VARIOUS

GOLDEN STORIES

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Содержание

Golden Stories / A Selection of the Best Fiction by the Foremost Writers

I
THE NIGHT EXPRESS

The Story of a Bank Robbery

By FRED M. WHITE

A pelting rain volleyed against the great glass dome of the terminus, a roaring wind boomed in the roof. Passengers, hurrying along the platform, glistened in big coats and tweed caps pulled close over their ears. By the platform the night express was drawn up—a glittering mass of green and gold, shimmering with electric lights, warm, inviting, and cozy.

Most of the corridor carriages and sleeping berths were full, for it was early in October still, and the Scotch exodus was not just yet. A few late comers were looking anxiously out for the guard. He came presently, an alert figure in blue and silver. Really, he was very sorry. But the train was unusually crowded, and he was doing the best he could. He was perfectly aware of the fact that his questioners represented a Cabinet Minister on his way to Balmoral and a prominent Lothian baronet, but there are limits even to the power of an express guard, on the Grand Coast Railway.

"Well, what's the matter with this?" the Minister demanded. "Here is an ordinary first-class coach that will do very well for us. Now, Catesby, unlock one of these doors and turn the lights on."

"Very sorry, my lord," the guard explained, "but it can't be done. Two of the carriages in the coach are quite full, as you see, and the other two are reserved. As a matter of fact, my lord, we are taking a body down to Lydmouth. Gentleman who is going to be buried there. And the other carriage is for the Imperial Bank of Scotland. Cashier going up north with specie, you understand."

It was all plain enough, and disgustingly logical. To intrude upon the presence of a body was perfectly impossible; to try and force the hand of the bank cashier equally out of the question. As head of a great financial house, the Minister knew that. A platform inspector bustled along presently, with his hand to his gold-laced cap.

"Saloon carriage being coupled up behind, my lord," he said.

The problem was solved. The guard glanced at his watch. It seemed to him that both the bank messenger and the undertaker were cutting it fine. The coffin came presently on a hand-truck—a black velvet pall lay over it, and on the sombre cloth a wreath or two of white lilies. The door of the carriage was closed presently, and the blinds drawn discreetly close. Following behind this came a barrow in charge of a couple of platform police. On the barrow were two square deal boxes, heavy out of all proportion to their size. These were deposited presently to the satisfaction of a little nervous-looking man in gold-rimmed glasses. Mr. George Skidmore, of the Imperial Bank, had his share of ordinary courage, but he had an imagination, too, and he particularly disliked these periodical trips to branch banks, in convoy, so to speak. He took no risks.

"Awful night, sir," the guard observed. "Rather lucky to get a carriage to yourself, sir. Don't suppose you would have done so only we're taking a corpse as far as Lydmouth, which is our first stop."

"Really?" Skidmore said carelessly. "Ill wind that blows nobody good, Catesby. I may be overcautious, but I much prefer a carriage to myself. And my people prefer it, too. That's why we always give the railway authorities a few days' notice. One can't be too careful, Catesby."

The guard supposed not. He was slightly, yet discreetly, amused to see Mr. Skidmore glance under the seats of the first-class carriage. Certainly there was nobody either there or on the racks. The carriage at the far side was locked, and so, now, was the door next the platform. The great glass dome was brilliantly lighted so that anything suspicious would have been detected instantly. The guard's whistle rang out shrill and clear, and Catesby had a glimpse of Mr. Skidmore making himself comfortable as he swung himself into his van. The great green and gold serpent with the brilliant electric eyes fought its way sinuously into the throat of the wet and riotous night on its first stage of over two hundred miles. Lydmouth would be the first stop.

So far Mr. Skidmore had nothing to worry him, nothing, that is, except the outside chance of a bad accident. He did not anticipate, however, that some miscreant might deliberately wreck the train on the off chance of looting those plain deal boxes. The class of thief that banks have to fear is not guilty of such clumsiness. Unquestionably nothing could happen on this side of Lydmouth. The train was roaring along now through the fierce gale at sixty odd miles an hour, Skidmore had the carriage to himself, and was not the snug, brilliantly lighted compartment made of steel? On one side was the carriage with the coffin; on the other side another compartment filled with a party of sportsmen going North. Skidmore had noticed the four of them playing bridge just before he slipped into his own carriage. Really, he had nothing to fear. He lay back comfortably wondering how Poe or Gaboriau would have handled such a situation with a successful robbery behind it. There are limits, of course, both to a novelist's imagination and a clever thief's process of invention. So, therefore....

Three hours and twenty minutes later the express pulled up at Lydmouth. The station clock indicated the hour to be 11.23. Catesby swung himself out of his van on to the shining wet platform. Only one passenger was waiting there, but nobody alighted. Catesby was sure of this, because he was on the flags before a door could be opened. He came forward to give a hand with the coffin in the compartment next to Skidmore's. Then he noticed, to his surprise, that the glass in the carriage window was smashed; he could see that the little cashier was huddled up strangely in one corner. And Catesby could see also that the two boxes of bullion were gone!

Catesby's heart was thumping against his ribs as he fumbled with his key. He laid his hand upon Skidmore's shoulder, but the latter did not move. The fair hair hung in a mass on the side of his forehead, and here it was fair no longer. There was a hole with something horribly red and slimy oozing from it. The carpet on the floor was piled up in a heap; there were red smears on the cushions. It was quite evident that a struggle had taken place here. The shattered glass in the window testified to that. And the boxes were gone, and Skidmore had been murdered by some assailant who had shot him through the brain. And this mysterious antagonist had got off with the bullion, too.

A thing incredible, amazing, impossible; but there it was. By some extraordinary method or another the audacious criminal had boarded an express train traveling at sixty miles an hour in the teeth of a gale. He had contrived to enter the cashier's carriage and remove specie to the amount of eight thousand pounds! It was impossible that only one man could have carried it. But all the same it was gone.

Catesby pulled himself together. He was perfectly certain that nobody at present on the train had been guilty of this thing. He was perfectly certain that nobody had left the train. Nobody could have done so after entering the station without the guard's knowledge, and to have attempted such a thing on the far side of the river bridge would have been certain death to anybody. There was a long viaduct here—posts and pillars and chains, with tragedy lurking anywhere for the madman

who attempted such a thing. And until the viaduct was reached the express had not slackened speed. Besides, the thief who had the courage and intelligence and daring to carry out a robbery like this was not the man to leave an express train traveling at a speed of upwards of sixty miles an hour.

The train had to proceed, there was no help for it. There was a hurried conference between Catesby and the stationmaster; after that the electric lamps in the dead man's carriage were unshipped, and the blinds pulled down. The matter would be fully investigated when Edinburgh was reached, meanwhile the stationmaster at Lydmouth would telephone the Scotch capital and let them know there what they had to expect. Catesby crept into his van again, very queer and dizzy, and with a sensation in his legs suggestive of creeping paralysis.

Naturally, the mystery of the night express caused a great sensation. Nothing like it had been known since the great crime on the South Coast, which is connected with the name of Lefroy. But that was not so much a mystery as a man hunt. There the criminal had been identified. But here there was no trace and no clue whatever. It was in vain that the Scotland Yard authorities tried to shake the evidence of the guard, Catesby. He refused to make any admissions that would permit the police even to build up a theory. He was absolutely certain that Mr. Skidmore had been alone in the carriage at the moment that the express left London; he was absolutely certain that he had locked the door of the compartment, and the engine driver could testify that the train had never traveled at a less speed than sixty miles an hour until the bridge over the river leading into Lydmouth station was reached; even then nobody could have dropped off the train without the risk of certain death. Inspector Merrick was bound to admit this himself when he went over the spot. And the problem of the missing bullion boxes was quite as puzzling in its way as the mysterious way in which Mr. Skidmore had met his death.

There was no clue to this either. Certainly there had been a struggle, or there would not have been blood marks all over the place, and the window would have remained intact. Skidmore had probably been forced back into his seat, or he had collapsed there after the fatal shot was fired. The unfortunate man had been shot through the brain with an ordinary revolver of common pattern, so that for the purpose of proof the bullet was useless. There were no finger marks on the carriage door, a proof that the murderer had either worn gloves or that he had carefully removed all traces with a cloth of some kind. It was obvious, too, that a criminal of this class would take no risks, especially as there was no chance of his being hurried, seeing that he had had three clear hours for his work. The more the police went into the matter, the more puzzled they were. It was not a difficult matter to establish the bona fides of the passengers who traveled in the next coach with Skidmore, and as to the rest it did not matter. Nobody could possibly have left any of the corridor coaches without attracting notice; indeed, the very suggestion was absurd. And there the matter rested for three days.

It must not be supposed that the authorities had been altogether idle. Inspector Merrick spent most of his time traveling up and down the line by slow local trains on the off-chance of hearing some significant incident that might lead to a clue. There was one thing obvious—the bullion boxes must have been thrown off the train at some spot arranged between the active thief and his confederates. For this was too big a thing to be entirely the work of one man. Some of the gang must have been waiting along the line in readiness to receive the boxes and carry them to a place of safety. By this time, no doubt, the boxes themselves had been destroyed; but eight thousand pounds in gold takes some moving, and probably a conveyance, a motor for choice, had been employed for this purpose. But nobody appeared to have seen or heard anything suspicious on the night of the murder; no prowling gamekeeper or watcher had noticed anything out of the common. Along the Essex and Norfolk marshes, where the Grand Coast Railway wound along like a steel snake, they had taken their desolate and dreary way. True, the dead body of a man had been found in the fowling nets up in the mouth of the Little Ouse, and nobody seemed to know who he was; but there could be no connection between this unhappy individual and the express criminal. Merrick shook his head as he listened to this from a laborer in a roadside public house where he was making a frugal lunch on bread and cheese.

"What do you call fowling nets?" Merrick asked.

"Why, what they catches the birds in," the rustic explained. "Thousands and thousands of duck and teel and widgeon they catches at this time of year. There's miles of nets along the road—great big nets like fowl runs. Ye didn't happen to see any on 'em as ye came along in the train?"

"Now I come to think of it, yes," Merrick said thoughtfully. "I was rather struck by all that netting. So they catch sea birds that way?"

"Catches 'em by the thousand, they does. Birds fly against the netting in the dark and get entangled. Ducks they get by 'ticing 'em into a sort of cage with decoys. There's some of 'em stan's the best part of half a mile long. Covered in over the top like great cages. Ain't bad sport, either."

Merrick nodded. He recollected it all clearly now. He recalled the wide, desolate mud flats running right up to the railway embankment for some miles. At high tide the mud flats were under water, and out of these the great mass of network rose both horizontally and perpendicular. And in this tangle the dead body of a man had been found after the storm.

There was nothing really significant in the fact that the body had been discovered soon after the murder of Mr. George Skidmore. Still, there might be a connection between the two incidents. Merrick was going to make inquiries; he was after what looked like a million to one chance. But then Merrick was a detective with an imagination, which was one of the reasons why he had been appointed to the job. It was essentially a case for the theoretical man. It baffled all the established rules of the game.

Late the same afternoon Merrick arrived at Little Warlingham by means of a baker's cart. It was here that the body of the drowned man lay awaiting the slim chances of identity. If nothing transpired during the next eight and forty hours, the corpse would be buried by the parish authorities. The village policeman acted as Merrick's guide. It was an event in his life that he was not likely to forget.

"A stranger to these parts, I should say, sir," the local officer said. "He's in a shed at the back of the 'Blue Anchor,' where the inquest was held. If you come this way, I'll show him to you."

"Anything found on the body?"

"Absolutely nothing, sir. No mark on the clothing or linen, either. Probably washed off some ship in the storm. Pockets were quite empty, too. And no signs of foul play. *There* you are, sir!"

Casually enough Merrick bent over the still, white form lying there. The dead face was turned up to the light, Rembrandtesque, coming through the door. The detective straightened himself suddenly, and wiped his forehead.

"Stranger to you, sir, of course?" the local man said grimly.

"Well, no," Merrick retorted. "I happen to know the fellow quite well. I'm glad I came here."

Until it was quite too dark to see any longer Merrick was out on the mud flats asking questions. He appeared to be greatly interested in the wildfowlers and the many methods of catching their prey. He learned, incidentally, that on the night of the express murder most of the nets and lures had been washed away. He took minute particulars as to the state of the tide on the night in question; he wanted to know if the nets were capable of holding up against any great force. For instance, if a school of porpoises came along? Or if a fish eagle or an osprey found itself entangled in the meshes?

The fowlers smiled. They invited Merrick to try it for himself. On that stormy east coast it was foolish to take any risks. And Merrick was satisfied. As a matter of fact, he was more than satisfied.

He was really beginning to see his way at last. By the time he got back to his headquarters again he had practically reconstructed the crime. As he stood on the railway permanent way, gazing down into the network of the fowlers below, he smiled to himself. He could have tossed a biscuit on to the top of the long lengths of tarred and knotted rigging. Later on he telephoned to the London terminus of the Grand Coast Railway for the people there to place the services of Catesby at his disposal for a day or two. Could Catesby meet him at Lydmouth to-morrow?

The guard could and did. He frankly admitted that he was grateful for the little holiday. He looked as if he wanted it. The corners of his mouth twitched, his hands were shaky.

"It's nerves, Mr. Merrick," he explained. "We all suffer from them at times. Only we don't like the company to know it, ye understand? To tell the truth, I've never got over that affair at the Junction here eight years ago. I expect you remember that."

Merrick nodded. Catesby was alluding to a great railway tragedy which had taken place outside Lydmouth station some few years back. It had been a most disastrous affair for a local express, and Catesby had been acting as guard to the train. He spoke of it under his breath.

"I dream of it occasionally even now," he said. "The engine left the line and dragged the train over the embankment into the river. If you ask me how I managed to escape, I can't tell you. I never come into Lydmouth with the night express now without my head out of the window of the van right away from the viaduct till she pulls up at the station. And what's more, I never shall. It isn't fear, mind you, because I've as much pluck as any man. It's just nerves."

"We get 'em in our profession, too," Merrick smiled. "Did you happen to be looking out of the window on the night of the murder?"

"Yes, and every other night, too. Haven't I just told you so? Directly we strike the viaduct I come to my feet by instinct."

"Always look out the same side, I suppose?"

"Yes, on the left. That's the platform side, you understand."

"Then if anybody had left the train there–"

"Anybody left the train! Why we were traveling at fifty miles an hour when we reached the viaduct. Oh, yes, if anybody *had* left the train I should have been bound to see them, of course."

"But you can't see out of both windows at once."

"Nobody could leave the train by the other side. The stone parapet of the viaduct almost touches the footboard, and there's a drop of ninety feet below that. Of course I see what you are driving at, Mr. Merrick. Now look here. I locked Mr. Skidmore in the carriage myself, and I can *prove* that nobody got in before we left London. That would have been too dangerous a game so long as the train was passing any number of brilliantly lighted stations, and by the time we got into the open we were going at sixty miles an hour. That speed never slackened till we were just outside Lydmouth, and I was watching at the moment that our pace dropped. I had my head out of the window of my van till we pulled up by the platform. I am prepared to swear to all this if you like. Lord knows how the thing was done, and I don't suppose anybody else ever will."

"You are mistaken there," said Merrick drily. "Now, what puzzles you, of course, is the manner in which the murderer left the train."

"Well, isn't that the whole mystery?"

"Not to me. That's the part I really do know. Not that I can take any great credit to myself, because luck helped me. It was, perhaps, the most amazing piece of luck I have ever had. It was my duty, of course, to take no chances, and I didn't. But we'll come to that presently. Let it suffice for the moment that I know how the murderer left the train. What puzzles me is to know how he got on it. We can dismiss every other passenger in the train, and we need not look for an accomplice. There *were* accomplices, of course, but they were not on the express. Why didn't Mr. Skidmore travel in one of the corridor coaches?"

"He was too nervous. He always had a first-class carriage to himself. We knew he was coming, and that was why we attached an ordinary first-class coach to the train. We shouldn't do it for anybody, but Lord Rendelmore, the chairman of Mr. Skidmore's bank, is also one of our directors. The coach came in handy the other night because we had an order from a London undertaker to bring a corpse as far as here—to Lydmouth."

"Really! You would have to have a separate carriage for that."

"Naturally, Mr. Merrick. It was sort of killing two birds with one stone."

"I see. When did you hear about the undertaking job?"

"The same morning we heard from the bank that Mr. Skidmore was going to Lydmouth. We reserved a coach at once, and had it attached to the Express. The other carriages were filled with ordinary passengers."

"Why didn't I hear of this before?" Merrick asked.

"*I* don't know. It doesn't seem to me to be of much importance. You might just as well ask me questions as to the passengers' baggage."

"Everything is of importance," Merrick said sententiously. "In our profession, there are no such things as trifles. I suppose there will be no difficulty in getting at the facts of this corpse business. I'll make inquiries here presently."

So far Merrick professed himself to be satisfied. But there were still difficulties in the way. The station people had a clear recollection of the receipt of a coffin on the night of the tragedy, and, late as it was, the gruesome thing had been fetched away by the people whom it was consigned to. A plain hearse, drawn by one horse, had been driven into the station yard, the consignment note had been receipted in the usual way, and there was an end of the matter. Lydmouth was a big place, with nearly a quarter of a million of inhabitants, and would necessarily contain a good many people in the undertaking line. Clearly it was no business of the railway company to take this thing any further.

Merrick admitted that freely enough. It was nearly dark when he came back to the station, profoundly dissatisfied with a wasted afternoon.

"No good," he told Catesby. "At the same time there are consolations. And, after all, I am merely confirming my suspicions. I suppose your people here are on the telephone. If so, I should like to send a message to your head office. I want the name of the firm in London who consigned the coffin here. I suppose the stationmaster could manage this for me."

An hour or so later the information came. Merrick, at the telephone, wanted a little further assistance. Would the Grand Coast Railway call up the undertaker's firm whilst he held the line and ask the full particulars as to the body sent from London to Lydmouth. For half an hour Merrick stood patiently there till the reply came.

"Are you there? Is that Inspector Merrick? Oh, yes. Well, we have called up Lincoln & Co., the undertakers. We got on to the manager himself. He declares that the whole thing is a mistake. They have not sent a corpse over our trunk system for two months. I read the manager the letter asking for special facilities, a letter on the firm's own paper. The manager does not hesitate to say the whole thing is a forgery. I think he is right, Inspector. If we can do anything else for you–"

Merrick hung up the receiver and smiled as if pleased with himself. He turned to his companion, Catesby.

"It's all right," he said. "Is there any way we can get back to London to-night? The whole thing is perfectly plain, now."

Though Merrick returned to London thoroughly satisfied, he knew that the sequel was not just yet. There was much conjuring work to be done before it would be possible to place all the cards on the table. The Christmas holidays had arrived before Merrick obtained a couple of warrants, and, armed with these, he went down to Brighton on Boxing Day, and put up at the Hotel Regina, registering himself as Colonel Beaumont, sometime of the United States Field Forces. Merrick could pose as an authority on Cuba, for on one occasion he had been there for six months on the lookout for a defaulting bank manager. He had made certain changes in his appearance, and just now he bore little resemblance to Inspector Merrick of New Scotland Yard.

The big hotel on the front was full. There was a smart dance that same night, preceded by a children's party and Christmas tree. The house swarmed with young folks, and a good many nationalities were represented. On occasions like these somebody generally takes the lead, and by common consent the part of the chief of the events had been allotted to the Marquis de Branza.

To begin with, he was immensely rich. He had vast estates in Italy. He had been staying at the Regina for the past month, and it was whispered that his bill had reached three figures. He entertained

lavishly; he was the soul of hospitality; he was going to buy a palace in Kings' Gardens, and more or less settle down in Brighton.

In addition to all this the Marquis was a handsome man, very fascinating, and a prime favorite with all the boys and girls at the Regina. He had his little peculiarities, of course—for instance, he paid for everything in gold. All his hotel bills were met with current coin.

Merrick had gleaned all this before he had been a day at the Regina. They were quite a happy family, and the Colonel speedily found himself at home. The Marquis welcomed him as if he owned the hotel, and as if everybody was his guest. The dance was a great success, as also were the presents in connection with the cotillon promoted by the Marquis.

At two o'clock the following morning the Marquis was entertaining a select party in the smoking-room. The ladies had all vanished by this time. The Marquis was speaking of his adventures. He really had quite a talent in that direction. Naturally, a man of his wealth was certain to be the mark for swindlers. Merrick listened with an approving smile. He knew that most of these stories were true, for they had all been recorded from time to time at Scotland Yard.

"You would have made an excellent detective, Marquis," he said. "You have made it quite clear where the police blundered over that Glasgow tragedy. I suppose you read all about the Grand Coast Railway murder."

The Marquis started ever so slightly. There was a questioning look in his eyes.

"Did you?" he said. "Naturally one would, Colonel. But a matter the most inexplicable. I gave him up. From the very first I gave him up. If the guard Catesby was not the guilty person, then I admit I have no theory."

One by one, the smoking-room company faded away. Presently only Merrick and the Marquis remained, save one guest who had fallen asleep in his chair. A sleepy waiter looked in and vanished again. The hotel was absolutely quiet now. Merrick, however, was wide awake enough; so, apparently, was the Marquis. All the same, he yawned ostentatiously.

"Let us to bed," he said. "To-morrow, perhaps–"

"No," Merrick said somewhat curtly. "I prefer to-night. Sit down."

The last two words came crisply and with a ring of command in them. The Marquis bowed as he dropped into a chair and lighted a fresh cigarette. A little red spot glowed on either of his brown cheeks, his eyes glittered.

"You want to speak to me, Colonel?" he said.

"Very much indeed. Now, you are an exceedingly clever man, Marquis, and you may be able to help me. It happens that I am deeply interested in the Grand Coast Express murder; in fact, I have devoted the last two months to its solution."

"With no success whatever, my dear Colonel?" the Marquis murmured.

"On the contrary, my dear Marquis, with absolute satisfaction. I am quite sure that you will be interested in my story."

The Marquis raised his cigarette graciously.

"You are very good to give me your confidence," he said. "Pray proceed."

"Thank you. I will not bore you with any preliminary details, for they are too recent to have faded from your memory. Sufficient that we have a murder committed in an express train; we have the disappearance of eight thousand pounds in gold, without any trace of the criminal. That he was on the train at the start is obvious. That he was not in any of the carriages conveying ordinary passengers is equally obvious. It is also certain that he left the train after the commission of the crime. Doubtless you read the evidence of the guard to prove that nobody left the train after the viaduct leading to Lydmouth station was reached. Therefore, the murderer contrived to make his escape when the express was traveling at sixty miles per hour."

"Is not all this superfluous?" the Marquis asked.

"Well, not quite. I am going to tell you how the murderer joined the train and how he left it after the murder and the robbery."

"You are going to tell me that! Is it possible?"

"I think so," Merrick said modestly. "Now, Mr. Skidmore had a compartment to himself. He was locked in the very last thing, and nobody joined the train afterward. Naturally a—well—an amateur detective like myself wanted to know who was in the adjoining compartments. Three of these could be dismissed at once. But in the fourth there was a corpse–"

"A corpse! But there was no mention of that at the inquest."

"No, but the fact remains. A corpse in a coffin. In a dark compartment with the blinds down. And, strangely enough, the firm of undertakers who consigned, or were supposed to consign, the body to Lydmouth denied the whole business. Therefore, it is only fair to suppose that the whole thing was a put-up job to get a compartment in the coach that Mr. Skidmore traveled by. I am going to assume that in that coffin the murderer lay concealed. But let me give you a light—your cigarette is out."

"I smoke no more," the Marquis said. "My throat, he is dry. And then–"

"Well, then, the first part is easy. The man gets out of the coffin and proceeds to fill it with some heavy substance which has been smuggled into the carriage under the pall. He screws the lid down and presently makes his way along the footboard to the next compartment. An athlete in good condition could do that; in fact, a sailor has done it in a drunken freak more than once. Mind you, I don't say that murder was intended in the first instance; but will presume that there was a struggle. The thief probably lost his temper, and perhaps Mr. Skidmore irritated him. Now, the rest was easy. It was easy to pack up the gold in leather bags, each containing a thousand sovereigns, and to drop them along the line at some spot previously agreed upon. I have no doubt that the murderer and his accomplices traveled many times up and down the line before the details were finally settled. Any way, there was no risk here. The broken packing cases were pitched out also, probably in some thick wood. Or they might have been weighted and cast into a stream. Are you interested?"

The Marquis gurgled. He had some difficulty in speaking.

"A little dangerous," he said. "Our ingenious friend could not possibly screw himself down in the coffin after returning to his compartment. And have you perceived the danger of discovery at Lydmouth?"

"Precisely," Merrick said drily. "It is refreshing to meet with so luminous a mind as yours. There were many dangers, many risks to take. The train might have been stopped, lots of things might have happened. It would be far better for the man to leave the express. And he did so!"

"The express at top speed! Impossible!"

"To the ordinary individual, yes. But then, you see, this was not an ordinary individual. He was —let us suppose—an acrobat, a man of great nerve and courage, accustomed to trapeze work and the use of the diving net."

"But Colonel, pardon me, where does the net come in?"

"The net came in at a place near Little Warlingham, on the Norfolk coast. There are miles of net up there, trap and flight nets close by the side of the line. These nets are wide and strong; they run many furlongs without supports, so that an acrobat could easily turn a somersault on to one of these at a given spot without the slightest risk. He could study out the precise spot carefully beforehand— there are lightships on the sands to act as guides. I have been down to the spot and studied it all out for myself. The thing is quite easy for the class of man I mean. I am not taking any great credit to myself, because I happened to see the body of the man who essayed that experiment. I recognized him for–"

"You recognized him! You knew who he was?"

"Certainly. He was Luigi Bianca, who used to perform in London years ago, with his brother Joseph, on the high trapeze. Then one of them got into trouble and subsequently embarked, as the papers say, on a career of crime. And when I saw the body of Luigi I knew at once that he had had a hand in the murder of Mr. Skidmore. When the right spot was reached the fellow took a header

in the dark boldly enough, but he did not know that the storm had come with a very high October tide, and washed the nets away. He fell on the sands and dislocated his neck. But I had something to go on with. When I found out about the bogus corpse I began to see my way. I have been making careful inquiries ever since for the other criminal–"

"The other criminal! You mean to insinuate–"

"I insinuate nothing," Merrick said coldly; "naturally enough I wanted to find Joseph Bianca. He was the man who picked up the gold; he was the man who hired a car in London from Moss & Co., in Regent Street, for a week. This was to recover the gold and incidentally also to take up the thief who stole it. I wanted to find Joseph Bianca, and *I've done it!*"

The Marquis leaped to his feet. As he did so the man in the distant chair woke up and moved across the room.

"Don't make a fuss!" Merrick said quietly. "You will be able to explain presently—perhaps what you are doing here posing as a Marquis, and where you got all that ready money from. Meanwhile, let me inform you that I am Inspector Merrick, of Scotland Yard, and that this is Sergeant Matthews. Joseph Bianca, you are my prisoner, and I have a warrant for your arrest as an accessory before and after the fact for the murder of Mr. George Skidmore. Ask them to call us a cab, Matthews!"

II
OVER THE GARDEN WALL

The Story of a Vacation

By LOUISE HAMILTON MABIE

The impression, which floated vaguely as a perfume in the wake of the departing Mr. and Mrs. Jasper Prentiss, adapted itself pleasingly to any point of view. Generally, it was thought that Katrina Prentiss was to remain at home under the eye of Grandfather McBride. Particularly, was this Grandfather McBride's reading of the unspoken word. But Miss Prentiss, herself, thought so otherwise that the situation completely reversed itself. To Miss Prentiss, Grandfather McBride was left absolutely under her eye.

Meanwhile the Jasper Prentisses, characteristically explaining nothing, commanding nothing, leaving events to work themselves out somehow, as events have been known to do, were off for their month's fishing without undue worry.

"Grandfather will smoke his pipe all over the house," remarked Mrs. Prentiss easily, as they drove away.

"Oh, Katrina will manage somehow," returned Mr. Prentiss, as easily. "They'll come to terms. By the way, Kitty, we mustn't forget that marmalade." And, absorbed in their list of supplies, the Jasper Prentisses disappeared from view.

Grandfather McBride, eighty-one, dependent, save in moments of excitement, upon his knotted stick, hard-featured, with a rusty beard and a shabby black hat, departed slowly for his own quarters. Miss Prentiss, twenty-one, hazel-eyed and graceful, with a wonderful creamy skin, under a crown of auburn braids, sank dreamily upon the broad porch step and gazed across the green lawn into the future.

"A whole month," thought Miss Prentiss, "of doing as I please—consulting nobody, ordering things, going to places, and coming home to—freedom." Miss Prentiss spread out her hands with a sigh of content. "Not that I'm interfered with—ever," she added, reproaching herself, "but now—well, I'm it."

She rose swiftly and turned up the steps. In the wide doorway stood Grandfather McBride, stick in hand, hat jammed down, and in his mouth, at a defiant angle, a battered black pipe. A red flag, backed up by a declaration of the rights of man, could not have spoken more plainly. Miss Prentiss drew back; Mr. McBride stepped forward. Their eyes met. Then the old gentleman flung down his challenge. He removed the pipe and held it poised in his hand.

"What you goin' to do to-day, Triny?" he asked, briskly. "When you goin' over to see the Deerings' parrot? There ain't another such bird in America. You go over there this morning and see that parrot. Don't loll about the house. Don't be lazy!" Whereupon, with less profanity, but as much of autocracy as was ever displayed by an Irish boss whipping into shape the lowliest of his Italian gang, Mr. McBride replaced his pipe elaborately, and walked off with the honors. Katrina, utterly astonished, stared after him, then shrugged, then smiled.

"Poor Grandfather," she reached at length, "in minor matters I'll let him have his way."

The next day, Grandfather McBride smoked his pipe on the porch. On the third morning he smoked it in the drawing-room—out of sheer defiance, for he never entered the room save under compulsion. Katrina, reminding herself that peace was to be desired above victory, shrugged once

more, smiled, and went for a ride. When she swept in, an hour or so later, Grandfather McBride was in the back garden with John, and the smoke of a huge bonfire obscured the sunlight. This was revolution, simple and straightforward, and Katrina went at once to the back garden.

"John," she said, "what is the meaning of this? Don't you know that Mr. Prentiss never allows bonfires? The rubbish is to be carted away, *not* set on fire."

John, apologetic, perturbed, nodded toward the old gentleman. "Yes, miss, I know. I told Mr. McBride, miss–"

Grandfather McBride turned coldly upon Katrina. "I ordered this bonfire," he said.

"But, Grandfather, you know the old orders. Father never allows them."

"I allow them," said Mr. McBride. "Your father's away fishing, and I'm in charge. This is my bonfire. I order bonfires when I please. I like 'em. I like the smell of 'em, I like the smoke–" Here an unexpected cough gave Katrina a word.

"But, Grandfather," she began again, only to be cut short.

"When the folks are home, I sit still and mind my own business. Now they're away, I'm goin' to do things. I'm on a vacation myself," said Mr. McBride, "and I'll have a bonfire on the front lawn if I say so. You go back to the house, Katriny, and read Gibson."

"Ibsen," flashed Katrina.

"I don't care what his Dutch name is—read him. Or else"—a grim light of humor in his hard gray eye—"go over and see that parrot."

Katrina almost stamped her foot. "I loathe parrots," she cried, "and I came out to talk about this bonfire."

"I know you did," said Mr. McBride, "but this parrot ain't like other parrots. It's a clown. It would make a rag baby laugh."

Katrina, flushed, angry, at a loss what to say, decided to say nothing. The sight of John, discreetly gazing at the roof of the chicken house, the grimness of Grandfather's face, the discomfort of the choking smoke, urged a dignified retreat. She turned abruptly and left them, overwhelmed at the exhibition furnished by Mr. McBride, confounded at his sudden leap into activity after years of serene floating and absolutely in the dark as to any method of controlling him in the future.

For a week, his pipe and his daily bonfire contented Mr. McBride. Between himself and Katrina, relations were polite but not cordial. Katrina preserved a dignity which deceived neither of them. Both knew that she was awaiting something sensational, and the fact worried the old gentleman, for already he had exhausted his possibilities. He longed for new ideas in this matter of revolution, but none came. He began to be bored by bonfires, and the lack of opposition to them. Even the parrot failed to amuse, and he was sinking into dull monotony, when a walk down the long lane behind the back garden one sunny afternoon changed the horizon of his world.

He was gone for two hours; but Katrina was away from the house herself, and did not notice. The next afternoon he disappeared for three, finally dragging in weary in body, but high in spirit. Twice at dinner he chuckled audibly, and three times he recommended the parrot across the street to Katrina. The next day he vanished after luncheon, and was late for dinner. At this, Katrina decided to take a hand.

"Grandfather," she said abruptly at dessert, after a long interval of silence on both sides, "it's all very well to take a vacation, but there is such a thing as overdoing it. I'm sure you would do nothing that would alarm mother, and I know that if she were at home she would worry over you. For days you have had no nap. Please rest to-morrow. Don't go walking. Let me drive you to the club for luncheon."

The old gentleman glanced up at Katrina quickly. "I declare if I hadn't forgot all about that fellow till this minute," he said. "Speaking of the club, how's Sparks, Katriny?"

Katrina sat suddenly erect and her color deepened. "Do you by any chance mean Mr. Willoughby Park, Grandfather? If so, I know nothing whatever about him. I haven't seen him for a week." This with a jerk.

"Don't you marry that chap, Katriny," went on Mr. McBride, unimpressed, "and don't you let him come around here. He's no good. A fellow that hangs around a country club when he ain't hangin' around a girl, is always no good. You marry a chap with brains, Katriny, even if he ain't so long on the cash. Why, I know a young fellow–" Mr. McBride pulled himself up short. "You dash in for brains, Triny, and I'll take out my pocket book." Here he nodded, as if concluding a bargain, but Katrina was already upon her feet.

"Grandfather McBride, you are growing insufferable," she cried. "Simply because I mention the club, you assume that I am—angling—for a man that—that has been decently polite to me. I have never been invited to marry Mr. Park. And you give me low advice about laying traps for some other sort of a man. And you mention pocket books! And you go off alone for hours and come home worn out. And you smoke your horrible old pipe and build your sickening bonfires, just to spite me! I think you are a wretch, and I've worried over you every day since mother left." Here she stopped suddenly, with a catch in her throat.

The old gentleman looked at her silently. Then he got up and came around the table. Awkwardly, he patted her shoulder. Katrina sat down.

"I'm glad you don't like Sparks, my dear," said Mr. McBride, leaning on his stick. "And don't worry your heart over Grandfather, Triny. Grandfather's no fool. He ain't had so much fun in years." Mr. McBride winked just here, and put on an air of profound mystery.

"I wonder where you do disappear to," said Katrina. "I think I'll go along."

"Don't you do that," spoke up Mr. McBride alertly. "Don't you do that! A man can't stand a woman tagging at his heels. He's got to have room, and air to breathe."

"Smoke, you mean," put in Katrina, with returning spirit, "and I warn you, Grandfather, that if you make fires off our place, you'll be arrested."

"Pooh! Fires!" said Mr. McBride contemptuously. "Amusement for children. I ain't a-makin' fires these days, Katriny. I've got other things to do." And, with a final pat upon her shoulder, and a last most telling wink, Grandfather McBride dragged himself wearily, but triumphantly, to bed.

When Katrina, on the lookout next afternoon, saw Mr. McBride join John in the back garden, hold with him a whispered consultation broken by many stealthy glances toward the house, and finally disappear with him down the lane, behind a wheelbarrow laden with boards, she gave orders that she was not at home, waited half an hour, and followed.

The lane wound coolly green and deserted from the Prentiss place into the heart of the country. Katrina, walking steadily, passed her own, passed the Graham and the Haskell boundaries, and stopped in surprise. At a branching path hung a new and conspicuous sign. "Private Road! No Trespassing, Under Penalty of the Law."

It was a churlish sign. The people of the neighborhood—a summer settlement of friends and pleasant informalities—were used to no such signs. And Katrina, knowing Grandfather McBride, turned at once into the branching path. At some distance in, she passed a similar sign, with every mark of disdain. Finally, she was brought up short by a wire fence, with a gate, high, wooden, and new, that stretched across the path. She tried the gate, but it did not budge. From the wood beyond came the sound of voices and the strokes of a hammer. With a quick glance behind her, and a determined set to her chin, she began to climb the gate.

She was descending upon the other side in safety, when Grandfather McBride came upon her. His hat was pushed back upon his head, his stick was forgotten. He descended upon her as might a hungry lion upon its prey. He roared—in fact, he bellowed.

"Katrina Prentiss, get back over that fence. Climb back over that gate; you're trespassing. Didn't you see the signs? Are you blind? Can't you read? What do you mean by coming in here where you don't belong? Climb back there and go home at once!"

Katrina, unprepared for battle and aware of being at a disadvantage, swallowed hard and obeyed. She climbed back over the gate. Once upon solid earth, however, and she glared as fiercely at Grandfather McBride as he stared ferociously at her.

"I'm not a child," she said furiously, when he stopped to breathe, "to be ordered about and sent home and insulted. I have never been so treated in my life and I give you fair warning, Grandfather, that I'll stand it no longer. After this I'll do as I please." Whereupon Katrina, having woman-like, in the act of obedience, said her say, retreated with dignity and dispatch. Behind her, Mr. McBride waved his recovered stick over the gate and shouted, but she did not turn nor attempt an answer.

He came home within an hour, slowly, leaning heavily upon his stick. John followed with the empty wheelbarrow. They parted at the barn and Mr. McBride went at once to his room and shut the door. Katrina, sitting at her own window, looked thoughtfully into space and swung a key upon her forefinger. After a time she stood up, smoothed her hair and pinned on her wide, rose-laden hat. Then she went down the hall quietly, stopped before Mr. McBride's door, and listened a moment. A gentle snore proclaimed Mr. McBride's occupation. Katrina fitted the key into the lock and turned it, took it out again and slipped it beneath a corner of the rug, listened a further moment and then walked down the stairs, out through the back garden, and, with a final glance behind her, turned once more into the green and deserted lane.

It must be confessed that Katrina started upon her quest in a spirit far removed from that of your single-minded explorer. She was urged by a variety of causes. Among them was a determination to disobey Grandfather McBride, to serve him with his own medicine, to pay him in his own coin, and to do it as quickly and as frankly as possible. Her rapidly increasing curiosity concerning the region he guarded with so much mystery counted as well, but the paramount force—for Katrina was young enough to take her responsibility seriously—was anxiety over the old gentleman himself. In fact, Katrina departed, as did Lot's wife, with her face and her thought turned backward, a policy not conducive to brilliant success in exploration.

This time, however, she was stopped by no one. She passed the gate safely, penetrated the wood and came at length upon a part of Mr. McBride's secret. It was a rough little flight of steps, made with the help of John, the wheelbarrow, and the boards, which led to the top of a high brick wall. The wall astounded Katrina even more than did the steps, which is saying a good deal. The whole elaborate contrivance for keeping people away, puzzled Katrina. It was some time before she mounted the steps and looked over the wall, but when she finally did so, she ceased to be merely puzzled. She became lost in a maze of wonder.

Stretching before her, was a wide expanse of green. Just opposite stood a long, low building of workmanlike appearance. At the left was a very presentable rose garden. At the right, a rustic summer-house. Surrounding all was the high brick wall. But it was none of these things that amazed Katrina.

Moving toward her, from the door of the long building, came a little procession—men and women, walking slowly, sedately dressed in old-time silks and finery, decked with plumes, jewels, laces, bouquets of flowers. Arrived at a broad space near the summer-house, the company, after a series of low and preliminary bows, launched forth into a stately dance. Katrina, conscious of music, descried an individual in very modern blue overalls, who manipulated a phonograph. A voice from beyond the summer-house, called forth instructions at intervals, with a huskiness vaguely suggestive of old Coney.

"More side-play there, Miss Beals. Just imagine he's a young hobo you're in love with and yer father won't let him up the steps. You're doing the Merry Widow act while the old man's not looking. Don't bow so low you hide your face, Mr. Peters. Your face is worth money to us all. And everybody get a move on! You're too slow! Hit it up a bit, Jim."

The overalls, thus adjured, accelerated the time of his machine, and a new spirit animated the group. Katrina leaned far over the wall in order to miss nothing. At length, the dance, moving toward

a finale, reached it with a succession of stirring chords, and a flourish of curtseys, and the group dissolved.

"That'll do for to-day. You can knock off now," began the husky voice, when Jim, glancing up from his phonograph, beheld Katrina in her rose-laden hat, leaning far over the wall. If he had stopped to reflect, he might have ignored the vision, for he was but man, and the vision a guilelessly pretty one, but he did not stop to reflect. With Jim, to see a thing was to proclaim it abroad. Immediately, he yelled:

"Hey! Get on to the lady on the wall! Hey! Mr. Connor, come around here. There's somebody on the wall. Hey!"

At once Katrina, to her utmost discomfort, became the centre of the stage. Everybody turned, saw her, and began to stare. The silken ladies, the velvet gentlemen, delayed their return to modern apparel, and took her in. Jim stared clamorously. Mr. Connor, rounding the summer-house, glared angrily. To Katrina, even the long building blinked its windows at her, and she thought, with sudden longing, of Grandfather McBride. She wished she had not come. Most of all, she wished to go, but she did not quite dare.

At once, Mr. Connor took charge of the situation. "Say, young lady," he demanded, in a truculent manner, "what do you mean by gettin' into these grounds and rubberin' at us over our wall? Don't you know you can be run in for passin' those signs? Didn't you see that gate?"

"Oh, yes," faltered Katrina; "yes—I saw the gate."

"Well, how'd you get past that gate and them signs," Mr. Connor wanted to know.

"I—I climbed the gate," hesitated Katrina.

Clearly this was not what Mr. Connor expected. Such simplicity must cover guile. A suppressed smile glimmered through the group and Mr. Connor became more suspicious of Katrina.

"I don't want no kiddin' now, do you hear?" he burst forth. "You're in a tight place, young woman, and you may as well wake up to the fact at once. The Knickerbocker is doin' things on a plane of high art, and our methods are our own. Now, I want to know who you represent? And freshness don't go, d'you see?"

Katrina hardly heard Mr. Connor. Her mind was occupied with the freedom that lay clear behind her, and the possible patrol-wagons and police stations before her. Perhaps she might conciliate this red-faced man by allowing him to talk, by being mild and meek and polite. Perhaps a chance might come for a desperate attempt at escape. But Mr. Connor, conversing fluently, read her very soul.

"Bring that there light ladder, Jim," he interrupted himself to order, "and if you try to get away, young woman, it'll be the worse for you. Now, I want to know what yellow sheet you represent?"

"Yellow—why do you take me for a newspaper woman?" cried Katrina. "I'm not. I'm nothing of the sort. I've never been inside a newspaper office in my life."

"Of course not," observed Mr. Connor, ironically. "They never have. Always society ladies that can't write their own names. You stand just where you are, miss, till that ladder arrives. Then I'm coming up to confiscate any little sketches and things you may have handy.

"You are a brute," said Katrina, lips trembling but head held high. "I am Miss Prentiss. I live near here, and you will not dare to detain me."

"Oh, won't I?" returned Mr. Connor. "I have a picture of myself letting you go. And where the deuce is Jim?" He turned impatiently toward the building across the lawn, then somewhat relaxed his frown. "Oh, well, I can take an orchestra chair," observed Mr. Connor. "Here comes the boss."

Katrina, with deepening concern, glanced from Mr. Connor toward the long building. A young man was sprinting across the stretch of green—a clean-cut young man in gray flannels. At the first sight of him, Katrina caught her breath sharply and blushed. It was Katrina's despair that she blushed so easily. As the young man neared them the spectators achieved the effect of obliterating themselves from the landscape. They melted into space. There remained the young man, Mr. Connor, and a divinely flushed Katrina.

The young man looked up at her without smiling. He bowed to her gravely. Then he turned to Mr. Connor. With a few low-spoken words, he wilted Mr. Connor. Katrina, gazing at the rose-garden, heard something in spite of herself. She heard her name, and caught Mr. Connor's articulate amazement. She heard mentioned some "old gentleman." She heard a recommendation to Mr. Connor to go more slowly in the future and to mend his manners at all times. After a hint to Mr. Connor to look up Jim and the ladder, she heard that gentleman withdraw much more quietly than he had come, and her eyes finally left the rose-garden and looked straight down into those of warm gray, belonging to the young man below her.

"Will you mind—waiting—just a moment longer?" he asked. "This is more luck than I've had lately."

Katrina smiled tremulously. "It's in my power to go, then," she said.

"No," said the young man, firmly, "it isn't. On second thoughts, you are to stay just where you are till that blockhead brings the ladder. I've a good deal to say. I'm going to walk home with you."

"Oh," said Katrina. "And what will become of your fancy-dress party?"

"My fancy-dress party," returned the young man, "will catch the next trolley for New York. Oh! Here labors the trusty henchman across the green. Right you are, Jim! No, the lady is not to come down. I'm to go up." And go up he did, in the twinkling of an eye, and in less than another the rose-wreathed hat and the young man's gray cap had disappeared from view together.

"Well, what do you know about that?" observed Jim, under his breath, staring at the top of the wall. He whistled softly. Then he grinned. "Hypnotized, by thunder," concluded Jim, returning with the ladder.

Meanwhile, the two lingered homeward through the deepening twilight. The gate opened easily to a key from the young man's pocket; the signs glimmered dimly. They talked lightly, but what they said proved to both simply an airy veil for what they did not say. Katrina spoke of the club and the tennis tournament.

"Of course, we lost," she said. "Our best man," with a sidelong look, "did not enter. The committee said that he was away—on business. I see now that they were misinformed."

"But they weren't," said the young man, eagerly, "if you mean me. I am 'away on business.' Why, do you know it's seven days since I've seen you?"

Katrina regarded her neat brown shoes.

"The fact is," continued the young man, diffidently, "I've been trying a new method with you. I've been endeavoring to be missed. And I'm afraid to hear that I haven't been."

"A little wholesome fear is good for anyone," observed Katrina, judicially, "but I can truthfully say that I rejoiced at the sight of you this afternoon. That red-faced man was about to drag me off the wall by the hair."

"Oh, Connor," said the young man. "Connor's not polished, but in his line, he's a jewel. He used to be a stage manager, and considered in that light, he's really mild."

"Is he?" said Katrina, drily. "Does he stage manage for you?"

"Practically that. Don't scoff—please. You see, there's a big future in this business. My father growled at first, but he's come clean around. The land was mine, and we are using it this way. The American public are going in for this thing. They want amusement and they want it quick. And the thing is to provide them with what they want, when they want it."

"Oh," said Katrina. "And you are providing the American public with what they want—back there?" with a tilt of her head behind her.

"Exactly," he answered. "That's our plant. We are the Knickerbocker Film Manufacturing Company."

"Oh," said Katrina, again. "And the fancy-dress people?"

"We are getting up 'Romeo and Juliet,'" said the young man. "Please don't laugh. It's been proven that the moving picture audiences like Shakespeare canned."

"Moving picture audiences," repeated Katrina in surprise, and then as the light broke, she stopped short and looked at the young man.

"Why, didn't you guess?" he queried. "The summer-house—why, of course, the summer-house must have hidden the camera." He looked at her dejectedly. "I've wanted you so much to know all about it," he said, "and now that you do, it sounds—oh, drivelling."

"But it doesn't," cried Katrina, eyes shining. "It sounds splendid. It sounds thrilling. I'm sure it will be a success. You're bound to make it one. I congratulate you. You've left out a good deal. You've told your story very badly, but I'm good at filling in. The fact is, I'm proud to know you, and you may shake hands with me if you wish to."

"Oh, Katrina," murmured the young man, and they clasped hands. It was just here that Grandfather McBride turned into the lane from the back garden and came upon them. When they became aware of him, leaning heavily upon his stick and frowning at them through the dusk, Katrina braced herself to meet whatever might come. But, suddenly, to her intense surprise, Mr. McBride beamed upon them radiantly.

"Well, well, Katriny," he said, in high good humor, "so you've been over that gate again, eh? Been lookin' over that wall, eh? I knew you would, my dear, I knew you would. There's some of the McBride spirit in you after all, thank God. I meant to take you myself, but you got ahead of me." Here he shook hands with the young man. "Glad to see you again, my boy," said Grandfather McBride. "Brought my little girl home, eh?"

"Well, we were on the way," admitted the young man with enthusiasm. "I see you got the steps up, sir."

"Yes," said Mr. McBride, "oh, yes. I'm much obliged to you for the permission. It's as good as any vaudeville, and it's a sight nearer home. You're bound to make money. I tell my granddaughter," with a triumphant nod to the lady in question, "to bank on brains and energy and American push. I tell her," with a profound wink to Katrina, "to let this old family nonsense and society racket go hang. I'm glad she met you."

"But we mustn't stand here in the lane, Grandfather," put in Katrina, hurriedly. "It's getting damp."

"That's so," agreed Mr. McBride, "and it's getting late." He hooked his cane about the young man's arm. "Come in and have dinner with us," he said.

Katrina stared in amazement at Mr. McBride. The young man looked eagerly at Katrina. "If Miss Prentiss will allow me–" he began.

"Huh! Miss Prentiss," spoke up Mr. McBride. "What's she got to say about it? I allow you." And as Katrina, behind Mr. McBride's back, smiled and nodded, the young man accepted promptly.

Together the three went through the back garden and up to the house. Arrived there, Katrina disappeared. Grandfather McBride, after settling his guest, came straight upstairs and stopped at her door.

"Little cuss," beamed Mr. McBride, "goin' off, locking up her old grandfather and meetin' young chaps. Say, Katriny," he remarked casually, "he's a fine fellow, ain't he?"

Katrina, busy with her hair, nodded.

"Now, if I was a girl," continued Mr. McBride, diplomatically, "and a fellow like that took a shine to me I'd show a glimmer of sense. I'd up and return it."

"Would you?" remarked Katrina. "I'm glad you like him. You see, Grandfather, you are too smart for me. I didn't know until just now that you had even met Mr. Park."

Mr. McBride's smile stiffened, then froze, finally disappeared. He opened his mouth, and shut it. He swallowed hard. At last, he got it out. "Katriny—Katriny, is *that* Sparks—that fellow downstairs? Is that *Sparks*?"

"Hush," said Katrina. "Of course, that is Willoughby Park. Why, Grandfather, didn't you ask his name?"

"No," said Mr. McBride, "I didn't. I just saw he was a fine, likely–" He stopped abruptly. "Well, I'll be damned," said Mr. McBride.

Katrina came over to him and put her hand on his shoulder. Mr. McBride looked into space. Standing so, he spoke once more. "Do you—do you really like him, Triny?" he asked, and although he looked into space, Mr. McBride saw Katrina's blush. He patted her hand once, and left her.

On his way downstairs, the grimness of Mr. McBride's face relaxed. In the lower hall, he went so far as to chuckle. When he joined Mr. Park on the porch, he grinned at him amiably.

"I'm a good sport," remarked Mr. McBride, irrelevantly, "but I know when to retire to my corner and stay there. Say," continued Mr. McBride, unconscious of discrepancies between thought and action, "after dinner I'm goin' to take you children across the street to see that parrot."

III
RURAL INSURANCE

The Story of a Wayside Halt

By CLOTILDE GRAVES

Exhausted by the effort involved in keeping the thermometer of the closing day of August at an altitude intolerable to the human kind and irksome to the brute, a large, red-hot sun was languidly sinking beyond an extensive belt of dusky-brown elms fringing the western boundary of a seventy acre expanse of stubbles diagonally traversed by a parish right-of-way leading from the village of Bensley to the village of Dorton Ware. A knee-deep crop of grasses, flattened by the passage of the harvest wains, clothed this strip of everyman's land, and a narrow footpath divided the grass down the middle, as a parting divides hair.

A snorting sound, which, accompanied by a terrific clatter of old iron and the crunching of road-mendings, had been steadily growing from distant to near, and from loud to deafening, now reached a pitch of utter indescribability; and as a large splay-wheeled, tall-funneled, plowing engine rolled off the Bensley highroad and lumbered in upon the right-of-way, the powerful bouquet of hot lubricating oil nullified all other smells, and the atmosphere became opaque to the point of solidity. As the dust began to settle it was possible to observe that attached to the locomotive was a square, solid, wooden van, the movable residence of the stoker, the engineer, and an apprentice; that a Powler cultivator, a fearsome piece of mechanism, apparently composed of second-hand anchors, chain-cables, and motor driving-wheels, was coupled to the back of the van, and that a bright green water-cart brought up the rear. Upon the rotund barrel of this water-cart rode a boy.

The plowing-engine came to a standstill, the boy got down from the water-cart and uncoupled the locomotive from the living-van. During the operations, though the boy received many verbal buffets from both his superiors, it was curiously noticeable that the engineer and stoker, while plainly egging one another on to wreak physical retribution upon the body of the neophyte, studiously refrained from personally administering it.

"Hook off, can't ye, hook off!" commanded the engineer. "A 'ead like a dumpling, that boy 'as!" he commented to the stoker, as Billy wrought like a grimy goblin at the appointed task.

"A clout on the side of it 'ud do 'im good!" pronounced the stoker, who was as thin and saturnine as the engineer was stout and good-humored. "Boys need correction."

"I'll allow you're right," said the engineer. "But it ain't my business to 'it Billy for 's own good. Bein' own brother to 'is sister's 'usband—it's plainly your place to give 'im wot for if 'e 'appens to need it."

The stoker grunted and the clock belonging to the Anglo-Norman church tower of the village struck six. Both the engineer and his subordinate wiped their dewy foreheads with their blackened hands, and simultaneously thought of beer.

"Us bein' goin' up to Bensley for a bit, me an' George," said the engineer, "an' supposin' Farmer Shrubb should come worritin' along this way and ask where us are, what be you a-going to tell 'im, Billy boy?"

"The truth, I 'ope," said the stoker, with a vicious look in an eye which was naturally small and artificially bilious.

"Ah, but wot is the truth to be, this time?" queried the engineer. "Let's git it settled before we go. As far as I'm consarned, the answer Billy's to give in regards to my question o' my whereabouts is: 'Anywhere but in the tap o' the Red Cow.'"

"And everythink but decently drunk," retorted the stoker.

"That's about it," assented the unsuspecting engineer.

The stoker laughed truculently, and Billy ventured upon a faint echo of the jeering cachinnation. The grin died from the boy's face, however, as the engineer promptly relieved a dawning sense of injury by cuffing him upon one side of the head, while the stoker wrung the ear upon the other.

"Ow, hoo," wailed Billy, stanching his flowing tears in the ample sleeve of his coat, "Ow, hoo, hoo!"

"Stop that blubberin', you," commanded the stoker, who possessed a delicate ear, "and make th' fire an' git th' tea ready against Alfred and me gits back. You hear me?"

"Yes, plaize," whimpered Billy.

"An' mind you warms up the cold bacon pie," added the stoker.

"And don't you forget to knock in the top of that tin o' salmon," added the engineer, "an' set it on to stew a bit. An' don't you git pickin' the loaf wi' they mucky black fingers o' yours, Billy, my lad, or you'll suffer for it when I comes home."

"Yes, plaize," gasped Billy, bravely swallowing the recurrent hiccough of grief. "An' plaize where be I to build fire?"

"The fire," mused the engineer. He looked at the crimson ball of the sun, now drowning in a lake of ruddy vapors behind the belt of elms; he nodded appreciatively at the palely glimmering evening star and pointed to a spot some yards ahead. "Build it there, Billy," he commanded briefly.

The stoker hitched his thumbs in his blackened leather waist-strap and spat toward the rear of the van. "You build the fire nigh th' hedge there," he ordered, "so as us can sit wi' our faces to'rds yon bit o' quick an' hev th' van to back of us, an' git a bit o' comfort outside four walls fur once. D' ye hear, boy?"

"Yes, George," quavered Billy.

The sleepy eye of the engineer had a red spark in it that might have jumped out of his own engine-furnace as he turned upon the acquiescent Billy. "Didn't you catch wot I said to you just now, my lad?" he inquired with ill-boding politeness.

"Yes, Alfred," gasped the alarmed Billy.

"If the boy doesn't mind me," came from the stoker, who was thoroughly roused, "and if I don't find a blazin' good fire, an' victuals welding hot, ready just in the place I've pointed out to 'im, when I've 'ad my pipe and my glass at the 'Red Cow,' I'll–" A palpably artificial fit of coughing prevented further utterance.

"You'll strap 'im within an inch of 'is life, I dursay," hinted the engineer. "You pipe what George says, Billy?" he continued, as Billy applied his right and left coat cuffs to his eyes in rapid succession. "He's give you his promise, and now I give you mine. If I don't find a roarin' good fire and the rest to match, just where I've said they're to be when I come back from where I've said I'm a-goin'–"

"You'll wallop 'im a fair treat, I lays you will," said the stoker, revealing a discolored set of teeth in a gratified smile. "We'll bide by wot the boy does then," he added. "Knowin' that wot 'e gits from either of us, he'll earn. An' your road is my road, Alfred, leastways as far as the 'Red Cow.'"

The engineer and the stoker walked off amicably side by side. The sun sank to a mere blot of red fire behind the elms, and crowds of shrilly-cheering gnats rose out of the dry edges and swooped upon the passive victim, Billy, who sat on the steps of the living van with his knuckles in his eyes.

"Neither of 'em can't kill me, 'cos the one what did it 'ud 'ave to be 'ung," he reflected, and this thought gave consolation. He unhooked a rusty red brazier from the back of the living van, and dumping it well into the hedge at the spot indicated by the stoker, filled it with dry grass, rotten sticks, coals out of the engine bunker, and lumps of oily cotton waste. Then he struck and applied a match,

saw the flame leap and roar amongst the combustibles, filled the stoker's squat tea-kettle with water from the green barrel, put in a generous handful of Tarawakee tea, and, innocent of refinements in tea-making, set it on to boil.

"George is more spitefuller nor wot Alfred is," Billy Beesley murmured, as the kettle sent forth its first faint shrill note. Then he added with a poignant afterthought, "But Alfred is a bigger man than wot George be."

The stimulus of this reflection aided cerebration. Possessed by an original idea, Billy rubbed the receptacle containing it, and his mouth widened in an astonished grin. A supplementary brazier, temporarily invalided by reason of a hole in the bottom, hung at the back of the living-van. The engineer possessed a kettle of his own. Active as a monkey, the small figure in the flapping coat and the baggy trousers sped hither and thither. Two hearths were established, two fires blazed, two tea-kettles chirped. Close beside the stoker's brazier a bacon pie in a brown earthen dish nestled to catch the warmth, a tin of Canadian salmon, which Billy had neglected to open, leaned affectionately against the other. Suddenly the engineer's kettle boiled over, and as Billy hurried to snatch it from the coals, the salmon-tin exploded with an awe-inspiring bang, and oily fragments of fish rained from the bounteous skies.

"He'll say I did it a purpose, Alfred will!" the aggrieved boy wailed, as he collected and restored to the battered tin as much of its late contents as might be recovered. While on all fours searching for bits which might have escaped him, and diluting the gravy which yet remained in the tin with salt drops of foreboding, a scorching sensation in the region of the back brought his head round. Then he yelled in earnest, for the roaring flame from the other brazier had set the quickset hedge, inflammable with drought, burning as fiercely as the naphtha torch of a fair-booth, while a black patch, widening every moment, was spreading through the dry, white grasses under the clumsy wheels of the living-van, whose brown painted sides were beginning to blister and char, as Billy, rendered intrepid by desperation, grabbed the broken furnace-rake handle, usually employed as a poker, and beat frantically at the encroaching fire. As he beat he yelled, and stamped fiercely upon those creeping yellow tongues. There was fire from side to side of the field pathway now, the straggling hedge on both sides was crackling gaily. And realizing the unconquerable nature of the disaster, Billy dropped the broken furnace-rake, uttered the short, sharp squeal of the ferret-pressed rabbit, and took to his heels, leaving a very creditable imitation of a prairie conflagration behind him.

It was quite dark by the time the engineer and his subordinate returned from the "Red Cow," and their wavering progress along the field pathway was rendered more difficult, after the first hundred yards or so, by the unaccountable absence of the hedge. It was a singularly oppressive night, a brooding pall of hot blackness hung above their heads, clouds of particularly acrid and smothering dust arose at every shuffle of their heavy boots, even the earth they trod seemed glowing with heat, and they remarked on the phenomenon to one another.

"It's thunder weather, that's wot it be," said the engineer, mopping his face. "I'm like my old mother, I feel it coming long before it's 'ere. Phew!"

"Uncommon strong smell o' roast apples there is about 'ere," commented the stoker, sniffing.

"That beer we 'ad must 'ave bin uncommon strong," said the engineer in a low, uneasy voice. "I seem to see three fires ahead of us, that's what I do."

"One whopping big one to the left, one little one farther on, right plumb ahead, and another small one lower down on my right 'and. I see 'em as well as you," confirmed the stoker in troubled accents. "And that's how that young nipper thinks to get off a licking from one of us–"

"By obeying both," said the engineer, quickening his pace indignantly. "This is Board School, this is. Well, you'll learn 'im to be clever, you will."

"You won't leave a whole bone in his dirty little carcase once you're started," said the stoker confidently.

By this time they were well upon the scene of the disaster. Before their dazed and horrified eyes rose the incandescent shell of what had been, for eight months past, their movable home, and a crawling crisping rustle came from the pile of ashes that represented the joint property of two men and one boy.

"Pinch me, Alfred," said the stoker, after an interval of appalled silence.

"Don't ask me," said the engineer, in a weak voice, "I 'aven't the power to kill a flea."

"There ain't one left living to kill," retorted the stoker, as he contemplated the smoking wreck. "There was 'undreds in that van, too," he added as an afterthought.

"Burned up the old cabin!" moaned the engineer, "an' my Sunday rig-out in my locker, an' my Post Office Savings Bank book sewed up in the pillar o' my bunk, along o' my last week's wages what I 'adn't paid in."

"I shouldn't wonder if Government 'ung on to they savings o' yourn," said the stoker, shaking his head. "It's a pity, but you'd invested yours as I 'ave mine," he added.

"In public 'ouses?" retorted the engineer.

"Some of it 'as went that way," the stoker admitted, "but for three weeks past I've denied myself to put a bit into a concern as I think is going to prove a paying thing."

"Owch!" exclaimed the engineer, who had been restlessly pacing in the velvety darkness round the still glowing wreck of the living-van.

"Don't you believe wot I've told you?" demanded the stoker haughtily.

"You don't always lie, George," said the engineer, gently. "Wot made me shout out like that just now," he explained, "was treading on something queer, down by the near side wheels. Somethink brittle that cracked like rotten sticks under my 'eel, an' then I slid on something round an' squashy. An' the smell like roast apples, what I noticed before, is stronger than ever."

"'Ave you a match about you?" asked the stoker eagerly.

"One," said the engineer, delicately withdrawing a solitary "kindler" from the bottom of his waistcoat pocket.

The stoker received the match, and struck it on his trousers. A blue glimmer resulted, a faint s-s-s! followed, and the match went out.

"On'y a glim," said the stoker in a satisfied tone, "but it showed me as I've made my money. An' made it easy, too."

"'Ow much 'ave you pulled orf, then?" asked the engineer.

"Double the value," replied the stoker, smiling broadly through the darkness, "of the property what I've lost in this here conflagration."

"That 'ud bring you in about eighteenpence," retorted the engineer bitterly.

The stoker laughed pleasantly.

"Wot do you say to three pun' seventeen?" he demanded.

"Better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick," said the engineer. "Wot did you say was the concern you invested in?"

The stoker felt in the darkness for his superior's arm, grasped it, and putting his mouth close to where he thought his ear ought to be, said loudly:

"A boy."

"Look 'ere, mate," began the engineer, hotly, "if you're trying a joke on me–"

"It ain't no joke," responded the stoker cheerfully. "Leastways not for the boy, it ain't. But Lord! when I think 'ow near I come to lettin' the policy fall through." He chuckled. "It's three weeks gone since I took it out," he said contentedly, "an' paid three weeks' money in advance, an' at threepence a week, that makes ninepence, an' the thought o' them nine half-pints I might 'ave 'ad out o' money 'as drove me 'arf wild with thirst, over an' over. I should 'ave 'ad to pay again come Monday, if only 'e 'ad 'ave lived."

"If only 'e 'ad lived—" repeated the engineer in a strange far-away tone, "Oo's 'e?" he asked eagerly.

"You know old Abey Turner as keeps the little sweet-an'-tobaccer shop over to Dorton Ware?" pursued the stoker. "Old Abey is a agint for the Popular Thrifty Life Insurance Company–"

"I know 'e is," confirmed the engineer.

"Abey 'as bin at me over an' over again to insure my life," explained the stoker, "but I told 'im as I didn't 'old with laying out good money wot wouldn't never come 'ome to roost-like, until I was dead. Then Abey leans over the counter an' ketches me by the neck 'andkerchief an' says, 'Think of the worst life you know, an' 'ave a bit on that.' Naturally, talkin' o' bad lives, you're the first chap whose name comes into my 'ead."

"Me!" ejaculated the engineer, starting.

"But it wasn't wickedness old Abey meaned," continued the stoker, "only un'ealthiness in general. Somebody wot wasn't likely to live long, that's the sort o' man or woman 'e wanted me to insure. 'A child'll do,' says 'e, smiling, an' tells me 'ow a large family may be made a source of blessing to parents 'oo are wise enough to insure in the Popular Thrifty. Then it comes into my mind all of a sudden as 'ow Billy 'ud do a treat, an' I names 'im to Old Abey. 'That young shaver!' calls out old Abey, disgusted like. 'Why, 'e's as 'ard as nails. Wot's likely to 'appen to 'im?' 'If you was to see the 'andling 'e gets when my mate is in 'is tantrums,' I says to old Abey, 'you'd put your bit o' money on 'im cheerful an' willin'.' 'Is Alfred Evans such a savage in 'is drink?' says old Abey, quite surprised–"

"I'll surprise 'im!" muttered the engineer, "when I meets 'im!"

The stoker continued: "So the long an' the short is, I insured Billy, an' Billy's dead!"

"You don't really think so?" cried the engineer, in shocked accents.

"I don't think," said the stoker, in a hard, high tone, "I knows 'e is."

"Not—burned with the van!" gasped the engineer.

"Burned to cinders," said the stoker comfortably. "'Ow about that smell o' roasting you kep' a sniffing as we came along, an' wot were it if not cooked boy? Wot was it your foot crashed into when you called out awhile back? 'Is ribs, 'im being overdone to a crisp. Wot was it you slipped on–?"

"Stop!" shuddered the engineer. "'Old 'ard! I can't bear it."

"I can," said the stoker, following his comrade as he gingerly withdrew from the immediate scene of the tragedy. "I could if it was twice as much."

"It will be that to me!" sighed the engineer, seating himself upon the parish boundary stone, over which he had stumbled in his retreat, and sentimentally gazing at the star-jewelled skies. "Twice three pound is six, an' twice seventeen bob is one-fourteen. Seven pounds fourteen is wot that pore boy's crool end 'as dropped into my pocket, and I'd 'ad those best clothes ever since I got married; an' there was only eight an' fourpence in the piller o' the bunk, an–"

The engineer stopped short, not for lack of words, but because the stoker was clutching him tightly by the windpipe.

"You don't durst dare to tell me," the frenzied mechanic shouted, "as wot you went an' insured Billy too?"

"That's just wot I 'ave done," replied the half-strangled engineer. Then as the dismayed stoker's arms dropped helplessly by his side, he added, "you ought to be grateful, George, you 'ad no 'and in it. I couldn't 'ave enjoyed the money properly, not if you'd 'ad to be 'ung for the boy's murder. That's wot I said to old Abey two weeks back, when I told 'im as 'ow Billy's life went more in danger than anyone else's what I could think of, through your being such a brutal, violent-tempered, dangerous man."

"An' wot did that old snake in the grass say to that bloomin' lie?" demanded the stoker savagely.

"'E said life was a uncertain thing for all," sniggered the engineer, gently. "An' I'd better 'ave a bit on the event an' turn sorrow into joy, as the saying is. So I give Abey a shillin', bein' two weeks in advance, an' the Company sent me the policy, an' 'ere I am in for the money."

"Like wot I am, an' with clean 'ands for both of us," said the stoker in a tone of cheerful self-congratulation. "I 'aven't laid a finger on that boy, not since I insured 'im."

"Nor I ave'n't," said the engineer. "It's wonderful how I've bin able to keep my temper since I 'ad the policy to take care of at the same time."

"Same with me," said the stoker happily. "Why, wot's wrong?" he added, for a tragic cry had broken from the engineer.

"Mate," he stammered tremulously, "where did you keep your policy?"

"Meanin' the bit o' blue-printed paper I 'ad from the Popular Thrifty? Wot do you want to know for?" snapped the stoker suspiciously.

"It just come into my 'ead to arsk," said the engineer, in faltering accents.

"In my little locker in the van, since you're so curious," said the stoker grudgingly.

"I 'ad mine stitched up in the piller o' my bunk with my Post Office Savin's book," said the engineer in the deep, hollow voice of a funeral bell. "An' it's burned to hashes, an' so is yours!"

"Then it's nineteen to one the company won't pay up," said the stoker after an appalled silence.

"Ten 'underd to one," groaned the engineer.

Another blank silence was broken by the stoker's saying, with a savage oath:

"I wish that boy was alive, I do."

"I know your feeling," agreed the engineer sympathetically. "It 'ud be a comfort to you to kick 'im—or any-think else weak and small wot didn't durst to kick back."

"If I was to give you a bounce on the jor," inquired the stoker, breathing heavily, "should you 'ave the courage to land me another?"

The engineer promptly hit out in the darkness, and arrived safe home on the stoker's chin. With a tiger-like roar of fury, the stoker charged, and on the engineer's dodging conjecturally aside, fell heavily over the parish boundary-stone. He rose, foaming, and a pitched battle ensued, in which the combatants saw nothing but the brilliant showers of stars evoked by an occasional head-blow, and the general advisability of homicide. Toward dawn fatigue overcame them. The stoker lay down and declined to get up again and the engineer even while traveling on all fours in search of him, lost consciousness in slumber.

A yellow glare in the east heralded the rising of the orb of day, as the figures of an aged man and a ragged boy moved from the shelter of the belt of elms that screened the village of Dorton Ware, and proceeded along the right-of-way.

"It's burned, right enough, Billy, my boy," said the old man, shading his bleared eyes with his horny hand as he gazed at the blackened skeleton of the living-van. "An' all considered, you can't be called to blame."

Billy whistled.

"If you'd bin asleep inside the van when that theer blaze got started," said old Abey, rebukingly, as he hobbled along by the boy's side, "you wouldn't be whistlin' 'My Own Bluebell' now; your pore widowed mother, what lives in that theer little cottage o' mine at Porberry End—and 'om I persuaded to insure you in the Popular Thrifty—would 'ave 'ad a bit o' money comin' in 'andy for 'er Michaelmas rent, an' one or two other people would be a penny o' th' right side, likewise." He paused, and shading his bleared eyes under his gnarled hand, looked steadfastly at two huddled, motionless, grimy figures, lying in the charred grass beside the pathway. "Dang my old eyes!" he cried. "'Tis George an' Alfred—Alfred an' George—snatched away i' their drink an' neither of 'em insured. I'll lay a farden. Here's a judgment on their lives, what wouldn't listen to Old Abey an' put into the Popular Thrifty. Here's a waste of opportunity—here's–"

Old Abey's voice quavered and broke off suddenly as the corpse of the engineer, opening a pair of hideously blood-shot eyes, inquired ferociously what in thunder he meant by making such a blamed row, while the body of the stoker rolled over, yawned, revealing a split lip, and sat up staring.

"We—we thought you was dead, mates," faltered Old Abey. "Didn't us, Billy?"

"At first I did," Billy admitted, "an' then I–"

"Then you wot?" repeated the engineer, bending his brows sternly above a nose swollen to twice its usual size.

"Out with it!" snarled the stoker, whose lip was painful.

"I was afraid as it couldn't be true," stuttered Billy.

The stoker exchanged a look with the engineer.

"The van's burnt, an' we've both lost our property, to say nothin' of our prospects, mate," he said with a sardonic sneer, "but one comfort's left us, Billy's alive!"

A little later the plowing engine with its consort was at work under the hot September sky. As the Powler cultivator traveled to and fro, ripping up the stubbles, the boy who sat on the iron seat and manipulated the guiding-wheel, snivelled gently, realizing that the brief but welcome interval of icy aloofness on the part of his superiors had passed, never to return; and that the injunction of the Prophet would thenceforth be scrupulously obeyed.

IV
HIS HONOR, THE DISTRICT JUDGE

A Tale of India

By JOHN LE BRETON

His Honor, Syed Mehta, the District Judge of Golampore, had dined with the Malcolms, and he was the first of the Collector's guests to leave the bungalow. He sauntered down the drive, lifting his contemplative gaze to the magnificence of the starry heavens. Behind him, the lamp-lit rooms sent long thrusts of light, sword-wise, into the hot darkness. Joan Malcolm had taken up her violin, and the sweet, wailing notes of it came sighing out on to the heavy air. Ruddy, broad-faced young Capper, of the Police, lounged by the open window, eating her up with adoring eyes.

His Honor smoked his cigar tranquilly, but at heart, he smouldered. Harrow and Lincoln's Inn backed his past, the High Courts awaited him in the future. For the present he was a Civil Servant of excellent position and recognized ability, a Mohammedan gentleman who had distinguished himself in England as well as in the land of his birth. Also, he was of less account in the eyes of Joan Malcolm than Capper, a blundering English Acting-Superintendent of Police, with a pittance of six hundred rupees per mensem.

Possibly Capper had not intended to be offensive, but it is not given to the young and the British to entirely conceal all consciousness of superiority when speaking with a native. His courtesy was that of a man who considered it to be beneath his dignity to use less ceremony. His civility was due to his respect for himself, not for the person whom he honored with his unintellectual conversation.

The Judge flipped the ash off his cigar, and his slender hand was cool and leisurely. His dark, straight-featured face was impassive as carven stone. Mentally, he was cursing Capper with curses of inexhaustible fire and venom.

Malcolm, the Collector, had a right to speak loudly, and to say this or that without cause, for he was Collector; but Capper, a mere Superintendent of the Police, a cub of twenty-three, was on a very different footing. Yet, not even as an equal had he borne himself toward a District Judge.

His Honor's bungalow was on the outskirts of the town, and as he paced along the dusty road, he came to a footpath that ran down the hill, through dense jungle, to the native village in the valley. There was a swarm of dark-skinned fellow-men down there, to whom his name stood for all that is highest in authority. They would have loaded him with gifts had he permitted them to approach him. To them, it seemed that he was placed far above as a god, holding their lives and their fate 'twixt finger and thumb, in mid-air. In the unfathomed depths of the Judge's educated, well-ordered mind stirred a craving for solace. Galled by the brutish indifference of the Englishmen, there was yet left to him the reverence of his own people. He looked sharply up and down the road before he dived into the moist heat beneath the trees. He knew all that he was risking for a mere escapade. He had never trodden that path before, excepting when he had gone on a shooting expedition with the Collector. There were strange noises in the darkness, stealthy rustlings, small, unfamiliar cries. He heard nothing but Capper's comment on his carefully reasoned prediction that the day must come when India would govern herself.

"Oh! you think so?"

Stupid, unmeaning, absurd, but—successful.

Then, immediately Capper was talking to Miss Malcolm about tennis, and she was listening, smiling and intent. The Judge was a crack tennis player. He loathed the game, but he had made himself proficient in it, because it is one of the things that people expect of a man. He was impelled to challenge Capper, and the answer was a drawled excuse.

The Judge was well down the hill now, descending the last precipitous slope, and the countless odors of the Indian village rose to his nostrils. There was a dull murmurous commotion afar off, such as bees make when they are hiving. He listened, without curiosity, as he pressed forward. Suddenly he halted. The murmur boomed out into a long, thunderous roar. Then silence, and out of the silence a single voice, deep and ringing.

"An infernal protest meeting," the Judge's British training informed him.

He went forward again, moving noiselessly, and reached the outskirts of the crowd, sheltering himself between the bushes that fringed the jungle. Torches flared, and smoked, and shed a ruddy, uncertain light on hundreds of rapt, upturned faces. The orator stood tall and straight above them, fully revealed by purposely clustered lights. He volleyed reproach and insult upon his listeners, he gave them taunts instead of persuasion. They stood enthralled by the passionate voice, and bitter words found their mark, and rankled poisonously.

"These *soors* of Feringhi, whom you call your masters, beat you, and they use your brothers to be their sticks. But for your brothers, who wear the uniform of the Feringhi, and carry their guns, these worthless masters would be trodden into the dust beneath your feet. The men who hedge them in with steel must turn that steel against them."

The roar of voices thundered among the trees, and died away suddenly, so that no word from the speaker might be lost.

"They are cunning, these Feringhi, my brothers. They steal the wisest from among us while yet they are children, and bear them away to their own land, and give them over to their own teachers. Thus come back your own, with power and authority to scourge you. Your sons, your brothers come back to you, learned, praised greatly, having striven against the Feringhi in their own schools, and won what they desired. Collector-sahib, Judge-sahib, yea, even padre-sahib, come they back to you —not to lift you to honor and happiness beside them, but to side with those that oppress you, to grind taxes from you who starve, to imprison you who would be free. Sons of unspeakable shame! They drink your blood, they fatten on your misery, and they have their reward. *We* curse, them, brothers! The Feringhis smile upon them, they eat bread and salt in their company, but they spit when they have passed by!"

Something in the scornful voice rang familiarly on the Judge's ears, and incautiously he changed his position and tried to get a clearer view of the treasonmonger. Instantly the man's bare brown arm shot out, and pointed him to public notice.

"Here is one," pealed out the trumpet-voice, "has he come as our brother? Or comes he as the slave of our masters, to spy upon our meetings, and to deal out punishment to those who dare to be free? O brother, do you walk to Calcutta, where the High Courts be, over our bodies, and the bodies of our children? Will you go to the Collector-sahib with tales of a native rising, and call up our brothers of the police to kill and maim us? Or come you to offer us a great heart?"

The Judge stood there, a motionless figure, flaring against the dark jungle in his spotless, white linen evening dress. There was a broad silk cummerband about his lean waist, and a gold signet-ring gleamed on his left hand. Half a dozen Englishmen, thread for thread in similar garb, still lounged in the Collector's drawing-room. He appeared the very symbol of Anglicized India. The brown, half-naked mob surged and struggled to look at him. The brown, half-naked orator still pointed at him, and waited for reply. Meanwhile, he had been recognized.

"Iswar Chandra—by Jove," muttered the Judge.

The last time they had met was in a London drawing-room. Iswar Chandra, the brilliant young barrister-at-law had discoursed to a philanthropic peeress upon the social future of his native land,

whilst an admiring circle of auditors hung upon his words. The fate of India's women, he had said, lay at the feet of such fair and noble ladies as her Grace. The Judge remembered that people were saying that evening of Iswar Chandra that he was a fascinating and earnest man, and that he would be the pioneer of great things in the country of his birth.

The eyes of the half-naked savage challenged the Judge over the sea of moving heads, and drove away the supercilious smile from his lips.

"Brother, we claim you! You are of our blood, and we need such as you to lead us. The Feringhi have sharpened a sword to cut us down, but it shall turn to destroy them. Brother, we suffer the torments of hell—will you deliver us? Brother, we starve—will you give us food? Will you deal out to us life or death, you whose fathers were as our fathers? Choose now between great honor and the infamy that dies not! You are the paid creature of the British Raj, or you are a leader of free men. Brother, speak!"

As in a dream the Judge approached the waiting crowd. His mouth was parched, his heart beat fitfully. He wanted that piercing voice to wake the echoes again, to take up the story of the old blood-feud, to goad him into doing that which he had not the courage to do. Vanished was his pride of intellect, and of fine achievement. He was a native, and he tugged and crawled at the stretch of the British chain.

"The Feringhi are few, and we are many. Shall the few rule the many? Shall we be servants and poor while yet in the arms of our own golden mother? In their own country do the Feringhi not say that the word of the majority shall be law? So be it! We accept their word. The majority shall rule! O brother, skilled in the Feringhi craft, high-placed to administer justice to all who are brought before thee, do I not speak the truth?"

The Judge threw away the dead end of his cigar, and shouldered his way into the inmost circle.

"Peace, thou," he said, thickly; "this is folly. Ye must wait awhile for vengeance."

Chandra threw up his arms, writhing in a very ecstasy of fury.

"We have waited—have we not waited?—beside our open graves. Death to the Feringhi! Let them no longer desecrate our land. Let us forget that they ever were. They be few, and we be many. Brothers! To-night, to-night!"

The Judge was tearing off his clothes, he was trampling them beneath his feet, he was crying out in a strange, raucous voice; and all the swaying crowds were taking up his words, maddening themselves and their fellows with the intoxicating sounds.

"Death to the Feringhi! To-night, to-night! Our land for ourselves!"

All but a few torches were extinguished. Secret places were torn up, and out came old guns, old swords sharpened to razor-like edges, great pistols, clubs, skinning-knives, daggers. Then, up and up through the dark jungle they thronged, hordes of them in the grip of a red and silent frenzy. Chandra was in the forefront, but the leader was his Honor the District Judge, a glassy-eyed, tight-lipped Mussulman in a loincloth and a greasy turban.

The lights of the Collector's bungalow came in view, and the leader thought of young Capper, and rushed on, frothing like a madman, waving his sword above his head. Then he paused, and ran back to meet the laggards of a yard or two.

"Only the men!" he shouted.

Chandra mocked at him as the press bore him onward again, with scarcely an instant's halt.

"Only the men, my brother!" he echoed.

A few of the native police stood guard at the Collector's gates, but they turned and fled before the overwhelming numbers of the attacking force. Up the long drive the dark wave poured, and into the wide, bright rooms. The bungalow was deserted. Some fleet-footed servant had brought warning in time, and the British were well out of the town by the other road, with young Capper and a score of his men guarding their rear.

The mob howled with disappointment. The next instant it was screaming with triumph as it settled down to sack and burn and destroy.

The Judge went into the dining-room, and looked at the long table still decked with silver, and glass, and flowers. He looked at the chair on which he had sat, with Joan Malcolm at his side, and he picked it up and dashed it with all his might into a great ivory-framed mirror, and laughed aloud at the crash, and the ruin, and the rain of jagged splinters.

"India must pass into the hands of the Indians!"

"Oh! *you* think so—you think so—you think so...."

He overthrew a couple of standard lamps, and watched the liquid fire run and eat up their silken shades, and run again and leap upon the snowy curtains, and so, like lightning, spring to the ceiling, and lick the dry rafters with a thousand darting tongues. Then, he was out in the night again, the night of his life, the wonderful night that was calling for blood, and would not be denied.

There was no lack of light now to make clear the path to vengeance. The Collector's bungalow roared red to the very heavens, and flames shot up in a dozen different parts of the town. The bazaar was looted, and English-made goods were piled upon bonfires in the street. A greater mob than had entered the town poured out of it, swift on the road to Chinsurah where thousands of their brothers lay, lacking only courage and leaders.

At the midway turn of the road where the giant trees rear themselves at the side of the well, came a sudden check, and the mob fell back upon itself, and grew dead silent. Those in the rear could only wait and guess what had happened. The forefront saw that the road was barred. The moon had risen, and well out in the white light, was Capper Sahib. Some of his men were behind him. There were soldiers there, too, how many could not be seen, for they were grouped in the velvety black shadows which the trees flung across the road. There might have been only fifty—or five hundred.

Young Capper came forward with his hands in his pockets, and stared at them. They saw that he was not afraid. He spoke to them in Maharattee, bluntly and earnestly, so that some of them wavered, and looked back. He said they were fools, led by a few rotten schemers who had only personal gain in view.

"Take good advice," he said, "go to your homes while ye may. Ignorant, and greatly daring that ye are, the *bandar-log*, or such thievish scum among ye, drive ye with idle words and chatterings even to the brink of death. So far have ye come, but no farther–"

The Judge had snatched a villager's gun, and fired. Capper Sahib fell, unspoken words upon his lips. His fair head draggled in the dust, and a red stain showed suddenly upon the white linen over his breast.

A triumphant roar swept the mob from end to end. British rifles cracked out the answer, and the bullets went home surely, into the rioting mass. Amid shrill screams of pain and fury the leaders rallied their men, and charged forward. A second volley stopped them, before young Capper's prostrate body could be reached. Few had joined the attack, but now they were fewer, and neither of the leaders stood among them.

That was the end. Bearing their dead and wounded, the rebels returned, wailing as they went. Before daylight the townsmen were in their houses, and the villagers had passed through the jungle, and regained their homes. Arms were concealed with all haste. The dead were buried, the wounded, for the most part, were hidden. Prisoners had been taken, but only an inconsiderable number. Before daylight also, the headman of the village, and a native surgeon came stealthily from the Judge's bungalow, and went their ways. They had their order, and they went to spread it abroad. The order was—*Silence!* The headman had bowed himself to the earth when it was given, for he understood all that it meant. Prisoners would be brought before a brother, not only to-day, but to-morrow, and for many morrows. So much had the night given them.

At noon His Honor came stiffly into the court-room, leaning upon the arm of his native servant. The Collector, who was awaiting him there, feared that he had been injured by the rioters on the

previous night; but he was quickly reassured. The Judge, it seemed, had sprained his knee shortly after leaving the Malcolm's hospitable roof. It was nothing. A mere trifle, though indisputably painful.

The Collector seated himself near the bench, and talked in a low voice. The ladies were all safe. No Europeans had been killed, and few injured. Capper had been shot by some cowardly dog while parleying with the rioters, but there were good hopes of him.

The Judge was most truly concerned to hear of the calamity which had befallen Mr. Capper—immensely thankful to know that things were no worse with him.

His Honor had heard little or nothing of what had happened during the riot, being laid by the leg, as it were, in his own room.

The first batch of prisoners was brought in. At first the Judge did not look at them. Afterward his eyes sought their gaze, and held it, and they knew him for their brother. They heard his soft voice speaking of them compassionately, as wayward children whom mercy would win over, though harshness might confirm them in their foolish resistance to authority. The Collector seemed to protest, but with gentle courtesy his objections were put aside. He leaned back in his chair, flushed and angry, as one after another, the sullen-looking rebels were fined, and having paid what was demanded, were set at liberty.

When the Judge looked up again, a single prisoner stood before him, a wounded, hawk-faced native, whose eyes blazed hate and contempt. The Collector drew his chair closer to the bench, and began to speak in gruff undertones.

"A ring-leader. Man of some education, I understand—qualified as a barrister, and has taken to journalism. Must make an example of him—eh?"

The Judge, straining in agony of mind and body, was aware of sudden relief from the pain of his wound. The bandage had slipped, and blood was cooling the torturing fire. A deathly faintness was upon him, and through it he spoke distinctly—again of mercy.

"They were all blind. The leaders were blind. The blind leading the blind. Blind—blind–"

The Collector sprang up with a startled exclamation. A thin stream of blood trickled from behind His Honor's desk, and went a twisting way down to the well of the court. He caught the Judge in his arms as he fell forward, and lowered him gently to the ground. Then it was seen that the unconscious man's clothes were saturated with blood.

Instantly the court was cleared. A military surgeon cut away the blood-stained clothing from the Judge's thigh, and laid bare the clean wound made by a British bullet. A look passed between him and the Collector, but never a word. Syed Mehta's life had ebbed with his blood, and so he passed, unawakened, from swoon to death.

The English, as their way is, betrayed nothing. It was His Honor, the District Judge of Golampore, who had died, and they gave him burial the next day with due regard to the high position which he had held in the service of H.M. the King and Emperor.

IV
A FOG-HORN CONCLUSION

The Story of a Gramophone

By FOX RUSSELL

The *Saucy Sally* was a vessel of renown. No blustering liner, no fussy tug, no squattering steamer, she; but a bluff-bowed, smartly painted, trim-built sailing barge, plying chiefly from the lower reaches of the Thames to ports west of Dover. She had no equal of her class, at any point of sailing, and certainly her Master, Mr. Joseph Pigg, was not the man to let her fair fame suffer for want of seamanship.

"Cap'n Pigg," as he insisted upon being called, was a great, hairy-faced man, with brawny muscles and a blood-shot eye. And in these respects, his mate, Bob Topper, greatly favored him—in fact, their physical resemblance was rather marked; but their tastes were in no way similar; 'the Cap'n' was fond of his glass, whilst the mate was a blue-ribbon man; Joseph Pigg couldn't bear music, in any form, whilst the total abstainer had a weakness for the flute and would not infrequently burst into song; the Skipper hated women, whereas the mate was, what he himself called "a bit of a gay Lathero." But notwithstanding these dissimilarities of tastes and disposition, they got along fairly well together, and both met on the common ground of getting as much work out of the two "hands" as was ordinarily possible. The Skipper didn't drink alcoholic liquors before the mate, and the mate returned the compliment by refraining from any musical outrage in the hearing of his superior officer.

One hot summer afternoon, when the *Saucy Sally* was taking in cargo and the Skipper was ashore, Mr. Topper, seated on the coamings of the hatchway, abandoned himself to the melancholy pleasures of Haydn's "Surprise," the tune being wrung out of a tarnished German-silver flute. "Kittiwake Jack," one of the crew, was seated as far as possible for'ard, vainly trying to absorb his tea and stop his ears, at one and the same time, whilst his fellow-sufferer, Bill Brown, having hastily dived below, lay in his bunk, striving to deaden the weird, wailing sounds that filled the ship. And just as Haydn's "Surprise" was half way through, for the seventh time, the Skipper walked on board.

The flutist stopped short, and stared up at him.

"Didn't expect you back so soon, Cap'n," he said in confused tones.

"No. What's that 'owlin' row you're making?"

"I dunno about no 'owlin' row, but–"

"Well, I do. I s'pose, accordin' to you, I ain't got no musical h'ear," sneered Cap'n Pigg.

"This—this here tune–"

"Yes. This disgustin' noise—what is it?"

The mate looked sulky.

"This is Haydn's 'Surprise,'" he growled.

"So I should think. I dunno who the bloke was, but it must have given Haydn quite a turn! Don't let's 'ave no more of it."

"Well, I don't see as there's no 'arm in music. And I didn't loose it off when you was about. I know you don't like it, so I studied your pecooliarities. Fact is, I studies yer too much," and the mate looked mutinous.

Cap'n Pigg scowled.

"You shet yer 'ead," he grunted as he stamped off below. He went to a small cupboard in the corner of the cabin, and mixed himself a stiff "go" of gin and water, which he tossed off at one gulp, saying:

"Haydn's 'S'prise,' eh? Haydn's S'prise be d—dished! 'E don't come no s'prises 'ere while I'm master of the *Saucy Sally*!"

After this slight breeze, things quickly settled down again on the old lines between master and mate, and the voyage to Chichester Harbor was entirely uneventful, the barge bringing up at a snug anchorage near Emsworth.

The next day Mr. Topper had undressed and gone overboard for a swim. After this, climbing up the bobstay, he regained the deck, and proceeded to dry his hairy frame on an ancient flannel shirt. In the midst of this occupation, temporarily forgetful of his superior officer's prejudices, he broke into song.

Thirty seconds after he had let go the first howl, the Skipper's head was thrust up the companion-way.

"Wodjer want to make all that row about? Anything disagreed with yer? If so, why don't yer take something for it?"

"It's a funny thing yer carn't let a man alone, when all 'e's a doin' is making a bit of 'armony on board," replied the mate, pausing in the act of drying his shock head.

"'Armony be d—driven overboard!" cried Mr. Pigg, wrathfully. "Now, look 'ere, Bob Topper, I ain't a onreasonable man in my likes and dislikes, but it ain't fair to sing at a feller creature with the voice nature fitted you out with! I never done you no 'arm."

Next day the *Saucy Sally* shipped some shingle ballast, got under weigh on the first of the ebb tide, and safely threading her way past the shallows and through the narrow channels of the harbor, emerged into the open sea, and turned her bluff-bowed stem eastwards.

The following afternoon, as Bob Topper took his trick at the wheel, he ruminated on the mutability of human affairs in general, and the "contraryness" of skippers in particular.

"Won't 'ave no music, won't he? Well, I reckon it's like religion when the missionaries is a shovin' of it into the African niggers—they just jolly well got to 'ave it! An' so it'll be with the ole man. I'll jest fix up a scheme as'll do 'im a treat."

He smiled broadly; and when Bob Topper smiled, the corners of his mouth seemed to almost meet at the back of his head.

And as soon as the *Saucy Sally* had pitched and tossed her way up channel—for she was light as a cork in ballast—and dropped anchor a little way off Gravesend, Bob Topper sculled himself ashore. Twenty minutes after stepping out of the boat, he was seated in the back-parlor of a friend, a musical-instrument maker.

When Mr. Topper went aboard again, he carried under his arm a large brown paper package, which he smuggled below, without encountering the Skipper, who was in his cabin at the time, communing with a bill of lading and a glass of Hollands neat. And, soon after the mate had come aboard, "the Cap'n" went ashore.

And then Mr. Topper laid himself out for some tranquil enjoyment, on quite an unusual scale. He unfastened the package, produced a gramophone, brought it on to the deck, and started "The Washington Post."

"Kittiwake Jack" and Bill Brown immediately fled below.

The mate sat on the edge of the hatch and gazed lovingly at the new instrument of torture, as he beat time to the inspiring strains, with a belaying pin. When the "Washington Post," was finished, he laid on "Jacksonville," with a chorus of human laughter, which sounded quite eerie. And so intent was he on this occupation, that he never even noticed the approach of Cap'n Pigg's boat until it was almost alongside.

The Skipper clambered aboard, looking black as thunder. This new outrage was not to be borne. Just as his foot touched the deck the instrument gave forth its unholy cachinnation of "Ha! Ha! Ha!" in the high nasal tones peculiar to its kind.

Cap'n Pigg was not easily disconcerted, but this ghostly "Ha! Ha! Ha!" was a distinct trial to his nerves; he thrust his hands deep into his coat pockets, glared at the mate, and then growled:

"Wodjer got there? More 'armony?"

"Grammarphone," was the mate's brief reply. He was getting sulky.

"Grammar be blowed! Worst grammar I ever 'eard," returned Pigg. "Turn the bloomin' thing off—and turn it off at the main. Enough to give any respectable, law-abidin' sailor-man the 'ump!"

He proceeded two steps down the companion; then hurled this parting shot at the offending mate:

"You oughter be 'ead of a laundry where the 'andle of the mangle turns a pianer-horgan as well—work and play!" he concluded scornfully, as he disappeared from the musician's sight below.

The mate whistled softly; then he stopped the offending instrument and conveyed it below.

"P'raps the old man'll be glad of it, one o' these days," he muttered mysteriously.

The next trip of the *Saucy Sally* was a more eventful one. She left Tilbury in a light haze, which first thickened into a pale-colored fog, and then, aided by the smoke from the tall chimneys, to a regular "pea-souper." The mate, taking advantage of the Captain's spell below, brought up a long yard of tin, which looked remarkably like the *Saucy Sally's* fog-horn, and quietly slipped it overboard.

As they got lower and lower down the river, the fog increased, and both Cap'n Pigg and Topper experienced a certain amount of anxiety as, first another barge, then a tramp steamer, and finally, a huge liner, all sounding their fog-horns loudly, passed them considerably too close for comfort. The Skipper himself was at the wheel and, coughing the raw, damp fog out of his throat, he shouted hoarsely to Topper:

"Better get our fog-horn goin', mate."

"Aye, aye, Skipper. It's in your cabin, ain't it?"

"Yes, in the first locker."

The mate descended the companion-steps, with a mysterious smile on his face, and his dexter optic closed. The casual observer might have thought that Mr. Topper was actually indulging in a wink.

After a time, he reappeared on deck, walked aft, and said:

"Fog-horn don't seem nowheres about, Skipper. Thought you always kept her in your charge."

Cap'n Pigg whisked the wheel round just in time to escape a tug, fussing up-stream, and feeling her way through the fog at half-speed, and then he grunted sourly:

"So I do. What the d—delay in findin' it is, I can't understand. 'Ere, ketch 'old o' the spokes, and I'll go; always got to do everything myself on this old tank, seems to me."

And thus grumbling, Cap'n Pigg went below—not altogether unwillingly, as, being a man who understood the importance of economizing time, he combined his search for the fog-horn with the quenching of a highly useful thirst. But when he came on deck again, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he was unaccompanied by the fog-horn.

"Where the blamed thing's got to, I dunno, more'n the dead. I see it there, myself, not two days ago, but it ain't nowheres to be found now."

"Rather orkard, Skipper, ain't it, in all this maze o' shippin'?" returned Mr. Topper with a half turn at the wheel.

"Yes, I don't more'n 'arf like it," returned the Cap'n uneasily. "My nerves arn't quite what they was. An' a fog's a thing as I never could abide."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.