged water pipe. Everything that was long enough was much too thick. One tine of a fork would go in, but was probably not long enough. Nevertheless, he would try.

He ran back to the window and prodded the tube with a tine of the fork. Then he straightened up and waited, breathless. The water did not come. He rushed again to the kitchen, and scratched about among the cooking utensils. Was there no piece of wire anywhere in the world? A pipe cleaner! That was it! He searched feverishly through all his pockets, but he knew all the time that he had none. It occurred to him that if Margot were there, she would have a hairpin, which could be straightened out, and he cursed her savagely that she had gone.

Suddenly his eye fell on the broom, which was standing in a corner. He went over to it and tore out a handful of splints, with which he rushed back to the tank.

"Wait, wait, Philippe!" he called as he approached. "Don't die! Wait just a very little minute!" And he thrust a splint down into the tube. It broke, and he had difficulty in extracting it.

Sweat came out on his forehead. He put two splints together, and inserted them with care.

"Don't die! Don't die!" he moaned, but softly, lest the splints should break.

Suddenly, incredibly, the water came, and dust and particles of food began to travel slowly toward the outlet. Jean-Pierre thrust his hands in up to the wrists, and shooed the stale water down the tank.

The next morning Philippe was quite himself again. Fearfully, Jean-Pierre crept into the room and approached the window.

"*Comment ça va ce matin?*" he questioned in a timid voice, and put a finger into the pool.

The eel aroused, and wriggled sullenly to the other end of the glass.

Jean-Pierre giggled sharply with delight, and all that morning he went about with a grin on his face, singing, "*Madame, voilà du bon fromage!*"

Jean-Pierre hated the room in which he slept. It seemed to have become, since Margot left, every day dirtier and more untidy. For one thing, of course, he never made the bed. When he crawled into it at night it was just as he had crawled out of it in the morning. The thin blanket dragged always to the floor on one side, the counterpane on the other. The sheets grew grayer and grayer, and the bolster flatter. And he seemed always to have fallen asleep on the button side of the square pillow.

Infrequently he drew off the soiled sheets and put on clean ones. But at such times he became more than usually unhappy; he missed Margot more. She had been used to exclaim always over the fresh bed that it smelled sweet, and to pass her hand with pleasure over the smooth old linen. Often she would say with pride, "I tell you frankly, my little cabbage, in many of the big hotels today, rich hotels, full of Americans, they make up the beds with cotton. I don't see how the clients sleep. I could not."

Every morning on awaking, Jean-Pierre groaned once and

turned heavily. Then he rubbed the back of his wrist across his eyes, and stared out at the daylight. He saw on the shelf above the narrow fireplace a pale photograph of himself and his brother when they were children. They were seated in an imitation rowboat. Into his hand had been thrust an imitation oar; from the hand of his brother dangled listlessly a handsome string of imitation fish.

He saw also the swathed and ghostly bulk of what he knew to be a clock — a clock so elegant and fine, so ornamented with whorls of shiny brass, that his wife had kept it lovingly wrapped in a towel. To be sure, the face of the clock could not be seen; but what will you? One cannot have everything. Between the clock and the photograph was a marvelous object — a large melon growing serenely in a small-necked bottle. A great trick, that. But Jean-Pierre was very tired of the melon.

He was tired of everything in the room, everything in his life, but particularly of the things on the mantelpiece. And most of all he was tired of the candlestick that stood between the clock and the wreath of wax gardenias — a candlestick which had never known a candle, a flat lily pad with a green frog squatting on it. Jean-Pierre did not know that it was a green frog squatting on a lily pad. It had been there so long that when he looked at it he no longer saw it. It was only one of the things on the mantelpiece.

One morning, however, as he awoke and groaned and turned and looked out with dull eyes on still another yesterday, it so happened that he stared for some moments at the candlestick. And presently he said, "*Tiens! tiens!*" and laid his forefinger alongside his nose.

That morning he dressed hurriedly, with a little smile going and coming at his lips. And when he was dressed he thrust the candlestick into his pocket and ran downstairs.

"*Bonjour, Philippe!*" he called as he entered the restaurant. "Regard, species of wild man, I bring you a little friend!"

Happily, and with excessive care, he installed the green frog at the bottom of the tank. The eel moved away from it in beautiful curves.

"There is somebody for you to talk to, Philippe," said Jean-Pierre, "as you are for me."

He went to the door and opened it. The morning air came freshly in from the trees and fountains of the Luxembourg.

The days went by and went by, and nothing happened in them. One afternoon Jean-Pierre stood for a long time outside the window of a shop which had the sign up, *Fleurs Naturelles*. It was unfortunate for Margot, he told you frankly, that she had left him, because otherwise on this day she would be receiving a bouquet of flowers, *pois de senteur*, purple, pink, and mauve, and big white *pivoines*. It was the anniversary of their wedding. There were water lilies in the window, too.

Suddenly Jean-Pierre burst into the flower shop with the face of a boy in love, and after much shrugging and gesticulation and interchange of commonplace insults, he parted from the shopkeeper, and went home to Philippe, bearing a long-stemmed lily.

At twenty minutes to one of an afternoon a week later a man might have been seen to walk along the *quai* of the Seine to the Place St. Michel, and then up the Boulevard St. Michel to the rue de Médicis. On the corner of the rue de Médicis he hesitated and looked both ways. Just then a very little girl came up the *boulevard* and held out to him a basket of pinks and roses. He shook his head.

It happened that for that moment these two were the only people on that corner. The little girl stood for a moment beside him, hesitating, looking both ways. Then she tucked her basket under her arm and started up the rue de Médicis. And because she had turned that way, the man turned that way, too, letting her decision take the place of his own.

He walked slowly, glancing as he passed at the many people taking their luncheon under the awnings in front of the cafés. He was looking for a place to eat, and it happened that he wished to be alone.

Before the Restaurant du Chat qui Pêche there were six oblong, iron-legged tables, on each of which stood a warted blue-

glass vase containing a sprig of faded sweet william and the wilted stamens of a rose from which the petals had dropped. The place was deserted. There was no sign of life anywhere about, saving only that in one of the windows there was a glass tank filled with slightly quivering water, on the surface of which floated a lily, and on the bottom of which, beside an artificial bright-green frog, dozed a large and sluggish eel.

The man seated himself at one of the tables and tapped upon the table with the vase. There was no response. He tapped again.

"*Voilà!*" called Jean-Pierre from the back of the restaurant, and came eagerly out, holding in his hand the *carte du jour*.

"The rabbit is very good," he suggested, "also the gigot. And what will you have, sir, in the way of wine?"

"White wine," said the man, "a half bottle. A salad of tomatoes, an onion soup, and an *anguille*."

"*Oui, monsieur*," said Jean-Pierre. "And after the *andouilles*, what?" *Andouilles* are a kind of sausage.

"Not *andouilles*," replied the man with some impatience, "*anguille*."

"*Oui, monsieur*," said Jean-Pierre, trembling. He passed his damp cloth over the table and went back into the restaurant. He sat down on a chair, and his head dropped to one side, his eyes bulging. "*O-o, là là!*" said Jean-Pierre.

Several moments passed. The man on the terrace outside rapped sharply on the table.

"*Voilà!*" called Jean-Pierre, leaping to his feet. Hurriedly he gathered up a folded napkin, a thick white plate, a knife, fork, and spoon, two round bits of bread, and an unlabeled bottle of white wine. With these he issued forth.

When the table was fairly set, he curved one hand behind his ear and leaned down to listen.

"Will *monsieur* kindly repeat his order?" he requested in a half whisper.

The gentleman did so, with annoyance, glanced up into the face bending over him, frowned, and reached for the wine.

Jean-Pierre went away and returned with the tomato salad.

It was very pretty. There were green bits of chopped onion scattered over it. Presently he brought the onion soup. This was not very good. It was composed chiefly of soaked bits of bread, and it was not hot; but with grated cheese it could be made to do.

When the soup was finished, Jean-Pierre appeared again and cleared away the dishes.

"And for the rest, sir," said he, fixing the eyes of his client with his own, which glittered meaningly, "it will be necessary to wait a few moments, you understand."

"Yes, yes," said the man, and shrugged. He wished vaguely he had gone elsewhere for his food.

"Because he is living," Jean-Pierre pursued in a clear voice of unaccountable pride, "and it will be necessary first to kill him. See, he lives!" And pulling the man by the sleeve, he pointed with his thumb to the brass-bound tank in the window.

The man glanced askance at the window, and twitched his sleeve free.

"*Encore une demi-bouteille de vin blanc,*" he replied.

Jean-Pierre stood for a moment looking down into the water. The eel was stretched along the bottom of the tank, dozing in the sunshine. Once he idly flipped his thick tail, then lay still again. His dark back shone with a somber iridescence.

"*Philippe,*" whispered Jean-Pierre, thrusting his face close to the surface of the pool, "*Philippe, mon petit, adieu!*"

At this, tears rushed from his eyes, and his neck and chest tried horridly to sob, working out and in like the shoulders of a cat that is sick.

"O Holy Virgin!" he moaned, and wound the clean white napkin firmly about his hand.

The eel came writhing out into the air. It was muscular and strong. It struck backward with its heavy body. It wound itself about Jean-Pierre's wrist. It was difficult to hold. It was difficult to shift from one hand to the other while one rushed to the kitchen.

Jean-Pierre held the eel to the table and reached for the

knife. The knife was gone. Sweat rolled from his forehead, down his cheeks, and into his beard.

He ran wildly from one end of the kitchen to the other, the eel all the time plunging and twisting in his hand. He could not think what it was he was looking for.

The broom! But, no, it was not that. At length he saw the handle of the knife, Margot's knife, with which she used to kill the bread. It was peering at him from under a clutter of red and white onion skins. It had been watching him all this time.

He walked slowly past it, then turned sharply, and snatched it with his hand. He held Philippe firmly down on the table, turned away his face, and struck with closed eyes. When he looked again, the knife was wedged in the table; Philippe had not been touched. He eased the knife free; the eel struck it with his lashing tail, and it fell to the floor. He stooped to pick it up; the eel reared in his grasp and smote him across the face.

"Ah-h-h!" cried Jean-Pierre, "you would, would you!" Smarting and furious from the blow, he clutched the knife and rose.

"You would, would you!" he said again, between his teeth. His throat thickened. Flames danced before his eyes. "*Eh bien, on verra!* Name of a name! We shall see, my little pigeon!" The flames roared and crackled. His eyes smarted, and his lungs were full of smoke. His heart swelled, burst, and the stored resentment and pain of his long isolation raced through his body, poisoning his blood.

"Take *that* for your lying face!" he cried. "Spaniard! Take *that* for your ankles! *That* for your red mustaches! Take *that!* Take *that!*"

Kneeling on the floor, he beat in the head of Philippe with the handle of the knife.

All the time that the stranger was eating, Jean-Pierre watched him slyly from the door. Twice a small giggle arose to his lips, but he caught at his beard and pulled it down. He was happy for the first time in many months. He had killed the taxi driver with the red mustaches, he had fried him in six pieces that leaped, and the stranger was eating him.

When the stranger had gone, Jean-Pierre gathered up the dishes and bore them to the kitchen, chuckling as he did so. He saw the head of the eel in the corner where he had kicked it, and he spat on it. But when he came back for the wine bottles and the salt and pepper and vinegar and oil, his eyes fell on the tank in the window, with its bright-green frog and its floating lily and its quiet emptiness. Then he remembered that it was Margot that he had killed.

He put his hand to his throat and stared. Margot! Now, how had that happened? He was sure that he had never intended to kill Margot. What a terrible mistake! But, no, it was not true that he had killed Margot. It was an ugly and tiresome dream. There was sun on the trees in the Gardens of the Luxembourg. Was not that proof enough that Margot was not dead, if one had needed proof?

Still, come to think of it, it was a long time since she had been about the house. It was fully a year, if you pressed the point, since he had heard her voice. There was something very dead about her, come to think of it.

But certainly he had killed Margot! How silly of him! He remembered the circumstances now perfectly. They had been out together in a rowboat on a river whose banks were brass. In Margot's hand was an oar, in his a handsome string of fish. At one end of the river was a dam covered by a dome of netted wire. At the other end water bubbled up continuously from a hidden spring.

He looked at Margot. As he looked, the oar slipped softly from her hand into the water; on the other side of the boat the string of fish slipped softly from his hand into the water. Then he noted with disquiet that the water in the river was steadily receding. He looked at the banks; they were like high walls of brass. He looked at them again; they were like tall cliffs of brass. He looked at the river; it was as shallow as a plate of soup.

It occurred to him that if he wanted to drown Margot, he would best be quick about it, as soon there would be no water in which to drown her. "But I do not wish to drown Margot!" he protested. But the man kept rapping on the table with a sprig of

sweet william. And even as he said it, he stepped from the boat, seized her by the waist with both hands, and plunged her beneath the surface.

Her lithe body doubled powerfully in his grasp. He was astonished at the litheness of her body. Her feet, in elegant shoes of patent leather with six straps, appeared above the water, the ankles crossed. The top of her head was not even wet. Yet, for all that, the life came out of her. It rose to the surface in a great colored bubble, and floated off into the sunshine.

Jean-Pierre gazed across at the Luxembourg. A child in a white dress passed through a gate into the garden, holding in its hand by a string a blue balloon. Jean-Pierre smiled, and watched the balloon float off.

Over there, under a tree whose blossoms of white and mauve drifted like lilies on the air, wearing a white dress and a pink hat with roses piled beneath the brim, forever and ever sat Margot. Over her head, tethered to her wrist by its string, floated forever and ever the blue balloon.

She was very near to him. It was a matter of a moment only to go across to her and lift the hat and say, "*Mademoiselle*, may I accompany you?"

Save that between them, flowing level with its brassy banks past the curb before his door, forever and ever ran the sunny river, full of rolling motor buses and rocking red taxicabs, too broad, too broad to swim. People went paddling past the window, this way and that way. A priest sailed by in a flapping gown, square boots on his feet. A little girl went drifting by in a basket; her eyes were closed; her hands were full of brown carnations. Two policemen passed, their short capes winging in thick folds.

At the sight of the policemen Jean-Pierre started violently and stepped back from the window. There was something he must be about, and that without more delay, but he could not think what it was. Memories of Margot flew at his mind with sharp beaks. He waved his arms about his head to scare them off. There was something he must be about, and that at once.

Something touched him lightly on the shoulder. He uttered

an indrawn scream, and swung on his heel. It was only the wall. He had backed into the wall. Yet even as he said to himself, "It is only the wall," and wiped his sleeve across his forehead, he saw them beside him, the two policemen, one on the left of him and one on the right.

The one on the right of him said to the other, "This is he, the man who drowned his wife in a plate of soup."

But the other answered, "Not at all. He beat in her head with a knife. Do you not see the onion skins?"

Then for the first time Jean-Pierre saw that both had red mustaches, and he knew that he was lost.

"Come, my man," they said, and stepped back, and he was left standing alone.

Suddenly that part of the floor on which he was standing slipped backward like a jerked rug under his feet, and he was thrown forward on his face. There came a rush of cold wind on the nape of his neck.

"No, you don't!" he shrieked, and rolling over violently, leaped into the kitchen and bolted the door.

He knelt behind the door and addressed them craftily through the keyhole.

"*Messieurs*," he said, "upstairs in my chamber is a melon as big as my head, in a bottle with a neck the size of a pipestem. It is the marvel of all Paris. I will give ten thousand francs to the man who can divine me how it came there."

Then he put his ear to the hole and listened, with difficulty restraining himself from chuckling aloud.

In a moment he heard their feet on the stairs.

He counted the stairs with them as they ascended, nodding his head at each. When he knew that they were at the top, he slipped quietly out and bolted the stairway door.

His head was very clear; it was as light as a balloon on his shoulders. He knew precisely what he must do. He must bury the body, remove all traces of his guilt, and get away. And he must lose no time.

He took his hat and coat from the peg where they were hang-

ing, and placed them in readiness over a chair by the street door. Then he went softly and swiftly into the kitchen.

He gathered up from the table six sections of a broken backbone, a large knife, and an unwashed platter; from the stove a greasy frying pan; and from the floor a crushed and bloodstained head. These objects he wrapped in a newspaper, laid upon a chair, and then covered with a cloth.

Hark! Was that a step in the room above? No.

Hastily he washed the table, scrubbing feverishly until the last stain was removed, scrubbed a wide stain from the floor, and set the kitchen in order.

Hark! Was that a step on the stair? No.

He lifted the newspaper parcel from the chair and bore it, shielded from sight by his apron, into the small backyard behind the restaurant, a yard bare save for a tree of empty bottles, some flower pots full of dry earth and withered stalks, and a rusted bird-cage with crushed and dented wires.

There he laid his burden down, and after an hour of terror and sweating toil buried it in a hole much bigger than was required.

The afternoon advanced, and evening came. A light flashed on in the *Rendezvous des Cochers et Camionneurs*; farther up the street another light. The street was ablaze. Gay people walked up and down, sat at tables eating, talked eagerly together.

In the *Restaurant du Chat qui Pêche* the dusk thickened into dark, the darkness into blackness, and no lights came on. The door was wide open. The night wind came in through the door, and moved about the empty rooms.

At midnight a policeman, seeing that the door was open and the restaurant in darkness, approached, rapped sharply on the open door, and called. There was no answer.

He closed the door, and went on.

*Mark
Van Doren*

(1894—)

Mark Van Doren is not only one of America's distinguished poets, he is equally distinguished as a fiction writer, as a critic and biographer of Thoreau, Dryden, and Shakespeare, as an editor, a teacher, and a lecturer, and as a radio and TV commentator. He is famous in academic circles as a most inspiring teacher, with an empathy for the literary work being studied and a profound sympathy for the students doing the studying; and his sense of humor, which has made his classes extremely popular, especially in the English Department of Columbia University, is a byword among the students who have taken his courses.

Mr. Van Doren won the Pulitzer Prize for his *Collected Poems* (1939). Most critics agree that his poetry has "a clean and chiseled quality," which is the direct outgrowth of the "clear-thinking sanity" which is his constant aim. Critics have also said that Mr. Van Doren's poetry is of the intellect rather than of passion. But even if that is true — and we are not at all sure it is — some of Mr. Van Doren's short stories, particularly those dealing with crime and detection, reveal not only his intellectual strength but also a deep-rooted passion for the oppressed and an emotional understanding of

those strange motives which lie dormant in the hearts of so many of us.

Anthony Boucher has written of the "luminous" quality in Mr. Van Doren's prose, and the word is *le mot juste*. This luminosity shines through the "crisp precision" of Mr. Van Doren's phrasing, burns brightly in the "questioning, questing" curiosity that pervades his work, is the light inside the warm, moving sense of evocation that diffuses everything he writes. Here is a tale that radiates and reflects that luminescence . . .

TESTIMONY AFTER DEATH

Even the Inspector was moved. The dead boy's face was beautiful despite its wound: a great bruise that disfigured the left cheek and extended back into the dark hair which many examining fingers had tangled till it was wild. But the face itself had never been wild. It still wore an expression which the Inspector kept turning about to consider. Again and again he went over it; and then, as if there were nothing in it after all, he shrugged and gave the customary order.

"Take care of this till we get identification. Plenty of pictures, too, in case — but he must have lived in the neighborhood; somebody will claim him."

Nobody did; and when the burial notice was brought to the Inspector he said a strange thing.

"Too bad. He almost told me who did it. I kept thinking I could find out from his face what happened. But of course I couldn't, there's nothing in that. It might have been accidental anyway — slipped or fell, or a truck chain swung and slugged him; he could have been near the curb; we had a case like that last year. But I don't think so. Somebody did this. And damned if I see why. There couldn't have been any money on him, with

those clothes. And it was a good face, if you get what I mean; it almost told me what I wanted to know."

None of the officers did get what he meant. Some of them hadn't gone with him to Dominick Street, and those who had were busy with other things: ringing doorbells in the block, interviewing bystanders, and consulting their list of local gangs. None of them looked for evidence in the pale features on which peace sat as if it were a bird with no intention of flying away. As if it were the boy's soul, determined not to leave his body yet. It was more in fact than either of those; it was a rapturous contentment with what the boy had seen, was seeing when something or somebody killed him, and he dropped in the dark street to lie until a dog barked, a woman screamed, and a patrolman came running from the corner. The woman knew nothing, and neither did anybody else who was questioned.

It was a closed case until the day next spring when Clancy came in and said to the Inspector, "There's a man here, a painter, wants to see you about the Dominick Street boy — remember? — that we never identified. He's been looking at the photographs; says it was his son."

"I'll see him."

The man was half starved, and the Inspector made him sit down.

"A painter? Where do you work?"

The man was nervous; he would rather have stood. "At home, sir, in my studio."

"Don't call me sir. You're not a house painter."

"Oh, no."

"Clancy, did you take his name and address?"

"Certainly. Philip Strong, 231 East Third."

"That's nowhere near — Strong, why didn't we hear from you before?"

"I don't read the newspapers, I don't go out."

"But you missed your boy — you had one, didn't you?"

"I had *him*." He still held one of the photographs in his hand, that shook as he looked down.

"I can believe it. There's a resemblance." But the Inspector

thought: The face I remember is only half there. "Your wife living?"

"No, sir, not since he was two years old."

"Don't call me sir. How old was he in October? What was his name?"

"Raphael."

"What?"

"Raphael. He was seventeen."

"Can you prove he was your son? I hope you can, frankly; I won't make it hard."

"Only" — he hesitated — "by my paintings. Most of them are of him; a hundred, nearly. If you would come and look — or send somebody —"

"I'll come." Clancy was astonished. "Call my car. Tell Jones I only want the car; I'll drive."

The studio was nothing but a north room over an empty store. The painter went in first, apologizing for the disorder; but it must have been years ago that he gave up caring how his habitation looked. In the two corners away from the window were two narrow beds, only one of which was made. "Where he slept," said Strong, following the Inspector's glance. The rest of the space was cluttered with broken chairs, a stove, a sink, some unwashed dishes, rags, brushes, dirt.

But an easel stood in the best place, and on it, in a gilt frame, was a portrait which the Inspector went at once to examine. He stood close to it, then backed away; looked over at Strong; then grew absorbed again in the face before him. The open eyes — soft, beautiful, black — were what he studied most. He had never seen them open.

"That's him," he said, and when he saw tears in the father's eyes he did all he could to speak gently. He still had questions to put.

"You said there were others, nearly a hundred." The painter started toward a closet whose door would not shut on all it contained. "But this is enough, don't bother. Is it finished?"

"No, I keep working on it. Ever since he left I've been tormented by this memory of mine" — he rubbed his forehead —

"it changes every hour of every day. But that is Raphael. Thank you for recognizing him."

"You say he left. When was that?"

"October sixth."

"The same day — "

"Yes, or the same night. He was on his way to the ferry; he was going west; I made him go." He struck his hands together. "I made him go. But I expected to hear from him — cards and letters. When they didn't come I got a certain satisfaction from this" — pointing to the easel — "I tried to see him as he must be then, wherever he was, whatever he was doing."

The Inspector looked for the least untrustworthy chair and sat down in it, carefully.

"What do you mean, you made him go?"

"He was too good."

"What?"

The painter, it appeared, hadn't expected to be understood. "You would have to know more about Raphael than you do. Or than I can tell you." Yet after a minute of looking out of the window, over the ramshackle roofs on which a cool clear sun was shining, he continued.

"Raphael didn't know about the world. I sent him off to find out what it was like in other places. Here in New York he didn't see what others see — what I do myself, what anybody does. He would pass a bar, would look in at the dingy lamps, the men there with glasses, the whole terrible, stupid scene, and the most wonderful expression would come over his face. I knew what it was, for sometimes he told me, though not very well; and never, mind you, proudly. He was thinking of the light inside those men; they sat in darkness, but their souls were bright within them — made so, of course, by rye and bourbon, and cold beer."

"We all see that," said the Inspector. "We call it being lit. Of course we don't say anything about the soul."

"Oh, but he did, and went on then to think about his own. It was still brighter. It was drunk too in a way, but not from drink-

ing. He had his natural light, that I've tried to paint and always failed. It was really a light, I think. He was going to beautify the world with it — not by preaching, or blaming others because they were different from him, but simply by existing to the full extent of what he was: by walking the streets, or coming home here and sitting by the window, or getting into bed there and letting his eyes go round and round the ceiling — well, dozens of ways, but the point was that something burned like a diamond in him, and this was all he considered to be necessary. If it was true, it made a tremendous difference in the world. And he made sure it was true. He did nothing but think how things would be if they were purified by fire — not real fire, but the kind he carried around with him inside of his dark head. He walked in the world like a fine day. He loved it, and he wanted it to love him. I tell you, it was a kind of intoxication, the purest and sweetest kind. But now — maybe I've made him sound insane. A pyromaniac or something."

The Inspector, ignoring his gaze, said nothing.

"That would be a horrible mistake. Raphael was serene. Except, to be sure, during the past year, when he grew restless and wouldn't tell me why. Then one day in June he did. He said he had found out something by himself, something I never have, or anybody else I know. I can't imagine how one could, but Raphael did. It came to him as clear as glass, or ice. He suddenly understood what it means to say that it makes all the difference in the world what each of us does. Not merely is, but does. Most of us couldn't bear to believe that; we'd be watching every move we made, every breath and every thought, and we'd be crushed at last by the responsibility. And so he was, in a way; but with him there was no old guilt, no habit of being disgusted with himself, to make the burden intolerable. Raphael knew how to be pleased with his own soul; it contented him, it soothed him, it was his best and most beautiful friend.

"This was why he didn't have to think about it any more than he did. It left him free, as our lungs do, when the weather is sweet, to enjoy nothing but that sweetness. Don't misunderstand

me, Inspector. Raphael loved himself, and therefore he could love the world. But now he had this vision of the universe as a great curved mirror in which each act, each utterance, each idea is magnified forever; and worse than that — or it would have been worse for you and me — the mirror was a kind of mind, a kind of heart; it was indeed all mind, all heart, and both at once; it was a person, and it judged us; it was gratified, was grieved, according as we played our parts below; and it concealed in its depths the consequences of our lives — our whole lives, and each minute of them too.

“Even for Raphael this was hard, because there was a next step to take, and nothing showed him how. He had no sense of what he ought to do, of what the great person up there would be most pleased by if he did it. He was on the stage, and ready to act, but still there were no lines for him to speak. What should he do? What should he not do? To do nothing might be the worst thing; yet there he was, helpless to go or come. It was then I began to talk about his leaving me a while. I couldn’t answer his questions; but the big world west of the river, once he was moving through it, might teach him to forget them. Not that I thought them wrong — or mad, oh, no! — but I was at the end of my wits, and for all I knew he was just at the beginning of his; and if so, a change of some sort would be good. I was the mad one, Inspector. I made him go. Everything I had was in him, and I sent him off.”

He felt his way to the window, found it, and turned about, the light behind him almost obliterating his thin figure.

“What will you do now?” The Inspector blinked. “I’m sorry for you, Strong. What will you do — go on painting that?” He inclined his head toward the easel.

Strong threw up his hands, then let them fall of their own weight. “I don’t know. Until today, when I thought of asking the police — the idea came to me before, but I fought it off — until I saw your photographs I wouldn’t admit there was anything *to* do. He would come back, I said; over and over I said it; then suddenly, this morning, I had doubts; and as soon as doubts, fears. I just don’t know, Inspector.”

"Can you live? I mean, do you ever sell any of those?" He motioned toward the closet door.

"Oh, none of *those*." Strong was alarmed. "Occasionally another kind, that I can do to order. Also, my wife left me a little money — just a little. Yes, I can keep alive."

"Did you notice anything in particular about the photographs? I had them taken because the boy's face — well, it struck me. It seemed to be about to" — he searched for words, found none that wouldn't embarrass him, and gave up.

"About to — please, Inspector, what?"

"Well then, *say* something. It was what you would call a speaking face. Even with the eyes closed I thought if I waited long enough it would tell me — "

"What? What sort of thing?"

"Who killed him. Or what killed him. But then he couldn't have known it was going to happen."

"No, no! Of course not!" A singular agitation seized the man. "For one thing, he wouldn't have believed it possible that any person — "

"You think it was one person?"

Strong stared at him. His face worked strangely.

"You're not trying to tell me, are you, that *you* did it?"

In the deep silence of the room the gasp that Strong made seemed to keep on echoing and coming back. It was a dreadful sound, and the Inspector spoke now in a low, deliberate voice, as if he measured every word against that echo.

"Have you been telling me all the time you couldn't take him as he was? You couldn't live with anyone like that? You couldn't stand him being — perfect? Pity, perhaps? For him, more than you? I don't mean, Strong, I don't necessarily mean anything ugly, at least in the first stages. Is that what you've been — "

It was no noise that stopped him, but rather the absence of any noise at all, inside the room or out of it, over the roofs or anywhere, while the boy's father wept. Tears formed in his eyes and fell; and others formed, and slowly fell; and he wiped none of them away as he watched, incredulous, the face that had ac-

cused him. The Inspector, watching him in return, saw nothing but tears, and behind them the wide-open eyes of one who had supposed he was his friend.

He was.

"I had to do that, Strong." The Inspector got up suddenly. "It was one angle, and I had to — here, sit down!" For Strong was staggering away from the window. The Inspector lowered him into the chair, and now his own back was toward the light. "One possibility, on paper at least, was that you went with him as far as Dominick Street and then — but stay where you are, I won't give you any more, sit still, Strong, sit still. The business you can't imagine — well, I can't either. It could have been more than one, you understand. A mob of them — wild boys — and they wouldn't have taken the trouble to look before they — "

"Oh!" It was a pure groan, not meant for ears to hear.

"Now then, there won't be any more." The Inspector turned about. "I hate to leave you, Strong, but I'll be back — tomorrow, maybe. You stay here. I'll come again and see how you're doing."

"Inspector!" He wasn't trying to get up. "I wasn't there, of course I wasn't, but I know how he looked when — I know what you saw in his eyes, even if they were closed. I saw it in the photographs; I see it here in that picture; I see it everywhere, and always will. Raphael was happy when he died. It was all clear to him. The mirror, I mean, and the great mind. Do you know what I think, Inspector? He had just got the parts of it in place — he knew for the first time what to do, what not to do — he may even have turned around and started home to let me know I mustn't worry any more."

"Yes, yes, that may have been it." The Inspector, hat on head, stood soberly at the door. "I wouldn't be surprised, Strong, if that was the way it was. But now don't think about it any oftener than you have to. I'll be here tomorrow, early in the afternoon. You wait. I'll come."

"Where would I go?"

The heavy steps continued down the stairs.



Back at his desk the Inspector said, "Clancy, let me see that list of Dominick Street gangs. All of them, and those nearby, as far uptown as Houston. I want every name we've got there on those lists; I want each one checked over, and each kid brought in here by the end of this month."

"The kids themselves. One at a time?"

"Not necessarily; two or three together wouldn't hurt. But every last damned one — you get me?"

"What'll we do then? Chloroform 'em?"

"Maybe, but before they go under I've got something I want to beat into their heads so it will stay there, Clancy."

"Listen, Inspector. You won't find out a thing about that boy, if he's the one —"

"He is. We're going to have his father on our hands too; or the city will. But first, bring in the kids, the muggers; young or old, I want them all. This is serious. Understand?"

"No, Inspector."

"Thought you wouldn't. But it's nothing off my nose. Simply an order. Run on now and get it out."

"Yes, Inspector."

He sat there a long time wondering how he would put into words the thing he wanted them never to forget. The thing they did to someone they hadn't looked at twice. Or even once, in that dark block. There could be another light at the far end — there would be, he decided — but it wouldn't take the place of this one that could never burn again.

Robert Graves

(1895-)

Robert Graves, poet, novelist, short-story writer, critic, essayist, and author of "unclassifiable" works, is a remarkably versatile and prolific man. Earlier in his life, boxing, sports, and mountain climbing appealed to him more than literature, and instead of going on to college he enlisted in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers where he was an officer in the same regiment with Siegfried Sassoon. It was probably Sassoon who persuaded Graves to turn to poetry, and before the first World War was over, while Graves was still on active service, he had already published three slender volumes of poetry. After the war Graves moved his family to Oxford where the struggling poet set about completing his education.

Later, in his thirties, Graves moved to the island of Majorca where, with Laura Riding, he founded the Seizin Press. In this period he developed a theory that poetry should be "pure" and "non-literary," a sort of "spiritual cathartic"; and Nelson Algren has compared Graves's work of this period to Skelton's.

In his forties Graves's poetry became richer and even more original; Algren noted that Graves had replaced "sad-

ness" with "terror" and with what had been called Graves's "certainty of despair of life."

Graves's first great success as a novelist — it brought him an international reputation — was the earliest in his series of brilliant historical novels, *I, Claudius* (1934), winner of both the Hawthorneden and the James Tait Black Prizes. *Count Belisarius* (1938) won the Femina-Vie Heureuse Prize, but perhaps, over the years, Graves has become best known for his unusually candid autobiography, *Good-bye to All That* (1929). He has been hailed as a modern "master of prose," and "the living English poet," and has often been mentioned as a possible recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

His more recent poems have been characterized as "vigorous and rough-textured." The Robert Graves story we now bring to you is certainly vigorous, but it is definitely not rough-textured. Like his more mature poetry it avoids, as if they were plagues, both rhetoric and obscurity. It will remind you of Nelson Algren's shrewd observation, his pinpointing of Graves's quality of terror — "up to the nostrils" . . .

THE STEINPILZ METHOD

Elsie and Roland Hedge — she a book illustrator, he an architect with suspect lungs — had been warned against Dr. Eugen Steinpilz. "He'll bring you no luck," I told them. "My little finger says so decisively."

"You too?" asked Elsie indignantly. (This was at Brixham, South Devon, in March, 1940.) "I suppose you think that because of his foreign accent and his beard he must be a spy?"

"No," I said coldly, "that point hadn't occurred to me. But I won't contradict you." I was annoyed.

The very next day Elsie deliberately picked a friendship — I don't like the phrase, but that's what she did — with the Doctor, an Alsatian with an American passport, who described himself as a *Naturphilosoph*; and both she and Roland were soon immersed in Steinpilzerei up to the nostrils. It began when he invited them to lunch and gave them cold meat and two rival sets of vegetable dishes — potatoes (baked), carrots (creamed), bought from the local fruiterer; and potatoes (baked) and carrots (creamed), grown on compost in his own garden.

The superiority of the latter over the former in appearance, size, and especially flavor came as an eye-opener to Elsie and Roland; and so Dr. Steinpilz soon converted the childless and devoted couple to the Steinpilz method of composting. It did not, as a matter of fact, vary greatly from the methods you read about in the *Gardening Notes* of your favorite national newspaper, except that it was far more violent. Dr. Steinpilz had invented a formula for producing extremely fierce bacteria, capable (Roland claimed) of breaking down an old boot or the family Bible or a torn woolen vest into beautiful black humus almost as you watched.

The formula could not be bought, however, and might be communicated under oath of secrecy only to members of the Eugen Steinpilz Fellowship — which I refused to join. I won't pretend therefore to know the formula myself, but one night I overheard Elsie and Roland arguing as to whether the planetary influences were favorable; and they also mentioned a ram's horn in which, it seems, a complicated mixture of triturated animal and vegetable products — technically called "the Mother" — was to be cooked up. I gather also that a bull's foot and a goat's pancreas were part of the works, because Mr. Pook, the butcher, afterward told me that he had been puzzled by Roland's request for these unusual cuts. Milkwort and pennyroyal and bee-orchid and vetch certainly figured among "the Mother's" herbal ingredients; I recognized these one day in a gardening basket Elsie had left in the post office.

The Hedges soon had their first compost heap cooking away

in the garden, which was about the size of a tennis court and consisted mostly of well-kept lawn. Dr. Steinpilz, who supervised, now began to haunt the cottage like the smell of drains; I had to give up calling on them. Then, after the Fall of France, Brixham became a war zone whence everyone but we British and our Free French or Free Belgian allies was extruded. Consequently Dr. Steinpilz had to leave; which he did with very bad grace, and was killed in a Liverpool air raid the day before he should have sailed back to New York.

I think Elsie must have been in love with the Doctor, and certainly Roland had a hero worship for him. They treasured a signed collection of all his esoteric books, each titled after a different semi-precious stone; and used to read them out loud to each other at meals, in turns. And to show that this was a practical philosophy, not just a random assembly of beautiful thoughts about Nature, they began composting in a deeper and even more religious way than before. The lawn had come up, of course; but they used the sods to sandwich layers of kitchen waste, which they mixed with the scrapings of an abandoned pigsty, two barrowfuls of sodden poplar leaves from the recreation ground, and a sack of rotten turnips. Once I caught the fanatic gleam in Elsie's eye as she turned the hungry bacteria loose on the heap, and could not repress a premonitory shudder.

So far, not too bad, perhaps. But when serious bombing started and food became so scarce that housewives were fined for not making over their swill to the national pigs, Elsie and Roland grew worried. Having already abandoned their ordinary sanitary system and built an earth-closet in the garden, they now tried to convince neighbors of their duty to do the same, even at the risk of catching cold and getting spiders down the neck. Elsie also sent Roland after the slow-moving Red Devon cows as they lurched home along the lane at dusk, to rescue the precious droppings with a kitchen shovel; while she visited the local ash dump with a packing case mounted on wheels, and collected whatever she found there of an organic nature — dead cats, old rags, withered flowers, cabbage stalks, and such household waste

as even a national wartime pig would have coughed at. She also saved every drop of their bath water for sprinkling the heaps; because it contained, she said, valuable animal salts.

The test of a good compost heap, as every illuminate knows, is whether a certain revolting-looking, if beneficial, fungus sprouts from it. Elsie's heaps were gray with this crop, and so hot inside that they could be used for haybox cookery; which must have saved her a deal of fuel. I called them "Elsie's heaps," because she now considered herself Dr. Steinpilz's earthly delegate; and loyal Roland did not dispute this claim.

A critical stage in the story came during the Blitz. It will be remembered that trainloads of Londoners, who had been evacuated to South Devon when War broke out, thereafter de-evacuated and re-evacuated and re-de-evacuated themselves, from time to time, in a most disorganized fashion. Elsie and Roland, as it happened, escaped having evacuees billeted on them, because they had no spare bedroom; but one night an old naval pensioner came knocking at their door and demanded lodging for the night. Having been burned out of Plymouth, where everything was chaos, he had found himself walking away and blundering along in a daze until he fetched up here, hungry and dead-beat. They gave him a meal and bedded him on the sofa; but when Elsie came down in the morning to fork over the heaps, she found him dead of heart failure.

Roland broke a long silence by coming, in some embarrassment, to ask my advice. Elsie, he said, had decided that it would be wrong to trouble the police about the case; because the police were so busy these days, and the poor old fellow had claimed to possess neither kith nor kin. So they'd read the burial service over him and, after removing his belt buckle, trouser buttons, metal spectacle case, and a bunch of keys, which were irreducible, had laid him reverently in the new compost heap. Its other contents, Roland added, were a cartload of waste from the cider factory and salvaged cow dung.

"If you mean 'Will I report you to Civil Authorities?' the answer is no," I assured him. "I wasn't looking at the relevant hour, and, after all, what you tell me is only hearsay."

The War went on. Not only did the Hedges convert the whole garden into serried rows of Eugen Steinpilz memorial heaps, leaving no room for planting the potatoes or carrots to which the compost had been prospectively devoted, but they regularly scavenged offal from the fish market. Every Spring, Elsie used to pick big bunches of primroses and put them straight on the compost, without even a last wistful sniff; virgin primroses were supposed to be particularly relished by the fierce bacteria.

Here the story becomes a little painful for readers of a family journal like this; I will soften it as much as possible. One morning a policeman called on the Hedges with a summons, and I happened to see Roland peep anxiously out of the bedroom window, but quickly pull his head in again.

The policeman rang and knocked and waited, then tried the back door; and presently went away. The summons was for a blackout offense, but apparently the Hedges did not know this.

Next morning the policeman called again, and when nobody answered, forced the lock of the back door. They were found dead in bed together, having taken an overdose of sleeping tablets. A note on the coverlet ran simply:

*Please lay our bodies on the heap nearest the pigsty.
Flowers by request. Strew some on the bodies, mixed
with a little kitchen waste, and then fork the earth lightly
over.*

E.H., R.H.

George Irks, the new tenant, proposed to grow potatoes and dig for victory. He hired a cart and began throwing the compost into the River Dart, "not liking the look of them toadstools." The five beautifully clean human skeletons which George unearthed in the process were still awaiting identification when the War ended.

*Stephen
Vincent
Benét*

(1898–1943)

Stephen Vincent Benét, like so many talented writers, came from a literary family: his father loved poetry, his older brother William Rose Benét was a poet and novelist, his sister Laura and an Uncle James followed the family tradition, and his wife Rosemary was also a writer; and until her death he was the brother-in-law of Elinor Wylie. It is not the least surprising, therefore, that Stephen Vincent Benét never had any profession other than that of a writer.

His first book was published when he was only seventeen — six dramatic monologues in verse titled *Five Men and Pompey* (1915). But when his earlier novels and short stories failed to bring him either fame or fortune, when perhaps he had grown tired of ghost-writing (he ghost-wrote the novelization of *The Bat*, 1926, based on the melodrama by Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood), he began to dream of a major work — a long narrative poem of the Civil War. The ultimate book was an instant success — *John Brown's Body* (1928); it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1929 and is still in print — more than one hundred editions in almost forty years! The 1943 Gold Medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters was to have been awarded to

him, but he died just weeks before the presentation, and in 1944, also posthumously, he won another Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, with *Western Star* (1943). His brother has said of him that “poetry was from the first a bright valor in his blood,” and surely it was his “first and dearest love.” But it should not be forgotten that some of Stephen Vincent Benét’s short stories, like “The Devil and Daniel Webster” (which has been a book, a play, an opera — with music by Douglas Moore — and a motion picture), are now acknowledged classics of American folklore.

The crime story we have chosen to represent Stephen Vincent Benét is not one of his famous tales — rather, it is a relative “unknown,” probably written shortly before he died. But it has the Stephen Vincent Benét hallmark — human interest. So meet Mr. Veery, an unusual and appealing character. Mr. Veery is retired, living in an old men’s Home. He is bland, twinkling, sentimental, sympathetic, and amazingly inconspicuous; you could think of him as a leprechaun, or the Santa Claus type; but Mr. Veery remembers — oh, how he remembers! — the dear, sweet, lovely suckers. It is a tale — most appropriately for this anthology — of poetic justice . . .

A GENTLEMAN OF FORTUNE

They’d had better fireworks in the days of his youth, thought Mr. Veery, as he woke up on the last morning of Fair Week. You never saw a set-piece nowadays like Custer’s Last Stand. But all the same, the program had said that the Fair would end in a Mammoth Pyrotechnic Display — and he was bound he was going to see it, rules or no rules.

Whenever the Board of Directors paid its official visit to the James Bogardus Home for Retired Boatmen, Mr. Veery was on

show. He sat in his immaculate little room as brisk and chipper as a canary in a clean cage, and whatever complaints were made, there were never any from Mr. Veery. Old men in Homes are apt to be touchy and querulous; Mr. Veery was always cheerful. Old men, from the very fact that they are old, are apt to suffer from ailments which remind a Board of Directors all too keenly of the uncertainties of mortal existence; but Mr. Veery seemed always to be in the pink of condition. More than one female member of the Board discovering him in his splint rocker with his silver-mounted spectacles on his nose and his Bible open at the third chapter of Kings, had drawn in her breath with a little sigh and tiptoed away as if from the presence of a saint. "So neat," they would whisper to each other as they passed on down the hall. "So gentle and appreciative — and that sweet little twinkle in his eye! My dear, if only the rest of them were more like Mr. Veery!"

When Mr. Veery was sure that they were quite gone, he would put his Bible away and take off his spectacles. Then the twinkle would become even more perceptible. The Bible was a well-thumbed one, though not by Mr. Veery — and it opened automatically now to the third chapter of Kings. Mr. Veery had kept the inscription on the flyleaf, *To dear Andrew from his loving grandmother, June 1st, 1877*, merely altering the *Andrew* to *Amos* with a few deft strokes of a pen. *Amos* sounded a little better, somehow, for a retired boatman. Sometimes he would wonder just who "grandmother" had been. But of that, and of the previous possessor of the silver-mounted spectacles, he had no definite knowledge, beyond the Albany pawnshop where he had picked them up. Mr. Veery had been born with a twinkle, and he had never lacked a keen appreciation of the value of suitable stage properties.

He did not need the spectacles, except as a property; and the manuscript which he kept concealed in a cleverly constructed little recess in his floorboards — Mr. Veery was a star pupil of the occupational workshop — might have given the Board of Directors some odd sidelights upon his career. It was romantically entitled, *Memoirs of a Gentleman of Fortune*, and Mr.

Veery wrote upon it every rest period in a copper-plate Spencerian hand. He plumed himself particularly on the Dedication, elaborately enscrolled in purple ink, *To the James Bogardus Home, within whose tranquil precincts this record of a busy life was penned.*

But the New York Police Department would have been rather more interested in such chapters as "The Art of the Con" — "The Spanish Prisoner Con" — "Gold Bricks and How to Plant Them" — "Sidelights on Wiretapping and Other Race-track Cons." For in these, Mr. Veery had put the results of a lifetime of experience. Like all beginning authors, he often wished for an audience. But being a sensible man, he had resigned himself, a little sadly, to a strictly posthumous fame.

Not that he had any complaints to make about the James Bogardus Home. Far from it. Ten years before, he had picked out the dozing, upstate town of Winkelstone with its weedy little canal and its air of comfortable, rather stuffy peace as an ideal spot to retire and enjoy the fruits of a well-earned leisure. True, he had intended to retire in a slightly different way. He had planned on one of the big rambling houses whose iron-ringed horseblocks and chestnut-littered lawns still lent a shabby grandeur to the Hill. But luck had been against him, and the James Bogardus Home was exceedingly snug. Retired boatmen who fulfilled the old-fashioned stipulations of the Deed of Gift were getting fewer and fewer — indeed, the Board of Directors was hard put to it to keep from fairly pampering the pensioners to death and yet carry out the terms of the Deed. Mr. Veery, of course, had had little difficulty with the stipulations. A genuinely retired boatman might be entirely authentic — but he never could seem as authentic as Mr. Veery.

Yes, the Home was a real haven for the storm-tossed, thought Mr. Veery, sentimentally and in character — he always did his best to live his parts. Food, quarters, workshop, free library, tobacco allowance — all were of the best. The company, to be sure, was hardly the *crème de la crème* — he had never thought to pass his old age next door to an ex-captain of a garbage scow; but Crutch was a decent fellow, except for his besetting sin of

gluttony, and Mr. Veery prided himself on his broad-mindedness. The only thing one really missed was contact with the busy outside world. And after all, there were places where one might miss that even more.

One read the papers, of course, and tried to keep up with the latest developments in one's profession — one must not allow oneself to rust. Sometimes the developments rather took one's breath away; sometimes, on the other hand, they made one shake one's head. All this bombing and racketeering — crude work, very crude. Very little bore the mark of the artist, from such routine matters as poke snatching to such higher flights as switching the ice in the old chewing gum stall. Of course, if one believed in mass production and purely mechanical efficiency — But Mr. Veery was a born individualist; and it seemed to him, as it must always seem to the old, that his own tradition — the great tradition of the Con — had fallen on sorry days.

He was content, on the whole, to sit by the fire and let the world spin — or had been, till the notice about Fair Week went up on the bulletin board. He had always loved fairs and fireworks — indeed, a fair and a man with three little shells and an elusive pea had started him on his career. But he had not realized until now how much it meant to him in his quietude to steep himself once a year in the noise and heat and dust of a gaping, good-humored crowd — to smell the hot dogs and the peanuts, roasting and sizzling — to hear the yelp of the barkers as the wheels of fortune spun and the brassy tune whanged out by the merry-go-round.

“Oh, Lordy, the suckers, the dear, sweet, lovely suckers!” thought Mr. Veery longingly. They were the world's chosen — you could fool them again and again, and they'd come back for more. They went to be fooled and dazzled, and tickled with feather ticklers, and spun screaming on human roulette wheels — they went to be human and silly — you couldn't stick up your nose at any of it or you didn't have a good time.

Mr. Veery knew all about carnivals, from the inside — but

he'd throw his ring at the solid gold watch and catch the tin one as cheerfully as the rest of them; he'd pay his dime to see the giant man-eating rats from South America and find they were ordinary muskrats, and never cheep. The fireworks alone were worth all the fatigue of the day.

It was all Dan Crutch's fault — overeating himself at the ice-cream stand last year till he had had to be treated at the emergency hospital tent. The paper had run a little squib about it, and the Board of Directors had not been pleased. So this year the Fair was out of bounds. If you broke out of bounds, you lost your special privileges, including tobacco allowance, for a period of from one to three months. Mr. Veery had practically all the special privileges available, and he cherished them. But when he read the notice, rebellion stirred in his heart.

Mr. Veery said nothing, but in secret Mr. Veery plotted. The first days of the Fair might be allowed to pass. But when the crowded finale came — and the Roman candles began to scatter their stars — Mr. Veery was going to be there, if he had to do a crashout in the best tradition of Dannemora.

Remained the problem of chastising the errant Mr. Crutch. Dan Crutch, as Mr. Veery knew, was given to the consumption of illicit midnight lunches, washed down with sarsaparilla, when lights were out. Such practices struck Mr. Veery as both greedy and anti-social. Somehow, it would be but poetic justice, if on this night of all nights, Dan Crutch should suffer the penalties of his gluttony by falling just a little ill. It might teach him a lesson in manners and point out to the Board of Directors that the ill effects of Mr. Crutch's gourmandizing could not properly be laid at the door of the Fair.

"I wonder," thought Mr. Veery — who was a privileged character in the Home dispensary — "I wonder if I still know how to mix a Mickey Finn?"

It was a long time since he had compounded one. It was a long time since he had picked a lock and crawled down a fire escape. But when the small side-gate of the Home — the one that nobody used — swung to behind him, he felt a certain

pride. Neither hand nor brain had forgotten their cunning, and in spite of rules and Directors, he had made his escape unobserved.

He stood in the sunshine a moment, free, breathless, and a little scared. The Mickey Finn powders still reposed in his pocket — Mr. Veery had had compunctions at the last moment; after all, Mickey Finns were potent, and Crutch was old. Now, for a moment of cowardice, he wondered if he hadn't better go back. They wouldn't have missed him yet — and it was a queer feeling, breaking even a minor rule after years of living strictly.

But just then a car whirled by at the end of the street — a car with a streaming pennant, *Harwich County Fair*, and three hobbledehoys in the back seat, blowing squeakers. Mr. Veery straightened his shoulders and felt like a man again. "Come on, old-timer," he told himself sternly. "They don't make 'em like us any more."

Half an hour later, however, he began to wonder. In a burst of energy and economy he had resolved to walk the three miles to the fairgrounds. But the road was not the road of everyday; it was a crowded and roaring thoroughfare. The crammed buses howled past in a cloud of dust and gas — they could not bother to stop for one tired old man. Leather-lunged little boys bawled, "Ride, Mister? Give us a ride?" and now and then some weary philanthropist paused to take one aboard. But no one seemed to see Mr. Veery's hand, deprecatingly extended. No one, that is, until the green runabout came.

Mr. Veery had noted it from afar — it was going slower than the rest of the traffic liked. But the boy and girl seemed oblivious of shouts and angry horns. They weren't holding hands; they weren't even sitting close; but now and then she'd look at him. Mr. Veery knew that look — it stirred a far memory. The girl hadn't Molly's hair, but there was a little, trusting turn of the head that reminded him. He boldly stepped out into the roadway, picking his moment.

The boy with the nervous mouth jerked brakes expertly. "Listen, Grandpa," he said, "this is no place for picking daisies. What's the big idea?" But he grinned as he said it. People generally grinned at Mr. Veery.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Veery with dignity. "I was looking for my son-in-law's car. A green car like yours, and —"

"Well, this isn't it," said the boy, his eyes hardening. "Sorry, Gramp." He started to release the brakes. But the girl touched his arm.

"Oh, Bert," she said in a low voice, "can't you see he's old and tired? He probably just wants a ride —"

"That it?" said the boy. He hesitated for a moment. "Oh, well —"

"I do so hate to trouble you," said Mr. Veery mildly. "If only I hadn't misunderstood Frank's instructions. It was green with a Pennsylvania license, and he told me to meet him at the corner of Elm and Pine, but it seemed so crowded there. I'm sure I had it written down. And then, if we did miss each other, I was to take a bus and find him at the Agricultural Building. But the buses didn't seem to stop and — dear, dear, what *will* Frank think of me?" He fumbled in his pockets with ineffectual hands.

"Oh — glory!" said the boy. "All right. Jump in; the front seat's rather a tight fit, but —"

"I wouldn't think of inconveniencing you —" sighed Mr. Veery, squeezing in beside them.

The girl gave him a little smile, and he felt at ease. He began to talk. He had opportunity, for the traffic stream moved slower and slower till at last it barely crawled. He talked about Frank and Frank's business and the grandchildren. It was art for art's sake, purely; but it did good to his soul. And while he talked, his bland eyes probed his companions shrewdly. Nice boy, but something on his mind. Double-breasted coat buttoned up, on a warm day, and slight bulge in the inside breast pocket. All right as long as you keep the coat buttoned, but bad place for a wallet at a crowded fair. Nice girl and fond of the boy, but vaguely troubled and puzzled. Girl better dressed than boy — boy not

quite at home with car — probably her car. Elopers? He wondered. He'd never heard of eloping to a Country Fair, but all young people in love were crazy. He expatiated on little Orinda's tonsillitis, watching the boy touch his breast pocket, as they got out of the car.

They started to walk together toward the clamor and the tents. Then suddenly the boy stopped. "Look here," he said, addressing Mr. Veery, "I don't know who you are or whether your story's straight or not. But I've got a — a business appointment — and I don't want to leave Kitty alone in this crowd. You look respectable, and anyhow you're old. So if you'll just take Kitty over to the Agricultural Building, I'll meet you there in half an hour by the front door. That all right, Kitty? Or would you rather take care of yourself?"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Veery statelily, "I should only be too delighted to be of the slightest service to Miss —"

"L-Lane —" said the girl with a little start; then more firmly, "Katrina Lane. Of course, Bert. Run along. I'll be perfectly safe."

Mr. Veery blinked. He had noticed the monogram on the runabout door and the twitch on the boy's mouth. The young lady's name might be almost anything beginning with an L, for the letters tallied; but Mr. Veery was perfectly sure it was not *Lane*.

"A very pleasant man, if somewhat abrupt," said Mr. Veery, as the boy darted away. He slipped a fatherly hand in the girl's arm. "May I congratulate you, my dear?"

"Bert's the finest boy in the world," said the girl defiantly. "It isn't his fault that my father — it isn't his fault that he — oh, dear!" she said.

Mr. Veery patted her arm. "There, there, my dear," he said. "Tell me all about it."

It was a very simple story, like that of most star-crossed lovers. Bert had worked his way up from messenger boy to teller in the Eastmouth bank, twelve miles upriver, but the Longfords had been in Eastmouth since 1812. "Though what they ever *did* except sit on their land!" said Katrina Longford. Yes, she was

very young. Yes, Bert was very young. But it was the real thing. It was love.

Mr. Veery clucked and sympathized. But it was going to be all right. Bert had a wonderful scheme. They were going to be rich. In fact, if Bert's business appointment went well today —

It was at that moment Mr. Veery's mild gaze discovered, to his amusement, that Shad Pickrey was still working the fairs. Time might alter many things, but not that bulbous, imposing nose, those bulgy, fish-cold eyes, even glimpsed for a moment, briefly, as their owner dived between the back curtains of a tent. Mr. Veery noted the tent for future reference — it was away from the main traffic of the Fair. He felt glad that his own features were entirely normal. It was a great asset to be entirely inconspicuous — even negative in appearance. He'd never really done business with Shad Pickrey, but he'd known him by sight and reputation. And yet he gravely doubted if Shad Pickrey would even recognize him now. It might be amusing to see.

Then his eyes widened slightly. Making hotfoot for the tent, in the manner of one who seeks to avoid observation, was the nervous Bert. Mr. Veery blocked the girl's view as her eyes turned to follow his. "Dear, dear," said Mr. Veery, "we must be getting on to the Agricultural Building. I'm afraid of missing Frank altogether, as it is."

He led her along, chatting; but as he chatted, his mind worked furiously. Shad Pickrey and a nervous bank teller. The coincidence was not encouraging. Shad had been one of the slickest come-on men of his time — and rough, thought Mr. Veery, very rough.

"You know," he said tenderly to the girl at his side, "you remind me of someone who was very dear to me." Dear Molly — the sweetest, cleverest partner a gentleman of fortune ever had. He remembered that little, trusting turn of her head — it had got them out of more bad scrapes than he cared to think of. He wished Molly were with them now.

Suddenly Mr. Veery gave an effective start. "Don't turn around!" he whispered to his companion. "There's somebody looking this way — I don't think he's recognized you, but —"

"Oh, golly!" said the girl. "A big man? Panama hat? Oh, why didn't I change my clothes! A big man who looks — looks as if he rather liked getting angry?"

"Yes!" said Mr. Veery libelously. "Keep your back to him — he's looking away —"

"Father," said the girl. "He'll scalp me if he knows I'm here with Bert. Oh, what shall we do?"

"See that fortuneteller's tent?" said Mr. Veery, pointing. "Hurry. Go in there. Have your fortune told. Several times, if necessary. He won't follow you there. He hasn't quite recognized you — yet. Meanwhile, I will find your young man and apprise him of the untoward circumstances which —"

She seemed about to argue, for an instant. Then Mr. Veery whispered, "He's turning!" and she fled. Mr. Veery saw her disappear within the fortuneteller's tent.

"Safe enough there," thought Mr. Veery, "And now for Bert."

He wormed his way patiently through the crowd toward the end of the roaring carnival street. But it was not long before he saw the boy coming toward him. He looked jaunty, and as if a weight were off his mind; but when he saw Mr. Veery, his jauntiness disappeared.

"Listen, you old dodo," he said violently, "where's my girl? Where's Kitty?"

"Not so loud," said Mr. Veery portentously; "we are observed." He looked for a nook of refuge and found it in a deserted corner to the rear of the grandstand. And thither he dragged his prey.

"Listen," he said, still clutching the boy's coat sleeve, "what were you doing with Shad Pickrey?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "You said you'd wait at the —"

"Imbecile!" snapped Mr. Veery. "I don't know what you've got in that pocket," and he tapped it; "but if its still there, I'm a Dutchman."

The boy's hand flew to it instantly, as his face whitened. Then he gasped with relief.

"Of course it's still — what do you mean?" he said.

"Have you never heard of the envelope switch?" said Mr. Veery patiently. "Or the box you seal with your own signet ring so there can't be any mistake, and then — idiot, look inside!"

He shielded the boy from any observation as the latter drew out a long envelope and tore it open. They both looked inside.

It was, thought Mr. Veery judicially, a very fair job. The strips of paper had just the right weight and crackle. But Shad had always had his points.

"Bank's, of course," said Mr. Veery. "What was it? Cash?"

"No," said the boy, his hand shaking. "Government bonds. Big ones."

Mr. Veery whistled soundlessly. "That's nice," he said. "What was the come-on? Green goods, borax mines, or that long-lost Australian cousin?"

"Why," quavered the boy, "you know, when this revolution happened, in Spain? Well, there was a fellow who —"

"Great land of Goshen!" said Mr. Veery reverently. "The old Spanish-prisoner game! I didn't know it could still be worked. But live and learn!"

"But," said the boy desperately, "he had all the proofs — letters — documents. I — I bought a Spanish dictionary and translated some of them. They were all right."

"They ought to be," said Mr. Veery laconically. "Shad was doing very well with those letters back in '97. Only it was a Cuban prisoner, then. And you had to show them the bonds, just to prove they could trust you? They weren't crude enough to slug you and grab them. Oh, no."

"Why, yes," said the boy. "He — he said I'd have to demonstrate my financial responsibility. But he didn't ask for a cent — and I didn't have the envelope out of my hands for more than a minute —"

"Only somebody stepped on your toe and begged your pardon, and when you looked again, it wasn't the same envelope," said Mr. Veery.

"Why —" said the boy. "As a matter of fact — say, who are you, anyway?"

"Call me Santa Claus," said Mr. Veery. "How many of them are in it?"

"Three," said the boy. "Mr. —" he swallowed, "Mr. Pendleton and two little sort of well-dressed fellows with kind of hard faces. They don't say much, but he explained they were Spanish."

"They may be," said Mr. Veery. "Or then again they may just be a couple of gunmen. Did they ask much about the bank?"

"Why, Mr. Pendleton — he's quite chatty, you know — he seemed pretty interested in banking."

"Oh, Lord!" said Mr. Veery. "And most of the State cops here and the other cops busy with traffic. And the roads pretty clear north of Eastmouth for a getaway, because everything will be jammed around here just about when the fireworks begin. Why, darling, it's a set-up!"

"But I'll stop it —" babbled the boy. "I'll go right to the police — I'll —"

"You'll go to the cops," said Mr. Veery scornfully, "and tell them, please, you think there's going to be a robbery because you just handed over some of the bank's bonds to a man who called himself 'Pendleton,' and now you're afraid that's not his name and he's a criminal. Or they blow the crib and you say you can help identify them because — oh, don't you see, you nit-wit? The robbery is your only out, and they're counting on it."

The boy's jaw tightened. "All right," he said, "I can take it. They'll believe me if I go to jail."

"I'm thinking about your girl," said Mr. Veery. "Now listen: we've got to work this out."

As Shad Pickrey opened the little compartment in his traveling icebox — the compartment that didn't have soda pop in it — a beatific smile was on his face. Manna was certainly falling from heaven. Not only had that poor sap of a bank teller suspected nothing, but he was so firmly hooked that he'd actually brought his hayseed uncle along to sweeten the "Spanish prisoner" with a little more ready cash. They'd have to

collect it, because the big blowoff at Eastmouth was scheduled for nine P.M. — but Shad Pickrey had never yet let a bird in the hand escape him because there might be other birds in the bush. Ricci and the Flea could drive Uncle over to Eastmouth while Uncle collected his roll from the hotel safe — and he, Shad, would stay here and keep an eye on the kid.

It would be a nice little outing for the boys, and they could give the bank the once-over as they went by. Afterward, another little drink, with the addition of some knockout drops, would settle Uncle and the kid. They could sleep it off under a tarpaulin — and if the cops found them in the morning, that would be just too bad.

He had a funny idea he'd seen Uncle somewhere before — but Lord, you met so many suckers you couldn't keep track of them! The old man certainly had brightened up at the first mention of liquor. This job would set him solid with the gang, but the bonds were his private perquisite and he intended to keep them. They were safe inside the kewpie doll on top of the icebox — it was his pet hiding place, and it always worked. He did not perceive Mr. Veery's glance at the doll. Nor did anyone except the boy for whom it was intended. Mr. Veery was remembering more and more about his old competitor's habits — and remembering that Shad very seldom changed his spots.

"Well," said Shad, lifting the paper cup, "happy days!" He exchanged a grin with Ricci and the Flea. Uncle had nearly spilled the liquor, trying to help pass it — the old fellow certainly had his tongue hanging out.

"To our castle in Spain!" said Mr. Veery politely. They drank, bottoms up. They shuddered.

State Trooper Joseph Conroy, in his private mind, put it down to leprechauns. Else how would the stroke of luck have fallen on him, and him so new to the Force? And wasn't the little old man like a leprechaun himself, popping out of a big car, as spry as a rabbit, and calling, "Officer — officer! My friends have been taken seriously ill — will you watch them while I get a doctor?" And then he whisked away in a runabout

as green as a shamrock, with a girl with a face like all the angels driving it.

No, he hadn't taken the number of the runabout — but one look inside the other car had driven all else out of his head. Sure, he'd captured two New York gangsters single-handed — and they weak as kittens with the desperate sickness that was on them — but that needn't go down on the report. And if he ever met the little old man again, he wouldn't believe it, and he'd as soon think of meeting one of the cobblers of the hills . . .

Mr. Veery, after he had got rid of the young people, dined lightly on a hot dog, a chocolate bar, and a bottle of lemon pop, and felt his soul at peace. It had all been very interesting but a trifle exhausting, and he looked forward to his fireworks with childish pleasure. The administration of the Mickey Finn had been elementary, once he got Shad to produce the liquor; but he had not enjoyed his ride in Shad's car. He had been wary enough to feign illness himself from the first — but even so, there had been some very bad moments.

However, gunmen were proverbially suspicious of their colleagues, and they had just been turning the car around to go back and kill Shad Pickrey for poisoning them, when the Mickey Finn had — ahem — come to its full powers. It was lucky the State policeman had arrived so promptly; but there was bound to be someone near the crossroads — and he had timed things as well as he knew how.

The boy and girl had played their parts very well — the girl, particularly, in trailing the big car. But the boy had done well also, to keep Shad quiet, with both of them in the throes of the Mickey Finn. He had given the boy as little as he dared — but there was no doubt it had a drastic effect. Foolish of Shad to hide the bonds in that same old doll — but Shad had always been a person of routine.

Well, well, least said soonest mended, and a penny saved was a penny earned, thought Mr. Veery, as he in his turn patted his breast pocket. The bonds had gone back to the boy — and the boy would do well now, after his scare, but the smaller gunman's wallet, while thinner than one might have wished for, came in

very handy. And the trouble had been worth it, just for the look on Shad's face when he had finally revealed himself. He'd hardly seemed able to speak, when Mr. Veery had stuffed bills in his hand and murmured recommendation of the California climate. Well, it was an expense; but for old time's sake he could hardly let the bulls get Shad.

So, having protected the lovers, and been an instrument of justice in the courts of the ungodly, Mr. Veery stood and enjoyed his fireworks. The set-piece — "Washington Crossing the Delaware" — was, he thought, particularly fine. The last red fire flared out and he thought, with a little sigh, of transportation home. But as he turned to go he was jostled — and he felt a slight, unmistakable tug at his coat.

Mr. Veery opened his mouth to cry, "Stop thief!" — and shut it again. He remembered, suddenly, the thin, sharp-nosed woman who had stood beside him — the one with the worn clothing and the beaten eyes. She didn't look like a professional; she looked hungry, and even if she were a professional, it was a hard year. He felt the unskilled, desperate hands fumble and retreat with their booty, and said no word. After all, it was gunman's money — fool's gold — and Mr. Veery had always been a philosopher. He would ride back in the crowded bus, with sixty-eight cents in his pocket, but he would ride content.

But as he made wearily for the exit, it did not even seem as if he would have to do that. For a hand fell on his shoulder, and a voice rang in his ear.

"Well, Mr. Veery, really! We've been looking all over for you! How could you give us such a scare!"

It was Mrs. Ransom, the matron, come in person to seek him. He sighed gratefully, as he thought of the comfortable back seat of Mrs. Ransom's car. Then he had an inspiration.

"Dear lady," he said, removing from his lapel the limp but still fragrant little knot of flowers that had once adorned the coat of Katrina Longford, "permit me. A little souvenir. No — no thanks, I beg of you. Just a tribute."

"Well, Mr. Veery —" said Mrs. Ransom uncertainly. "Well, I certainly should be very angry with you. Well —"

Mr. Veery smiled to himself in the darkness. He might not lose his tobacco allowance after all. But when he got back to his room, he would take from its hiding place a certain piece of printed matter and burn it. The circular spoke in no uncertain terms of a person sometimes called *Smiling Jim Atkinson, alias Sir George Rumbold, alias* — and a list. It contained the phrases, *Gentlemanly appearance — good manners — dresses well but not flashily* — and Mr. Veery had always cherished it for that.

But now he would burn it — perhaps even burn his memoirs; for he knew, by the ache in his bones, that that chapter of life was closed. He had joined with the world again today, and the world had been very exhausting. . . . For him, the peace of the Home and the games of checkers — the chair in the sunny corner — the gossip of little things — the life of a duly retired boatman. But at least there had been fireworks, even on this last sally. And it was something, to remember fireworks, even when one was old.

Ogden Nash

(1902—)

We do not know if Ogden Nash is the dean of American humorous verse, but he is by all odds its most famous practitioner. He is witty, sophisticated, perhaps deeper than he seems on first reading, and he has the facility or faculty — call it what you will — to invent the most outrageous rhymes ever to be read or spoken. His first two books of verse, *Hard Lines* and *Free Wheeling*, both published in 1931, were aptly titled: the lines were certainly hard to scan and the thoughts they conveyed were certainly free wheeling. Louis Untermeyer has said that Ogden Nash “often writes the best light verse in America today,” and it would be difficult — hard lines, indeed — to challenge this appraisal.

The most provocative question about Ogden Nash has already been suggested: is he deeper than he seems? Does he write funny lines when really, deep down, he wants to write serious lines? Is there more in his work than the “sharp sting of the smiling scorpion”?

Perhaps the Ogden Nash story that follows will help you make up your mind. It is definitely not typical Nash —

not at all what you would expect from the “most quoted” of contemporary American humorous poets . . .

THE THREE D'S

Victoria was an attractive new girl at the Misses Mallisons' Female Seminary — such an attractive new girl, indeed, that it is a pity she never grew to be an old girl. Perhaps she would have, if the Misses Mallison had established their Seminary a little closer to Newburyport — or at least a little farther from Salem.

Victoria was good enough at games and not too good at lessons; her mouth was wide enough to console the homely girls and her eyes bright enough to include her among the pretty ones; she could weep over the death of a horse in a story and remain composed at the death of an aunt in the hospital; she would rather eat between meals than at them; she wrote to her parents once a week if in need of anything; and she truly meant to do the right thing, only so often the wrong thing was easier.

In short, Victoria was an ideal candidate for The Three D's, that night-blooming sorority which had, like the cereus, flourished after dark for many years, unscented by the precise noses of the Misses Mallison.

So felt The Three D's, so felt Victoria, and the only obstacle to her admission lay in the very title of the club itself, which members knew signified that none could gain entrance without the accomplishment of a feat Daring, Deadly, and Done-never-before. Victoria was competent at daring feats, unsurpassable at deadly feats, but where was she to discover a feat done-never-before?

Of the present membership, Amanda had leaped into a cold bath with her clothes on, Miranda had climbed the roof in her nightgown to drop a garter snake down the Misses Mallisons' chimney, Amelia had eaten cold spaghetti blindfolded thinking

it was worms, and Cordelia had eaten worms blindfolded thinking they were cold spaghetti. What was left for Victoria?

It was Amanda who, at a meeting of the Steering Committee, wiped the fudge from her fingers on the inside of her dressing gown and spoke the name of Eliza Catspough.

"Who was she?" asked Miranda, pouring honey on a slice of cocoanut cake.

"A witch," said Amanda.

"She was burned," said Amelia.

"Hanged," said Cordelia.

"And she couldn't get into the churchyard, so they buried her in the meadow behind the old slaughterhouse," said Amanda.

"The gravestone is still there," said Amelia. "Oh, bother, the cake's all gone! Never mind, I'll eat caramels."

"There's writing on it, too," said Cordelia, who was not hungry, "but you can't read it in the daytime, only by moonlight."

"I'd forgotten how good currant jelly is on marshmallows," said Amanda. "The Three D's must tell Victoria about Eliza Catspough."

Late next evening Victoria took her pen in hand. *Dear Father and Mother, she wrote, I hope you are well. I am doing well in algebra but Miss Hattie is unfair about my French irreguler verbs. I am doing well in grammar but Miss Mettie has choosen me to pick on. Dear Father, everybody elses Father sends them one dollar every week. I have lots of things to write but the bell is wringing for supper. Lots of love, your loving daughter, Victoria.*

Victoria knew that in ten minutes Miss Hattie Mallison would open the door slightly, peer at the bed, murmur, "Good night, Victoria, sweet dreams," and disappear. It took Victoria seven minutes to construct a dummy out of a mop, a nightgown, and several pillows and blankets. As she lowered herself to the ground she heard the door open, heard Miss Hattie's murmur, heard the door close.

The soaring moon ran through Victoria as she marched, as

she skipped, as she pranced toward the old slaughterhouse. She had for company her high moon-spirits and her long shadow — the shadow which was a Victoria that no Miss Mallison could ever cage. “No girl has ever had a taller, livelier companion than my shadow,” thought Victoria, and she breathed deeply and spread her arms, and her shadow breathed with her and spread crooked arms up the walls and across the roof of the slaughterhouse.

The moon grew brighter with each burr that Victoria struggled against on her way across the meadow that had been abandoned to burrs, the meadow where no beasts fed, the meadow where Victoria’s shadow strengthened at each proud and adventurous step.

Where the burrs grew thickest, where her loyalty to The Three D’s wore the thinnest, she came upon the gravestone. How hard the moon shone as Victoria leaned against the crooked slab, perhaps to catch her breath, perhaps to stand on one foot and pluck the burrs off. When the stone quivered and rocked behind her, and the ground trembled beneath her feet, she bravely remembered her purpose: that at midnight, in the moonlight, she was to prove herself a worthy companion of Amanda and Miranda, Amelia and Cordelia. Unwillingly she turned, and willfully she read the lines which the rays of the moon lifted from the stone so obscured by rain and moss.

Here Waits

ELIZA CATSPAUGH

*Who touches this stone
on moonlight meadow
shall live no longer
than his shadow.*

The job of memorizing was done, the initiation into The Three D’s handsomely undergone. “Gracious, is that all there is to it?” thought Victoria, and set out for the seminary.

It was natural that she should hurry, so perhaps it was natural that she did not miss the exuberant shadow which should have escorted her home. The moon was bright behind Victoria

— who can tell how she forgot there should have been a shadow to lead the way?

But there was no shadow — her shadow had dwindled as she ran, as though Victoria grew shorter, or perhaps the moon grew more remote. And if she did not miss her shadow, neither did she hear or see whatever it may have been that rustled and scuttled past her and ahead of her.

“I hope my dear little dummy is still there,” thought Victoria as she climbed through the window. “I hope Miss Hattie hasn’t been unfair and shaken me.”

She tiptoed across the room in the dark to the bed, and bent to remove the dummy. But as she reached down, the dummy, which was no longer a dummy, reached up its dusty fingers first . . .

*Muriel
Rukeyser*

(1913-)

We do not know many poets personally. One of the few we have come to know more than casually is Muriel Rukeyser, a fascinating and many-faceted human being who has the rare ability to read her own poems the way her poems should be read, in exactly the right tones of voice and with exactly the right expressiveness. Hearing her is an experience, hearing her talk in just run-of-the-day conversation is equally impressive, and she writes like an angel. She probably knows — or feels instinctively — more about the creative imagination than scholars and pundits have been able to “excavate” from the buried tombs of the past. She says that she wishes, out of the richness and variety of the human condition, and with intense rhetoric, “to make my poems exist in the quick images that arrive crowding on us now, in the lives of Americans who are unpraised and vivid and indicative.”

Her first books of poetry were *Theory of Flight* (1935), *U.S. 1* (1938), and *A Turning Wind* (1939). It has been said that she has a “grasp of the essential.” Surely the same is true in her prose. Her story in *Poetic Justice* is one of the most poetically conceived and “justly” executed tales of pre-

meditated, cold-blooded murder that we have read in a long time . . .

THE CLUB

That was the day when he decided what it was he had to do. It was fortunate that he was not a nervous man, for this was Monday, and the wait between Monday and the weekend is too hard for the resolve of nervous people; that is what he thought as he looked down at the pens and pencils, the gold pen and the mottled green one in their groove, and the two mechanical pencils with their metallic colors among the red company pencils in their groove on his fancy inkwell. The inkwell was a present from Gracie.

But it was two minutes to three, and he had better put the whole matter aside until four thirty. At three the time-study man was coming for his appointment. The whole office, all the branches, and the plant itself might be reorganized. At four thirty, after the time-study man, after Mr. Greenwood, and Miss Brosnac, he would be free to find the place.

And now it was three o'clock. There was his door opening, the shadowless lights of all the fluorescent overheads in the main office were falling through the doorway, the shoulder of the time-study man was darkening the heavy pebbled glass of the door whose surface he loved, and he said, "Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Stainer," said the time-study man.

It was nearer to a quarter of five before he got away. But on this day of April, the blue-green of the McGraw-Hill Building was still brilliant, almost white, with the sunlight. There was beginning to be a strength in the sun.

He got his car out of the garage in the second cellar of Two Hundred West; he was in the tunnel within ten minutes. The roar of enclosed noise was, this time, a happiness to him; he felt

that he was living in a trumpet; the exultation and the light were still there as he came to surface on the New Jersey side.

He headed north almost at once. Seven traffic lights, two red, one green, one red, three green. Why should they run that way? he thought in irritation, and realized he had turned several corners. Why should I be counting? he thought.

He looked again at the road map. For none of these roads, none of these towns, were known to him. When the transfer had finally been announced, four months ago in Salt Lake City, he welcomed it; the eager, confirmed man at the high moment of his life. New York! The main office! He and Gracie were ready to leave in three weeks, their train pulled out a month to the day after his notice arrived.

And now here he was, in the gathering darkness, looking at the last lap of the journey as it lay on the map in crude green and yellow and the decisive black.

The road was even better marked in reality than on the map. The traffic circle after Paterson; Butler, and now it was really dark, and hardly any cars. He could use his full headlights. He liked the red dot over the speedometer that showed now, when the headlights were on full. A careful man, I'm a careful man; it gave him pleasure to say that of himself; and my pleasures are all the keener for my care.

This driving alone was one of the excellent pleasures. During all his office life, of course, people could come in at any time. And much as he wanted to be left alone, much as he disliked associating himself with random people, he was exposed to that always. In a car, by himself, he had freedom; as long as he wanted it that way, the doors opened in one direction only: out.

Butler, and Newfoundland, and then any old road. Better than he had hoped; this dark way up the hill, and it must be over a thousand feet. Before and below him in its shining, the reservoir, its darkness gleaming under a colored moon. With a swift floating movement the moon cleared a flat edge-lit cloud. Time's going, Mr. Stainer thought. It won't be dark. It will be bright and green; the leaves are out, they are bright. I'll kill her here, he thought.

He was walking upstairs and turning the key in the apartment lock at the usual time. He had a usual time, a little later than homecoming in Salt Lake City; but the smells were almost the same as he opened the door. Lamb and potatoes, and he could sort out mint, and no, that was the cedar of the floor oil, and was that asparagus?

There was Gracie's smell, flowery and unlike her, a moment before he put his arms lightly around her arms and back, and, mechanically, kissed the flatness of her mouth.

Gracie's mouth was not flat. He knew that when he looked at her; he really knew it, of course. But it was as though he had not looked at her since he came to his decision; for months before that, too. Perhaps for two whole years, if you counted what had happened on Easter Sunday two years ago.

He had understood, that day, the full extent of her refusal. It was a refusal to see how all his suffering derived from her denial, refusal to see his drive for separation which she would not allow, for divorce which she would not allow, for anything to break this life. And now here she was, talking about the trip as if she were going to go.

"Flora is so excited," she was saying. "She went to the consulate and found out a lot . . . all French towns, you know, and the Gaspé . . ."

He made her voice fade out. He could do that at will. And it was because he could make her image fade that he could feel as if he no longer saw her. As for dreams: he had not dreamed about her since before he had married her.

Yes, it was all about sex. Whatever anyone said, that was the whole answer. What other answer was there? He said what she expected him to say. There! it was said, and they were going in to dinner, the last dinner at home.

People could say that money, economics, dominated our lives, that society always had a hand; but take their own case. If things had been right between them. Anything. Any one thing. But her flat mouth. When he kissed her these days, it was as if her lips were flatnesses of — not flesh, not meat, more like potato, he thought. His fork went into the little new potato on his plate.

In Salt Lake City he had been able to manage. Even if her mouth was flat, he had — his legs tightened. He was advancing in the company — the automobile business was in a curious position and suddenly he, Paul Stainer, had been able to predict and maneuver and move freely in his business life. A sort of fog light for the company, in that period. People who talk of economic reasons! With, all the time, his personal life shot to pieces.

He could say that Gracie had been awful when the vice-president came to dinner. Better to stay away from people altogether than have that kind of evening. Better not to identify yourself with any group. He had never been a joiner. However, the vice-president . . . But he got his promotion, didn't he? The raise and the transfer? She had been nervous, weeping and pink-faced, and then weeping and red-faced, in the bedroom, later.

Everything was so bad between them. Abomination, he thought, this curse, nonexistence! He couldn't make her feel it. She never could see that the lack was an active cause. But it worked in him, night after night, day after day.

It wasn't so bad in Salt Lake City. He had been able to manage. First, there was Miss Aydelotte; then there was little Miss Kenmore, who had even added a henna tint to her hair; and then, right up to the day they left, Miss Dietz.

New York was different. Even forgetting how awful Gracie had been the night the vice-president came to dinner. He himself liked only the society of the well-bred, the handsome, the powerful. Gracie was ill at ease with people at that level. He was resigned to all that. But the chances here, the range, the rival excitements in the air; this fierce spring in the vertical stone city, at the nerve center of the company, a kind of open fighting and open creation. Life stronger than he had ever felt.

In business, that is. The rest of it . . . He could not, he could not: he was overpowered. Gracie, the company, the city. Whatever it was, it came out in the open that night at the hotel. With the neon striking the hotel room red one instant, black and dark the next, red the next. Striking the terrified face of

Miss Walters, so moving in its panes (a modern, metropolitan face, he thought, even without its freshness of color and passion, even twisting in fear and disappointment, and that bud of horror, her mouth), striking her face and young breasts and the long fair legs first red then black.

It was all Gracie. While she was there, he was done for — as done for with anyone else as he was with her. And no children. No life in them. No life before them . . .

He put his hand out for another slice of lamb. He would have his life; nobody would keep him from it. He could be himself, come into his own powers, whatever they were, that had been kept from him. Some part of himself was out of reach. He would reach it.

“But, Paul,” she was saying. “I don’t know how I can do this without you. It’s been two years since — oh, I suppose — but to be separated —”

Finish your sentence, he was saying to her, although his teeth locked, his voice closed on the words, the little muscles hardened over his jaw. He was not a big man, but when his face darkened with blood, and his muscles rose, he seemed almost tall, almost broad.

Soon they were lying in their bedroom. The last, he thought. And the dim, level affection she was showing was worse for him than nothing at all . . .

Sunday morning was a real spring morning. The chimes woke Gracie; Paul was wide-awake, and started as his wife woke and sat up, all in one movement.

“The picnic!” she said, in her moaning singsong.

“Let’s just get out of town,” he said, as he shut the apartment door, “and not decide where we’re going. Let’s go some place we never went before.”

From then on it was easy. They were on top of the big hill. Under them, the reservoir, steely, and its cold walls.

It was at that point he had his only bad moment. I will be my only weapon, he thought, looking at his thumbs. She will never again stare her frigid terrible stupid empty frightening

fiery vegetable stare, he thought; the brain lies unprotected directly behind the eyes.

But he got hold of himself. That was a satisfaction he was not to have. And when he pushed her into the reservoir, and she went down almost at once, her hair going reluctantly down after, he knew he had been right not to use violence.

He jumped in almost at once and swam about, although he hated this part. And soon he was dripping in the farmhouse parlor, his teeth beginning to chatter, hearing himself say, "An ax —" and he almost began to laugh — "there's been an accident."

He went through the next three days as if he were drunk. People were very kind. Flora was a great help at the funeral. And the work of mourning, he discovered, turned into, actually, a kind of mourning. Work was being done on the image of Gracie. More than she had ever faded in life, she faded to whiteness after her death; and quickly; and to a kind of benevolence, so that he began to lose his hatred.

But he was attracted to the place.

He went to stay with Flora and her husband after the funeral and they talked very little about the tragic accident. They were glad he had himself so well in hand; they did not protest to the point of annoyance when he left early Sunday afternoon. He would be going back to work the next morning, anyway; he had some things to do.

On the bus he fell asleep. The sleep was a powerful drink to him, he had been thirsty for this for weeks. He woke on the road leading to that hill, he realized the murder for the first time, and he knew he must not go back.

With an effort he stayed in his seat. He felt as if some change were taking place in him. He was learning something, that was all he knew, as the bus drove steadily into the green spring countryside.

He got off in the first town with a railway station. He was surprised to find, in the Men's Room of the restaurant where he went to inspect his clothes and his face, that he looked and felt no different. There was no difference at all. "You're supposed at

least to want a drink," he said to his reflection in the square glass above the wash basin. For the sake of form he left by way of the bar, where he drank most of a Scotch and soda.

There was not long to wait. He got on the New York train and opened the magazine he had bought on the platform. As the train started and he settled down to his story, he realized that the feeling he had had for months, the sense of things losing substance, fading before his eyes, the sense of unreality and fear amounting to insanity, had disappeared. All apprehension had gone. The pressure on his chest and head, the unease of feeling followed by her look — these too had been abolished. The set of acts had been frightful, yes; but necessary; and the trouble was gone.

The magazine story was in front of him, letter by letter and word for word. It *stayed*, as nothing had stayed before him all this time. He read with concentration and considerable relish. It was not much of a story; but it was a pleasure to him to follow the events and motives of simple people, wearing their habits, behaving in lightness and love, and moving inevitably toward the prescribed ending. It would be a happy one. He turned to the last page of the story. Yes, it was a happy one.

He looked up into the eyes of the passengers on the slow local. The man was watching him with a summary stare; he did not now blink or avert his attention. The man looked as though he thought he knew Paul; but Paul was certain he had never met this passenger.

Paul often forgot the names, and indeed the faces, of guests at cocktail parties or of brief visitors at the office. But this passenger could never have been at the office or at any party the Stainers would have attended. The passenger had the face of, say, a small grocer: dark-stubbled, fleshy, notable only for the eyes, around which were bunched the folds which develop after years of critical appraisal or uncorrected nearsightedness. However, the look which met Paul was not critical; it was as if the passenger were reading something with appraisal and withholding any final opinion; and what he was reading was Paul's face.

As Paul came to this conclusion, he judged also that he did

not care for the stare, nor indeed the face which stared. It was a rather ugly, unapproachable, repellent face.

Just at this moment the passenger began a nod of recognition. Paul looked away.

Why did I do that? he thought with a rush of consternation. Suppose, he went on, with a real taste of panic, suppose this man I cannot place has reason to remember me on this train. He must be some night clerk at a delicatessen, or an elderly newsboy I pass everyday.

And he saw how he might give himself away. However, he thought, there is nothing to give away. He looked back at the face, which by now he hated cordially. But the other passenger was looking out the window at the flats, whose tender green showed over the deep browns and ochers of the earth.

Only in the tunnel, lit by the black-yellow light, just before the train got in, did their looks meet. This time the delicatessen man did nod at him.

Once in the station Paul rushed to the escalator and walked the moving stairs. He could not wait to ride to the top. On the lower level he searched for a restaurant; he was awfully hungry by now; but he did not wish to face the glare of the health bars and the soda fountains. He went on to the Savarin and felt much better after a hot roast beef sandwich and a cup of coffee. He took more cream than he was used to, and drank a pony of brandy after his meal.

Out on the street he paused for the first time. He knew he must not go home until after the office on Monday. He knew that he must buy an overnight bag and some shaving things and a toothbrush — and a couple of paperback mysteries, he supposed — and go to a hotel that he would choose at random. But he must make the random choice count. First he would find a drug store.

He was thinking very clearly. It was almost as if he had been insane for two years, and now was at last sane.

He was startled out of his musing plans by a woman who stood before him, weaving slightly, a very tall woman with a thin round face. Her eyes had something of a look he had seen

somewhere before. Recently. On the train. Her appraisal was open, and she went further than the passenger: she said, after a moment, in a breath that carried a strong current of cheap whiskey, "Take it easy, fella."

"Of course." Paul clipped off the syllables and walked away. Damn fool, you damn fool! You needn't have answered at all!

He hurried to the big drug store down Thirty-Fourth Street, bought a zipper bag, and filled it with toilet articles, paperbacks, and a bottle of eau de cologne whose heraldic stopper he had admired for a long time. He walked back to the station and straight through, with his executive stride, to the opposite doors. Then he crossed the avenue, got on a downtown bus, and rode to the end of the line.

The nearest hotel was across the little square, over the travel agency. He lay in his small green-gray room, hearing the voices outside. At first he imagined he had scrambled the words. They were speaking a language he had never heard a word of, and languages were what he had been keen on in college. He read a mystery novel, shaved carefully and bathed, read another mystery instead of going out to dinner, and fell into an early dreamless sleep.

He woke with heat on his face; the sun, combed through the slats of the venetian blinds. What language could it be? he thought. And then — Gracie. He must see a paper. For the only time he felt that someone might have been watching the reservoir that Sunday.

At the hotel desk, where steamship tickets were also sold, he asked what language he had heard in the halls. The boy behind the desk was happy to inform him. "Basque," he said, and smiled with his dark mouth.

"Have you got a *Times*?"

The boy sent Paul up the side of the square to a newsstand. Nothing on the front page: a headline about a union row. Nothing on the back page: an attempted suicide by mother of four, illness of a Nobel prizewinner. All the way through, nothing.

Things went well at the office. He had a large morning

mail, got it all out of the way, talked to Detroit, and looked at his calendar. The time-study man was due at eleven thirty.

It was not until the time-study man had been talking to him for almost ten minutes that Paul was fully aware of the evil in his face. A week ago he had seen him as a very effective, rather pushing, blond man, with saturnine eyebrows and lines going straight down his cheeks. A statistical mind, he had thought, a man who is himself not much more than a labor-saving device.

But this week the time-study man, seen clearly, conveyed the most extreme corruption with every feature and every gesture. Or was it simply the manner in which he was regarding Paul, seeming to give a double meaning to everything he said?

Just then the time-study man drew a breath, interrupted what he was explaining about methods in the middle west to mutter to Paul, in an entirely new voice, "We trust you, you know," and went on with the Terre Haute report.

"What do you mean?" he said like a schoolboy.

"The sort of person you are," said the time-study man.

"How do you —"

"How do you think?" the time-study man answered, inflecting the words curiously. Then he picked up his brief case and his hat, and left.

It had been a remarkably stupid conversation. But for a minute Paul thought the man meant that he knew about what had happened that picnic afternoon. Paul went to the office library and opened a copy of *Fortune*. But he could not have known! Paul smiled at what he was reading: here was an article praising the beauty of design in certain new industrial buildings. (It must have been something about the company that he knew; something evidently flattering to Paul.) The article included photographs of some of the buildings. Handsome they were: long low windowless factories, great round turrets, and the radar tower just built in (no, of course he meant what he seemed to mean) New Jersey.

Yes. The time-man knew. And the only way he could know was by seeing something that had given Paul away.

But what was there? There was not a clue to that day. The

map? Destroyed, thrown over the railing of the George Washington Bridge. And what would the map have meant? Plans for a picnic. No. Someone would have had to see the thing itself. He had taken that chance. By this time he was safe. Completely safe.

Paul thought he had better go home. It was lunchtime — an early lunch, well, yes, but just the same.

But at home, on the way back, during the rest of the office day, there was nothing that did not go smoothly.

It was a routine afternoon until just before closing, when the inter-office gadget announced Mr. Dought. For a second Paul could not remember who that was, and then, before he remembered, he jumped, his skin leaped. The time-study man!

"Mr. Stainer," he heard, "I have only come back to be friendly. You seemed nervous this morning, alarmed."

"I'm not alarmed," Paul said.

"Of course not," the answer came. "You are not to be. We want you to understand that you can trust us."

In bed that night Paul began to see.

He took the subway to work the next morning. There, facing him, he saw the one who brought it home to him. Stupid, thick-faced, filthy, he was smiling and rolling his head at Paul as if he had found a long-lost brother. Paul thought the man had the worst face he had ever seen, the most brutal hands; the foulest, most broken shoes.

After two stops, when still no one stood between them to cut off his view, Paul leaned forward and said across the aisle, "Why do you pretend to recognize me?"

The man drew back, hurt. A stricken look passed over the thick features; then a defensive changing expression, and that gave way to the most disfiguring mask of all — jocular, intimate, and in a low defaced way, witty.

"Well," said the thick man, and the bullying creature came through in its full force, "take it easy. We're all in this together, you know."

It would not end. He was pulled into a group, doomed to a herd at last, to a group doom. Tighter, more stable, more demanding than any clan he had ever imagined. And the rasping

or weak or timbreless voices; the brute masks, stupid and sly and always less human; the knowledge in all their eyes of his fall, his fault, the fact of his unaccepted guilt.

This is the worst, he thought.

But it was not the worst. That was not to come for almost a week more, when, again in the subway, he saw the young white-faced boy, the eyes that looked through the windows at the blackness of subway tunnel and the sudden fever-bright station platforms, the mouth that only occasionally trembled, the feet, one pressed down hard on the laces of the other shoe. He knew at once: a murder has just been committed. And he saw the streak of half-dried blood on the dark ragged cuff.

And then he comprehended: it was not only that he would be recognized, and taken in and befriended by those, and only those, who saw his crime, all his life long. It was that they recognized him because of their own crimes.

And it was more: it was that he too would recognize all those, and only those, who had committed such violence against human spirit and flesh, such murder of assault or treachery against life, all his life long.

Dylan Thomas

(1914–1953)

And now we close this anthology (will it, harking back to our Introduction, be “revised and expanded” in the future?) with Dylan Thomas, unquestionably the most famous and most exciting of the “advanced” poets. A legend in his own time, an even greater legend directly after his death, and now, more than a decade later, a legend still a-growing, Dylan Thomas was, on paper and in life, what so many people misguidedly visualize as a “poet” — ultra-bohemian, too heavy a drinker, orgiastic, alternately gay and grim, exuberant and morbid, hilarious and serious, notorious for his excesses and his wildness — “the roaring boy.”

His first book, *18 Poems* (1934), published when he was only nineteen, ushered in the finest lyrical talent, the most amazing and seemingly inexhaustible image-maker, of our day. *Twenty-five Poems* (1936), *The Map of Love* (1939), and *Deaths and Entrances* (1946) — already, in his own generation, rare and expensive collectors’ items — revealed further what Edith Sitwell praised as Dylan Thomas’ “archangelic power.” Herbert Read unhesitatingly declared Thomas’ work “the most absolute poetry that has been writ-

ten in our time.” And Dylan Thomas defined his own poetry as “the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision.”

But it was Conrad Aiken who cut into Dylan Thomas’ work most surgically: “a born language-lover and language-juggler, a poet with an unmistakable genius for word-magic . . . a chameleon for colors, a word-spout . . . if his meanings too often escape us, nevertheless he can be read for the shape and shine alone, for the glitter of magic by itself and for its own sake.”

When first-rate poets turn to prose — especially to the short story of crime, mystery, and detection — their sensitivity and perception usually infuse every line, and every line becomes almost an incantation. In Dylan Thomas’ “The Old Woman Upstairs” the brilliant Welsh poet exposes a brutal murder to “the clear nakedness of light” and tells us an extraordinary lot about the three people involved — all in his own fashion, all within the “watertight compartment” of only 1500 words, and all “a grief ago” . . .

THE OLD WOMAN UPSTAIRS

The old woman upstairs had been dying since Martha could remember. She had lain like a wax woman in her sheets since Martha was a child coming with her mother to bring fresh fruit and vegetables to the dying. And now Martha was a woman under her apron and print frock, and her pale hair was bound in a bunch behind her head. Each morning she got up with the sun, lit the fire, let in the red-eyed cat. She made a pot of tea, and, going up to the bedroom at the back of the cottage, bent over the old woman whose blind eyes were never closed. Each morning she looked into the hollows of the old woman’s eyes, and passed her hands over them. She could not tell if the

old woman breathed. Eight o'clock, eight o'clock now, she said. And the blind eyes smiled. A ragged hand came out from the sheets, and stayed there until Martha took it in her little, padded hand and closed it around the cup. When the cup was empty Martha filled it, and when the pot was dry she pulled back the white sheets from the bed. There the old woman lay, stretched out in her nightdress, and the color of her flesh was gray as her last hairs. Martha tidied the sheets and attended to the old woman's wants. Then she took the pot away. Each morning she had her meal with the boy who worked in the garden. She went to the back door, opened it, and saw him in the distance with his spade. Half-past eight now, she said. He was an ugly boy, and his eyes were redder than the cat's, two cuts in his head forever spying on the first shadows of her breast. Martha put his food in front of him, and sat sideways with her hands near the fire. When he got up he always said, Is there anything you want me to do? She had never said yes. The boy went back to dig potatoes out of the patch or to count the hens' eggs; and if there were berries to be picked off the garden bushes, she joined him before noon. Seeing the little red currants pile up in the palm of her hand, she would think of the money under the old woman's mattress. If there were hens to be killed she could cut their throats far more cleanly than the boy who let his knife stay in the wound and wiped the blood on the knife along his sleeve. She caught a hen and killed it, felt its warm blood, and saw it run headless up the garden path. Then she went in to wash her hands.

It was in the first week of spring. Martha had reached her twentieth year, and still the old woman stretched out her hand for the cup of tea, still the front of her nightdress never stirred with her breathing, and still the fortune lay under the mattress. There was so much that Martha wanted. She wanted a man of her own and a black dress for Sundays and a hat with flowers. She had no money at all. On the days that the boy took the eggs and the vegetables to market, she gave him a six-penny piece that the old woman gave her, and the money the boy brought back in his handkerchief she put into the old woman's hands. She worked for her food and her shelter as the boy worked for

his, though she slept in a room upstairs and he in a bed of straw over the empty sheds.

On a bright market morning she walked out into the garden so that her plan might be cooled in her head. She saw two clouds in the sky, two unshapely hands closing round the head of the sun. If I could fly, she thought, I could fly in at the open window and fasten my teeth in the old woman's throat. But the cool wind blew the thought away. She knew that she was no common girl, for she had read books in the winter evenings when the boy was dreaming in the straw and the old woman was alone in the dark. She had read of a god who came down like money, of snakes with the voices of men, and of a man who stood on the top of a hill, talking with a thing of fire.

At the end of the garden, where the fence kept out the wild green fields, she came to a mound of earth. There she buried the dog she had killed for catching and killing the hens in the garden. Peace in Rest, the cross said, and the date of the death was written backwards so that the dog had not died yet. I could bury her here, said Martha to herself, by the side of the dog, under the manure so that nobody could find her. And she patted her hands, and reached the back door of the cottage as the two hands got round the sun.

Inside there was a meal to be prepared for the old woman, potatoes to be mashed up in the tea. The knife made the only sound, the wind had dropped down, her heart was as quiet as though she had wrapped it up. Nothing moved in the cottage; her hand was dead on her lap; she could not think that smoke went up the chimney and out into the still sky. Her mind, alone in the world, was ticking away. Then, when all things were dead, a cock crew, and she remembered the boy who would soon be back from market. She felt her hand die again in her lap. And in the midst of death she heard the boy's hand lift up the latch.

He came into the kitchen, saw that Martha was cleaning the potatoes, and dropped his handkerchief onto the table. Hearing the noise of the money in the cloth, she looked up at him and smiled. He had never seen her smile before.

Soon she put his meal in front of him, and sat sideways by

the fire. As she bent over him, he smelt the clover in her hair, and saw the damp garden soil behind her fingernails. She rarely went outside the cottage into the unusual world but to kill or pick the berry bushes. Have you taken up her dinner? he asked. She did not answer. When he had finished his meal, he got up from the table and said, Is there anything you want me to do? as he had said a thousand times. Yes, said Martha.

She had never said yes to him before. He had never heard a woman speak as she had spoken. The first shadows of her breast had never been so dark. He stumbled across the kitchen to her, and she lifted her hands to her shoulders. What will you do for me? she said, and loosed the straps of her frock so that it fell about her and left her breast bare. She took his hand and put it on her breast. He stared like a fool at her nakedness, then said her name and caught hold of her. What will you do for me? she said. Thinking of the money under the mattress, she held him close and let her frock fall on the floor and ripped her petticoat away. You will do what I want, she said.

After a minute she struggled out of his arms and ran softly across the room. With her naked back to the door that led upstairs, she beckoned him and told him what he was to do. We shall be rich, she said. He tried to finger her again, but she held his fingers. You will help me, she said. The boy smiled and nodded. She opened the door and led him upstairs. You stay here quiet, she said. In the old woman's room she looked at the cracked jug, the half-open window, and the text on the wall. One o'clock now, she said into the old woman's ear, and the blind eyes smiled. Martha put her fingers round the old woman's throat. One o'clock now, she said, and knocked the old woman's head against the wall. It needed but three little knocks, and the head burst like an egg.

What have you done? cried the boy. Martha called for him to come in. He opened the door and, staring at the naked woman who cleaned her hands on the bed, and at the blood that made such a round, red stain on the wall, he screamed out in horror. Be quiet, said Martha; but he screamed again at her quiet voice and ran downstairs.

So Martha must fly, she said to herself, fly out of the old woman's room into the wind. She opened the window wide, and stepped out. I am flying, she said.

But Martha was not flying.

L'Envoi

We hope that this anthology has proved what has always been clear to us — that there is a natural kinship between the stuff of poetry and the stuff of mystery and detective stories, a deeper, closer affinity than most readers are aware of. Throughout the ages — from Chaucer to Dylan Thomas to the unknown, unpublished poet who has just found a new freedom by abandoning rhyme, punctuation, syntax, and in this Camp and Pop world of ours, by even abandoning words¹ — throughout the ages poets have been peculiarly sensitive to the physiology of mystery — to the smell of evil, to the sound of violence, to the sight of cruelty, to the touch of tragedy, to the taste of murder — and to that sixth sense (poetic justice?) which detects and diagnoses “the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.”

So it should no longer be a surprise to realize that poets are peculiarly fitted to write stories of crime, mystery, detection, and justice. For, as Sir Edwin Arnold said, “Don’t poets know/Better than others?”

¹ The blank page, the empty canvas, the vacant pedestal, the silent symphony — are these the apogees, the farthest-out, of contemporary art? Or are they already *derrière-garde*?

But then again it has been written that "all poets are mad." Robert Burton said it, and so did Drayton, Horace, Macaulay, Swinburne, Browning, and others.

But if poets are mad — well, Aristotle and Plato and Seneca have said: "There is no great genius without some touch of madness." And Emily Dickinson went further: "Much madness is divinest sense/To a discerning eye."

Shall we let Poe, the supreme example of the marriage of poetry and mystery, have the next to the last word? "The question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence." (A good case could be made out that Poe not only invented the detective story but also the story of the absurd.)

But one question is settled. Poets bring order out of chaos. Detectives, in resolving mysteries, also bring order out of chaos. Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. Therefore poets are detectives, and detectives are poets. Q.E.D.

— *E.Q.*

About the Editor

Ellery Queen is a collaboration of Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee, who have written 91 books, including those first published under the pseudonym of Barnaby Ross, and have edited 65 more. Their total sales in various editions published throughout the world are estimated at over 100,000,000.

Ellery Queen popularized the dramatic mystery on radio, in a program called The Adventures of Ellery Queen, which was on the air weekly for nine years, and in 1950 TV Guide awarded the Ellery Queen program its national award for the best mystery show on TV. Ellery Queen has won five annual Edgars (the national Mystery Writers of America awards, similar to the Oscars of Hollywood), including the Grand Master award of 1960, and both the silver and gold Gertrudes awarded by Pocket Books, Inc.

Ellery Queen's most recent successes are Face to Face, The Fourth Side of the Triangle, And On the Eighth Day, and The Player on the Other Side. He is internationally known as an editor — Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine is now in its 27th year of continuous publication.

Anthony Boucher described Queen best when he said, "Ellery Queen is the American detective story."

