

# WITHIN THE TIDES

TALES

BY

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... go, make you ready

—Hamlet *to the Players*

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TO

MR. AND MRS. RALPH WEDGWOOD

THIS SHEAF OF CARE-FREE ANTE-BELLUM PAGES  
IN GRATITUDE FOR THEIR CHARMING HOSPITALITY  
IN THE LAST MONTH OF PEACE

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## THE PLANTER OF MALATA

### I

IN the private editorial office of the principal newspaper in a great colonial city two men were talking. They were both young. The stouter of the two, fair, and with more of an urban look about him, was the editor and part-owner of the important newspaper.

The other's name was Renouard. That he was exercised in his mind about something was evident on his fine bronzed face. He was a lean, lounging, active man. The journalist continued the conversation.

"And so you were dining yesterday at old Dunster's."

He used the word old not in the endearing sense in which it is sometimes applied to intimates, but as a matter of sober fact. The Dunster in question was old. He had been an eminent colonial statesman, but had now retired from active politics after a tour in Europe and a lengthy stay in England, during which he had had a very good press indeed. The colony was proud of him.

"Yes. I dined there," said Renouard. "Young Dunster asked me just as I was going out of his office. It seemed to be like a sudden thought. And yet I can't help suspecting some purpose behind it. He was very pressing. He swore that his uncle would be very pleased to see me. Said his uncle had mentioned lately that the granting to me of the Malata concession was the last act of his official life."

"Very touching. The old boy sentimentalises over the past now and then."

"I really don't know why I accepted," continued the other. "Sentiment does not move me very easily. Old Dunster was civil to me of course, but he did not even inquire how I was getting on with my silk plants. Forgot there was such a thing probably. I must say there were more people there than I expected to meet. Quite a big party."

"I was asked," remarked the newspaper man. "Only I couldn't go. But when did you arrive from Malata?"

"I arrived yesterday at daylight. I am anchored out there in the bay—off Garden Point. I was in Dunster's office before he had finished reading his letters. Have you ever seen young Dunster reading his letters? I had a glimpse of him through the open door. He holds the paper in both hands, hunches his shoulders up to his ugly ears, and brings his long nose and thick lips on to it like a sucking apparatus. A commercial monster."

"Here we don't consider him a monster," said the newspaper man looking at his visitor thoughtfully.

"Probably not. You are used to seeing his face and the faces of others. I don't know how it is that, when I come to town, the appearance of the people in the street strikes me with such force. They seem































































































































































world knows it. Every second man, at least, on this globe of ours has tried it.

“Why!” I cried, “they missed an immense fortune.”

“Yes,” he mumbled, “by the price of a revolver-shot.”

He told me also that eventually Cloete resumed to the States, passenger in a cargo-boat from Albert Dock. The night before he sailed he met him wandering about the quays, and took him home for a drink. “Funny chap, Cloete. We sat all night drinking grogs, till it was time for him to go on board.”

It was then that Cloete, unembittered but weary, told him this story, with that utterly unconscious frankness of a patent-medicine man stranger to all moral standards. Cloete concluded by remarking that he had “had enough of the old country.” George Dunbar had turned on him, too, in the end. Cloete was clearly somewhat disillusioned.

As to Stafford, he died, professed loafer, in some East End hospital or other, and on his last day clamoured “for a parson,” because his conscience worried him for killing an innocent man. “Wanted somebody to tell him it was all right,” growled my old ruffian, contemptuously. “He told the parson that I knew this Cloete who had tried to murder him, and so the parson (he worked among the dock labourers) once spoke to me about it. That skunk of a fellow finding himself trapped yelled for mercy. . . . Promised to be good and so on. . . . Then he went crazy . . . screamed and threw himself about, beat his head against the bulkheads . . . you can guess all that—eh? . . . till he was exhausted. Gave up. Threw himself down, shut his eyes, and wanted to pray. So he says. Tried to think of some prayer for a quick death—he was that terrified. Thought that if he had a knife or something he would cut his throat, and be done with it. Then he thinks: No! Would try to cut away the wood about the lock. . . . He had no knife in his pocket. . . . He was weeping and calling on God to send him a tool of some kind when suddenly he thinks: Axe! In most ships there is a spare emergency axe kept in the master’s room in some locker or other. . . . Up he jumps. . . . Pitch dark. Pulls at the drawers to find matches and, groping for them, the first thing he comes upon—Captain Harry’s revolver. Loaded too. He goes perfectly quiet all over. Can shoot the lock to pieces. See? Saved! God’s providence! There are boxes of matches too. Thinks he: I may just as well see what I am about.

“Strikes a light and sees the little canvas bag tucked away at the back of the drawer. Knew at once what that was. Rams it into his pocket quick. Aha! says he to himself: this requires more light. So he pitches a lot of paper on the floor, set fire to it, and starts in a hurry rummaging for more valuables. Did you ever? He told that East-End parson that the devil tempted him. First God’s mercy—then devil’s work. Turn and turn about. . . .

“Any squirming skunk can talk like that. He was so busy with the

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drawers that the first thing he heard was a shout, Great Heavens. He looks up and there was the door open (Cloete had left the key in the lock) and Captain Harry holding on, well above him, very fierce in the light of the burning papers. His eyes were starting out of his head. Thieving, he thunders at him. A sailor! An officer! No! A wretch like you deserves no better than to be left here to drown.

“This Stafford—on his death-bed—told the parson that when he heard these words he went crazy again. He snatched his hand with the revolver in it out of the drawer, and fired without aiming. Captain Harry fell right in with a crash like a stone on top of the burning papers, putting the blaze out. All dark. Not a sound. He listened for a bit then dropped the revolver and scrambled out on deck like mad.”

The old fellow struck the table with his ponderous fist.

“What makes me sick is to hear these silly boatmen telling people the captain committed suicide. Pah! Captain Harry was a man that could face his Maker any time up there, and here below, too. He wasn't the sort to slink out of life. Not he! He was a good man down to the ground. He gave me my first job as stevedore only three days after I got married.”

As the vindication of Captain Harry from the charge of suicide seemed to be his only object, I did not thank him very effusively for his material. And then it was not worth many thanks in any case.

For it is too startling even to think of such things happening in our respectable Channel in full view, so to speak, of the luxurious continental traffic to Switzerland and Monte Carlo. This story to be acceptable should have been transposed to somewhere in the South Seas. But it would have been too much trouble to cook it for the consumption of magazine readers.

So here it is raw, so to speak—just as it was told to me—but unfortunately robbed of the striking effect of the narrator; the most imposing old ruffian that ever followed the unromantic trade of master stevedore in the port of London.

*Oct., 1910.*

## THE INN OF THE TWO WITCHES

### A FIND

THIS tale, episode, experience—call it how you will—was related in the fifties of the last century by a man who, by his own confession, was sixty years old at the time. Sixty is not a bad age—unless in perspective, when no doubt it is contemplated by the majority of us with mixed feelings. It is a calm age; the game is practically over by then; and standing aside one begins to remember with a certain vividness what a fine fellow one used to be. I have observed that, by an amiable

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attention of Providence, most people at sixty begin to take a romantic view of themselves. Their very failures exhale a charm of peculiar potency. And indeed the hopes of the future are a fine company to live with, exquisite forms, fascinating if you like, but—so to speak—naked, stripped for a run. The robes of glamour are luckily the property of the immovable past which, without them, would sit, a shivery sort of thing, under the gathering shadows.

I suppose it was the romanticism of growing age which set our man to relate his experience for his own satisfaction or for the wonder of his posterity. It could not have been for his glory, because the experience was simply that of an abominable fright—terror he calls it. You would have guessed that the relation alluded to in the very first lines was in writing.

This writing constitutes the Find declared in the sub-title. The title itself is my own contrivance (can't call it invention), and has the merit of veracity. We will be concerned with an inn here. As to the witches that's merely a conventional expression, and we must take our man's word for it that it fits the case.

The Find was made in a box of books bought in London, in a street which no longer exists, from a second-hand bookseller in the last stage of decay. As to the books themselves they were at least twentieth-hand, and on inspection turned out not worth the very small sum of money I disbursed. It might have been some premonition of the fact which made me say: "But I must have the box too." The decayed bookseller assented by the careless, tragic gesture of a man already doomed to extinction.

A litter of loose pages at the bottom of the box excited my curiosity but faintly. The close, neat, regular handwriting was not attractive at first sight. But in one place the statement that in A. D. 1813 the writer was twenty-two years old caught my eye. Two and twenty is an interesting age in which one is easily reckless and easily frightened; the faculty of reflection being weak and the power of imagination strong.

In another place the phrase: "At night we stood in again," arrested my languid attention, because it was a sea phrase. "Let's see what it is all about," I thought, without excitement.

Oh! but it was a dull-faced MS., each line resembling every other line in their close-set and regular order. It was like the drone of a monotonous voice. A treatise on sugar-refining (the dreariest subject I can think of) could have been given a more lively appearance. "In A. D. 1813 I was twenty-two years old," he begins earnestly, and goes on with every appearance of calm, horrible industry. Don't imagine, however, that there is anything archaic in my find. Diabolic ingenuity in invention though as old as the world is by no means a lost art. Look at the telephones for shattering the little peace of mind given to us in this world, or at the machine guns for letting with dispatch life out of our bodies. Now-a-days any blear-eyed old witch if only strong enough

to turn an insignificant little handle could lay low a hundred young men of twenty in the twinkling of an eye.

If this isn't progress! . . . Why immense! We have moved on, and so you must expect to meet here a certain naiveness of contrivance and simplicity of aim appertaining to the remote epoch. And of course no motoring tourist can hope to find such an inn anywhere, now. This one, the one of the title, was situated in Spain. That much I discovered only from internal evidence, because a good many pages of that relation were missing—perhaps not a great misfortune after all. The writer seemed to have entered into a most elaborate detail of the why and wherefore of his presence on that coast—presumably the north coast of Spain. His experience has nothing to do with the sea, though. As far as I can make it out, he was an officer on board a sloop-of-war. There's nothing strange in that. At all stages of the long Peninsular campaign many of our men-of-war of the smaller kind were cruising off the north coast of Spain—as risky and disagreeable a station as can well be imagined.

It looks as though that ship of his had had some special service to perform. A careful explanation of all the circumstances was to be expected from our man, only, as I've said, some of his pages (good tough paper too) were missing: gone in covers for jampots or in wadding for the fowling-pieces of his irreverent posterity. But it is to be seen clearly that communication with the shore and even the sending of messages inland was part of her service, either to obtain intelligence from or to transmit orders or advice to patriotic Spaniards, guerilleros or secret juntas of the province. Something of the sort. All this can be only inferred from the preserved scraps of his conscientious writing.

Next we come upon the panegyric of a very fine sailor, a member of the ship's company, having the rating of the captain's coxswain. He was known on board as Cuba Tom; not because he was Cuban however; he was indeed the best type of a genuine British tar of that time, and a man-of-war's man for years. He came by the name on account of some wonderful adventures he had in that island in his young days, adventures which were the favourite subject of the yarns he was in the habit of spinning to his shipmates of an evening on the forecastle head. He was intelligent, very strong, and of proved courage. Incidentally we are told, so exact is our narrator, that Tom had the finest pigtail for thickness and length of any man in the Navy. This appendage, much cared for and sheathed tightly in a porpoise skin, hung half way down his broad back to the great admiration of all beholders and to the great envy of some.

Our young officer dwells on the manly qualities of Cuba Tom with something like affection. This sort of relation between officer and man was not then very rare. A youngster on joining the service was put under the charge of a trustworthy seaman, who slung his first hammock for him and often later on became a sort of humble friend to the junior officer. The narrator on joining the sloop had found this

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man on board after some years of separation. There is something touching in the warm pleasure he remembers and records at this meeting with the professional mentor of his boyhood.

We discover then that, no Spaniard being forthcoming for the service, this worthy seaman with the unique pigtail and a very high character for courage and steadiness had been selected as messenger for one of these missions inland which have been mentioned. His preparations were not elaborate. One gloomy autumn morning the sloop ran close to a shallow cove where a landing could be made on that iron-bound shore. A boat was lowered, and pulled in with Tom Corbin (Cuba Tom) perched in the bow, and our young man (Mr. Edgar Byrne was his name on this earth which knows him no more) sitting in the stern sheets.

A few inhabitants of a hamlet, whose grey stone houses could be seen a hundred yards or so up a deep ravine, had come down to the shore and watched the approach of the boat. The two Englishmen leaped ashore. Either from dullness or astonishment the peasants gave no greeting, and only fell back in silence.

Mr. Byrne had made up his mind to see Tom Corbin started fairly on his way. He looked round at the heavy surprised faces.

"There isn't much to get out of them," he said. "Let us walk up to the village. There will be a wine shop for sure where we may find somebody more promising to talk to and get some information from."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Tom, falling into step behind his officer. "A bit of palaver as to courses and distances can do no harm; I crossed the broadest part of Cuba by the help of my tongue tho' knowing far less Spanish than I do now. As they say it themselves it was 'four words and no more' with me, that time when I got left behind on shore by the *Blanche*, frigate."

He made light of what was before him, which was but a day's journey into the mountains. It is true that there was a full day's journey before striking the mountain path, but that was nothing for a man who had crossed the island of Cuba on his two legs, and with no more than four words of the language to begin with.

The officer and the man were walking now on a thick sodden bed of dead leaves, which the peasants thereabouts accumulate in the streets of their villages to rot during the winter for field manure. Turning his head Mr. Byrne perceived that the whole male population of the hamlet was following them on the noiseless springy carpet. Women stared from the doors of the houses and the children had apparently gone into hiding. The village knew the ship by sight, afar off, but no stranger had landed on that spot perhaps for a hundred years or more. The cocked hat of Mr. Byrne, the bushy whiskers and the enormous pigtail of the sailor, filled them with mute wonder. They pressed behind the two Englishmen staring like those islanders discovered by Captain Cook in the South Seas.



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It was then that Byrne had his first glimpse of the little cloaked man in a yellow hat. Faded and dingy as it was, this covering for his head made him noticeable.

The entrance to the wine shop was like a rough hole in a wall of flints. The owner was the only person who was not in the street, for he came out from the darkness at the back where the inflated forms of wine skins hung on nails could be vaguely distinguished. He was a tall, one-eyed Asturian with scrubby, hollow cheeks; a grave expression of countenance contrasted enigmatically with the roaming restlessness of his solitary eye. On learning that the matter in hand was the sending on his way of that English mariner toward a certain Gonzales in the mountains, he closed his good eye for a moment as if in meditation. Then opened it, very lively again.

“Possibly, possibly. It could be done.”

A friendly murmur arose in the group in the doorway at the name of Gonzales, the local leader against the French. Inquiring as to the safety of the road Byrne was glad to learn that no troops of that nation had been seen in the neighbourhood for months. Not the smallest little detachment of these impious *polizones*. While giving these answers the owner of the wine-shop busied himself in drawing into an earthenware jug some wine which he set before the heretic English, pocketing with grave abstraction the small piece of money the officer threw upon the table in recognition of the unwritten law that none may enter a wine-shop without buying drink. His eye was in constant motion as if it were trying to do the work of the two; but when Byrne made inquiries as to the possibility of hiring a mule, it became immovably fixed in the direction of the door which was closely besieged by the curious. In front of them, just within the threshold, the little man in the large cloak and yellow hat had taken his stand. He was a diminutive person, a mere homunculus, Byrne describes him, in a ridiculously mysterious, yet assertive attitude, a corner of his cloak thrown cavalierly over his left shoulder, muffling his chin and mouth; while the broad-brimmed yellow hat hung on a corner of his square little head. He stood there taking snuff, repeatedly.

“A mule,” repeated the wine-seller, his eyes fixed on that quaint and snuffy figure. . . . “No, señor officer! Decidedly no mule is to be got in this poor place.”

The coxswain, who stood by with the true sailor’s air of unconcern in strange surroundings, struck in quietly—

“If your honour will believe me Shank’s pony’s the best for this job. I would have to leave the beast somewhere, anyhow, since the captain has told me that half my way will be along paths fit only for goats.”

The diminutive man made a step forward, and speaking through the folds of the cloak which seemed to muffle a sarcastic intention—

“Si, señor. They are too honest in this village to have a single mule

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amongst them for your worship's service. To that I can bear testimony. In these times it's only rogues or very clever men who can manage to have mules or any other four-footed beasts and the wherewithal to keep them. But what this valiant mariner wants is a guide; and here, señor, behold my brother-in-law, Bernardino, wine-seller, and alcade of this most Christian and hospitable village, who will find you one."

This, Mr. Byrne says in his relation, was the only thing to do. A youth in a ragged coat and goatskin breeches was produced after some more talk. The English officer stood treat to the whole village, and while the peasants drank he and Cuba Tom took their departure accompanied by the guide. The diminutive man in the cloak had disappeared.

Byrne went along with the coxswain out of the village. He wanted to see him fairly on his way; and he would have gone a greater distance, if the seaman had not suggested respectfully the advisability of return so as not to keep the ship a moment longer than necessary so close in with the shore on such an unpromising looking morning. A wild gloomy sky hung over their heads when they took leave of each other, and their surroundings of rank bushes and stony fields were dreary.

"In four days' time," were Byrne's last words, "the ship will stand in and send a boat on shore if the weather permits. If not you'll have to make it out on shore the best you can till we come along to take you off."

"Right you are, sir," answered Tom, and strode on. Byrne watched him step out on a narrow path. In a thick pea-jacket with a pair of pistols in his belt, a cutlass by his side, and a stout cudgel in his hand, he looked a sturdy figure and well able to take care of himself. He turned round for a moment to wave his hand, giving to Byrne one more view of his honest bronzed face with bushy whiskers. The lad in goatskin breeches looking, Byrne says, like a faun or a young satyr leaping ahead, stopped to wait for him, and then went off at a bound. Both disappeared.

Byrne turned back. The hamlet was hidden in a fold of the ground, and the spot seemed the most lonely corner of the earth and as if accursed in its uninhabited desolate barrenness. Before he had walked many yards, there appeared very suddenly from behind a bush the muffled up diminutive Spaniard. Naturally Byrne stopped short.

The other made a mysterious gesture with a tiny hand peeping from under his cloak. His hat hung very much at the side of his head. "Señor," he said without any preliminaries. "Caution! It is a positive fact that one-eyed Bernardino, my brother-in-law, has at this moment a mule in his stable. And why he who is not clever has a mule there? Because he is a rogue; a man without conscience. Because I had to give up the *macho* to him to secure for myself a roof to sleep under and a mouthful of *olla* to keep my soul in this insignificant body of

mine. Yet, señor, it contains a heart many times bigger than the mean thing which beats in the breast of that brute connection of mine of which I am ashamed, though I opposed that marriage with all my power. Well, the misguided woman suffered enough. She had her purgatory on this earth—God rest her soul.”

Byrne says he was so astonished by the sudden appearance of that sprite-like being, and by the sardonic bitterness of the speech, that he was unable to disentangle the significant fact from what seemed but a piece of family history fired out at him without rhyme or reason. Not at first. He was confounded and at the same time he was impressed by the rapid forcible delivery, quite different from the frothy excited loquacity of an Italian. So he stared while the homunculus, letting his cloak fall about him, aspired an immense quantity of snuff out of the hollow of his palm.

“A mule,” exclaimed Byrne, seizing at last the real aspect of the discourse. “You say he has got a mule? That’s queer! Why did he refuse to let me have it?”

The diminutive Spaniard muffled himself up again with great dignity.

“*Quien sabe,*” he said coldly, with a shrug of his draped shoulders. “He is a great *político* in everything he does. But one thing your worship may be certain of—that his intentions are always rascally. This husband of my *defunta* sister ought to have been married a long time ago to the widow with the wooden legs.” (The gallows, supposed to widowed of the last executed criminal and waiting for another).

“I see. But remember that, whatever your motives, your worship countenanced him in this lie.”

The bright unhappy eyes on each side of a predatory nose confronted Byrne without wincing, while with that testiness which lurks so often at the bottom of Spanish dignity—

“No doubt the señor officer would not lose an ounce of blood if I were stuck under the fifth rib,” he retorted. “But what of this poor sinner here?” Then changing his tone. “Señor, by the necessities of the times I live here in exile, a Castilian and an old Christian, existing miserably in the midst of these brute Asturians, and dependent on the worst of them all, who has less conscience and scruples than a wolf. And being a man of intelligence I govern myself accordingly. Yet I can hardly contain my scorn. You have heard the way I spoke. A caballero of parts like your worship might have guessed that there was a cat in there.”

“What cat?” said Byrne uneasily. “Oh, I see. Something suspicious. No, señor. I guessed nothing. My nation are not good guessers at that sort of thing; and, therefore, I ask you plainly whether that wine-seller has spoken the truth in other particulars?”

“There are certainly no Frenchmen anywhere about,” said the little man with a return to his indifferent manner.

“Or robbers—*ladrones?*”

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“*Ladrones en grande*—no! Assuredly not,” was the answer in a cold philosophical tone. “What is there left for them to do after the French? And nobody travels in these times. But who can say! Opportunity makes the robber. Still that mariner of yours has a fierce aspect, and with the son of a cat rats will have no play. But there is a saying, too, that where honey is there will soon be flies.”

This oracular discourse exasperated Byrne. “In the name of God,” he cried, “tell me plainly if you think my man is reasonably safe on his journey.”

The homunculus, undergoing one of his rapid changes, seized the officer’s arm. The grip of his little hand was astonishing.

“Señor! Bernardino had taken notice of him. What more do you want? And listen—men have disappeared on this road—on a certain portion of this road, when Bernardino kept a *meson*, an inn, and I, his brother-in-law, had coaches and mules for hire. Now there are no travellers, no coaches. The French have ruined me. Bernardino has retired here for reasons of his own after my sister died. They were three to torment the life out of her, he and Erminia and Lucilla, two aunts of his—all affiliated to the devil. And now he has robbed me of my last mule. You are an armed man. Demand the *macho* from him, with a pistol to his head, señor—it is not his, I tell you—and ride after your man who is so precious to you. And then you shall both be safe, for no two travellers have been ever known to disappear together in those days. As to the beast, I, its owner, I confide it to your honour.”

They were staring hard at each other, and Byrne nearly burst into a laugh at the ingenuity and transparency of the little man’s plot to regain possession of his mule. But he had no difficulty to keep a straight face because he felt deep within himself a strange inclination to do that very extraordinary thing. He did not laugh, but his lip quivered at which the diminutive Spaniard, detaching his black glittering eyes from Byrne’s face, turned his back on him brusquely with a gesture and a fling of the cloak which somehow expressed contempt, bitterness, and discouragement all at once. He turned away and stood still, his hat aslant, muffled up to the ears. But he was not offended to the point of refusing the silver duro which Byrne offered him with a non-committal speech as if nothing extraordinary had passed between them.

“I must make haste on board now,” said Byrne, then.

“*Vaya usted con Dios*,” muttered the gnome. And this interview ended with a sarcastic low sweep of the hat which was replaced at the same perilous angle as before.

Directly the boat had been hoisted the ship’s sails were filled on the off-shore tack, and Byrne imparted the whole story to his captain, who was but a very few years older than himself. There was some amused indignation at it—but while they laughed they looked gravely at each other. A Spanish dwarf trying to beguile an officer of his maj-

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esty's navy into stealing a mule for him—that was too funny, too ridiculous, too incredible. Those were the exclamations of the captain. He couldn't get over the grotesqueness of it.

"Incredible. That's just it," murmured Byrne at last in a significant tone.

They exchanged a long stare. "It's as dear as daylight," affirmed the captain impatiently, because in his heart he was not certain. And Tom the best seaman in the ship for one, the good-humouredly deferential friend of his boyhood for the other, was becoming endowed with a compelling fascination, like a symbolic figure of loyalty appealing to their feelings and their conscience, so that they could not detach their thoughts from his safety. Several times they went up on deck, only to look at the coast, as if it could tell them something of his fate. It stretched away, lengthening in the distance, mute, naked, and savage, veiled now and then by the slanting cold shafts of rain. The westerly swell rolled its interminable angry lines of foam and big dark clouds flew over the ship in a sinister procession.

"I wish to goodness you had done what your little friend in the yellow hat wanted you to do," said the commander of the sloop late in the afternoon with visible exasperation.

"Do you, sir?" answered Byrne, bitter with positive anguish. "I wonder what you would have said afterward? Why! I might have been kicked out of the service for looting a mule from a nation in alliance with His Majesty. Or I might have been battered to a pulp with flails and pitchforks—a pretty tale to get abroad about one of your officers—while trying to steal a mule. Or chased ignominiously to the boat—for you would not have expected me to shoot down unoffending people for the sake of a mangy mule. . . . And yet," he added in a low voice, "I almost wished myself I had done it."

Before dark those two young men had worked themselves up into a highly complex psychological state of scornful scepticism and alarmed credulity. It tormented them exceedingly; and the thought that it would have to last for six days at least, and possibly be prolonged further for an indefinite time, was not to be borne. The ship was therefore put on the inshore tack at dark. All through the gusty dark night she went toward the land to look for her man, at times lying over in the heavy puffs, at others rolling idle in the swell, nearly stationary, as if she too had a mind of her own to swing perplexed between cool reason and warm impulse.

Then just at daybreak a boat put off from her and went on tossed by the seas toward the shallow cove where, with considerable difficulty, an officer in a thick coat and a round hat managed to land on a strip of shingle.

"It was my wish," writes Mr. Byrne, "a wish of which my captain approved, to land secretly if possible. I did not want to be seen either by my aggrieved friend in the yellow hat, whose motives were not clear, or by the one-eyed wine-seller, who may or may not have been

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affiliated to the devil, or indeed by any other dweller in that primitive village. But unfortunately the cove was the only possible landing place for miles; and from the steepness of the ravine I couldn't make a circuit to avoid the houses."

"Fortunately," he goes on, "all the people were yet in their beds. It was barely daylight when I found myself walking on the thick layer of sodden leaves filling the only street. No soul was stirring abroad, no dog barked. The silence was profound, and I had concluded with some wonder that apparently no dogs were kept in the hamlet, when I heard a low snarl, and from a noisome alley between two hovels emerged a vile cur with its tail between its legs. He slunk off silently showing me his teeth as he ran before me, and he disappeared so suddenly that he might have been the unclean incarnation of the Evil One. There was, too, something so weird in the manner of its coming and vanishing, that my spirits, already by no means very high, became further depressed by the revolting sight of this creature as if by an unlucky presage."

He got away from the coast unobserved, as far as he knew, then struggled manfully to the west against wind and rain, on a barren dark upland, under a sky of ashes. Far away the harsh and desolate mountains raising their scarp and denuded ridges seemed to wait for him menacingly. The evening found him fairly near to them, but, in sailor language, uncertain of his position, hungry, wet, and tired out by a day of steady tramping over broken ground during which he had seen very few people, and had been unable to obtain the slightest intelligence of Tom Corbin's passage. "On! on! I must push on," he had been saying to himself through the hours of solitary effort, spurred more by incertitude than by any definite fear or definite hope.

The lowering daylight died out quickly, leaving him faced by a broken bridge. He descended into the ravine, forded a narrow stream by the last gleam of rapid water, and clambering out on the other side was met by the night which fell like a bandage over his eyes. The wind sweeping in the darkness the broadside of the sierra worried his ears by a continuous roaring noise as of a maddened sea. He suspected that he had lost the road. Even in daylight, with its ruts and mudholes and ledges of outcropping stone, it was difficult to distinguish from the dreary waste of the moor interspersed with boulders and clumps of naked bushes. But, as he says, "he steered his course by the feel of the wind," his hat rammed low on his brow, his head down, stopping now and again from mere weariness of mind rather than of body—as if not his strength but his resolution were being overtaxed by the strain of endeavour half suspected to be vain, and by the unrest of his feelings.

In one of these pauses borne in the wind faintly as if from very far away he heard a sound of knocking, just knocking on wood. He noticed that the wind had lulled suddenly.

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His heart started beating tumultuously because in himself he carried the impression of the desert solitudes he had been traversing for the last six hours—the oppressive sense of an uninhabited world. When he raised his head a gleam of light, illusory as it often happens in dense darkness, swam before his eyes. While he peered, the sound of feeble knocking was repeated—and suddenly he felt rather than saw the existence of a massive obstacle in his path. What was it? The spur of a hill? Or was it a house! Yes. It was a house right close, as though it had risen from the ground or had come gliding to meet him, dumb and pallid, from some dark recess of the night. It towered loftily. He had come up under its lee; another three steps and he could have touched the wall with his hand. It was no doubt a *posada* and some other traveller was trying for admittance. He heard again the sound of cautious knocking.

Next moment a broad band of light fell into the night through the opened door. Byrne stepped eagerly into it, whereupon the person outside leaped with a stifled cry away into the night. An exclamation of surprise was heard too, from within. Byrne, flinging himself against the half-closed door, forced his way in against some considerable resistance.

A miserable candle, a mere rushlight, burned at the end of a long deal table. And in its light Byrne saw, staggering yet, the girl he had driven from the door. She had a short black skirt, an orange shawl, a dark complexion—and the escaped single hairs from the mass, sombre and thick like a forest and held up by a comb, made a black mist about her low forehead. A shrill lamentable howl of: “*Misericordia!*” came in two voices from the further end of the long room, where the fire-light of an open hearth played between heavy shadows. The girl recovering herself drew a hissing breath through her set teeth.

It is unnecessary to report the long process of questions and answers by which he soothed the fears of two old women who sat on each side of the fire, on which stood a large earthenware pot. Byrne thought at once of two witches watching the brewing of some deadly potion. But all the same, when one of them raising forward painfully her broken form lifted the cover of the pot, the escaping steam had an appetizing smell. The other did not budge, but sat hunched up, her head trembling all the time.

They were horrible. There was something grotesque in their decrepitude. Their toothless mouths, their hooked noses, the meagreness of the active one, and the hanging yellow cheeks of the other (the still one, whose head trembled) would have been laughable if the sight of their dreadful physical degradation had not been appalling to one’s eyes, had not gripped one’s heart with poignant amazement at the unspeakable misery of age, at the awful persistency of life becoming at last an object of disgust and dread.

To get over it Byrne began to talk, saying that he was an Englishman, and that he was in search of a countryman who ought to have

passed this way. Directly he had spoken the recollection of his parting with Tom came up in his mind with amazing vividness: the silent villagers, the angry gnome, the one-eyed wine-seller, Bernardino. Why! These two unspeakable frights must be that man's aunts—affiliated to the devil.

Whatever they had been once it was impossible to imagine what use such feeble creatures could be to the devil, now, in the world of the living. Which was Lucilla and which was Erminia? They were now things without a name. A moment of suspended animation followed Byrne's words. The sorceress with the spoon ceased stirring the mess in the iron pot, the very trembling of the other's head stopped for the space of breath. In this infinitesimal fraction of a second Byrne had the sense of being really on his quest, of having reached the turn of the path, almost within hail of Tom.

"They have seen him," he thought with conviction. Here was at last somebody who had seen him. He made sure they would deny all knowledge of the Ingles; but on the contrary they were eager to tell him that he had eaten and slept the night in the house. They both started talking together, describing his appearance and behaviour. An excitement quite fierce in its feebleness possessed them. The doubled-up sorceress flourished aloft her wooden spoon, the puffy monster got off her stool and screeched, stepping from one foot to the other, while the trembling of her head was accelerated to positive vibration. Byrne was quite disconcerted by their excited behaviour. . . . Yes! The big, fierce Ingles went away in the morning, after eating a piece of bread and drinking some wine. And if the caballero wished to follow the same path nothing could be easier—in the morning.

"You will give me somebody to show me the way?" said Byrne.

"Si, señor. A proper youth. The man the caballero saw going out."

"But he was knocking at the door," protested Byrne. "He only bolted when he saw me. He was coming in."

"No! No!" the two horrid witches screamed out together. "Going out. Going out!"

After all it may have been true. The sound of knocking had been faint, elusive, reflected Byrne. Perhaps only the effect of his fancy. He asked—

"Who is that man?"

"Her *novio*." They screamed pointing to the girl. "He is gone home to a village far away from here. But he will return in the morning. Her *novio*! And she is an orphan—the child of poor Christian people. She lives with us for the love of God, for the love of God."

The orphan crouching on the corner of the hearth had been looking at Byrne. He thought that she was more like a child of Satan kept there by these two weird harridans for the love of the Devil. Her eyes were a little oblique, her mouth rather thick, but admirably formed; her dark face had a wild beauty, voluptuous and untamed. As to the character of her steadfast gaze attached upon him with a sensuously



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savage attention, "to know what it was like," says Mr. Byrne, "you have only to observe a hungry cat watching a bird in a cage or a mouse inside a trap."

It was she who served him the food, of which he was glad; though with those big slanting black eyes examining him at close range, as if he had something curious written on his face, she gave him an uncomfortable sensation. But anything was better than being approached by these blear-eyed nightmarish witches. His apprehensions somehow had been soothed; perhaps by the sensation of warmth after severe exposure and the ease of resting after the exertion of fighting the gale inch by inch all the way. He had no doubt of Tom's safety. He was now sleeping in the mountain camp having been met by Gonzales' men.

Byrne rose, filled a tin goblet with wine out of a skin hanging on the wall, and sat down again. The witch with the mummy face began to talk to him, ramblingly of old times; she boasted of the inn's fame in those better days. Great people in their own coaches stopped there. An archbishop slept once in the *casa*, a long, long time ago.

The witch with the puffy face seemed to be listening from her stool, motionless, except for the trembling of her head. The girl (Byrne was certain she was a casual gipsy admitted there for some reason or other) sat on the hearth stone in the glow of the embers. She hummed a tune to herself, rattling a pair of castanets slightly now and then. At the mention of the archbishop she chuckled impiously and turned her head to look at Byrne, so that the red glow of the fire flashed in her black eyes and on her white teeth under the dark cowl of the enormous overmantel. And he smiled at her.

He rested now in the ease of security. His advent not having been expected there could be no plot against him in existence. Drowsiness stole upon his senses. He enjoyed it, but keeping a hold, so he thought at least, on his wits; but he must have been gone further than he thought because he was startled beyond measure by a fiendish uproar. He had never heard anything so pitilessly strident in his life. The witches had started a fierce quarrel about something or other. Whatever its origin they were now only abusing each other violently, without arguments; their senile screams expressed nothing but wicked anger and ferocious dismay. The gipsy girl's black eyes flew from one to the other. Never before had Byrne felt himself so removed from fellowship with human beings. Before he had really time to understand the subject of the quarrel, the girl jumped up rattling her castanets loudly. A silence fell. She came up to the table and bending over, her eyes in his—

"Señor," she said with decision, "You shall sleep in the archbishop's room."

Neither of the witches objected. The dried-up one bent double was propped on a stick. The puffy faced one had now a crutch.

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Byrne got up, walked to the door, and turning the key in the enormous lock put it coolly in his pocket. This was clearly the only entrance, and he did not mean to be taken unawares by whatever danger there might have been lurking outside. When he turned from the door he saw the two witches "affiliated to the Devil" and the Satanic girl looking at him in silence. He wondered if Tom Corbin took the same precaution last night. And thinking of him he had again that queer impression of his nearness. The world was perfectly dumb. And in this stillness he heard the blood beating in his ears with a confused rushing noise, in which there seemed to be a voice uttering the words: "Mr. Byrne, look out, sir." Tom's voice. He shuddered; for the delusions of the senses of hearing are the most vivid of all, and from their nature have a compelling character.

It seemed impossible that Tom should not be there. Again a slight chill as of stealthy draught penetrated through his very clothes and passed over all his body. He shook off the impression with an effort.

It was the girl who preceded him upstairs carrying an iron lamp from the naked flame of which ascended a thin thread of smoke. Her soiled white stockings were full of holes.

With the same quiet resolution with which he had locked the door below, Byrne threw open one after another the doors in the corridor. All the rooms were empty except for some nondescript lumber in one or two. And the girl seeing what he would be at stopped every time, raising the smoky light in each doorway patiently. Meantime she observed him with sustained attention. The last door of all she threw open herself.

"You sleep here, señor," she murmured in a voice light like a child's breath, offering him the lamp.

"*Buenos noches, señorita,*" he said politely, taking it from her.

She didn't return the wish audibly, though her lips did move a little, while her gaze black like a starless night never for a moment wavered before him. He stepped in, and as he turned to close the door she was still there motionless and disturbing, with her voluptuous mouth and slanting eyes, with the expression of expectant sensual ferocity of a baffled cat. He hesitated for a moment, and in the dumb house he heard again the blood pulsating ponderously in his ears, while once more the illusion of Tom's voice speaking earnestly somewhere near by was specially terrifying, because this time he could not make out the words.

He slammed the door in the girl's face at last, leaving her in the dark; and he opened it again almost on the instant. Nobody. She had vanished without the slightest sound. He closed the door quickly and bolted it with two heavy bolts.

A profound mistrust possessed him suddenly. Why did the witches quarrel about letting him sleep here? And what meant that stare of the girl as if she wanted to impress his features for ever in her mind? His own nervousness alarmed him. He seemed to himself to

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be removed very far from mankind.

He examined his room. It was not very high, just high enough to take the bed which stood under an enormous baldaquin-like canopy from which fell heavy curtains at foot and head; a bed certainly worthy of an archbishop. There was a heavy table carved all round the edges, some arm-chairs of enormous weight like the spoils of a grandee's palace; a tall shallow wardrobe placed against the wall and with double doors. He tried them. Locked. A suspicion came into his mind, and he snatched the lamp to make a closer examination. No, it was not a disguised entrance. That heavy, tall piece of furniture stood clear of the wall by quite an inch. He glanced at the bolts of his room door. No! No one could get at him treacherously while he slept. But would he be able to sleep? he asked himself anxiously. If only he had Tom there—the trusty seaman who had fought at his right hand in a cutting out affair or two, and had always preached to him the necessity to take care of himself. “For it's no great trick,” he used to say, “to get yourself killed in a hot fight. Any fool can do that. The proper pastime is to fight the Frenchies and then live to fight another day.”

Byrne found it a hard matter not to fall into listening to the silence. Somehow he had the conviction that nothing would break it unless he heard again the haunting sound of Tom's voice. He had heard it twice before. Odd! And yet no wonder, he argued with himself reasonably, since he had been thinking of the man for over thirty hours continuously and, what's more, inconclusively. For his anxiety for Tom had never taken a definite shape. “Disappear” was the only word connected with the idea of Tom's danger. It was very vague and awful. “Disappear!” What did that mean?

Byrne shuddered, and then said to himself that he must be a little feverish. But Tom had not disappeared. Byrne had just heard of him. And again the young man felt the blood beating in his ears. He sat still expecting every moment to hear through the pulsating strokes the sound of Tom's voice. He waited straining his ears, but nothing came. Suddenly the thought occurred to him: “He has not disappeared, but he cannot make himself heard.”

He jumped up from the arm-chair. How absurd! Laying his pistol and his hanger on the table he took off his boots and, feeling suddenly too tired to stand, flung himself on the bed which he found soft and comfortable beyond his hopes.

He had felt very wakeful, but he must have dozed off after all, because the next thing he knew he was sitting up in bed and trying to recollect what it was that Tom's voice had said. Oh! He remembered it now. It had said: “Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir!” A warning this. But against what?

He landed with one leap in the middle of the floor, gasped once, then looked all round the room. The window was shuttered and barred with an iron bar. Again he ran his eyes slowly all round the bare walls, and even looked up at the ceiling, which was rather high.

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Afterward he went to the door to examine the fastenings. They consisted of two enormous iron bolts sliding into holes made in the wall; and as the corridor outside was too narrow to admit of any battering arrangement or even to permit an axe to be swung, nothing could burst the door open—unless gunpowder. But while he was still making sure that the lower bolt was pushed well home, he received the impression of somebody's presence in the room. It was so strong that he spun round quicker than lightning. There was no one. Who could there be? And yet . . .

It was then that he lost the decorum and restraint a man keeps up for his own sake. He got down on his hands and knees, with the lamp on the floor, to look under the bed, like a silly girl. He saw a lot of dust and nothing else. He got up, his cheeks burning, and walked about discontented with his own behaviour and unreasonably angry with Tom for not leaving him alone. The words: "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir," kept on repeating themselves in his head in a tone of warning.

"Hadn't I better just throw myself on the bed and try to go to sleep," he asked himself. But his eyes fell on the tall wardrobe, and he went toward it feeling irritated with himself and yet unable to desist. How he could explain to-morrow the burglarious misdeed to the two odious witches he had no idea. Nevertheless he inserted the point of his hanger between the two halves of the door and tried to prize them open. They resisted. He swore, sticking now hotly to his purpose. His mutter: "I hope you will be satisfied, confound you," was addressed to the absent Tom. Just then the doors gave way and flew open.

He was there.

He—the trusty, sagacious, and courageous Tom was there, drawn up shadowy and stiff, in prudent silence, which his wide-open eyes by their fixed gleam seemed to command Byrne to respect. But Byrne was too startled to make a sound. Amazed, he stepped back a little—and on the instant the seaman flung himself forward headlong as if to clasp his officer round the neck. Instinctively Byrne put out his faltering arms; he felt the horrible rigidity of the body and then the coldness of death as their heads knocked together and their faces came into contact. They reeled, Byrne hugging Tom close to his breast in order not to let him fall with a crash. He had just strength enough to lower the awful burden gently to the floor—then his head swam, his legs gave way, and he sank on his knees, leaning over the body with his hands resting on the breast of that man once full of generous life, and now as insensible as a stone.

"Dead! my poor Tom, dead," he repeated mentally. The light of the lamp standing near the edge of the table fell from above straight on the stony empty stare, of these eyes which naturally had a mobile and merry expression. Byrne turned his own away from them. Tom's black silk neckerchief was not knotted on his breast. It was gone. The murderers had also taken off his shoes and stockings. And noticing

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this spoliation, the exposed throat, the bare upturned feet, Byrne felt his eyes run full of tears. In other respects the seaman was fully dressed; neither was his clothing disarranged as it must have been in a violent struggle. Only his checked shirt had been pulled a little out the waistband in one place, just enough to ascertain whether he had a money belt fastened round his body. Byrne began to sob into his handkerchief.

It was a nervous outburst which passed off quickly. Remaining on his knees he contemplated sadly the athletic body of as fine a seaman as ever had drawn a cutlass, laid a gun, or passed the weather earring in a gale, lying stiff and cold, his cheery, fearless spirit departed—perhaps turning to him, his boy chum, to his ship out there rolling on the grey seas off an iron-bound coast, at the very moment of its flight. He perceived that the six brass buttons of Tom's jacket had been cut off. He shuddered at the notion of the two miserable and repulsive witches busying themselves ghoulishly about the defenceless body of his friend. Cutoff. Perhaps with the same knife which . . . The head of one trembled; the other was bent double, and their eyes were red and bleared, their infamous claws unsteady. . . . It must have been in this very room too, for Tom could not have been killed in the open and brought in here afterward. Of that Byrne was certain. Yet those devilish crones could not have killed him themselves even by taking him unawares—and Tom would be always on his guard of course. Tom was a very wideawake wary man when engaged on any service. . . . And in fact how did they murder him? Who did? In what way?

Byrne jumped up, snatched the lamp off the table, and stooped swiftly over the body. The light revealed on the clothing no stain, no trace, no spot of blood anywhere. Byrne's hands began to shake so that he had to set the lamp on the floor and turn away his head in order to recover from this agitation.

Then he began to explore that cold, still, and rigid body for a stab, a gunshot wound, for the trace of some killing blow. He felt all over the skull anxiously. It was whole. He slipped his hand under the neck. It was unbroken. With terrified eyes he peered close under the chin and saw no marks of strangulation on the throat.

There were no signs anywhere. He was just dead.

Impulsively Byrne got away from the body as if the mystery of an incomprehensible death had changed his pity into suspicion and dread. The lamp on the floor near the set, still face of the seaman showed it staring at the ceiling as if despairingly. In the circle of light Byrne saw by the undisturbed patches of thick dust on the floor that there had been no struggle in that room. "He has died outside," he thought. Yes, outside in that narrow corridor, where there was hardly room to turn, the mysterious death had come to his poor dear Tom. The impulse of snatching up his pistols and rushing out of the room abandoned Byrne suddenly. For Tom, too, had been armed—with

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just such powerless weapons as he himself possessed—pistols, a cutlass! And Tom had died a nameless death, by incomprehensible means.

A new thought came to Byrne. That stranger knocking at the door and fleeing so swiftly at his appearance had come there to remove the body. Aha! That was the guide the withered witch had promised would show the English officer the shortest way of rejoining his man. A promise, he saw it now, of dreadful import. He who had knocked would have two bodies to deal with. Man and officer would go forth from the house together. For Byrne was certain now that he would have to die before the morning—and in the same mysterious manner, leaving behind him an unmarked body.

The sight of a smashed head, of a cut throat, of a gaping gunshot wound, would have been an inexpressible relief. It would have soothed all his fears. His soul cried within him to that dead man whom he had never found wanting in danger. “Why don’t you tell me what I am to look for, Tom? Why don’t you?” But in rigid immobility, extended on his back, he seemed to preserve an austere silence, as if disdainful in the finality of his awful knowledge to hold converse with the living.

Suddenly Byrne flung himself on his knees by the side of the body, and dry-eyed, fierce, opened the shirt wide on the breast, as if to tear the secret forcibly from that cold heart which had been so loyal to him in life! Nothing! Nothing! He raised the lamp, and all the sign vouchsafed to him by that face which used to be so kindly in expression was a small bruise on the forehead—the least thing, a mere mark. The skin even was not broken. He stared at it a long time as if lost in a dreadful dream. Then he observed that Tom’s hands were clenched as though he had fallen facing somebody in a fight with fists. His knuckles, on closer view, appeared somewhat abraded. Both hands.

The discovery of these slight signs was more appalling to Byrne than the absolute absence of every mark would have been. So Tom had died striking against something which could be hit, and yet could kill one without leaving a wound—by a breath.

Terror, hot terror, began to play about Byrne’s heart like a tongue of flame that touches and withdraws before it turns a thing to ashes. He backed away from the body as far as he could, then came forward stealthily casting fearful glances to steal another look at the bruised forehead. There would perhaps be such a faint bruise on his own forehead—before the morning.

“I can’t bear it,” he whispered to himself. Tom was for him now an object of horror, a sight at once tempting and revolting to his fear. He couldn’t bear to look at him.

At last, desperation getting the better of his increasing horror, he stepped forward from the wall against which he had been leaning, seized the corpse under the armpits, and began to lug it over to the bed. The bare heels of the seaman trailed on the floor noiselessly. He

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was heavy with the dead weight of inanimate objects. With a last effort Byrne landed him face downward on the edge of the bed, rolled him over, snatched from under this stiff passive thing a sheet with which he covered it over. Then he spread the curtains at head and foot so that joining together as he shook their folds they hid the bed altogether from his sight.

He stumbled toward a chair, and fell on it. The perspiration poured from his face for a moment, and then his veins seemed to carry for a while a thin stream of half-frozen blood. Complete terror had possession of him now, a nameless terror which had turned his heart to ashes.

He sat upright in the straight-backed chair, the lamp burning at his feet, his pistols and his hanger at his left elbow on the end of the table, his eyes turning incessantly in their sockets round the walls, over the ceiling, over the floor, in the expectation of a mysterious and appalling vision. The thing which could deal death in a breath was outside that bolted door. But Byrne believed neither in walls nor bolts now. Unreasoning terror turning everything to account, his old time boyish admiration of the athletic Tom, the undaunted Tom (he had seemed to him invincible), helped to paralyse his faculties, added to his despair.

He was no longer Edgar Byrne. He was a tortured soul suffering more anguish than any sinner's body had ever suffered from rack or boot. The depth of his torment may be measured when I say that this young man, as brave at least as the average of his kind, contemplated seizing a pistol and firing into his own head. But a deadly, chilly languor was spreading over his limbs. It was as if his flesh had been wet plaster stiffening slowly about his ribs. Presently, he thought, the two witches will be coming in, with crutch and stick—horrible, grotesque, monstrous—affiliated to the devil—to put a mark on his forehead, the tiny little bruise of death. And he wouldn't be able to do anything. Tom had struck out at something, but he was not like Tom. His limbs were dead already. He sat still, dying the death over and over again; and the only part of him which moved were his eyes, turning round and round in their sockets, running over the walls, the floor, the ceiling, again and again till suddenly they became motionless and stony—starting out of his head fixed in the direction of the bed.

He had seen the heavy curtains stir and shake as if the dead body they concealed had turned over and sat up. Byrne, who thought the world could hold no more terrors in store, felt his hair stir at the roots. He gripped the arms of the chair, his jaw fell, and the sweat broke out on his brow while his dry tongue dove suddenly to the roof of his mouth. Again the curtains stirred, but did not open. "Don't, Tom!" Byrne made effort to shout, but all he heard was a slight moan such as an uneasy sleeper may make. He felt that his brain was going, for, now, it seemed to him that the ceiling over the bed had moved, had slanted, and came level again—and once more the closed curtains

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swayed gently as if about to part.

Byrne closed his eyes not to see the awful apparition of the seaman's corpse coming out animated by an evil spirit. In the profound silence of the room he endured a moment of frightful agony, then opened his eyes again. And he saw at once that the curtains remained closed still, but that the ceiling over the bed had risen quite a foot. With the last gleam of reason left to him he understood that it was the enormous baldaquin over the bed which was coming down, while the curtains attached to it swayed softly, sinking gradually to the floor. His drooping jaw snapped to—and half rising in his chair he watched mutely the noiseless descent of the monstrous canopy. It came down in short smooth rushes till lowered half way or more, when it took a run and settled swiftly its turtle-back shape with the deep border piece fitting exactly the edge of the bedstead. A slight crack or two of wood were heard, and the overpowering stillness of the room resumed its sway.

Byrne stood up, gasped for breath, and let out a cry of rage and dismay, the first sound which he is perfectly certain did make its way past his lips on this night of terrors. This then was the death he had escaped! This was the devilish artifice of murder poor Tom's soul had perhaps tried from beyond the border to warn him of. For this was how he had died. Byrne was certain he had heard the voice of the seaman, faintly distinct in his familiar phrase, "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir!" and again uttering words he could not make out. But then the distance separating the living from the dead is so great! Poor Tom had tried. Byrne ran to the bed and attempted to lift up, to push off the horrible lid smothering the body. It resisted his efforts, heavy as lead, immovable like a tombstone. The rage of vengeance made him desist; his head buzzed with chaotic thoughts of extermination, he turned round the room as if he could find neither his weapons nor the way out; and all the time he stammered awful menaces. . . .

A violent battering at the door of the inn recalled him to his soberer senses. He flew to the window, pulled the shutters open, and looked out. In the faint dawn he saw below him a mob of men. Ha! He would go and face at once this murderous lot collected no doubt for his undoing. After his struggle with nameless terrors he yearned for an open fray with armed enemies. But he must have remained yet bereft of his reason, because forgetting his weapons he rushed downstairs with a wild cry, unbarred the door while blows were raining on it outside, and flinging it open flew with his bare hands at the throat of the first man he saw before him. They rolled over together. Byrne's hazy intention was to break through, to fly up the mountain path, and come back presently with Gonzales' men to exact an exemplary vengeance. He fought furiously till a tree, a house, a mountain, seemed to crash down upon his head—and he knew no more.

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Here Mr. Byrne describes in detail the skilful manner in which he found his broken head bandaged, informs us that he had lost a great deal of blood, and ascribes the preservation of his sanity to that circumstance. He sets down Gonzales' profuse apologies in full too. For it was Gonzales who, tired of waiting for news from the English, had come down to the inn with half his band, on his way to the sea. "His excellency," he explained, "rushed out with fierce impetuosity, and, moreover, was not known to us for a friend, and so we . . . etc., etc. When asked what had become of the witches, he only pointed his finger silently to the ground, then voiced calmly a moral reflection: 'The passion for gold is pitiless in the very old, señor,' he said. 'No doubt in former days they have put many a solitary traveller to sleep in the archbishop's bed.'"

"There was also a gipsy girl there," said Byrne feebly from the improvised litter on which he was being carried to the coast by a squad of guerilleros.

"It was she who winched up that infernal machine, and it was she too who lowered it that night," was the answer.

"But why? Why?" exclaimed Byrne. "Why should she wish for my death?"

"No doubt for the sake of your excellency's coat buttons," said politely the saturnine Gonzales. "We found those of the dead mariner concealed on her person. But your excellency may rest assured that everything that is fitting has been done on this occasion."

Byrne asked no more questions. There was still another death which was considered by Gonzales as "fitting to the occasion." The one-eyed Bernardino stuck against the wall of his wine-shop received the charge of six escopettas into his breast. As the shots rang out the rough bier with Tom's body on it went past carried by a bandit-like gang of Spanish patriots down the ravine to the shore, where two boats from the ship were waiting for what was left on earth of her best seaman.

Mr. Byrne, very pale and weak, stepped into the boat which carried the body of his humble friend. For it was decided that Tom Corbin should rest far out in the bay of Biscay. The officer took the tiller and, turning his head for the last look at the shore, saw on the grey hillside something moving, which he made out to be a little man in a yellow hat mounted on a mule—that mule without which the fate of Tom Corbin would have remained mysterious for ever.

*June, 1913.*

BECAUSE OF THE DOLLARS

I

WHILE we were hanging about near the water's edge, as sailors idling ashore will do (it was in the open space before the Harbour Office of a great Eastern port), a man came toward us from the "front" of business houses, aiming obliquely at the landing steps. He attracted my attention because in the movement of figures in white drill suits on the pavement from which he stepped, his costume, the usual tunic and trousers, being made of light grey flannel, made him noticeable.

I had time to observe him. He was stout, but he was not grotesque. His face was round and smooth, his complexion very fair. On his nearer approach I saw a little mustache made all the fairer by a good many white hairs. And he had, for a stout man, quite a good chin. In passing us he exchanged nods with the friend I was with and smiled.

My friend was Hollis, the fellow who had so many adventures and had known so many queer people in that part of the (more or less) gorgeous East in the days of his youth. He said: "That's a good man. I don't mean good in the sense of smart or skilful in his trade. I mean a really good man."

I turned round at once to look at the phenomenon. The "really good man" had a very broad back. I saw him signal a sampan to come alongside, get into it, and go off in the direction of a cluster of local steamers anchored close inshore.

I said: "He's a seaman, isn't he?"

"Yes. Commands that biggish dark-green steamer: 'Sissie—Glasgow.' He has never commanded anything else but the '*Sissie*—Glasgow,' only it wasn't always the same *Sissie*. The first he had was about half the length of this one, and we used to tell poor Davidson that she was a size too small for him. Even at that time Davidson had bulk. We warned him he would get callosities on his shoulders and elbows because of the tight fit of his command. And Davidson could well afford the smiles he gave us for our chaff. He made lots of money in her. She belonged to a portly Chinaman resembling a mandarin in a picture-book, with goggles and thin drooping mustaches, and as dignified as only a Celestial knows how to be.

"The best of Chinamen as employers is that they have such gentlemanly instincts. Once they become convinced that you are a straight man, they give you their unbounded confidence. You simply can't do wrong, then. And they are pretty quick judges of character, too. Davidson's Chinaman was the first to find out his worth, on some theoretical principle. One day in his counting-house, before several white men he was heard to declare: 'Captain Davidson is a good man.' And that settled it. After that you couldn't tell if it was Davidson who

belonged to the Chinaman or the Chinaman who belonged to Davidson. It was he who, shortly before he died, ordered in Glasgow the new *Sissie* for Davidson to command."

We walked into the shade of the Harbour Office and leaned our elbows on the parapet of the quay.

"She was really meant to comfort poor Davidson," continued Hollis. "Can you fancy anything more naively touching than this old mandarin spending several thousand pounds to console his white man? Well, there she is. The old mandarin's sons have inherited her, and Davidson with her, and he commands her; and what with his salary and the trading privileges he makes a lot of money; and everything is as before; and Davidson even smiles—you have seen it? Well, the smile's the only thing which isn't as before."

"Tell me, Hollis," I asked, "what do you mean by good in this connection?"

"Well, there are men who are born good just as others are born witty. What I mean is his nature. No simpler, more scrupulously delicate soul had ever lived in such a—a—comfortable envelope. How we used to laugh at Davidson's fine scruples! In short, he's thoroughly humane, and I don't imagine there can be much of any other sort of goodness that counts on this earth. And as he's that with a shade of particular refinement, I may well call him a '*really* good man.'"

I knew from old that Hollis was a firm believer in the final values of shades. And I said: "I see"—because I really did see Hollis's Davidson in the sympathetic stout man who had passed us a little while before. But I remembered that at the very moment he smiled his placid face appeared veiled in melancholy—a sort of spiritual shadow. I went on.

"Who on earth has paid him off for being so fine by spoiling his smile?"

"That's quite a story, and I will tell it to you if you like. Confound it! It's quite a surprising one, too. Surprising in every way, but mostly in the way it knocked over poor Davidson—and apparently only because he is such a good sort. He was telling me all about it only a few days ago. He said that when he saw these four fellows with their heads in a bunch over the table, he at once didn't like it. He didn't like it at all. You mustn't suppose that Davidson is a soft fool. These men—

"But I had better begin at the beginning. We must go back to the first time the old dollars had been called in by our Government in exchange for a new issue. Just about the time when I left these parts to go home for a long stay. Every trader in the islands was thinking of getting his old dollars sent up here in time, and the demand for empty French wine cases—you know the dozen of vermouth or claret size—was something unprecedented. The custom was to pack the dollars in little bags of a hundred each. I don't know how many bags each case would hold. A good lot. Pretty tidy sums must have been moving afloat just then. But let us get away from here. Won't do to stay in the

sun. Where could we—? I know! let us go to those tiffin-rooms over there.”

We moved over accordingly. Our appearance in the long empty room at that early hour caused visible consternation amongst the China boys. But Hollis led the way to one of the tables between the windows screened by rattan blinds. A brilliant half-light trembled on the ceiling, on the whitewashed walls, bathed the multitude of vacant chairs and tables in a peculiar, stealthy glow.

“All right. We will get something to eat when it’s ready,” he said, waving the anxious Chinaman waiter aside. He took his temples touched with grey between his hands, leaning over the table to bring his face, his dark, keen eyes, closer to mine.

“Davidson then was commanding the steamer *Sissie*—the little one which we used to chaff him about. He ran her alone, with only the Malay serang for a deck officer. The nearest approach to another white man on board of her was the engineer, a Portuguese half-caste, as thin as a lath and quite a youngster at that. For all practical purposes Davidson was managing that command of his single-handed; and of course this was known in the port. I am telling you of it because the fact had its influence on the developments you shall hear of presently.

“His steamer, being so small, could go up tiny creeks and into shallow bays and through reefs and over sand-banks, collecting produce, where no other vessel but a native craft would think of venturing. It is a paying game, often. Davidson was known to visit in her places that no one else could find and that hardly anybody had ever heard of.

“The old dollars being called in, Davidson’s Chinaman thought that the *Sissie* would be just the thing to collect them from small traders in the less frequented parts of the Archipelago. It’s a good business. Such cases of dollars are dumped aft in the ship’s lazarette, and you get good freight for very little trouble and space.

“Davidson, too, thought it was a good idea; and together they made up a list of his calls on his next trip. Then Davidson (he had naturally the chart of his voyages in his head) remarked that on his way back he might look in at a certain settlement up a mere creek, where a poor sort of white man lived in a native village. Davidson pointed out to his Chinaman that the fellow was certain to have some rattans to ship.

“‘Probably enough to fill her forward,’ said Davidson. ‘And that’ll be better than bringing her back with empty holds. A day more or less doesn’t matter.’

“This was sound talk, and the Chinaman owner could not but agree. But if it hadn’t been sound it would have been just the same. Davidson did what he liked. He was a man that could do no wrong. However, this suggestion of his was not merely a business matter. There was in it a touch of Davidsonian kindness. For you must know that the man could not have continued to live quietly up that creek if

it had not been for Davidson's willingness to call there from time to time. And Davidson's Chinaman knew this perfectly well, too. So he only smiled his dignified, bland smile, and said: 'All right, Captain. You do what you like.'

"I will explain presently how this connection between Davidson and that fellow came about. Now I want to tell you about the part of this affair which happened here—the preliminaries of it.

"You know as well as I do that these tiffin-rooms where we are sitting now have been in existence for many years. Well, next day about twelve o'clock, Davidson dropped in here to get something to eat.

"And here comes the only moment in this story where accident—mere accident—plays a part. If Davidson had gone home that day for tiffin, there would be now, after twelve years or more, nothing changed in his kindly, placid smile.

"But he came in here; and perhaps it was sitting at this very table that he remarked to a friend of mine that his next trip was to be a dollar-collecting trip. He added, laughing, that his wife was making rather a fuss about it. She had begged him to stay ashore and get somebody else to take his place for a voyage. She thought there was some danger on account of the dollars. He told her, he said, that there were no Java-sea pirates nowadays except in boys' books. He had laughed at her fears, but he was very sorry, too; for when she took any notion in her head it was impossible to argue her out of it. She would be worrying herself all the time he was away. Well, he couldn't help it. There was no one ashore fit to take his place for the trip.

"This friend of mine and I went home together in the same mail-boat, and he mentioned that conversation one evening in the Red Sea while we were talking over the things and people we had just left, with more or less regret.

"I can't say that Davidson occupied a very prominent place. Moral excellence seldom does. He was quietly appreciated by those who knew him well; but his more obvious distinction consisted in this, that he was married. Ours, as you remember, was a bachelor crowd; in spirit anyhow, if not absolutely in fact. There might have been a few wives in existence, but if so they were invisible, distant, never alluded to. For what would have been the good? Davidson alone was visibly married.

"Being married suited him exactly. It fitted him so well that the wildest of us did not resent the fact when it was disclosed. Directly he had felt his feet out here, Davidson sent for his wife. She came out (from Australia) in the *Somerset* under the care of Captain Ritchie—you know, Monkey-face Ritchie—who couldn't praise enough her sweetness, her gentleness, and her charm. She seemed to be the heaven-born mate for Davidson. She found on arrival a very pretty bungalow on the hill, ready for her and the little girl they had. Very soon he got for her a two-wheeled trap and a Burmah pony, and she

used to drive down of an evening to pick up Davidson on the quay. When Davidson, beaming, got into the trap, it would become very full all at once.

“We used to admire Mrs. Davidson from a distance. It was a girlish head out of a keepsake. From a distance. We had not many opportunities for a closer view, because she did not care to give them to us. We would have been glad to drop in at the Davidson bungalow, but we were made to feel somehow that we were not very welcome there. Not that she ever said anything ungracious. She never had much to say for herself. I was perhaps the one who saw most of the Davidsons at home. What I noticed under the superficial aspect of vapid sweetness was her convex, obstinate forehead, and her small, red, pretty, ungenerous mouth. But then I am an observer with strong prejudices. Most of us were fetched by her white, swan-like neck, by that drooping, innocent profile. There was a lot of latent devotion to Davidson’s wife hereabouts, at that time, I can tell you. But my idea was that she repaid it by a profound suspicion of the sort of men we were; a mistrust which extended—I fancied—to her very husband at times. And I thought then she was jealous of him in a way; though there were no women that she could be jealous about. She had no women’s society. It’s difficult for a shipmaster’s wife unless there are other shipmasters’ wives about, and there were none here then. I know that the dock manager’s wife called on her; but that was all. The fellows here formed the opinion that Mrs. Davidson was a meek, shy little thing. She looked it, I must say. And this opinion was so universal that the friend I have been telling you of remembered his conversation with Davidson simply because of the statement about Davidson’s wife. He even wondered to me: ‘Fancy Mrs. Davidson making a fuss to that extent. She didn’t seem to me the sort of woman that would know how to make a fuss about anything.’

“I wondered, too—but not so much. That bumpy forehead—eh? I had always suspected her of being silly. And I observed that Davidson must have been vexed by this display of wifely anxiety.

“My friend said: ‘No. He seemed rather touched and distressed. There really was no one he could ask to relieve him; mainly because he intended to make a call in some God-forsaken creek, to look up a fellow of the name of Bamtz who apparently had settled there.’

“And again my friend wondered. ‘Tell me,’ he cried, ‘what connection can there be between Davidson and such a creature as Bamtz?’

“I don’t remember now what answer I made. A sufficient one could have been given in two words: ‘Davidson’s goodness.’ *That* never boggled at unworthiness if there was the slightest reason for compassion. I don’t want you to think that Davidson had no discrimination at all. Bamtz could not have imposed on him. Moreover, everybody knew what Bamtz was. He was a loafer with a beard. When I think of Bamtz, the first thing I see is that long black beard and a lot

of propitiatory wrinkles at the corners of two little eyes. There was no such beard from here to Polynesia, where a beard is a valuable property in itself. Bamtz's beard was valuable to him in another way. You know how impressed Orientals are by a fine beard. Years and years ago, I remember, the grave Abdullah, the great trader of Sambir, unable to repress signs of astonishment and admiration at the first sight of that imposing beard. And it's very well known that Bamtz lived on Abdullah off and on for several years. It was a unique beard, and so was the bearer of the same. A unique loafer. He made a fine art of it, or rather a sort of craft and mystery. One can understand a fellow living by cadging and small swindles in towns, in large communities of people; but Bamtz managed to do that trick in the wilderness, to loaf on the outskirts of the virgin forest.

"He understood how to ingratiate himself with the natives. He would arrive in some settlement up a river, make a present of a cheap carbine or a pair of shoddy binoculars, or something of that sort, to the Rajah, or the headman, or the principal trader; and on the strength of that gift, ask for a house, posing mysteriously as a very special trader. He would spin them no end of yarns, live on the fat of the land for a while, and then do some mean swindle or other—or else they would get tired of him and ask him to quit. And he would go off meekly with an air of injured innocence. Funny life. Yet, he never got hurt somehow. I've heard of the Rajah of Dongala giving him fifty dollars' worth of trade goods and paying his passage in a prau only to get rid of him. Fact. And observe that nothing prevented the old fellow having Bamtz's throat cut and the carcass thrown into deep water outside the reefs; for who on earth would have inquired after Bamtz?"

"He had been known to loaf up and down the wilderness as far north as the Gulf of Tonkin. Neither did he disdain a spell of civilisation from time to time. And it was while loafing and cadging in Saigon, bearded and dignified (he gave himself out there as a bookkeeper), that he came across Laughing Anne.

"The less said of her early history the better, but something must be said. We may safely suppose there was very little heart left in her famous laugh when Bamtz spoke first to her in some low café. She was stranded in Saigon with precious little money and in great trouble about a kid she had, a boy of five or six.

"A fellow I just remember, whom they called Pearler Harry, brought her out first into these parts—from Australia, I believe. He brought her out and then dropped her, and she remained knocking about here and there, known to most of us by sight, at any rate. Everybody in the Archipelago had heard of Laughing Anne. She had really a pleasant silvery laugh always at her disposal, so to speak, but it wasn't enough apparently to make her fortune. The poor creature was ready to stick to any half-decent man if he would only let her, but she always got dropped, as it might have been expected.

"She had been left in Saigon by the skipper of a German ship with

whom she had been going up and down the China coast as far as Vladivostok for near upon two years. The German said to her: 'This is all over, mein *Taubchen*. I am going home now to get married to the girl I got engaged to before coming out here.' And Anne said: 'All right, I'm ready to go. We part friends, don't we?'

"She was always anxious to part friends. The German told her that of course they were parting friends. He looked rather glum at the moment of parting. She laughed and went ashore.

"But it was no laughing matter for her. She had some notion that this would be her last chance. What frightened her most was the future of her child. She had left her boy in Saigon before going off with the German, in the care of an elderly French couple. The husband was a doorkeeper in some Government office, but his time was up, and they were returning to France. She had to take the boy back from them; and after she had got him back, she did not like to part with him any more.

"That was the situation when she and Bamtz got acquainted casually. She could not have had any illusions about that fellow. To pick up with Bamtz was coming down pretty low in the world, even from a material point of view. She had always been decent, in her way; whereas Bamtz was, not to mince words, an abject sort of creature. On the other hand, that bearded loafer, who looked much more like a pirate than a bookkeeper, was not a brute. He was gentle—rather—even in his cups. And then despair, like misfortune, makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows. For she may well have despaired. She was no longer young—you know.

"On the man's side this conjunction is more difficult to explain, perhaps. One thing, however, must be said of Bamtz; he had always kept dear of native women. As one can't suspect him of moral delicacy, I surmise that it must have been from prudence. And he, too, was no longer young. There were many white hairs in his valuable black beard by then. He may have simply longed for some kind of companionship in his queer, degraded existence. Whatever their motives, they vanished from Saigon together. And of course nobody cared what had become of them.

"Six months later Davidson came into the Mirrah Settlement. It was the very first time he had been up that creek, where no European vessel had ever been seen before. A Javanese passenger he had on board offered him fifty dollars to call in there—it must have been some very particular business—and Davidson consented to try. Fifty dollars, he told me, were neither here nor there; but he was curious to see the place, and the little *Sissie* could go anywhere where there was water enough to float a soup-plate.

"Davidson landed his Javanese plutocrat, and, as he had to wait a couple of hours for the tide, he went ashore himself to stretch his legs.

"It was a small settlement. Some sixty houses, most of them built on piles over the river, the rest scattered in the long grass; the usual



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pathway at the back; the forest hemming in the clearing and smothering what there might have been of air into a dead, hot stagnation.

“All the population was on the river-bank staring silently, as Malays will do, at the *Sissie* anchored in the stream. She was almost as wonderful to them as an angel’s visit. Many of the old people had only heard vaguely of fire-ships, and not many of the younger generation had seen one. On the back path Davidson strolled in perfect solitude., But he became aware of a bad smell and concluded he would go no farther.

“While he stood wiping his forehead, he heard from somewhere the exclamation: ‘My God! It’s Davy!’

“Davidson’s lower jaw, as he expressed it, came unhooked at the crying of this excited voice. Davy was the name used by the associates of his young days; he hadn’t heard it for many years. He stared about with his mouth open and saw a white woman issue from the long grass in which a small hut stood buried nearly up to the roof.

“Try to imagine the shock: in that wild place that you couldn’t find on a map, and more squalid than the most poverty-stricken Malay settlement had a right to be, this European woman coming swishing out of the long grass in a fanciful teagown thing, dingy pink satin, with a long train and frayed lace trimmings; her eyes like black coals in a pasty-white face. Davidson thought that he was asleep, that he was delirious. From the offensive village mudhole (it was what Davidson had sniffed just before) a couple of filthy buffaloes uprose with loud snorts and lumbered off crashing through the bushes, panic-struck by this apparition.

“The woman came forward, her arms extended, and laid her hands on Davidson’s shoulders, exclaiming: ‘Why! You have hardly changed at all. The same good Davy.’ And she laughed a little wildly.

“This sound was to Davidson like a galvanic shock to a corpse. He started in every muscle. ‘Laughing Anne,’ he said in an awe-struck voice.

“‘All that’s left of her, Davy. All that’s left of her.’

“Davidson looked up at the sky: but there was to be seen no balloon from which she could have fallen on that spot. When he brought his distracted gaze down, it rested on a child holding on with a brown little paw to the pink satin gown. He had run out of the grass after her. Had Davidson seen a real hobgoblin his eyes could not have bulged more than at this small boy in a dirty white blouse and ragged knickers. He had a round head of tight chestnut curls, very sunburnt legs, a freckled face, and merry eyes. Admonished by his mother to greet the gentleman, he finished off Davidson by addressing him in French.

“‘Bonjour.’

“Davidson, overcome, looked up at the woman in silence. She sent the child back to the hut, and when he had disappeared in the grass, she turned to Davidson, tried to speak, but after getting out the words, ‘That’s my Tony,’ burst into a long fit of crying. She had to

lean on Davidson's shoulder. He, distressed in the goodness of his heart, stood rooted to the spot where she had come upon him.

"What a meeting—eh? Bamtz had sent her out to see what white man it was who had landed. And she had recognised him from that time when Davidson, who had been pearling himself in his youth, had been associating with Harry the Pearler and others, the quietest of a rather rowdy set.

"Before Davidson retraced his steps to go on board the steamer, he had heard much of Laughing Anne's story, and had even had an interview, on the path, with Bamtz himself. She ran back to the hut to fetch him, and he came out lounging, with his hands in his pockets, with the detached, casual manner under which he concealed his propensity to cringe. Ya-a-as-as. He thought he would settle here permanently—with her. This with a nod at Laughing Anne, who stood by, a haggard, tragically anxious figure, her black hair hanging over her shoulders.

"No more paint and dyes for me, Davy,' she struck in, 'if only you will do what he wants you to do. You know that I was always ready to stand by my men—if they had only let me.'

"Davidson had no doubt of her earnestness. It was of Bamtz's good faith that he was not at all sure. Bamtz wanted Davidson to promise to call at Mirrah more or less regularly. He thought he saw an opening to do business with rattans there, if only he could depend on some craft to bring out trading goods and take away his produce.

"I have a few dollars to make a start on. The people are all right.'

"He had come there, where he was not known, in a native prau, and had managed, with his sedate manner and the exactly right kind of yarn he knew how to tell to the natives, to ingratiate himself with the chief man.

"The Orang Kaya has given me that empty house there to live in as long as I will stay,' added Bamtz.

"Do it, Davy,' cried the woman suddenly. 'Think of that poor kid.'

"Seen him? 'Cute little customer,' said the reformed loafer in such a tone of interest as to surprise Davidson into a kindly glance.

"I certainly can do it,' he declared. He thought of at first making some stipulation as to Bamtz behaving decently to the woman, but his exaggerated delicacy and also the conviction that such a fellow's promises were worth nothing restrained him. Anne went a little distance down the path with him talking anxiously.

"It's for the kid. How could I have kept him with me if I had to knock about in towns? Here he will never know that his mother was a painted woman. And this Bamtz likes him. He's real fond of him. I suppose I ought to thank God for that.'

"Davidson shuddered at any human creature being brought so low as to have to thank God for the favours or affection of a Bamtz.

"And do you think that you can make out to live here?' he asked

gently.

“Can’t I? You know I have always stuck to men through thick and thin till they had enough of me. And now look at me! But inside I am as I always was. I have acted on the square to them all one after another. Only they do get tired somehow. Oh, Davy! Harry ought not to have cast me off. It was he that led me astray.

“Davidson mentioned to her that Harry the Pearler had been dead now for some years. Perhaps she had heard?

“She made a sign that she had heard; and walked by the side of Davidson in silence nearly to the bank. Then she told him that her meeting with him had brought back the old times to her mind. She had not cried for years. She was not a crying woman either. It was hearing herself called Laughing Anne that had started her sobbing like a fool. Harry was the only man she had loved. The others—

“She shrugged her shoulders. But she prided herself on her loyalty to the successive partners of her dismal adventures. She had never played any tricks in her life. She was a pal worth having. But men did get tired. They did not understand women. She supposed it had to be.

“Davidson was attempting a veiled warning as to Bamtz, but she interrupted him. She knew what men were. She knew what this man was like. But he had taken wonderfully to the kid. And Davidson desisted willingly, saying to himself that surely poor Laughing Anne could have no illusions by this time. She wrung his hand hard at parting.

“It’s for the kid, Davy—it’s for the kid. Isn’t he a bright little chap?”

## II

“ALL this happened about two years before the day when Davidson, sitting in this very room, talked to my friend. You will see presently how this room can get full. Every seat’ll be occupied, and as you notice, the tables are set close, so that the backs of the chairs are almost touching. There is also a good deal of noisy talk here about one o’clock.

“I don’t suppose Davidson was talking very loudly; but very likely he had to raise his voice across the table to my friend. And here accident, mere accident, put in its work by providing a pair of fine ears close behind Davidson’s chair. It was ten to one against the owner of the same having enough change in his pockets to get his tiffin here. But he had. Most likely had rooked somebody of a few dollars at cards overnight. He was a bright creature of the name of Fector, a spare, short, jumpy fellow with a red face and muddy eyes. He described himself as a journalist as certain kind of women give themselves out as actresses in the dock of a police-court.

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“He used to introduce himself to strangers as a man with a mission to track out abuses and fight them whenever found. He would also hint that he was a martyr. And it’s a fact that he had been kicked, horsewhipped, imprisoned, and hounded with ignominy out of pretty well every place between Ceylon and Shanghai for a professional blackmailer.

“I suppose, in that trade, you’ve got to have active wits and sharp ears. It’s not likely that he overheard every word Davidson said about his dollar-collecting trip, but he heard enough to set his wits at work.

“He let Davidson go out, and then hastened away down to the native slums to a sort of lodging-house kept in partnership by the usual sort of Portuguese and a very disreputable Chinaman. Macao Hotel, it was called, but it was mostly a gambling den that one used to warn fellows against. Perhaps you remember?

“There, the evening before, Fector had met a precious couple, a partnership even more queer than the Portuguese and the Chinaman. One of the two was Niclaus—you know. Why! the fellow with a Tartar mustache and a yellow complexion like a Mongolian, only that his eyes were set straight and his face was not so flat. One couldn’t tell what breed he was. A nondescript beggar. From a certain angle you would think a very bilious white man. And I daresay he was. He owned a Malay prau and called himself The Nakhoda, as one would say: The Captain. Aha! Now you remember. He couldn’t, apparently, speak any other European language than English, but he flew the Dutch flag on his prau.

“The other was the Frenchman without hands. Yes. The very same we used to know in ’79 in Sydney, keeping a little tobacco shop at the lower end of George Street. You remember the huge carcass hunched up behind the counter, the big white face and the long black hair brushed back off a high forehead like a bard’s. He was always trying to roll cigarettes on his knee, with his stumps, telling endless yarns of Polynesia and whining and cursing in turn about ‘*mon malheur*.’ His hands had been blown away by a dynamite cartridge while fishing in some lagoon. This accident, I believe, had made him more wicked than before, which is saying a good deal.

“He was always talking about ‘resuming his activities’ some day, whatever they were, if he could only get an intelligent companion. It was evident that the little shop was no field for his activities, and the sickly woman with her face tied up, who used to look in sometimes through the back door, was no companion for him.

“And, true enough, he vanished from Sydney before long, after some trouble with the Excise fellows about his stock. Goods stolen out of a warehouse or something similar. He left the woman behind, but he must have secured some sort of companion—he could not have shifted for himself; but whom he went away with, and where, and what other companions he might have picked up afterward, it is impossible to make the remotest guess about.

“Why exactly he came this way I can’t tell. Toward the end of my time here we began to hear talk of a maimed Frenchman who had been seen here and there. But no one knew then that he had foregathered with Niclaus and lived in his prau. I daresay he put Niclaus up to a thing or two. Anyhow, it was a partnership. Niclaus was somewhat afraid of the Frenchman on account of his tempers, which were awful. He looked then like a devil; but a man without hands, unable to load or handle a weapon, can at best go for one only with his teeth. From that danger Niclaus felt certain he could always defend himself.

“The couple were alone together loafing in the common-room of that infamous hotel when Fector turned up. After some beating about the bush, for he was doubtful how far he could trust these two, he repeated what he had overheard in the tiffin-rooms.

“His tale did not have much success till he came to mention the creek and Bamtz’s name. Niclaus, sailing about like a native in a prau, was, in his own words, ‘familiar with the locality.’ The huge Frenchman, walking up and down the room with his stumps in the pockets of his jacket, stopped short in surprise. ‘*Comment? Bamtz! Bamtz!*

“He had run across him several times in his life. He exclaimed: *Bamtz! mais je ne connate que ca!*’ And he applied such a contemptuously indecent epithet to Bamtz that when, later, he alluded to him as ‘une *chiffe*’ (a mere rag) it sounded quite complimentary. ‘We can do with him what we like,’ he asserted confidently. ‘Oh, yes. Certainly we must hasten to pay a visit to that—’ (another awful descriptive epithet quite unfit for repetition). ‘Devil take me if we don’t pull off a *coup* that will set us all up for a long time.’

“He saw all that lot of dollars melted into bars and disposed of somewhere on the China coast. Of the escape after the *coup* he never doubted. There was Niclaus’s prau to manage that in.

“In his enthusiasm he pulled his stumps out of his pockets and waved them about. Then, catching sight of them, as it were, he held them in front of his eyes, cursing and blaspheming and bewailing his misfortune and his helplessness, till Niclaus quieted him down.

“But it was his mind that planned out the affair and it was his spirit which carried the other two on. Neither of them was of the bold buccaneer type; and Fector, especially, had never in his adventurous life used other weapons than slander and lies.

“That very evening they departed on a visit to Bamtz in Niclaus’s prau, which had been lying, emptied of her cargo of cocoanuts, for a day or two under the canal bridge. They must have crossed the bows of the anchored *Sissie*, and no doubt looked at her with interest as the scene of their future exploit, the great haul, *le grand coup!*

“Davidson’s wife, to his great surprise, sulked with him for several days before he left. I don’t know whether it occurred to him that, for all her angelic profile, she was a very stupidly obstinate girl. She didn’t like the tropics. He had brought her out there, where she had no friends, and now, she said, he was becoming inconsiderate. She had

a presentiment of some misfortune, and notwithstanding Davidson's painstaking explanations, she could not see why her presentiments were to be disregarded. On the very last evening before Davidson went away she asked him in a suspicious manner: "Why is it that you are so anxious to go this time?"\*

"I am not anxious," protested the good Davidson. 'I simply can't help myself. There's no one else to go in my place.'

"Oh! There's no one,' she said, turning away slowly.

"She was so distant with him that evening that Davidson from a sense of delicacy made up his mind to say good-bye to her at once and go and sleep on board. He felt very miserable and, strangely enough, more on his own account than on account of his wife. She seemed to him much more offended than grieved.

"Three weeks later, having collected a good many cases of old dollars (they were stowed aft in the lazarette with an iron bar and a padlock securing the hatch under his cabin-table), yes, with a bigger lot than he had expected to collect, he found himself homeward bound and off the entrance of the creek where Bamtz lived and even, in a sense, flourished.

"It was so late in the day that Davidson actually hesitated whether he should not pass by this time. He had no regard for Bamtz, who was a degraded but not a really unhappy man. His pity for Laughing Anne was no more than her case deserved. But his goodness was of a particularly delicate sort. He realized how these people were dependent on him, and how they would feel their dependence (if he failed to turn up) through a long month of anxious waiting. Prompted by his sensitive humanity, Davidson, in the gathering dusk, turned the *Sissie's* head toward the hardly discernible coast, and navigated her safely through a maze of shallow patches. But by the time he got to the mouth of the creek the night had come.

"The narrow waterway lay like a black cutting through the forest. And as there were always grounded snags in the channel which it would be impossible to make out, Davidson very prudently turned the *Sissie* round, and with only enough steam on the boilers to give her a touch ahead if necessary, let her drift up stern first with the tide, silent and invisible in the impenetrable darkness and in the dumb stillness.

"It was a long job, and when at the end of two hours Davidson thought he must be up to the clearing, the settlement slept already, the whole land of forests and rivers was asleep.

"Davidson, seeing a solitary light in the massed darkness of the shore, knew that it was burning in Bamtz's house. This was unexpected at this time of the night, but convenient as a guide. By a turn of the screw and a touch of the helm he sheered the *Sissie* alongside Bamtz's wharf—a miserable structure of a dozen piles and a few planks of which the ex-vagabond was very proud. A couple of Kalashes jumped down on it, took a turn with the ropes thrown to

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them round the posts, and the *Sissie* came to rest without a single loud word or the slightest noise. And just in time too, for the tide turned even before she was properly moored.

“Davidson had something to eat, and then, coming on deck for a last look round, noticed that the light was still burning in the house.

“This was very unusual, but since they were awake so late, Davidson thought that he would go up to say that he was in a hurry to be off and to ask that what rattans there were in store should be sent on board with the first sign of dawn.

“He stepped carefully over the shaky planks, not being anxious to get a sprained ankle, and picked his way across the waste ground to the foot of the house ladder. The house was but a glorified hut on piles, unfenced and lonely.

“Like many a stout man, Davidson is very light-footed. He climbed the seven steps or so, stepped across the bamboo platform quietly, but what he saw through the doorway stopped him short.

“Four men were sitting by the light of a solitary candle. There was a bottle, a jug, and glasses on the table, but they were not engaged in drinking. Two packs of cards were lying there too, but they were not preparing to play. They were talking together in whispers, and remained quite unaware of him. He himself was too astonished to make a sound for some time. The world was still, except for the sibilation of the whispering heads bunched together over the table.

“And Davidson, as I have quoted him to you-before, didn’t like it. He didn’t like it at all.

“The situation ended with a scream proceeding from the dark, interior part of the room. ‘O Davy! you’ve given me a turn.’

“Davidson made out beyond the table Anne’s very pale face. She laughed a little hysterically, out of the deep shadows between the gloomy mat walls. ‘Ha! ha! ha!’

“The four heads sprang apart at the first sound, and four pairs of eyes became fixed stonily on Davidson. The woman came forward, having little more on her than a loose chintz wrapper and straw slippers on her bare feet. Her head was tied up Malay fashion in a red handkerchief, with a mass of loose hair hanging under it behind. Her professional, gay, European feathers had literally dropped off her in the course of these two years, but a long necklace of amber beads hung round her uncovered neck. It was the only ornament she had left; Bantz had sold all her poor-enough trinkets during the flight from Saigon—when their association began.

“She came forward, past the table into the light, with her usual groping gesture of extended arms, as though her soul, poor thing! had gone blind long ago, her white cheeks hollow, her eyes darkly wild, distracted, as Davidson thought. She came on swiftly, grabbed him by the arm, dragged him in. ‘It’s heaven itself that sends you to-night. My Tony’s so bad—come and see him. Come along—do!’

“Davidson submitted. The only one of the men to move was

Bamtz, who made as if to get up but dropped back in his chair again. Davidson in passing heard him mutter confusedly something that sounded like 'poor little beggar.'

"The child, lying very flushed in a miserable cot knocked up out of gin-cases, stared at Davidson with wide, drowsy eyes. It was a bad bout of fever clearly. But while Davidson was promising to go on board and fetch some medicines, and generally trying to say reassuring things, he could not help being struck by the extraordinary manner of the woman standing by his side. Gazing with despairing expression down at the cot, she would suddenly throw a quick, startled glance at Davidson and then toward the other room.

"Yes, my poor girl,' he whispered, interpreting her distraction in his own way, though he had nothing precise in his mind. 'I'm afraid this bodes no good to you. How is it they are here?'

"She seized his forearm and breathed out forcibly: 'No good to me! Oh, no! But what about you! They are after the dollars you have on board.'

"Davidson let out an astonished 'How do they know there are any dollars?'

"She clapped her hands lightly, in distress. 'So it's true! You have them on board? Then look out for yourself.'

"They stood gazing down at the boy in the cot, aware that they might be observed from the other room.

"We must get him to perspire as soon as possible,' said Davidson in his ordinary voice. 'You'll have to give him hot drink of some kind. I will go on board and bring you a spirit-kettle amongst other things.' And he added under his breath: 'Do they actually mean murder?'

"She made no sign, she had returned to her desolate contemplation of the boy. Davidson thought she had not heard him even, when with an unchanged expression she spoke under her breath.

"The Frenchman would, in a minute. The others shirk it—unless you resist. He's a devil. He keeps them going. Without him they would have done nothing but talk. I've got chummy with him. What can you do when you are with a man like the fellow I am with now. Bamtz is terrified of them, and they know it. He's in it from funk. Oh, Davy! take your ship away—quick!

"Too late,' said Davidson. 'She's on the mud already.'

"If the kid hadn't been in this state I would have run off with him—to you—into the woods—anywhere. Oh, Davy! will he die?' she cried aloud suddenly.

"Davidson met three men in the doorway. They made way for him without actually daring to face his glance. But Bamtz was the only one who looked down with an air of guilt. The big Frenchman had remained lolling in his chair; he kept his stumps in his pockets and addressed Davidson.

"Isn't it unfortunate about that child! The distress of that woman there upsets me, but I am of no use in the world. I couldn't smooth



the sick pillow of my dearest friend. I have no hands. Would you mind sticking one of those cigarettes there into the mouth of a poor, harmless cripple? My nerves want soothing—upon my honour, they do.’

“Davidson complied with his naturally kind smile. As his outward placidity becomes only more pronounced, if possible, the more reason there is for excitement; and as Davidson’s eyes, when his wits are hard at work, get very still and as if sleepy, the huge Frenchman might have been justified in concluding that the man there was a mere sheep—a sheep ready for slaughter. With a ‘*merci bien*’ he uplifted his huge carcass to reach the light of the candle with his cigarette, and Davidson left the house.

“Going down to the ship and returning, he had time to consider his position. At first he was inclined to believe that these men (Niclaus—the white Nakhoda—was the only one he knew by sight before, besides Bamtz) were not of the stamp to proceed to extremities. This was partly the reason why he never attempted to take any measures on board. His pacific Kalashes were not to be thought of as against white men. His wretched engineer would have had a fit from fright at the mere idea of any sort of combat. Davidson knew that he would have to depend on himself in this affair if it ever came off.

“Davidson underestimated naturally the driving power of the Frenchman’s character and the force of the actuating motive. To that man so hopelessly crippled these dollars were an enormous opportunity. With his share of the robbery he would open another shop in Vladivostok, Haiphong, Manila—somewhere far away.

“Neither did it occur to Davidson, who is a man of courage, if ever there was one, that his psychology was not known to the world at large, and that to this particular lot of ruffians, who judged him by his appearance, he appeared an unsuspecting, inoffensive, soft creature, as he passed again through the room, his hands full of various objects and parcels destined for the sick boy.

“All the four were sitting again round the table. Bamtz not having the pluck to open his mouth, it was Niclaus who, as a collective voice, called out to him thickly to come out soon and join in a drink.

“‘I think I’ll have to stay some little time in there, to help her look after the boy,’ Davidson answered without stopping.

“This was a good thing to say to allay a possible suspicion. And, as it was, Davidson felt he must not stay very long.

“He sat down on an old empty nail-keg near the improvised cot and looked at the child; while Laughing Anne, moving to and fro, preparing the hot drink, giving it to the boy in spoonfuls, or stopping to gaze motionless at the flushed face, whispered disjointed bits of information. She had succeeded in making friends with that French devil. Davy would understand that she knew how to make herself pleasant to a man.

“And Davidson nodded without looking at her.

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“The big beast had got to be quite confidential with her. She held his cards for him when they were having a game. Bamtz! Oh! Bamtz in his funk was only too glad to see the Frenchman humoured. And the Frenchman had come to believe that she was a woman who didn’t care what she did. That’s how it came about they got to talk before her openly. For a long time she could not make out what game they were up to. The new arrivals, not expecting to find a woman with Bamtz, had been very startled and annoyed at first, she explained.

“She busied herself in attending to the boy; and nobody looking into that room would have seen anything suspicious in those two people exchanging murmurs by the sick-bedside.

“‘But now they think I am a better man than Bamtz ever was,’ she said with a faint laugh.

“The child moaned. She went down on her knees, and, bending low, contemplated him mournfully. Then raising her head, she asked Davidson whether he thought the child would get better. Davidson was sure of it. She murmured sadly: ‘Poor kid. There’s nothing in life for such as he. Not a dog’s chance. But I couldn’t let him go, Davy! I couldn’t.’

“Davidson felt a profound pity for the child. She laid her hand on his knee and whispered an earnest warning against the Frenchman. Davy must never let him come to close quarters. Naturally Davidson wanted to know the reason, for a man without hands did not strike him as very formidable under any circumstances.

“‘Mind you don’t let him—that’s all,’ she insisted anxiously, hesitated, and then confessed that the Frenchman had got her away from the others that afternoon and had ordered her to tie a seven-pound iron weight (out of the set of weights Bamtz used in business) to his right stump. She had to do it for him. She had been afraid of his savage temper. Bamtz was such a craven, and neither of the other men would have cared what happened to her. The Frenchman, however, with many awful threats had warned her not to let the others know what she had done for him. Afterward he had been trying to cajole her. He had promised her that if she stood by him faithfully in this business he would take her with him to Haiphong or some other place. A poor cripple needed somebody to take care of him—always.

“Davidson asked her again if they really meant mischief. It was, he told me, the hardest thing to believe he had run up against, as yet, in his life. Anne nodded. The Frenchman’s heart was set on this robbery. Davy might expect them, about midnight, creeping on board his ship, to steal anyhow—to murder, perhaps. Her voice sounded weary, and her eyes remained fastened on her child.

“And still Davidson could not accept it somehow; his contempt for these men was too great.

“‘Look here, Davy,’ she said. ‘I’ll go outside with them when they start, and it will be hard luck if I don’t find something to laugh at. They are used to that from me. Laugh or cry—what’s the odds. You

will be able to hear me on board on this quiet night. Dark it is too. Oh! it's dark, Davy!—it's dark!

“Don't you run any risks,” said Davidson. Presently he called her attention to the boy, who, less flushed now, had dropped into a sound sleep. ‘Look. He'll be all right.’

“She made as if to snatch the child up to her breast, but restrained herself. Davidson prepared to go. She whispered hurriedly:

“Mind, Davy! I've told them that you generally sleep aft in the hammock under the awning over the cabin. They have been asking me about your ways and about your ship, too. I told them all I knew. I had to keep in with them. And Bamtz would have told them if I hadn't—you understand?’

“He made a friendly sign and went out. The men about the table (except Bamtz) looked at him. This time it was Fector who spoke. ‘Won't you join us in a quiet game, Captain?’

“Davidson said that now the child was better he thought he would go on board and turn in. Fector was the only one of the four whom he had, so to speak, never seen, for he had had a good look at the Frenchman already. He observed Fector's muddy eyes, his mean, bitter mouth. Davidson's contempt for those men rose in his gorge, while his placid smile, his gentle tones and general air of innocence put heart into them. They exchanged meaning glances.

“‘We shall be sitting late over the cards,’ Fector said in his harsh, low voice.

“Don't make more noise than you can help.’

“Oh! we are a quiet lot. And if the invalid shouldn't be so well, she will be sure to send one of us down to call you, so that you may play the doctor again. So don't shoot at sight.’

“‘He isn't a shooting man,’ struck in Niclaus.

“‘I never shoot before making sure there's a reason for it—at any rate,’ said Davidson.

“Bamtz let out a sickly snigger. The Frenchman alone got up to make a bow to Davidson's careless nod. His stumps were stuck immovably in his pockets. Davidson understood now the reason.

“He went down to the ship. His wits were working actively, and he was thoroughly angry. He smiled, he says (it must have been the first grim smile of his life), at the thought of the seven-pound weight lashed to the end of the Frenchman's stump. The ruffian had taken that precaution in case of a quarrel that might arise over the division of the spoil. A man with an unsuspected power to deal killing blows could take his own part in a sudden scrimmage round a heap of money, even against adversaries armed with revolvers, especially if he himself started the row.

“‘He's ready to face any of his friends with that thing. But he will have no use for it. There will be no occasion to quarrel about these dollars here,’ thought Davidson, getting on board quietly. He never paused to look if there was anybody about the decks. As a matter of









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“As to the others, Davidson never set eyes on a single one of them. Whether they had concealed themselves in the scared settlement, or bolted into the forest, or were hiding on board Niclaus’s prau, which could be seen lying on the mud a hundred yards or so higher up the creek, the fact is that they vanished; and Davidson did not trouble his head about them. He lost no time in getting out of the creek directly the *Sissie* floated. After steaming some twenty miles clear of the coast, he (in his own words) ‘committed the body to the deep.’ He did everything himself. He weighted her down with a few fire-bars, he read the service, he lifted the plank, he was the only mourner. And while he was rendering these last services to the dead, the desolation of that life and the atrocious wretchedness of its end cried aloud to his compassion, whispered to him in tones of self-reproach.

“He ought to have handled the warning she had given him in another way. He was convinced now that a simple display of watchfulness would have been enough to restrain that vile and cowardly crew. But the fact was that he had not quite believed that anything would be attempted.

“The body of Laughing Anne having been ‘committed to the deep’ some twenty miles S.S.W. from Cape Selatan, the task before Davidson was to commit Laughing Anne’s child to the care of his wife. And there poor, good Davidson made a fatal move. He didn’t want to tell her the whole awful story, since it involved the knowledge of the danger from which he, Davidson, had escaped. And this, too, after he had been laughing at her unreasonable fears only a short time before.

“‘I thought that if I told her everything,’ Davidson explained to me, ‘she would never have a moment’s peace while I was away on my trips.’

“He simply stated that the boy was an orphan, the child of some people to whom he, Davidson, was under the greatest obligation, and that he felt morally bound to look after him. Some day he would tell her more, he said, and meantime he trusted in the goodness and warmth of her heart, in her woman’s natural compassion.

“He did not know that her heart was about the size of a parched pea, and had the proportional amount of warmth; and that her faculty of compassion was mainly directed to herself. He was only startled and disappointed at the air of cold surprise and the suspicious look with which she received his imperfect tale. But she did not say much. She never had much to say. She was a fool of the silent, hopeless kind.

“What story Davidson’s crew thought fit to set afloat in Malay town is neither here nor there. Davidson himself took some of his friends into his confidence, besides giving the full story officially to the Harbour Master.

“The Harbour Master was considerably astonished. He didn’t think, however, that a formal complaint should be made to the Dutch



Government. They would probably do nothing in the end, after a lot of trouble and correspondence. The robbery had not come off, after all. Those vagabonds could be trusted to go to the devil in their own way. No amount of fuss would bring the poor woman to life again, the actual murderer had been done justice to by a chance shot from Davidson. Better let the matter drop.

"This was good common sense. But he was impressed.

"Sounds a terrible affair, Captain Davidson.'

"Aye, terrible enough,' agreed the remorseful Davidson. But the most terrible thing for him, though he didn't know it then, was that his wife's silly brain was slowly coming to the conclusion that Tony was Davidson's child, and that he had invented that lame story to introduce him into her pure home in defiance of decency, of virtue—of her most sacred feelings.

"Davidson was aware of some constraint in his domestic relations. But at the best of times she was not demonstrative; and perhaps that very coldness was part of her charm in the placid Davidson's eyes. Women are loved for all sorts of reasons and even for characteristics which one would think repellent. She was watching him and nursing her suspicions.

"Then, one day, Monkey-faced Ritchie called on that sweet, shy Mrs. Davidson. She had come out under his care, and he considered himself a privileged person—her oldest friend in the tropics. He posed for a great admirer of hers. He was always a great chatterer. He had got hold of the story rather vaguely, and he started chattering on that subject, thinking she knew all about it. And in due course he let out something about Laughing Anne.

"Laughing Anne,' says Mrs. Davidson with a start. 'What's that?'

"Ritchie plunged into circumlocution at once, but she very soon stopped him. 'Is that creature dead?' she asks.

"I believe so,' stammered Ritchie. 'Your husband says so.'

"But you don't know for certain?'

"No! How could I, Mrs. Davidson!'

"That's all I wanted to know,' says she, and goes out of the room.

"When Davidson came home she was ready to go for him, not with common voluble indignation, but as if trickling a stream of cold clear water down his back. She talked of his base intrigue with a vile woman, of being made a fool of, of the insult to her dignity.

"Davidson begged her to listen to him and told her all the story, thinking that it would move a heart of stone. He tried to make her understand his remorse. She heard him to the end, said 'Indeed!' and turned her back on him.

"Don't you believe me?' he asked, appalled.

"She didn't say yes or no. All she said was, 'Send that brat away at once.'

"I can't throw him out into the street,' cried Davidson. 'You don't mean it.'

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“I don’t care. There are charitable institutions for such children, I suppose.’

“That I will never do,’ said Davidson.

“Very well. That’s enough for me.’

“Davidson’s home after this was like a silent, frozen hell for him. A stupid woman with a sense of grievance is worse than an unchained devil. He sent the boy to the White Fathers in Malacca. This was not a very expensive sort of education, but she could not forgive him for not casting the offensive child away utterly. She worked up her sense of her wifely wrongs and of her injured purity to such a pitch that one day, when poor Davidson was pleading with her to be reasonable and not to make an impossible existence for them both, she turned on him in a chill passion and told him that his very sight was odious to her.

“Davidson, with his scrupulous delicacy of feeling, was not the man to assert his rights over a woman who could not bear the sight of him. He bowed his head; and shortly afterward arranged for her to go back to her parents. That was exactly what she wanted in her outraged dignity. And then she had always disliked the tropics and had detested secretly the people she had to live amongst as Davidson’s wife. She took her pure, sensitive, mean little soul away to Fremantle or somewhere in that direction. And of course the little girl went away with her too. What could poor Davidson have done with a little girl on his hands, even if she had consented to leave her with him—which is unthinkable.

“This is the story that has spoiled Davidson’s smile for him—which perhaps it wouldn’t have done so thoroughly had he been less of a good fellow.”

Hollis ceased. But before we rose from the table I asked him if he knew what had become of Laughing Anne’s boy.

He counted carefully the change handed him by the Chinaman waiter, and raised his head.

“Oh! that’s the finishing touch. He was a bright, taking little chap, as you know, and the Fathers took very special pains in his bringing up. Davidson expected in his heart to have some comfort out of him. In his placid way he’s a man who needs affection. Well, Tony has grown into a fine youth—but there you are! He wants to be a priest; his one dream is to be a missionary. The Fathers assure Davidson that it is a serious vocation. They tell him he has a special disposition for mission work, too. So Laughing Anne’s boy will lead a saintly life in China somewhere; he may even become a martyr; but poor Davidson is left out in the cold. He will have to go downhill without a single human affection near him because of these old dollars.”

*Jan. 1914.*