"Ghoulish, I calls it, sir. Ghoulish, no less."
"That entirely depends," said Mr. Trevor, "on what you are talking about. In some things, ghoulish is as ghoulish does. In others, no."
"You've said it," said the policeman. "But ghoulish goes, in this 'ere affair. One after the other lying in their own blood, and not a sign as to who's done it, not a sign!"
"Oh, come, constable! Tut-tut! Not even a thumbmark in the blood?"
"I'm telling you," said the policeman severely. "Corpses slit to ribbons all the way from 'Ampstead 'Eath to this 'ere Burkley Square. And why? That's what I asks myself. And why?"
"Of course," said Mr. Trevor gaily, "there certainly have been a lot of murders lately. Ha-ha! But not, surely, as many as all that!"
"I'm coming to that," said the policeman severely. "We don't allow of the Press reporting more'n a quarter of them. No, sir. That's wot it 'as come to, these larst few days. A more painful situation 'as rarely arisen in the hannels of British crime. The un'eard-of bestiality of the criminal may well baffle ordinary minds like yours and mine."
"I don't believe a word of it!" snapped Mr. Trevor.
"Ho, you don't!" said the policeman. "You don't!"
"That's right," said Mr. Trevor, "I don't. Do you mean to stand there and tell me that I wouldn't 'ave 'eard—I mean, have heard of this criminal if he had really existed?"
"You're a gent," said the policeman.
"You've said it," said Mr. Trevor.
"And gents," said the policeman, "know nothing. And what they do know is mouldy. Ever 'eard of Jack the Ripper?"
"Yes, I 'ave," said Mr. Trevor bitterly.
"Have is right, sir, if you'll excuse me. Well, Jack's death was never rightly proved, not it! So it might well be 'im at 'is old tricks again, even though 'e has been retired, in a manner of speaking, these forty years. Remorseless and hindiscriminate murder, swift and sure, was Jack's line, if you remember, sir."
"Before my time," said Mr. Trevor gloomily.
"Well, Jack's method was just to slit 'em up with a razor, frontwise and from south to north, and not a blessed word
spoken. No one's touched 'im yet, not for efficiency, but this new chap, 'e looks like catching Jack up. And at Jack's own game, razor and all. Makes a man fair sick, sir, to see the completed work. Just slits 'em up as clean as you or me might slit up a vealanam-pie. We was laying bets on 'im over at Vine Street only to-night, curious like to see whether 'e'd beat Jack's record. But it'll take some beating, I give you my word. Up to date this chap 'as only done in twelve in three weeks—not that that's 'alf bad, seeing as how 'e's new to the game, more or less."

"Oh rather, more or less!" said Mr. Trevor faintly. "Twelve! Good God—only twelve! But why—why don't you catch the ghastly man?"

"Ho, why don't we!" said the policeman. "Becos we don't know 'ow, that's why. Not us! It's the little one-corps men we're good for, not these 'ere big artists. Look at Jack the Ripper—did we catch 'im? Did we? And look at Julian Raphael—did we catch 'im? I'm asking you."

"I know you are," said Mr. Trevor gratefully. "Thank you."

"I don't want your thanks," said the policeman. "I'm just warning you."

Mr. Trevor gasped: "Warning me!"

"You've said it," said the policeman. "You don't ought to be out alone at this time of night, an 'earty young chap like you. These twelve 'e's already done in were all 'earty young chaps. 'E's partial to 'em 'earty, I do believe. And social gents some of 'em was, too, with top-ats to hand, just like you might be now, sir, coming 'ome from a smoking-concert. Jack the Ripper all over again, that's wot I say. Except that this 'ere new corpse-fancier, 'e don't seem to fancy women at all."

"A chaps' murderer, what!" said Mr. Trevor faintly. "'Ha-ha! What!"

"You've said it," said the policeman. "But you never know your luck, sir. And maybe as 'ow thirteens your lucky number."

Mr. Trevor lays emphasis on the fact that throughout he treated the constable with the courtesy due from a gentleman to the law. He merely said: "Constable, I am now going home. I do not like you very much. You are an alarmist.
And I hope that when you go to sleep to-night your ears swell so that when you wake up in the morning you will be able to fly straight to Heaven and never be seen or heard of again. You and your razors and your thirteens!"

"Ho, they ain't mine, far from it!" said the policeman, and even as he spoke a voice crashed upon the silence from the direction of Mount Street. The voice belonged to a tall figure in black and white, and on his head was a top-hat that shone under the pallid moon like a monstrous black jewel.

"That there," said the policeman, "is a Noise."
"He's singing," said Mr. Trevor.
"I'll teach 'im singing!" said the policeman.
Sang the voice:

"With an host of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear
And a horse of air
To the wilderness I wander."

"You will," said the policeman. "Oh, you will!"

"By a knight of ghosts and shadows
I summoned am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond
The wide world's end—
Methinks it is no journey!"

"Not to Vine Street, it isn't," said the policeman.
"Ho there!" cried the approaching voice. "Who dares interrupt my song!"
"Beau Maturin!" cried Mr. Trevor gladly. "It's not you! Bravo, Beau Maturin! Sing, bless you, sing! For I am depressed."

"From Heaven's Gate to Hampstead Heath
Young Bacchus and his crew
Came tumbling down, and o'er the town
Their bursting trumpets blew."

"Fine big gentleman, your friend," said the policeman thoughtfully.
"And when they heard that happy word
   Policeman leapt and ambled:
   The busmen pranced, the maidens danced,
   The men in bowlers gambolled."

"Big!" said Mr. Trevor. "Big? Let me tell you, constable, that the last time Mr. Maturin hit Jack Dempsey, Dempsey bounced back from the floor so quick that he knocked Mr. Maturin out on the rebound."

Mr. Trevor says that Beau Maturin came on through the night like an avenger through a wilderness, so little did he reck of cruel moons and rude policemen. Said he: "Good evening, Ralph. Good evening, constable. Lo, I am in wine!"

"You've said it," said the policeman.

"Gently, my dear! Or," said Mr. Maturin cordially, "I will dot you one, and look at it which way you like, it is a far better thing to be in wine than in a hospital. Now, are there any good murders going to-night?"

"Going?" said the constable. "I'm 'ere to see there ain't any coming. But I've just been telling this gent about some recent crises. Corpses slit to ribbons just as you or me might slit up a vealanam——"

"Don't say that again!" snapped Mr. Trevor.

"By Heaven, what's that?" sighed Mr. Maturin; and, following his intent eyes, they saw, a yard or so behind them on the pavement, a something that glittered in the moon-light. Mr. Trevor says that, without a thought for his own safety, he instantly took a step towards the thing, but that the policeman restrained him. It was Mr. Maturin who picked the thing up. The policeman whistled thoughtfully.

"A razor, let's face it!" whispered Beau Maturin.

And sharp!" said the policeman, thoughtfully testing the glittering blade with the ball of his thumb.

Mr. Trevor says that he was never in his life less conscious of any feeling of excitement. He merely pointed out that he could swear there had been no razor there when he had come round the corner, and that, while he had stood there, no one had passed behind him.

"The chap that owns this razor," said the policeman, emphasising each word with a gesture of the blade, "must 'ave slunk behind you and me as we stood 'ere talking and
dropped it, maybe not finding it sharp enough for 'is purpose. What do you think, Mr. Maturin?"

But Mr. Maturin begged to be excused from thinking, protesting that men are in the hands of God, and God is in the hands of women and so what the devil is there to think about?

Mr. Trevor says that the motive behind his remark at that moment, which was to the effect that he simply must have a drink, was merely that he was thirsty. A clock struck two.

"After hours," said the policeman; and he seemed, Mr. Trevor thought, to grin evilly.

"What do they know of hours," sighed Mr. Maturin, "who only Ciro's know? Come, Ralph. My love, she jilted me but the other night. Therefore I will swim in wine, and thrice will I call upon her name when I am drowning. Constable, good night to you."

"Now I've warned you!" the policeman called after them. "Don't go into any alleys or passages like Lansdowne Passage, else you'll be finding yourselves slit up like vealanampies."

Maybe it was only the treacherous light of the moon, but Mr. Trevor fancied as he looked back that the policeman, where he stood thoughtfully fingerling the shining blade, seemed to be grinning evilly at them.

II

They walked in silence, their steps ringing sharp on the bitter-chill air. The night in the sky was pale at the white disdain of the moon. It was Mr. Maturin who spoke at last, saying: "There's too much talk of murder to-night. A man cannot go to bed on such crude talk. You know me, kid. Shall we go to The Garden of My Grandmother?"

At that moment a taxi-cab crawled across the moonlight; and the driver, a man in a Homburg hat of green plush, did not attempt to hide his pleasure at being able to satisfy the gentlemen's request to take them to The Garden of My Grandmother.

Mr. Trevor says that he has rarely chanced upon a more unsatisfactory taxi-cab than that driven by the man in the
Homburg hat of green plush. By closing one’s eyes one might perhaps have created an illusion of movement by reason of certain internal shrieks and commotions, but when one saw the slow procession of shops by the windows and the lamp-posts loitering by the kerb, one was, as Beau Maturin pointed out, justified in believing that the hackney-cab in question was not going fast enough to outstrip a retired Czecho-Slovakian Admiral in an egg-and-spoon race. Nor were they altogether surprised when the taxi-cab died on them in Conduit Street. The man in the Homburg hat of green plush jumped out and tried to re-start the engine. He failed. The gentlemen within awaited the issue in silence. The silence, says Mr. Trevor, grew terrible. But the taxi-cab moved not, and the man in the Homburg hat of green plush began, in his agitation, thumping the carburettor with his clenched fist.

“No petrol,” he pleaded. “No petrol.”

Said Mr. Trevor to Mr. Maturin: “Let us go. Let us leave this man.”

"’Ere, my fare!" said the fellow.

"Your fare?" said Mr. Maturin, with contracted brows.

“What do you mean, ‘your fare’?"

"Bob on the meter," said the wretch.

“My friend will pay," said Mr. Maturin, and stalked away. Mr. Trevor says that, while retaining throughout the course of that miserable night his undoubted flair for generosity, he could not but hold Beau Maturin’s high-handed disavowal of his responsibilities against him; and he was hurrying after him up Conduit Street, turning over such phrases as might best point the occasion and make Mr. Maturin ashamed of himself, when that pretty gentleman swung round sharply and said: “Ssh!”

But Mr. Trevor was disinclined to Ssh, maintaining that Mr. Maturin owed him ninepence.

"Ssh, you fool!" snapped Mr. Maturin; and Mr. Trevor had not obliged him for long before he discerned in the quietness of Conduit Street a small discordant noise, or rather, says Mr. Trevor, a series of small discordant noises.

“She’s crying, let’s face it,” whispered Mr. Maturin.

“She! Who?”

“Ssh!” snapped Mr. Maturin.

They were at that point in Conduit Street where a turn
to the right will bring one into a fat little street which looks blind but isn’t, insomuch as close by the entrance to the Alpine Club Galleries there is a narrow passage or alley leading into Savile Row. Mr. Trevor says that the repugnance with which he at that moment looked towards the darkness of that passage or alley had less than nothing to do with the bloodthirsty policeman’s last words, but was due merely to an antipathy he had entertained towards all passages or alleys ever since George Tarlyon had seen a ghost in one. Mr. Maturin and he stood for some minutes in the full light of the moon while, as though from the very heart of the opposite darkness, the lacerating tremors of weeping echoed about their ears.

“I can’t bear it!” said Beau Maturin. “Come along.” And he advanced towards the darkness, but Mr. Trevor said he would not, pleading foot trouble.

“Come,” said Beau Maturin, but Mr. Trevor said: “Tomorrow, yes. But not to-night.”

Then did Beau Maturin advance alone into the darkness towards the passage or alley, and with one pounce the darkness stole his top-hat from the moon. Beau Maturin was invisible. The noise of weeping abated.

“Oi!” called Mr. Trevor. “Come back, you fool!”

“Ssh!” whispered the voice of Mr. Maturin.

Mr. Trevor said bitterly: “You’re swanking, that’s all!”

“It’s a girl!” whispered the voice of Mr. Maturin, whereupon Mr. Trevor, who yielded to no man in the chivalry of his address towards women, at once advanced, caught up Mr. Maturin, and, without a thought for his own safety, was about to pass ahead of him, when Beau Maturin had the bad taste to whisper, “’Ware razors!” and thus again held the lead.

She who wept, now almost inaudibly, was a dark shape just within the passage. Her face, says Mr. Trevor, was not visible, yet her shadow had not those rather surprising contours which one generally associates with women who weep in the night.

“Madam,” began Mr. Maturin.

“Oh!” sobbed the gentle voice. “He is insulting me!”

Mr. Trevor lays some emphasis on the fact that throughout the course of that miserable night his manners were a
pattern of courtliness. Thinking, however, that a young lady in a situation so lachrymose would react more favourably to a fatherly tone, he said:

"My child, we hope——"

"Ah," sobbed the gentle voice. "Please go away, please! I am not that sort!"

"Come, come!" said Mr. Maturin. "It is us whom you insult with a suspicion so disagreeable. My friend and I are not of the sort to commit ourselves to so low a process as that which is called, I believe, 'picking up.'"

"We have, as a matter of fact, friends of our own," said Mr. Trevor haughtily.

"Speaking generally," said Mr. Maturin, "women like us. Time over again I have had to sacrifice my friendship with a man in order to retain his wife's respect."

"Ah, you are a man of honour!" sobbed the young lady.

"We are two men of honour," said Mr. Trevor.

"And far," said Mr. Maturin warmly, "from intending you any mischief, we merely thought, on hearing you weeping——"

"You heard me, sir!"

"From Conduit Street," said Mr. Trevor severely, where upon Mr. Maturin lifted up his voice and sang:

"From Conduit Street, from Conduit Street,
The street of ties and tailors:
From Conduit Street, from Conduit Street,
A shocking street for trousers."

"Oh!" sobbed the young lady. "Is this chivalry?"

"Trousers," said Mr. Maturin, "are closely connected with chivalry, insomuch as he who commits chivalry without them is to be considered a rude fellow. But, child," Mr. Maturin protested sincerely, "we addressed you only in the hope that we might be of some service in the extremity of your grief. I assure you that you can trust us, for since we are no longer soldiers, rape and crime have ceased to attract us. However, you do not need us. We were wrong. We will go."

"It was I who was wrong!" came the low voice; and Mr. Trevor says that only then did the young lady raise her
face, when it was instantly as though the beauty of that small face sent the surrounding darkness scurrying away. Not, however, that Mr. Trevor was impressed altogether in the young lady's favour. Her eyes, which were large, dark, and charming, appeared to rest on handsome Beau Maturin with an intentness which Mr. Trevor can only describe as bold; while her disregard of his own presence might have hurt him had he, says Mr. Trevor, cared two pins for that kind of thing.

"You see, I have not eaten to-day," the young lady told Beau Maturin, who cried: "But then we can help you!"

"Ah, how do I know! Please," the young lady began weeping again, and Mr. Trevor says that had he not hardened his heart he could not say what he might not have done. "Please, sirs, I simply do not know what to do! I am so unhappy, so alone—but you cannot imagine! You are gentlemen?"

"Speaking for my friend," said Mr. Maturin warmly, "he has been asked to resign from Buck's Club only after repeated bankruptcies."

"Mr. Maturin," said Mr. Trevor, "has in his time been cashiered from no less a regiment than the Coldstream Guards."

The young lady did not, however, favour Mr. Trevor with so much as a glance, never once taking her beautiful eye from the handsome face of Beau Maturin. Indeed, throughout the course of that miserable night she admirably controlled any interest Mr. Trevor might have aroused in her, which Mr. Trevor can only account for by the supposition that she must have been warned against him. Beau Maturin, meanwhile, had taken the young lady's arm, a familiarity with which Mr. Trevor cannot too strongly dissociate himself, and was saying:—

"Child, you may come with us, if not with honour, at least with safety. And while you refresh yourself with food and drink you can tell us, if you please, the tale of your troubles. Can't she, Ralph?"

"I don't see," said Mr. Trevor, "what good we can do."

"Your friend," said the young lady sadly to Beau Maturin, "does not like me. Perhaps you had better leave me alone to my misery."

"My friend," said Beau Maturin, guiding her steps down
the fat little street towards Conduit Street, "likes you only too well, but is restraining himself for fear of your displeasure. Moreover, he cannot quickly adapt himself to the company of ingenuous young ladies, for he goes a good deal into society, where somewhat cruder methods obtain."

"But oh, where are you taking me to?" suddenly cried the young lady.

"To The Garden of My Grandmother," said Mr. Trevor bitterly, and presently they found a taxi-cab on Regent Street which quickly delivered them at the place in Leicester Square. Mr. Trevor cannot help priding himself on the agility with which he leapt out of that taxi-cab, saying to the driver: "My friend will pay."

But Mr. Maturin, engrossed in paying those little attentions to the young lady which really attractive men, says Mr. Trevor, can afford to neglect, told the driver to wait, and when the driver said he did not want to wait, to go and boil his head.

III

Mr. Trevor describes The Garden of My Grandmother in some detail, but that would be of interest only to the specialist. The place was lately raided, and is now closed; and remained open so long as it did only with the help of such devices as commend themselves to those aliens who know the laws of the land only to circumvent them. For some time, indeed, the police did not even know of its existence as a night-club, for the entrance to the place was through two mean-looking doors several yards apart, on one of which was boldly inscribed the word "Gentlemen" and on the other "Ladies."

Within, all was gaiety and chic. From the respectable night-clubs and restaurants, all closed by this hour, would come the jeunesse if England; and an appetising smell of kippers brought new life to the jaded senses of young ladies, while young gentlemen cleverly contrived to give the appearance of drinking ginger-ale by taking their champagne through straws. Mr. Trevor says, however, that there was not the smallest chance of the place being raided on the night in question, for among the company was a Prince of the Blood; and it is an unwritten law in the Metropolitan Police Force
that no night-club shall be raided while a Prince of the Blood is pulling a party therein.

The young lady and our two gentlemen were presently refreshing themselves at a table in a secluded corner; and when at last only the wine was left before them, Mr. Maturin assumed his courtliest manner to beg the young lady to tell her tale, and in detail, if she thought its relation would relieve her at all. She thought, with all the pensive beauty of her dark eyes, that it would, and immediately began on the following tale:—

**The Tale of the Bulgarian Girl**

I am (she said) twenty-three years old, and although I once spent two years in England at a boarding-school in Croydon, my life hitherto has been lived entirely in Bulgaria. My father was a Bulgar of the name of Samson Samsonovitch Samsonoff, my mother an Englishwoman of the Lancashire branch of the race of Jones, and for her tragic death in a railway accident just over a year ago I shall grieve all my life: which, I cannot help praying, may be a short one, for I weary of the insensate cruelties that every new day opens out for me.

I must tell you that my mother was an unusual woman, of rigid principles, lofty ideals, and a profound feeling for the grace and dignity of the English tongue, in which, in spite of my father's opposition, for the Samsonoffs are a bitter proud race, she made me proficient at an early age. Never had this admirable woman a thought in her life that was not directed towards furthering her husband's welfare and to obtaining the happiness of her only child; and I am convinced that my father had not met his cruel death two months ago had she been spared to counsel him.

My father came of an ancient Macedonian house. For hundreds of years a bearer of the name of Samson Samsonovitch Samsonoff has trod the stark hillsides of the Balkans and raided the sweet, rich valleys about Phillippopolis. As brigands, the Samsonoffs had never a rival; as comitadjis, in war or peace, their name was a name for heroism and of terror; while as assassins—for the domestic economy of Bulgaria has ever demanded the occasional services of a hawk's eye and a ruthless hand—a Samsonoff has been
honourably associated with some of the most memorable coups in Balkan history. I am well aware that pride of family has exercised a base dominion over the minds of many good men and women; yet I do not hesitate to confess that it is with almost unbearable regret that I look upon the fact that I, a wretched girl, am the last and only remnant of our once proud house.

Such a man it was whom my mother, while accompanying her father, a civil engineer, through Bulgaria, married. Nor did it need anything less than the ardour of her love and the strength of her character to seduce a Samson Samsonovitch from the dour dominion of the hills to the conventional life of the valleys. I loved my father, but cannot be blind to the grave flaws in his character. A tall, hairy man, with a beard such as would have appalled your English description of Beaver, he was subject to ungovernable tempers and, occasionally, to regrettable lapses from that moral code which is such an attractive feature of English domestic life. Ah, you who live in the content and plenty of so civilized a land, how can you even imagine the horrors of lawlessness that obtain among primitive peoples! Had it not that good woman my mother always willed him to loving-kindness, Samsonovitch Samsonoff had more than once spilled the blood of his dearest friends in the heat of some petty tavern brawl.

We lived in a farmhouse in what is surely the loveliest valley in the world, that which is called the Valley of the Roses, and whence is given to the world that exquisite essence known as attar of roses. Our little household in that valley was a happy and united one; more and more infrequent became my father's demoniac tempers; and, but for his intolerance of fools and cravens, you had taken the last of the Samsonoffs to be a part of the life of the valley-men, of whose industry, the cultivation of roses, he rapidly became a master.

Thus we come to the time which I now think of as two months before my mother's death. My father had attained to a certain degree of wealth, and was ever enticing my mother with dreams of a prolonged visit to her beloved birthplace, Southport, which is, I believe, a pretty town on the seaboard of Lancashire, and which I look forward with delight to visiting. While enticing her, however, with such visions, he did not hesitate to warn her that she must wait on the issue
of his fanciful hobby, which daily grew on him; for the last of the Samsonoffs had become an inventor of flowers!

You may well look bewildered. But had you known my father you would in some measure have understood how a man, of an extreme audacity of temperament, might be driven into any fanciful pursuit that might lend a spice to a life of intolerable gentility. Nor was that pursuit so fanciful as might at first appear to those of conventionally studious minds: my father had a profound knowledge of the anatomy of flowers; and was in the habit of saying that he could not but think that the mind of man had hitherto neglected the invention and cultivation of the most agreeable variations. In fine, the tempestuous but simple mind of Samsonovitch Samsonoff had been captivated by the possibility of growing green carnations.

My mother and I were, naturally enough, not at all averse from his practising so gentle a hobby as the invention and cultivation of improbable flowers. And it was long before we even dreamt of the evil consequences that might attend so inoffensive an ambition. But my poor mother was soon to be rid of the anxieties of this life.

One day she and I were sitting in the garden discussing the English fashion-journals, when, silently as a cloud, my father came out of the house and looked towards us in the half-frowning, half-smiling way of his best mood. Tall and patriarchal, he came towards us—and in his hand we saw a flower with a long slender stem, and we stared as it as though we could not believe our eyes, for it was a green carnation!

"You have painted it!" we cried, my mother and I, for his success had seemed to us as remote as the stars.

"I have made it!" said my father, and he smiled into his beard, which was ever his one confidential friend. "Women, I have made it in my laboratory. And as I have made this I can make thousands, millions, and thousands of millions!"

He waved a closely-covered piece of paper towards me. "My daughter," he said, "here is your dower, your heritage. I am too old to burden myself with the cares of great riches, but by the help of this paper, you, my beloved child, will become an heiress who may condescend to an Emperor or an American. We will not lose a minute before going to England, the land of honest men, to put the matter of the patent in train. For on this paper is written the formula by which
green carnations, as well as all previously known varieties of carnations, can be made instead of grown. Made, I say, instead of grown! Women, do you understand what it is that I have achieved? I have stolen something of the secret of the sun!"

"Samson, boast not!" cried my mother, but he laughed at her and fondled me, while I stared in great wonder at the slip of paper that fluttered in his hand and dreamed the fair dreams of wealth and happiness in a civilized country. Ah, me, ah me, the ill-fated excellence of dreams! For here I am in the most civilized country in the world, a pauper, and more wretched than a pauper!

Our preparations for removal to England were not far advanced before that happened which brought the first cruel turn to our fortunes. On an evil day my mother set out to Varna to buy some trivial thing, and—but I cannot speak of that, how she was returned to us a mangled corpse, her dear features mutilated beyond recognition by the fury of the railway accident.

My father took his sudden loss strangely: it was as though he was deprived at one blow of all the balance, the restraint, with which so many years of my mother's influence had softened the dangerous temper of the Samsonoff; and the brooding silence he put upon his surroundings clamoured with black thoughts. Worst of all, he began again to frequent the taverns in the valley, wherein he seemed to find solace in goading to fury the craven-hearted lowlanders among whom he had lived in peace for so long. The Samsonoff, in short, seemed rapidly to be reverting to type; and I, his daughter, must stand by and do nothing, for my influence over him was never but of the pettiest sort.

The weeks passed, and our preparations for departure to England proceeded at the soberest pace. In England we were going to stay with my mother's brother, a saintly man of some little property who lived a retired life in London, and whose heir I would in due course be, since he was himself without wife or children.

My father, never notable for the agreeable qualities of discretion and reticence, soon spread about the report of his discovery of the green carnation. He could not resist boasting of it in his cups, of the formula with which he could always make them, of the fortune he must inevitably make. Nor did he hesitate to taunt the men of the valley, they who
came of generations of flower-growers, with his own success in an occupation which, he said, he had never undertaken but at a woman’s persuasion, since it could be regarded as manly only by those who would describe as manly the painted face of a Circassian eunuch. Thus he would taunt them, laughing me to scorn when I ventured to point out that even worms will turn and cravens conspire. Woe and woe to the door and high-handed in a world of polity, for their fate shall surely find them out!

One day, having been to the village to procure some yeast for the making of a yaourt or yawort, which is that same Bulgarian “sour milk” so strongly recommended to Anglo-Saxon digestions, I was startled, as I walked up the path to the door, by the bruit of loud, rough voices. Only too soon was my fear turned to horror. One of the voices was my father’s, arrogant and harsh as only his could be, with a sneer like a snake running through it. The other I could not recognize, but could hear only too well that it had not the soft accents of the men of the valley; and when, afraid to enter, I peered in through the window, I saw my father in violent altercation with a man his equal in stature and demeanour—another bearded giant, as fair as my father was dark, and with the livid eyes of a wolf.

What was my horror on recognizing him as Michaelis the komitadjji, the notorious and brutal Michaelis of the hills. The Michaelis and the Samsonovitch Samsonoffs had always been the equal kings of the banditti, and, in many a fight between Christian and Turk, the equal champions of the Cross against the Crescent. And now, as I could hear through the window, the last of the Michaelis was asking of the last of the Samsonoffs some of his great wealth, that he might arm and munition his troop to the latest mode.

My father threw back his head and laughed. But his laugh had cost him dear had I not screamed a warning, for the Michaelis with the wolfish eyes had raised a broad knife. My father leapt to one side, and taking up the first thing that came to hand, a heavy bottle of mastic, crashed it down like an axe on the fair giant’s head; and then, without so much as a glance at the unconscious man, and massive though the Michaelis was, slung him over his shoulder, strode out of the house and garden, and flung him into the middle of the roadway, where he lay for long moaning savagely with the
pain of his broken head. I had gone to the aid of the wretch, but my father would not let me, saying that no Michaelis ever yet died of a slap on the crown and that a little blood-letting would clear the man’s mind of his boyish fancies. Ah, if it had!

It was at a late hour of the very next night—for since my mother’s death my father would loiter in the taverns until all hours—that his hoarse voice roused me from my sleep; and on descending I found him raging about the kitchen like a wounded tiger, his clothes in disorder and showing grim dark stains that, as I clung to him, foully wetted my hands. I prayed him, in an access of terror, to tell me he was not hurt, for what other protection than him had I in that murderous land?

“I am not hurt, child,” he growled impatiently. “But I have been driven to hurt some so that they can never again feel pain.”

They had ambushed him, the cowards, as he came home through the wood—as though a hundred of those maggots of the valley could slay a Samsonovitch Samsonoff! My father had caught the last of them by the throat, and the trembling coward had saved himself by confessing the plot. It appeared that it was they who had persuaded the Michaelis to visit us the day before, inflaming his fancy with tales of the discovery of the carnation and of the great riches the Samsonoff had concealed about the house. And the Michaelis had come to our house not for part of my father’s wealth but for all he could find, as also for the secret of the carnation, which he might sell at a great price to some Jew in Sofia—he had come to kill my father!

“And I, like a fool,” cried my father, “only broke the skin of his wolfish head! Girl, we must be off at once! I have not lived in unwilling peace all these years to die like a rat; and now that these weak idiots have failed to kill me, Michaelis and his troop will surround the house, and who shall escape the wolves of the hills? Now linger not for your clothes and fineries. Grigory Eshekovitch has horses for us at the edge of the wood, and we can make Philippopolis by the morning. Here is all our money in notes. Take them, so that you will be provided for should these scum get me. And the formula—take care of the formula, child, for that is your fortune! Should I have to stay behind, your mother’s brother in
England is a good man and will probably not rob you of
more than half the profits of it."

And so we came to leave our beloved home, stealing like
thieves through the darkness of a moonless night. How shall
I ever forget those desperate moments! Our farm lay far
from any other habitation, and a long sloping lane joined our
pastures to the extensive Karaloff Wood, a wood always
evoked by Bulgarian poets of past centuries as the home of
vampires and the kennel of the hounds of hell.

There, at its borders, Grigory Eschekovitch, a homely
man devoted to our interests, awaited us with two horses;
and, although I could not see his face in the darkness, I could
imagine by the tremor of his never very assured voice how
pallid, indeed green, it must have been; for poor Grigory
Eschekovitch suffered from some internal affection, which had
the effect of establishing his complexion very uncertainly.

"Have you seen any one in the wood?" my father asked
him.

"No, but I have heard noises," Grigory Eschekovitch
trembled.

"Bah!" growled my father. "That was the chattering of
your own miserable teeth."

I wonder what has happened to poor Grigory Eschekovitch,
whether he survived that hideous night. We left him there,
a trembling figure on the borders of the wood, while we put
our horses into the heart of that darkness; and I tried to
find solace in our desperate situation by looking forward to
the safety and comfort of our approaching life in England.
Little I knew that I was to suffer such agonies of fear in this
huge city that I would wish myself back in the land of wolves!

My dreams were shattered by a low growl from my
father, and we pulled up our horses, listening intently. By
this time we were about half-way through the wood; and had
we not known the place by heart we had long since lost our
way, for the curtain of leaves between us and the faint light
of the stars made the place to black that we could not even
see the faintest glimmer of each other. At last my father
whispered that it was all right, and we were in the act of
spurring our tired horses for the last dash through the wood
when torches flamed on all sides, and we stood as in the
tortured light of a crypt in moonlight.

"Samson Samsonovitch," cried a hoarse voice, and like a
stab at my heart I knew it for the voice of the Michaelis, “we hope your sins are not too heavy, for your time has come.”

It ill becomes a girl to boast of her parent; but shall I neglect to mention the stern fortitude, the patriarchal resignation, the monumental bravery, of my father, how he sat his horse still as a rock in a tempest and only his lips moved in a gentle whisper to me. “Child, save yourself,” said he, and that was his farewell. “I command you to go—to save yourself and my secret from these hounds. Maybe I, too, will get through. God is as good to us as we deserve. Head right through them. Their aim, between you and me, will be so unsure that we might both escape. Go, and God go with you!”

Can you ask me to remember the details of the awful moment? The darkness, the flaming torches, the hoarse cries of the bandits as they rode in on us, my father’s great courage—all these combined to produce in me a state for which the word “terror” seems altogether too homely. Perhaps I should not have left my father. Perhaps I should have died with him. I did not know what I was doing. Blindly as in a nightmare I spurred my horse midway between two moving torches. The horse, startled already, flew madly as the wind. Cries, curses, shots seemed to sweep about me, envelop me, but terror lent wings to my horse, and the shots and shouts faded behind me as phantoms might fade in a curious wind. Last of all came a fearful fusillade of shots, then a silence broken only by the harsh rustle of the bracken under my horse, which, with the livid intelligence of fear, did not stop before we reached Philippopolis in the dawn.

I was never to see my father again. Until noon of the next day I sat anxiously in the only decent inn of the ancient town, praying that some act of Providence had come to his aid and that he might at any moment appear; when, from a loquacious person, who did not know my name, I heard that the last of the Samsonoffs had that morning been found in Karaloff Wood nailed to a tree-trunk with eighteen bullet wounds in his body.

I will spare you my reflections on the pass in which I then found myself. No young girl was ever so completely alone as she who sat the day through in the parlour of the Bulgarian inn, trying to summon the energy with which to
arrange for her long journey on the Orient Express to England.

Arrived in London, I at once set out to my uncle’s house in Golgotha Road, Golder’s Green. I was a little surprised that he had not met me at the station, for I had warned him of my arrival by telegram; but knowing he was a gentleman of particular though agreeable habits, it was with a sufficiently good heart that I rang the bell of his tall, gloomy house, which stood at the end of a genteel street of exactly similar houses.

Allow me, if you please, to hurry over the relation of my further misfortunes. My uncle had died of a clot of blood on the heart a week before my arrival. His property he had, of course, left to me; and I could instantly take possession of his house in Golgotha Road. I was utterly alone.

That was four weeks ago. Though entirely without friends or acquaintance—for my uncle’s lawyer, Mr. Tarbold, was a man who bore his own lack of easy conversation and human sympathy with a resigned fortitude worthy of more wretched sorrows—I passed the first two weeks pleasantly enough in arranging the house to my taste, in engaging a housekeeper and training her to my ways, and in wondering how I must proceed as regards the patenting and exploiting of the carnation, the formula for which I kept locked in a secret drawer of my toilet-table.

At the end of three weeks—one week ago—my housekeeper gave me notice of her instant departure, saying that no consideration would persuade her to spend another night in the house. She was, it seemed, psychic, and the atmosphere of the house, which was certainly oppressive, weighed heavily on her mind. She had heard noises in the night, she affirmed, and also spoke indignantly of an unpleasant smell in the basement of the house, a musty smell which she for one made no bones of recognizing as a graveyard consistency; and if she did not know a graveyard smell, she asked, from one of decent origins, who did, for she had buried three husbands?

Of course I laughed at her tremors, for I am not naturally of a nervous temper, and when she insisted on leaving that very day I was not at all disturbed. Nor did I instantly make inquiries for another woman, for I could very well manage by myself, and the work of the house, I thought, must help to fill in the awful spaces made by the utter lack of
companionship. As to any nervousness at being left entirely alone in a house, surrounded as it was by the amenities of Golder's Green, I never gave a thought to it, for I had been inured to a reasonable solitude all my life. And, putting up a notice of "Apartments to Let," in one of the ground-floor windows, I set about the business of the house in something of a spirit of adventure natural, if I may say so, to one of my years.

That, as I have said, was one week ago; and the very next day but one after my housekeeper had left me was to see my hardly-won peace shattered at one blow. I do not know if you gentlemen are aware of the mode of life that obtains in Golder's Green; but I must tell you that the natives of that quarter do not discourage the activities of barrel-organs—a somewhat surprising exercise of restraint to one who has been accustomed to the dolorous and beautiful songs of the Balkan ciziganes. It is true, however, that these barrel-organs are played mostly by foreigners, and I have been given to understand that foreigners are one of the most sacred institutions of this great country.

The very next morning after my housekeeper had left me I was distracted from my work by a particularly disagreeable combination of sounds, which, I had no doubt, could come only from a barrel-organ not of the first order and the untrained voice of its owner. A little amused, I looked out of the window—and with a heart how still leapt back into the room, for the face of the organ-grinder was the face of the Michaelis!

I spent an hour of agony in wondering if he had seen me, for how could I doubt but that he had followed me to England in quest of the formula of the carnation? At last, however, I decided that he could not have seen me, and I was in some degree calmed by the decreasing noise of the barrel-organ as it inflicted itself on more distant streets. London, I told myself, was a very large city; it was not possible that the Michaelis could have the faintest idea in what part of it I lodged; and it could only have been by the most unfortunate combination of chances that he had brought his wretched organ into Golgotha Road. Nevertheless I took the precaution to withdraw the notice of Apartments to Let from the window, lest yet another unfortunate combination of chances should lead him or his minions to search for lodging in my house.
The next day passed quietly enough. I went out shopping with a veil over my face, for reasons you can well understand. And little did I dream that the approaching terror was to come from a quarter which would only be known to the Michaelis when he was dead.

That evening in my bedroom, in a curious moment of forgetfulness, I chanced to pull the bell-ropes. I wanted some hot water, had for the moment forgotten that the silly woman had left me, and only remembered it with a smile when, far down in the basement, I heard the thin clatter of the bell. The bathroom was some way down the passage, and I had reached the door, empty jug in hand, when I was arrested by the sound of approaching steps! They were very faint, they seemed to be coming up from the basement, as though in answer to the bell! I pressed my hand to my forehead in a frantic attempt to collect my wits, and I have no hesitation in saying that for those few moments I was near insane. The accumulation of terrors in my recent life had, I thought, unhinged my mind; and I must that day have engaged a servant and forgotten it.

Meantime the steps ascended, slowly, steadily, exactly as an elderly servant might ascend in answer to the bell; and as they ascended I was driven, I cannot tell you how, somehow past fear. Maybe it was the blood of the Samsonoffs at last raging in me: I was not afraid, and, without locking the door, I withdrew to a far corner of the room, awaiting the moment when the steps must reach the door. I must not forget to add that the empty jug was still in my hand.

Steadily, but with a shuffling as of carpet-slippers, the steps came up the passage: slowly the door was opened, and a gaunt, grey-haired woman in musty black stood there, eyeing me with strange contempt. Fear returned, enveloped me, shook me, and I sobbed, I screamed. The woman did not move, did not speak, but stood there, gaunt and grey and dry, eyeing me with a strange contempt; and on her lined face there was such an undreamt-of expression of evil. Yet I recognized her.

I must tell you that my mother had often, in telling me of her brother, spoken of his confidential housekeeper. My mother was a plain-spoken woman, and I had gathered from her that the woman had exercised some vulgar art to enthrall my poor uncle and had dominated him, to his hurt, in all
things. At the news of this woman's death just before my mother's tragic end, she had been unable to resist an expression of relief; and I, on having taken possession of the house a few weeks before, had examined with great interest, as girls will, the various photographs of her that stood about the rooms.

It was from these that I recognized the woman who stood in the doorway. But she was dead, surely she had died more than a year ago! Yet there she now stood, eyeing me with that strange contempt—with such contempt, indeed, that I, reacting from fear to anger, sternly demanded of her what she did there and what she wanted.

She was silent. That was perhaps the most awful moment of all—but no, no, there was worse to come! For, sobbing with terror, I hurled the empty jug at her vile face with a precision of aim which now astonishes me: but she did not waver so much as the fraction of an inch as the jug came straight at her—and, passing through her head, smashed into pieces against the wall of the passage outside. I must have swooned where I stood, for when I was again conscious of my surroundings she was gone: I was alone; but, far down in the house, I could hear the shuffling steps, retreating, descending, to the foul shades whence she had come.

Now I am one who cannot bear any imposition; and unable, despite the witness of my own eyes to believe in the psychic character of the intruder, I ran out of the room and in hot pursuit down the stairs. The gaunt woman must have descended with a swiftness surprising in one of her years, for I could only see her shadow far below, on the last flight of stairs that would take her to the basement. Into that lower darkness, I must confess, I had not the courage to follow her; and still less so when, on peering down the pitch-dark stairs into the kitchen, I was assailed by that musty smell which my housekeeper had spoken of with such indignant conviction as of a graveyard consistency.

I locked the door of my room and slept, I need scarcely say, but ill that night. However, in the cheerful light of the following morning, I was inclined, as who would not, to pooh-pooh the incredible events of the previous night; and again pulled the bell-rope, just to see the event, if any. There was; and, unable to await the ascent of the shuffling steps, I crammed on a hat and ran down the stairs.
The woman was coming upstairs, steadily, inevitably. As she heard me descending she stopped and looked up, and I cannot describe the effect that the diabolical wickedness of her face had on me in the clear daylight. I stopped, was rooted there, could not move. To get to the front door I must pass the foul thing, and that I could not summon the courage to do. And then she raised an arm, as though to show me something, and I saw the blade of a razor shining in her hand. You may well shudder, gentlemen!

When I came to, it was to find myself lying at the foot of the stairs, whither I must have fallen, and the foul thing gone. Why she did not kill me, I do not know. God will pardon me for saying that maybe it had been better if she had, for what miseries are not still in store for me! Trembling and weak, I reached the door and impelled myself into the clear air of morning. Nor could the fact that I had forgotten my veil, and the consequent fear of Michaelis, persuade me to re-enter that house until I had regained some degree of calmness.

All day long I wandered about, knowing neither what to do nor where to go. I am not without some worldly sense, and I knew what little assistance the police could give me in such a dilemma, even had they believed me; while as for the lawyer, Mr. Tarbold, how could I face a man of so little sympathy in ordinary things with such an extraordinary tale?

Towards ten o’clock that night, I determined to return and risk another night in that house; I was desperate with weariness and hunger; and could not buy food nor lodging for the night, for in my flight I had forgotten my purse; while I argued to myself that if, after all, she had intended to murder me, she could without any difficulty have done so that morning when I lay unconscious on the stairs.

My bravery, however, did not help me to ascend the stairs to my bedroom with any resolution. I stole upstairs, myself verily like a phantom. But, hearing no sound in the house, I plucked up the courage to switch on the light on my bedroom landing. My bedroom door stood open, but I could not remember whether or not I had left it so that morning. It was probable, in my hasty descent. I tiptoed to it and peered in—and I take the liberty to wonder whether any man, was he never such a lion-heart, had been less disturbed than I at the sight which the light of the moon revealed to my eyes.
The Michaelis lay full length on the floor, his great fair beard darkened with his blood, which came, I saw, from a great gash behind his ear. Across him, with her back to me, sat straddled the gaunt, foul thing, as silent as the grave. Yet even my terror could not overcome my curiosity as to her actions, for she kept on lowering and raising her left hand to and from the Michaelis's beard, while with her right, in which shone the bloody razor, she sawed the air from side to side. I could not realize what that vile shape was doing—I could, and could not admit the realization. For with her left hand she was plucking out one by one the long hairs of the Michaelis's beard, while with the razor in her right she was slicing them to the floor!

I must have gasped, made some noise, for she heard me; and, turning on me and brandishing the dripping razor, she snarled like an animal and leapt towards me. But I am young and quick, and managed just in time to reach the street door and slam it against her enraged pursuit.

That was last night. Since then, gentlemen, I have wandered about the streets of London, resting a little among the poor people in the parks. I have had no food, for what money I have is in that house, together with the formula for the green carnation; but nothing, not death by exposure nor death by starvation, would induce me to return to the house in Golder's Green while it is haunted by that foul presence. Is she a homicidal lunatic or a phantom from hell? I do not know, I am too tired to care. I have told you two gentlemen my story because you seem kind and capable, and I can only pray that I have not wearied you overmuch. But I do beg you to believe that nothing is further from my mind than to ask, and indeed nothing would induce me to accept, anything from you but the generous sympathy of your understanding and the advice of your chivalrous intelligence. My tale is finished, gentlemen. And, alas, am not I?

IV

Mr. Trevor is somewhat confused in his relation of the course of events immediately subsequent to Miss Samsonoff's narrative. During its course he had time, he says, to study the young lady's beauty, which, though of a very superior
order, was a little too innocent and insipid for his taste. His judgment, however, cannot be entirely fair, for such was the direction of the young lady’s eyes that Mr. Trevor could judge of her features only. As to the story itself, Mr. Trevor says that, while yielding to no one in his liking for a good story, he could not see his way to considering Miss Samsonoff’s notable either for interest, entertainment, or that human note of stark realism which makes for conviction; and while, in the ordinary way, a murderer was to him like a magnet, he could not rouse himself to feel irresistibly attracted towards the ghoul of Golder’s Green. It was therefore with surprise not unmixed with pain that he heard Mr. Maturin saying:

“Ralph, we are in luck!”

“To what—” Mr. Trevor could not entirely cleanse his voice from the impurity of sarcasm—“to what do you refer?” But it was not without some compunction that he heard the young lady sigh miserably to Beau Maturin:

“I am afraid I have wearied your friend. Forgive me.”

“My friend,” said Beau Maturin gently, “is an ass. In point of fact, Miss Samsonoff, far from wearying us, you have put us under a great obligation——”

“Ah, you are kind!” the young lady was moved to sob.

“On the contrary,” Mr. Maturin warmly protested, “I am selfish. I gather you have not been reading the newspapers lately? Had you done so, you would have read of a murderer who has recently been loose in London and has so far evaded not only capture but even identification. So far as the public know through the newspapers, this criminal has been responsible for only two or three murders; but this very night my friend and I have had private information to the effect that within the last few weeks twelve mutilated corpses have been found in various parts of London; to which we must now, no doubt, add a thirteenth, the remains of your late enemy, Mr. Michaelis. But where your information,” said Mr. Maturin gallantly, “is especially valuable, is that the police do not dream that the criminal is of your sex. To my friend and me it is this original point that invests the pursuit——”

“Pursuit?” Mr. Trevor could not help starting.

“—with,” said Mr. Maturin coldly, “an added charm. And now with your permission, Miss Samsonoff, we will not only return to you your formula, as to the financial worth of
which I cannot entirely share your late parent’s optimism, but also——”

“Also,” Mr. Trevor said with restraint, “we will first of all call at Vine Street and borrow a few policemen.”

“Oh, yes!” the young lady said eagerly. “We will be sure to need some policemen. Please get some policemen. They will listen to you.”

“I do not find an audience so difficult to find as all that,” said Mr. Maturin coldly. The London police, Miss Samsonoff, are delightful, but rather on the dull side. They are much given to standing in the middle of crowded roads and dreaming, and in even your short stay in London you must have observed what a serious, nay intolerable, obstruction they are to the traffic. No, no, my friend and I will get this murderer ourselves. Come, Miss Samsonoff.”

“But I dare not come with you!” cried the young lady. “I simply dare not approach that house again! May I not await your return here?”

“The attacks of ten murderers,” said Mr. Maturin indignantly, “cannot disfigure your person more violently than being left alone in a night-club will disfigure your reputation. Bulgarians may be violent, Miss Samsonoff. But loungelizards are low dogs.”

Mr. Trevor says that he was so plunged in thought that he did not arise from the table with his usual agility; and the first notice he had that Mr. Maturin had risen and was nearly at the door was on hearing him waive aside a pursuing waiter with the damnable words: “My friend will pay.”

Without, the taxi-cab was still waiting. Its driver, says Mr. Trevor, was one of those stout men of little speech and impatient demeanour: on which at this moment was plainly written the fact that he had been disagreeably affected by waiting in the cold for nearly two hours; and on Mr. Maturin’s sternly giving him a Golder’s Green direction he just looked at our two gentlemen and appeared to struggle with an impediment in his throat.

Golgotha Road was, as the young lady had described it, a genteel street of tall, gloomy houses. Mr. Trevor says that he cannot remember when he liked the look of a street less. The taxi-cab had not penetrated far therein when Miss Samsonoff timidly begged Mr. Maturin to stop its further progress, pointing out that she could not bear to wait immediately
opposite the house and would indeed have preferred to await her brave cavaliers in an altogether different part of London. Mr. Maturin, however, soothed her fears; and, gay as a schoolboy, took the key of the house from her reluctant fingers and was jumping from the cab when Miss Samsonoff cried:

"But surely you have weapons!"

Mr. Trevor says that, while yielding to no one in deploring the use of weapons in daily life, in this particular instance the young lady’s words struck him as full of a practical grasp of the situation.

"Of course," said Mr. Trevor nonchalantly, "we must have weapons. How stupid of us to have forgotten! I will go back to my flat and get some. I won’t be gone a moment."

"That’s right," Mr. Maturin agreed, "because you won’t be gone at all. My dear Miss Samsonoff, my friend and I do not need weapons. We put our trust in God and St. George. Come along, Ralph. Miss Samsonoff, we will be back in a few moments."

"And what do I do?" asked the taxi-driver.

"Nothing," cried Mr. Maturin gaily. "Nothing at all. Aren’t you lucky!"

The house which the young lady had pointed out to them had an air of even gloomier gentility than the others, and Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he liked the look of a house less, particularly when the ancient brown door gave to Beau Maturin’s hand before he had put the key into the lock. Mr. Trevor could not resist a natural exclamation of surprise. Mr. Maturin begged him not to shout. Mr. Trevor said that he was not shouting, and, without a thought for his own safety, was rushing headlong into the house to meet the terror single-handed when he found that his shoe-lace was untied.

He found Beau Maturin in what, he supposed, would be called a hall when it was not a pit of darkness. A stealthily lit match revealed that it was a hall, a narrow one, and it also revealed a closed door to the right, by Mr. Trevor’s elbow, which he removed. The match went out.

"Quietly," said Mr. Maturin quite unnecessarily, for Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he felt less noisy. He heard the door to his right open, softly, softly.
"Is it you opening that door?" he asked, merely from curiosity.

"Ssh!" snapped Beau Maturin. "Hang on to my shoulder-blades."

Mr. Trevor thought it better to calm Beau Maturin's fears by acceding to his whim, and clung close behind him as they entered the room. The moon, which Mr. Trevor already had reason to dislike, was hanging at a moderate elevation over Golder's Green as though on purpose to reveal the darkness of that room. Mr. Trevor's foot then struck a shape on the floor. The shape was soft and long. Mr. Trevor was surprised. Mr. Maturin whispered:

"Found anything?"

Mr. Trevor said briefly that his foot had.


"And mine," said Mr. Trevor.

"They're corpses, let's face it," sighed Mr. Maturin. "Making fifteen in all. With us, seventeen. Just give yours a kick, Ralph, to see if it's alive. I've kicked mine."

"I don't kick corpses," Mr. Trevor was muttering when he felt a hard round thing shoved into the small of his back.

"Ow!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Found anything?" said Mr. Maturin.

Mr. Trevor said briefly that there was something against his back.


"So is mine," said Mr. Trevor.

"They're revolvers, let's face it," sighed Beau Maturin.

"They are," said a harsh voice behind them. "So don't move."

"I've got some sense, thank you," snapped Beau Maturin.

"Sir," said the harsh voice, and it was a woman's voice, "I want none of your lip. I have you each covered with a revolver——"

"Waste," said Beau Maturin. "One revolver would have been quite enough. Besides, my friend and I were distinctly given to understand that you were partial to a razor. Or do you use that for shaving?"

"I use a razor," said the harsh voice, "only when I want to kill. But I have a use for you two."
The light was suddenly switched on, a light so venomous, says Mr. Trevor, that they had to blink furiously. And that must have been a very large room, for they could not see into its far corners. The light came from what must have been a very high-powered lamp directly above a table in the middle of the room; and it was concentrated by a shade in such a way as to fall, like a searchlight, exactly on the two helpless gentlemen. Mr. Trevor says that Beau Maturin’s handsome face looked white and ghastly, so the Lord knows what Mr. Trevor’s must have looked like. Meanwhile their captor leapt from her station behind them, and they were privileged to see her for the first time. She was, says Mr. Trevor, exactly as Miss Samsonoff had described her, grey and gaunt and dry, and her expression was strangely contemptuous and evil as sin. And never for a moment did she change the direction of her revolvers, which was towards our gentlemen’s hearts. Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he saw a woman look less afraid that a revolver might go off in her hand.

"Look down," she commanded.

"It’s all right," said Beau Maturin peaceably; "we’ve already guessed what they are. Corpses. Nice cold night for them, too. Keep for days in weather like this."

Mr. Trevor could not resist looking down to his feet. The corpses were of two youngish men in dress-clothes.

"They’re cut badly," said Mr. Maturin.

"They’re not cut at all," said the woman harshly. "I shot these two for a change."

"I meant their clothes," Mr. Maturin explained. "Death was too good for them with dress-clothes like that."

"Well, I can’t stop here all night talking about clothes," snapped the woman. "Now then, to business. These bodies have to be buried in the back-garden. You will each take one. There are spades just behind you. I shall not have the slightest hesitation in killing you as I have killed these two, but it will be more convenient for me if you do as you are told. I may kill you later, and I may not. Now be quick!"

"Lord, what’s that!" cried Mr. Trevor sharply. He had that moment realized a strange muffled, ticking noise which must, he thought, come either from somewhere in the room or from a room near by. And, while he was never in his life
less conscious of feeling fear he could not help but be startled by that ticking noise for he had heard it before, when timing a dynamite-bomb.

“That is why,” the woman explained with what, Mr. Trevor supposed, was meant to be a smile, “you will be safer in the garden. Women are but weak creatures, and so I take the precaution of having a rather large size in dynamite-bombs so timed that I have but to press a button to send us all to blazes. It will not be comfortable for the police when, if ever, they catch me. But pick up those spades and get busy.”

“Now don’t be rude,” begged Beau Maturin. “I can stand anything from plain women but discourtesy. Ralph, you take the bigger corpse, as you are smaller than I am, while I take this little fellow on my shoulder—which will probably be the nearest he will ever get to Heaven, with clothes cut as badly as that.”

“You can come back for the bodies when you’ve dug the graves,” snapped the woman. “Take the spades and go along that passage. No tricks! I am just behind you.”

There was a lot of rubbish in that garden. It had never been treated as a garden, it did not look like a garden, it looked even less like a garden than did The Garden of My Grandmother. High walls enclosed it. And over it that deplorable moon threw a sheet of dead daylight.

“Dig,” said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

“Do you mind if we take our coats off?” asked Beau Maturin. Mr. Trevor says that he was being sarcastic.

“I don’t mind what you take off,” snapped the woman.

“Now don’t say naughty things!” said Mr. Maturin. “Nothing is more revolting than the naughtiness of plain women.”

“Dig,” said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

They dug, says Mr. Trevor, for a long time, for a very long time. Not, however, that it was difficult digging once one had got into the swing of it, for that garden was mostly dug-up soil. Suddenly Beau Maturin said:

“Bet you a fiver I dig a grave for my fellow before you.”

“Right!” said Mr. Trevor.

“Dig,” said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

“And,” said the woman, “I don’t allow any betting in this house. So call that bet off.”
"What?" said Mr. Maturin.
"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.
Mr. Maturin threw down his spade.
"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.
Mr. Trevor dug.
Mr. Maturin said: "Dig yourself!"
"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.
Mr. Trevor brandished his spade from a distance. He noticed for the first time that they had been digging in the light of the dawn and not of the moon.
"And who the deuce," said Mr. Maturin dangerously, "do you think you are, not to allow any betting? I have stood a lot from you, but I won't stand that."
"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, but Mr. Maturin advanced upon the revolvers like a punitive expedition. Mr. Trevor brandished his spade.
"Another step, and I fire!" cried the woman harshly.
"Go ahead," said Mr. Maturin. "I'll teach you to stop me betting! And I hate your face."
"Oh dear, oh dear!" the woman suddenly cried with a face of fear, and, lowering her revolvers, fled into the house.
Mr. Trevor was so surprised that he could scarcely speak. Mr. Maturin laughed so much that he could not speak.
"What's there to laugh about?" Mr. Trevor asked at last.
"It's funny. They've had us, let's face it. Come on, let's follow her in."
"She may shoot," Mr. Trevor cautioned.
"Shoot my eye!" sighed Beau Maturin.
Once in the house, Mr. Trevor stopped spellbound. There were voices, there was laughter—from the room of the two corpses!
"They're laughing at us!" said Mr. Trevor.
"Who wouldn't!" laughed Beau Maturin, and, opening the door said: "Good morning."
"You've said it," said the policeman. "Haw-haw!"
"You'll have some breakfast?" asked the woman with the revolvers.
"Please do!" said Miss Samsonoff.
"You ought to be hungry," said the taxi-driver with the Homburg hat of green plush.
"Look here!" gasped Mr. Trevor. "What the blazes——"
"Haw-haw!" laughed the policeman. "'Ave a bit of vealanam-pie?"

"Now, Ted, don't be rude to the gentlemen!" said the woman with the revolvers.

"Quite right, mother," said Miss Samsonoff. "We owe these gentlemen an explanation and an apology——"

"And if they don't take it we are in the soup!" miserably said the man in the Homburg hat of green plush.

"Now, you two, go and get the cups and plates for the two gentlemen," said the woman with the revolvers to the two corpses in dress-clothes.

"Listen, please," Miss Samsonoff gravely addressed Mr. Maturin, "my name isn't Samsonoff at all but Kettlewell, and that's my mother and these are my four brothers——"

"How do you do?" said Mr. Maturin, absently drinking the policeman's coffee, but Mr. Trevor is glad that no one heard what he said.

"You see," said Miss Kettlewell, and she was shy and beautiful, "we are The Kettlewell Film Company, just us, but of course we haven't got a lot of money——"

"A 'lot' is good!" said the policeman.

"My brother there," and Miss Kettlewell pointed to the wretched man with the Homburg hat of green plush, "was the director of an American company in Los Angeles, but he got the sack lately and so we thought we would make some films on our own. You see, we are such a large family! And the recent murders gave us a really brilliant idea for a film called 'The Ghoul of Golder's Green,'* which, thanks to you two gentlemen, we have completed to-night. Oh, I do hope it will be a success, especially as you have been kind enough to help us in our predicament, for we hadn't any money to engage actors—and we did so need two gentlemen, just like you, who really looked the part, didn't we, mother?"

"But, my dear child," cried Beau Maturin. "I'm afraid your film can't have come out very well. Trevor and I will look perfectly ghastly, as we neither of us had any make-up on."

"But it's that kind of film!" smiled Miss Kettlewell.

* When the film was released by the Kettlewell Film Corporation, evidences of public favour were so notably lacking that it was offered to the Society for Presenting Nature Films to the Blind.

Surely, after the above exposure of the methods adopted, no further reasons should be sought for the so much deplored inferiority of British films.
"You see, you and your friend are supposed to be corpses who, by some powerful psychic agency are digging your own graves—Heavens, what's that?"

There, at the open door, stood an apparition with a dreadful face. He appeared, says Mr. Trevor, to have some difficulty in choosing among the words that his state of mind was suggesting to him.

"And me?" gasped the taxi-driver hoarsely. "Wot abaht me? 'Angingabahtallnight! 'Oo's going to pay me, that's wot I want to know? There's four quid and more on that clock——"

Mr. Maturin swept his empty coffee-cup round to indicate the family Kettlewell.

"My friends will pay," sighed Mr. Maturin.
THE MOUNTAIN

J. J. BELL
J. J. Bell, journalist and author, was probably best known as the creator of "Wee Macgregor" and other amusing Scottish characters, but he also wrote a large number of novels and one-act plays.
THE MOUNTAIN

The two-seater came bumping down the rough, gravelly cart-track—the first motor vehicle ever seen at Achnadamp, which is not to say that the inhabitants of the township (seventeen souls) had never seen a motor-car before.

Achnadamp, after all, is only seven miles off the main road, though, to be sure, it is somewhat remote from what some of us call civilization, its distance from the nearest licensed premises being no less than thirty-two miles. It lies near the head of Glen Bogie, in the benevolent shadow of Ben Bogie—benevolent, since among its rude, forbidding neighbour peaks the mountain provides an oddly gracious, shapely and green appearance. Once in a while somebody makes its ascent, though not from Glen Bogie, which would involve a fairly long tramp before the climb could be begun. Strangers are rare in Glen Bogie—an occasional angler, a party of shooters in the season—and they seldom come within a mile or two of Achnadamp. The Glen receives an abundant rainfall, the climate generally is mild and relaxing, but in spite of their remoteness the inhabitants on their crofts are probably as happily contented as any of us in these uncertain, troublous times.

The arrival of the two-seater was, of course, an event. Work on the nearer crofts and in the cottages thereon was suspended. A straggling procession began to move up the track to meet the daring motorist, who came down cautiously and at intervals stopped—apparently looking for a space in which to turn safely.

Observing the procession, he drew up and waited. Then, as it drew near, he got out, stretched himself, lighted a cigarette, and surveyed the scene, very wild yet lovely. It was one of those perfect summer days on which the visitor to the West Highlands can almost forgive and forget a week of the worst possible weather. In his rough Harris tweeds, with his
sunburnt countenance and greying hair, the motorist presented a thick-set, sturdy figure. His jaw was square, his mouth humorous.

"He will be a tourist," remarked one of the two men who led the procession—Roderick MacDonald, a wiry, middle-aged person, with a heavy black moustache, which gave him a sinister look, and a three days' growth on his chin.

"Then it will be no good news for any of us here," said his companion—Alan MacDonald, an old man with a white beard; "Alexander MacDonald was saying it might be somebody to tell him that his wealthy uncle had at long last passed away."

It may be mentioned here that most of the inhabitants of Achnadamph were MacDonalds. The old man spoke in his native tongue, but the first speaker used the English. Roderick MacDonald was not as his neighbours were. Once he had gone abroad to make his fortune. At the end of five years he had returned, without any evidence of having done so, yet with a certain air of superiority. Whenever possible he used the English, including words which impressed, when they did not puzzle and annoy, his neighbours. Among other things he declared himself an abstainer, and missed no opportunity of dwelling on the evils of alcohol in any form, especially that of whisky. His neighbours resented this, which was natural enough, considering that their indulgence in alcohol was perforce limited to the occasions of weddings and funerals, neither of which took place in the Glen once in four years.

His neighbours resented other things—a good many other things—but Roderick, with his superior knowledge of the world, was too much for their simpler minds. He had not been six months home when he became the dominating personality in Achnadamph.

"Now," he said, as he and the patriarch, without the authority of one, approached the stranger, "I will be spokesman. You do not need to be opening your mouth at all."

"For why should I not be speaking to the gentleman?" said Alan, in feeble protest. "Am I not the oldest man in this place?"
"It is an honourable thing to be the oldest man," was the reply, "but it is more seemly to hold your tongue when you have not got the good English."

"I have plenty of the good English to speak to a gentleman. Have I not spoke to Sir Andrew——?"

"Do not be letting your pride go before a fall! I can see from his stockings, which are of a tartan not of the earth nor of the heavens above, that the gentleman is a Sassenach, who would not understand you, and it would be a great pity to affront yourself and the population of Achnadamph before him. I will be spokesman."

By this time "the population" was close behind, and suddenly Roderick turned about and held up his hand, saying:

"Do not come any nearer, or you will be incommodating and obstreperating the gentleman to your great shame afterwards. I will be spokesman."

Turning again, he advanced towards the stranger, followed closely, however, by Alan, and, more gradually, by the others, men, women, and two small children.

"Good morning, sir," he said pleasantly. "Were you taking the wrong road with your car?"

"Good morning! Not exactly," the stranger said. "I wanted to have a look at the Glen, though I dare say I should have done without had I known what the road was like. Still, it's worth the trouble. That's a glorious mountain you have! Ben Bogie, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," old Alan made haste to say. "It is a very good mountain."

"An excellent mountain!" said Roderick, giving him a nudge.

"The view from the top must be wonderful."

"It will be a very good view, sir," said Alan.

"A most superior view!" corrected Roderick. "I am sure it will be a superior view, sir."

"What!" cried the stranger. "Never been up?"

"Nobody here," Roderick replied with dignity, "has ever been up. We are all far too busy with our crofts for such frivolous pleasures."

"My grandfather," old Alan put in, "was once going up to the very top, and was seeing Inverness and Glasgow and America."
“America! Some eyesight!” exclaimed the stranger, laughing.

This time the nudge was almost painful. “Can you not be holding your tongue!” muttered Roderick; and aloud: “Be pleased to excuse him, sir. He is as ignorant as a very child about geography and other obscene matters. But, you see, it would not be natural for any of us to be taking the great trouble of going up yon hill. We are not shepherds or deer-stalkers, and our cattle are never crossing the river yonder; so we are not crossing, either, and you have to be crossing to get to the foot of Ben Bogie. It would be just foolishness to be going away up in the air, and maybe the clouds, for nothing at all—no remuneration whatsoever.”

“Well, it’s no affair of mine,” the stranger remarked, now disposed to believe all the untruths he had heard concerning the laziness of the West Highland people, “but I must say I’m surprised at a hardy set of men like you.”

“My grandfather was a very hardy——”

Old Alan’s speech was cut short by a dunt in the ribs that sent most of the breath from his body.

“Well, now,” said the stranger, “perhaps you will kindly tell me of a place where I can turn my car.”

“With great pleasure! If you will go carefully round yon big rock at the corner, you will come to plenty of room in front of Alan MacDonald’s byre, which is a perfect disgrace to Achnadamph. I will now go in front to directify you.”

Presently the car was going slowly down a steep stretch, followed by “the population,” including old Alan, who must have burst with his indignation had not some of it escaped in gusts of Gaelic. Most of the hearers were sympathetic enough, though they could offer neither comfort nor encouragement. At one time or another every one of them had experienced a similar emotion. But what could they do? What could anybody do with a man like Roderick, whose flow of fine English simply drowned opposition before it could raise its head?

On reaching the grassy space between old Alan’s cottage and byre, the stranger lost no time in turning. Observing a little boy and girl in the group of onlookers, he beckoned them over, and gave each a florin, bidding them grow big and strong and climb Ben Bogie. Possibly they did not understand what he was saying, but in any case the sight of the
silver would have stricken them dumb. Their astounded
countenances revealed their gratification.

With a word of thanks to Roderick and another to Alan,
congratulating him on his distinguished ancestor, which
the old man took seriously and gratefully, the stranger started
the car and was presently grinding up the hill—and chuckling
at an idea which had just struck him.

No doubt Achnadamph would have forgotten the event
—within the coming year or so—but on the very next morning
the car was again observed bumping down the hill. By the
time it stopped at the grassy space, most of “the population”
had gathered there.

This time the stranger was not alone. He had a pas-
senger in the shape of a tall, hefty gillie. Both alighted,
and it was observed that they were carrying staves and wearing
stout climbing boots.

“We are going to take the long way up Ben Bogie,” the
stranger announced, and turned to old Alan. “May I leave
my car here?”

“Certainly, by all means, with great pleasure,” came the
reply—from Roderick. “It will be quite safe here, sir, and I
will be taking every care of it.”

The stranger proceeded to make some small preparations.
Producing a knapsack, he fitted it upon the gillie’s shoulders;
into it he packed two sandwich tins, a couple of lemons, and
a pair of thermos flasks. Then from the car he brought a
parcel, whose shape to the innocent eye would have sug-
gested a bar of common soap. For reasons best known to
himself he opened it, and took out the contents.

A murmur went through “the population.” A bottle of
whisky—a whole bottle of “Long Tom—the Dew of Glen
Bogie.”

“I’m no judge,” he said to Alan, who was at his side.
“Do you happen to know if ‘Long Tom’ is good stuff?”

“Oh, Cod!” the old man fervently sighed. “It is the
very best! I once had a cousin with a bottle of it, and he
was giving me a dram—just like cream!”

“I was once at a wedding,” said a small man, Alexander
MacDonald, “where there was a bottle or two of ‘Long Tom’;
it was the noblest wedding I ever saw; but that was in the
good old days when the price was only three-and-six, and
other common whisky was only three shillings. And now it is twelve-and-six—tarnn the Government!"

"Behave yourself, Alexander, and you, too, Alan!" said the stern voice of Roderick.

"What do you say about it?" asked the stranger.

"In my young and balmy days," Roderick replied, "I would have said that 'Long Tom' was the king of all the whiskies, but I have been an abstainer from all intoxicating fluids for a thousand—I mean seven years, and now I am saying it is a deplorable and deleterious beeverage!"

"Really!" said the stranger, restraining his amusement, and proceeded to repack the bottle, after which he placed it in the knapsack, and fastened the straps. "Well, shall we start, Donald?"

The gillie, who had been surveying the country, asked a few questions of the men about him, received their answers, and declared himself read.

With a friendly wave and a "See you in the evening, sometime," the stranger moved off.

For a long time they watched the pair going up the Glen, on the other side of the river, and little or no work was done in Achnadamph that day.

"They will have a glorious time on the top," little Alexander MacDonald mournfully remarked. "I hope they will bring back the empty bottle. I will be offering the gentleman a penny for it. A snuff of it would be better than nothing. Oh, yes," he added in response to several requests, "if I get it, you will all get a wee snuff. I am not greedy."

"It would be a terrible thing," quoth old Alan, in the Gaelic, of course, "if they were leaving the bottle empty on the top, for the next climber to behold. Oh, what a sorrowful sight—enough to make a man's heart bleed!"

"If you were not an aged buffoon, Alan MacDonald, and not long for this world," said Roderick, "I would be making your nose to bleed. What an example to these women of weak intellects and the children of tender years. You ought to be black ashamed of yourself, and you, too, Alexander, and all of you! Now I will be putting up a silent prayer that the bottle may fall from the gentleman's hands and be dashed into a thousand hundred pieces!"

In the early dusk the mountaineers returned.
"A fairly stiff climb, but we took it pretty easy," the stranger reported. "The view was magnificent. If I had my way, you'd all be on the top to-morrow, gazing at the glorious country you don't deserve to belong to!"

"Excuse me, sir," said little Alexander very respectfully, "but were you bringing back the empty bottle of 'Long Tom'?

The stranger smiled. "Why, no! The bottle is safe on the top of Ben Bogie."

"Empty?" came the groan from several breasts.

"Full!" was the astounding answer. "Full and unopened! Donald and I did not want any whisky, so we left it there—in case, one of these days, some of you might take a notion for the view."

"Cod preserve us!" wailed old Alan. "A bottle of 'Long Tom' on Ben Bogie! My grief, but my aged legs would never get there!"

The stranger gave him a kind look. "Never mind!" he murmured, and turned to the others. "I will tell you just where I put it. The top is pretty rough, and there are four big rocks almost in a straight line from north to south. Under the third rock, going south, in a hollow, lies the bottle of 'Long Tom.'" He looked at his watch. "Get on board, Donald. Sorry, friends, my holiday is at its end, but I shall hope to run down and see you all next summer. Good-bye!"

To the old man he said: "Thanks for letting me park the car here"—and slipped something into his hand; then got on board and started the engine.

A minute later old Alan was exhibiting to his wife a pound note, while Roderick, who seemingly did not apply his temperance principles to his language, declaimed:

"And after all I was doing for him! He is surely a —— bad egg in a —— tourist's clothing!"

That night many eyes watched Ben Bogie as it faded into the darkness.

Next morning the adult males of Achnadamphe rose earlier than usual—all except old Alan. Each hoped he was the earliest. Little Alexander MacDonald even flattered himself that he was. He had just started to go down the moor towards the river when he was hailed by Roderick.
“Alexander MacDonald, where are you off to this fine morning?”

In some confusion Alexander replied: “I got up too early by mistake, and was just for taking a wee walk before my porridge.”

“Then I will be taking a wee walk with you. And yonder is Hector MacDonald coming out of his house—and Angus, too! How early we all are this morning, to be sure!”

The idea of stealing a march was thus nipped in the bud. It is true that in the dead of night Alexander again set out, but he had not gone a mile when old legends of the water-kelpie and other horrors in the hollows over yonder got the better of his courage, so that he turned shuddering and came home with all speed.

But something had to be done. Ben Bogie, except when shrouded in mist, which was not seldom, was become a thing that mocked. One evening there was a meeting in Alan MacDonald’s house, convened by the old man himself. The five other adults—Roderick had not been invited—were there.

“I am feeling very sorry for you all,” said Alan, “and I have been making a plan for your great satisfaction. I am not wishing anything for my trouble, for the gentleman was very kind to me, and now I can be getting a bottle of ‘Long Tom’ for myself when I like. Indeed, I am ready to pay a little to help you.”

“What is the plan, Alan?” respectfully asked little Alexander MacDonald.

“It is quite simple. You have only to get Roderick MacDonald to go up Ben Bogie and fetch for you the bottle of ‘Long Tom.’”

They gazed at him in dismay—horrified dismay.

“No, I am not mad,” said Alan. “You think he will not do it, but I think he will—if you make it worth his while. Roderick is a greedy man. He is very fond of money. He is fonder of money than of temperance. Now listen! I will give two shillings, and if you will give sixpence each, I believe he will be satisfied and do what you ask.”

Alan paused to reflect, then continued: “Yes, he will do it! Mind, I am not asking for any of the whisky. Maybe you think two glasses each is not very much, but it is a good dram for sixpence.”
“And so it is,” agreed Alexander, “especially when it is ‘Long Tom’! A very good dram!”

There were murmurs of agreement.

“Well, now, here is the two shillings, Alexander. Do not tell him you got it from me. Say nothing about me at all. Go and see him now, and let me know secretly what he says.”

They went to Roderick MacDonald. At first he was vastly indignant, declared himself to be grossly insulted, and confounded them with avalanches of English, full of huge words that stunned their intelligence. Afterwards, however, he cooled down. In haughty tones he said:

“After all, it is very likely superfluously hopeless for me to think of converting you from your vile habits of dissolution; and I would not like to have some nice young tourist going up Ben Bogie, and finding the bottle, and becoming a dipsolunatic on the spot, and for evermore! But you will have to pay me more for my trouble and all the perils and dangers, and so forth.”

Followed twenty minutes of haggling, at the end of which he had screwed up the joint fee to six shillings.

“Furthermore,” he went on, “I must have the money in advance. I might have an accident on the mountain; I might fall down a precipice; and the money would not half pay for the cuts and bruises and the general debility.”

“But if the bottle is getting broken when you fall?” ventured little Alexander.

“I am an honourable man. I will take every care of the disreputable bottle. But I am running a risk, and so must you. Give me the money now, and I will start at nine o’clock to-morrow morning, if the weather is fine and clear.”

Ultimately they gave him the money, and went to their homes to spend restless nights, wondering about the weather.

The morning broke fine; by eight o’clock a beautiful day appeared certain. In good time they gathered at Roderick’s house, each carrying a wrapping of some sort to be used for protecting the precious bottle.

“I will never get to the top if I inaccommodate myself with all these things,” said Roderick, and chose an old muffler and two yards of string.
He was a man of his word. At nine he set out, with pockets full of food, and a large flask of cold tea, followed by the fervent wishes of the subscribers, also their admonitions as to shielding the bottle if he felt himself about to fall.

It was a long, long day. Work went on as usual in the homes, for the good wives were not particularly interested in this mountaineer, though they were cross enough with their men; but very little was done on the crofts. It was a long evening, too; it passed without sign of Roderick. According to arrangement, they were not to go to meet him, but to await him outside his house.

"I am very much afraid," said little Alexander, for the tenth time, voicing the fears of the others, "that there has been a serious accident to 'Long Tom.'"

The dusk deepened. In the depths of the glen it was so murky that they could not have detected any movement there. And they were almost startled when Roderick suddenly appeared in the gloom, coming up from the river.

He approached wearily, slowly, on faltering feet. They did not hail him, but a sigh of relief went up when they perceived that one of his pockets was bulging.

"It is all right," whispered someone; "it is safe in the muffler—Cod bless it! He has not done so badly after all."

He reached his home and in the little porch turned and faced them, and spoke.

"I am quite exhausted. It was a beautiful view, but the climb up was most obnoxious. I was so tired I had to take a sleep on the top. But it was a most obnoxious view, though the climb up was——"

"You can tell us all about it in the morning," Alexander interrupted. "We do not wish to keep you from your bed, so give us the 'Long Tom,' which you have brought home so safe and sound to its true and rightful owners."

Roderick's hand went to his pocket and brought out the bundle. Unwinding the old muffler, he disclosed his tea-flask. He let flask and muffler fall at his feet. He leaned his back heavily against the door and, before anyone could speak said:

"It was not worth while to bring home the bottle that long, long way. You will all be greatly benefishialized without the 'Long Tom.'"

Murmurs rose.
“Where,” demanded Alexander, “is the bottle?”
“I fell.”
There was a shocked silence till Alexander further demanded:
“Where are the cuts and bruises?”
Roderick made a grand effort to remain dignified.
“I fell,” he said slowly and rather thickly, “but it was not a vulgar, corpuscular fall. I fell—metaphysically.”
Naturally enough, they did not follow him, and for the moment they stood dumb.
From his trousers-pocket he brought something in his closed hand.
“It would have been all right if it had been a cork, for, of course, I had no corkscrew;” he said. “This thing was invented by the devil.” He opened his hand.
Alexander struck a match. The flame glinted on a patent screw-top.
At that moment his wife opened the door and he tumbled in—which was probably the best thing he could have done in the circumstances.

But old Alan MacDonald was the pleased and happy man.
“It was well worth the two shillings! Now, Mary,” he said to his wife, “there will be no more crowing from that one, and once more I will be the first man in Glen Bogie!”
And it was so.
THE GREAT MAMMOTH STORY

STELLA GIBBONS
Stella Gibbons left University College, London, to be secretary to the editor of a London evening paper. She has contributed verse and short stories to various journals and jumped into prominence with *Cold Comfort Farm*, a hilarious burlesque of the "back-to-the-soil" novels. Among her later books, previous to *Miss Linsey and Pa*, are *Basset* and *The Untidy Gnome*—the latter a fairy story in the old tradition.
THE GREAT MAMMOTH STORY

"And don't make the mistake of thinkin' your Dad's money and his being an M.P. means anything to Cosmos Publicity, Mr. Field. Once you step inside this building of a morning, you're an employee of this firm, and nothing more."

There was a pause, while the departmental manager turned his attention angrily to the ringing telephone.

Claude Field sat staring at the tip of his shoe and swinging it gently to and fro, exactly as he had sat since Mr. Sprott began to talk ten minutes ago.

He did not resent this dressing-down; he admitted that he was indolent, inefficient and unpunctual. But he was also bored; a state of mind unknown to the personnel which laboured to make Cosmos Publicity, Limited, even larger, richer and more public than it already was.

"Ants, my dear soul, positive ants," was how he had described the staff of Cosmos Publicity, to a younger sister on his return from his first day there. All toiling and moiling (whatever moiling may be) and laying up hay for the rainy day and all the rest of it. Very exhausting. I'm not at all sure that I shall be able to cope."

His prophecy was fulfilled. After six months with the firm, Claude was invited to see Mr. Sprott in his office.

The receiver was slammed angrily down.

"... and it all reflects on the firm, Mr. Field," resumed Mr. Sprott, turning on Claude a long North-country face bitter as an east wind. "You may think that your duties are slight, and so they are, but the life of a machine Mr. Field, is dependent upon the efficiency of the smallest cog in that machine, and details are important... as you may one day learn. I take a serious view of this matter. I am warning you, Mr. Field. This is not the first time, I believe, that you have received a hint that Cosmos is dissatisfied with your work. Unless you can make a drastic
change in your methods, Cosmos has no further use for you."

He leant forward, his forefinger on a bell push and looked full with his frosty eyes into Claude’s mild young face.

“Oh I say, sir,” protested Claude, as he stood up, “that’s a bit thick, isn’t it? I mean to say . . . well, the trouble is, you know, I’m not cut out for routine work. I’d much sooner have a stab at the creative side of the business; copy-writting and thinking up stunts and all that. I feel sure I could do that sort of thing, you know. More scope and all that.”

Mr. Sprott smiled bitterly as his secretary entered with her notebook.

“It won’t do, Mr. Field,” was his last word. “Stunts, as you call them, and copy-writting need Flair. They aren’t everybody’s work. Learn to be punctual, and write a good business letter, and talk sense on the telephone; that’ll be enough to keep you busy for the next year or so. Good morning. Miss Bruce, take a letter, please.

He leant back as Claude shut the door and began to dictate in an absent-minded snarl.

Claude wandered along the corridor to his own little office, kicked the door open, and went moodily in. He looked out of place among the chromium and pale wood of the fierce modernist furniture, for he had the long narrow head of an eighteenth-century portrait, and he seemed half asleep. His light suit, tea-coloured hair and pale face suggested neither efficiency nor a desire to Get On.

Among his letters was one from a firm of breakfast-food manufacturers, with their trademark stamped at the head of the paper. It was at this that Claude sat staring for nearly half an hour, while his cigarette burned peacefully to ash on the rim of the tray.

* The preparations for the General Election, which began some three weeks later, increased the conversation between those who frequented the Rest in Peace, near Hurling Gap, in Sussex, but did not increase their number. It was a quiet little pub, visited by the same moderate drinkers year in and year out; and Miss Clipper, the landlady’s niece and barmaid, often threatened to go off and get a job at Brightbourne, a large and noisy seaside town some eight miles away.
This evening the bar was quiet as usual. It was getting on for seven o’clock. A clear May twilight covered the Downs. Mr. Rose had been in for his glass and gone out again. Now there was a lull until eight o’clock or so, when the men would begin to drift in after their suppers.

Miss Clipper leant her elbows upon the bar, and sighed. Nothing ever ’appens, reflected Miss Clipper. Not what you might call anything, that is. She glanced at the faded face of an old clock which ticked loudly in a corner, sighed again, and took a duster and began flicking spitefully among the bottles.

It was precisely as Miss Clipper began to flick that she heard an unusual noise outside.

Someone was running down the chalk road which led up to Hurling Down.

Miss Clipper heard the footsteps coming nearer and nearer. She glanced at the dark rim of the mighty Down, which she could see against the yellow sky through the window of the Rest in Peace. It’s them kids of Dowler’s, thought Miss Clipper, flicking. Ought to be in bed.

Suddenly the monotony of which Miss Clipper complained was broken.

The door flew open.

An old man staggered in, waving his arms above his head, and collapsed across the bar, choking.

“Brandy, me dear, brandy,” he gasped. “I run all the way from the Gap and I’m near dead. I see an elephant—oh, my dear heart, I see a great hairy elephant nigh as big as a house and I run all the way and I’m near dead.”

Miss Clipper drew herself virtuously away from the old man.

“Mr. Mitson,” said Miss Clipper, “I’m surprised at you, that I am. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Where’ve you been? That nasty Red Lion, I suppose; bad beer and worse company. Elephants, indeed!”

Her homily ended in a shriek. Mr. Mitson had gained a point by fainting.

“What’s all this?” demanded Mrs. Wilson, landlady of the Rest in Peace, sailing into the bar. “What elephants?”

“Mr. Mitson’s dead,” announced Miss Clipper, pointing.

“Nonsense,” said Mrs. Wilson. “He’s only fainted. Here, Nellie, get some brandy, and be quick about it.”
At the fiery touch of the brandy, shudderingly administered by Miss Clipper while Mrs. Wilson supported him, Mr. Mitson recovered enough to sit up and drain the glass, not without a glance of triumph at the barmaid.

"Now, Mr. Mitson, just you tell us all about it," said Mrs. Wilson comfortably. "You were in a state, weren't you. Have a drop more—well, perhaps, sherry 'ud be better this time. Nellie, get Mr. Mitson a small sherry."

A pause. The sherry was drunk, and Mr. Mitson began to breathe more calmly. He wiped his forehead with a trembling hand and glanced from one concerned face to the other. Miss Clipper still looked a little indignant, but Mrs. Wilson was plainly all agog.

"Well, Mrs. Wilson, me dear, and you, miss," began Mr. Mitson, "I was coming home along from a day's work up at New Hurling in Major Fortescue's garden, rolling his lawn and doing a bit o' pruning and I see an elephant."

He paused, and nodded. The expressions on two faces looking down at him changed a little.

"I see an elephant," repeated Mr. Mitson, more loudly.

"Just as I were coming up by Long Barrow Wood. A great elephant he were, true as I lie here, all over long black hair and he had great big tusks and a trunk as long as this bar, Mrs. Wilson, me dear. And when I see him a standing there, waving his trunk and as big as a house, I were fair horrified and I run all the way down from Hurling Gap wi'out stopping and here I be."

Mrs. Wilson shook her head.

"Now, now, Danny Mitson! Remember you and me have known each other since I was so-high. Don't you come into the Rest in Peace with tales like that. You and your hairy elephants! Liken it was a cow."

"It were an elephant," repeated Mr. Mitson obstinately. "Mind you, I don't say as it were a real elephant. Maybe it were a ghost-elephant out of Long Barrow where all them old heathen soldiers is buried. Come to think of it, 'e glided along like a ghost. But I saw him, plain as your hand."

Mrs. Wilson and Miss Clipper exchanged glances, which said, "Poor old man, his wits are failing at last. We must humour him."

"Well, he can't get you now, whatever he was," said Mrs.
Wilson soothingly. "You just sit by the fire and rest a bit, and when Jim Wykes comes in, you can go along home with him. Just you take it easy, now."

She rose from her kneeling position beside the old man, and was holding out her hand playfully to help him rise from the floor, when a gasp from Miss Clipper made her look round.

"Look!" whispered Miss Clipper.

Three pairs of eyes turned towards the long ridge of Hurling Down, black against the fading light, which could be seen through the window.

A vast shaggy shape, enormous even at that distance, passed leisurely across the skyline, swinging a great trunk!

It disappeared beyond the edge of the window; and there was an intense stillness.

Mr. Mitson broke it.

"I told yer so," nodded Mr. Mitson complacently.

"Hooper," said the news editor of the *Morning Star* in the reporters' room of that paper, a week later, "take a run down to Sussex and see if there's anything in this Mammoth story, will you? Don't handle it too seriously, of course. Strike the 'Silly Sussex' note ... but don't strike it too hard or we shall get let in for a long correspondence with that old ass Sir John Field. He's a nasty customer when he's roused, and he loves Sussex like a father. He's a cert for Brightbourne, too; they've returned him for the last ten years. Don't do too much; half a column at the most. See how it works out."

Hooper, sceptical, but fond, of fresh air and looking forward to a day in the country, ran into his young friend Claude Field while he was starting up his car.

"How's Cosmos?" asked Hooper.

Claude shook his head. He was not unlike a fish, decided Hooper, except that fishes had more spine and were not all so elaborately dressed.

"Very irksome. I envy you, Hooper. You do see life, anyway. Where are you beetling off to?"

"Mammoth-chasing," grinned Hooper. "Our correspondent at Brightbourne has sent in a yarn about some local worthies seeing a hairy elephant on the Downs. Marvellous what beer can do, aided by imagination."
Claude looked at him pensively.

"I wonder, Hooper? The Downs are jolly ancient, you know, and all that. Prehistoric and what-not. I shouldn’t be at all surprised if there’s something in it."

"I should," said Hooper, driving away. "Very."

So it happened that Hooper was responsible for the Great Mammoth Story, which burst over England on the following morning and drove the General Election News off the front page for nearly a fortnight.

Hooper saw the Mammoth.

At least, he saw something more like a mammoth than anything he had ever seen before; a huge dark shape moving across a twilight valley half a mile away, its trunk rooting among the fresh shoots of the furze bushes. He stood on the hillside, staring down into the dusk, suddenly very aware how vast and lonely were the hills rolling on all sides, and how empty the darkening sky.

Suddenly the thing disappeared.

He realized that he was staring at a dark patch of bushes. The moving shape had apparently sunk into the earth.

Hooper hesitated, standing on the hillside and gazing doubtfully down into the dim valley. He knew that he ought to go down there and have a look round. It was his duty, as a newspaper man, to trail the mammoth to its lair and secure the biggest scoop in history. But he did not go, because he was afraid; and he did not mind confessing as much to the scoffing news editor of the Morning Star later.

There was a contrast between that bulk, and its stealthy gliding movement which was so strong as to be horrible.

There should have been the noise of tearing undergrowth and cracking branches to accompany the monstrous size of the brute, but there had not been a sound. Like a ghost, thought Hooper, staring down into the valley. It moved like a ghost.

The Morning Star splashed his story on the front page with a photograph of a different Sussex valley, explaining that this was the type of country where the Mammoth had been seen.

By the afternoon the evening papers were on the trail, and the Rest in Peace had sold out of gin.

The Morning Star was fond of speculating in its columns about probable conditions in the next world; and it took
the Mammoth story from a supernatural angle. It pointed out in a brightly-written leader that mammoths had at one time roamed England from Scotland to Cornwall. There was scarcely a county in England which might not contain their fossilized remains (it was safe to say this, as anyone who wrote in to say that there were no fossilized mammoths in their part of the world could be floored by telling them that their part of the world was one of the few counties were there were no fossilized mammoths). The article ended on a pious "Who knows?" note. The leader writer refrained from quoting Hamlet but afterwards inserted the quotation on a hint from the editor.

This leader brought a letter from Professor Pinchell Wainflethe, F.Z.S., B.Sc., Ph.D.

"I cannot say that I am surprised at the nature of the article in your paper," wrote the Professor. "I ceased some years ago to be surprised at the nature of any item printed by the daily Press. But I must confess that your leader has revealed to me depths which I had hitherto not suspected. I marvel, sir. I stand like a little child, and I marvel. Of all the barbarous, inaccurate, mischievous and positively harmful . . ." etc.

The President of the Spiritists Society, invited by telephone to say what he thought about Professor Wainflethe's letter, coughed up handsomely by calling the Professor an old-fashioned materialist. He quoted Sir James Jeans. He also suggested that the Mammoth might be an emanation or earth-bound herd-spirit, given off by some part of the Downs where huge herds of Mammoths had once grazed.

"I don't care if it's Cary Cooper in disguise," crooned the news editor of the Morning Star. "This is the best story since that chap killed his wife with a pencil-sharpener."

The Mammoth Story rioted over the front pages of the Press for a fortnight; even The Times gave it eight lines at the bottom of a column and a veiled reference in a third leader.

It would not be true to say that people talked about nothing else; but they certainly talked about it a great deal. Society hostesses gave Mammoth Luncheons. Comedians made jokes about it. Mammoth hunting parties were organized and Carr, the famous barman at the Sheridan, invented a new cocktail which he called Tusker.
But Hooper was not satisfied.
He was the only other man in England who had seen the Mammoth; and therefore he was the only man who believed that it was real. Mr. Mitson agreed with the President of the Spiritists Society in believing it to be a ghost. As for Mrs. Wilson and Miss Clipper, they were dismissed as hysterical females who probably imagined things.

Mr. Mitson and Hooper had many a long talk about the Mammoth. Hooper was still down in Sussex, covering the story from that end, and he spent his evenings in the bar of the Rest in Peace.

Mr. Mitson took the Mammoth very seriously indeed. He had temporarily retired on the money earned by two articles signed by himself and entitled: “When I saw the Mammoth” and “The Mammoth: What it Means.” These had been judiciously sub-edited by Hooper.

“The Mammoth: What it Means” had been a bit difficult to do because, if the matter were looked squarely in the face, the Mammoth did not seem to mean anything in particular except better trade for the cottages near Hurling which sold teas to motorists. But Hooper had a chat with the President of the Spiritists Society and spent one afternoon in the Natural History Museum and another in the reading-room of the British Museum library; and then turned out an article in a pure yet racy style which was, as even the news editor had to admit, “pure Mitson in his later, and better, manner.”

But Hooper was puzzled.
He compared notes with Mr. Mitson, and they agreed that it was queer that the Mammoth should restrict his appearances to the hour of dusk.

“Almost as though he didn’t want to be seen,” mused Mr. Mitson, who now assumed the airs of a connoisseur in mammoths. “Funny kind of a walk he’s got, too. Kind of a glide. Not ‘uman, if you come to think of it. But then, come to think of it again, that’s only natural.”

“Why?” demanded Miss Clipper, polishing a glass.

“Because he ain’t human,” said Mr. Mitson triumphantly.

“Well if you ask me I think its someone playing a joke,” said Mrs. Wilson.

No one took any notice of this.
Three nights later two young men, driving home across
the Downs after a party in Seacove, saw the Mammoth by bright moonlight, "tossing its trunk in the air as though it were playing." They telephoned the Morning Star just as the paper was going to bed, and the front page lay-out had to be altered. The General Election news was huddled into a corner. England awoke to read of "Mammoth At Play on the Downs by Moonlight." In the lunch edition of the evening papers this had changed to "Mammoths Moonlight Gambol on Downs."

But Hooper, lounging in the bar of the Rest in Peace, was shaking his head. The Mammoth Story had gone just a little too far. Hooper smelt a rat, and fancied he knew its name.

He was studying a paragraph from a London paper's gossip column which stated that Sir Sam Range, the famous big game-hunter, had taken Hurling House near Mammoth Wood (as Long Barrow Wood was now called) for the season.

"Is this mighty hunter hoping to get a pot at the Mammoth?" archly demanded the gossip-writer.

Hooper slipped the cutting into his pocket-book, and glanced out through the window at the slowly darkening sky.

"A perfect Mammoth evening," thought Hooper. "I think I'll run up and see Sir Sam about the possibilities of a mammoth-shooting season on the South Downs."

But when Hooper arrived at Hurling House he was not pleased to find a fellow-newspaperman, Jorrocks of the Comet, standing at the gate, silently listening to Sir Sam Range giving instructions to a couple of game-keepers who carried rifles. Sir Sam was armed with a heavier type of gun.

He glanced round as Hooper approached, and made a brief sign of welcome. He knew the reporter fairly well, who was himself a fair shot, as Hooper had interviewed him several times.

Hooper looked coldly at Jorrocks.

"We're going mammoth-hunting," murmured Jorrocks. "All of us. I came up here on the trail of that paragraph in the Clarion and walked into this peach of a story. Hooper ... when I think that if I had been half an hour later I should have missed it, I almost believe in God."
Hooper looked at him with distaste, and asked where they were to begin the search for their quarry?

"By Long Barrow Wood, I understand, where old Mitson first saw the brute . . . or thought he did. Oh, beg pardon, you saw it too, of course, didn't you? Sir Sam and the keepers are going to fire at sight. And if we don't see anything to-night we're coming out every night until we do see something."

"Will he mind the publicity?"

"He'll eat it. And think of the kudos for him if he shoots the first mammoth on English soil."

Hooper studied Jorrocks in silence, then shook his head.

"If you're not careful," he said kindly, "you'll find yourself seeing the Mammoth, too."

The light had almost gone by the time the little party reached Long Barrow Wood. They approached Long Barrow itself from the wood side, so that the great mound was visible against the skyline between the trunks of the trees.

"If he's anywhere, he's about here somewhere," breathed Sir Sam as they cautiously entered the wood, "and this is the time to get him. The light couldn't be worse for shooting, of course, but he's big enough to hit at a mile if the stories are true."

They paused among the last thin barrier of trees before the wood ended, full in face of Long Barrow itself.

"Now we'll lie down," whispered Sir Sam, "and wait. There's nothing else to be done. The odds are a million to one against our seeing anything, of course. Still, now we're here, we may as well stay."

Contempt, scepticism and excitement were oddly mixed in his low, grumbling tones. He settled himself among the undergrowth with the noiselessness of an old hunter, and the other men did the same.

They had been waiting perhaps three quarters of an hour, and Hooper was beginning to feel that he must smoke or shriek, when Jorrocks put out his hand stealthily and touched Sir Sam's arm.

Against the shadows, no more than a deepening of their darkness, another shadow was nearing up, between the watchers and the Long Barrow!
It was an enormous bulk, moving with a peculiar gliding motion.

There was not a sound. Not a leaf stirred.

Jorrocks felt the hair rising on his scalp as the enormous shadow began to move slowly up Long Barrow towards the skyline, and he saw a long trunk swaying before it, and the glimmer of its tusks.

Sir Sam was shaking with excitement. He wormed his way forward, followed by the others, until they left the trees behind them and were advancing over the turf towards the Barrow, towering black and ominous against the sky.

But Hooper, who was the least moved of the party, was listening hard as they advanced to catch a peculiar intermittent creaking noise which seemed to come from the direction of the mighty shadow.

It was exactly like the whine of an unoiled wheel.

And surely there was a peculiar stiffness about the lower part of the brute’s body? The legs scarcely seemed to move; the bulk jerked, rather than glided, over the ground.

It was now towering on the twilight skyline scarcely fifty feet away.

Hooper’s reflections were cut short by the splitting report of Sir Sam’s rifle, followed, before the echoes had stopped tearing through the wood, by a second and a third.

“Fire, you fools, fire!” yelled Sir Sam, running forward (with insane courage, considering the situation) and the keepers, scarcely stopping to take aim, obeyed.

If the Mammoth doesn’t get us the keepers will, thought Hooper, dodging a bullet.

Then he saw an amazing sight.

The upper part of the Mammoth’s body was shrinking!

Even as they advanced, encouraged by the curious stillness of that enormous shape, the great body collapsed between the pedestals of the legs with a long, sustained whistling sound like that made by escaping air.

“Fooled I!” exclaimed Sir Sam grimly, and his torch flashed over the legs of painted canvas mounted on collapsible wire hoops, mounted on a wheeled stand. Between them sagged the body of black balloon silk, hung with coarse black hair.

“The biggest practical joke of the century, by gad! Look—” he smartly struck one of the legs with the butt of
his gun, "they collapse at a touch. You could pack the thing into a side-car."

But Hooper had seen something else—the figures of two men running like hares across the dim turf towards the Hurling road, and with a shout he set off in pursuit, followed by the two keepers.

"Take a look at this, will you?" demanded Sir Sam, pursuing investigations with his torch.

"This" was a placard slung across the Mammoth's shapeless forehead.

"EAT MAMMOTH WHEATNUTS AND VOTE FOR SIR JOHN FIELD."

And across the bottom of the placard:

"This is a Cosmos Advertisement."

Hooper, after a fierce chase and a battle, found himself sitting on the chest of his young friend Claude Field.

"You great fool, it's me," said Claude coldly. "Let me get up, can't you."

"I thought as much," said Hooper. "As soon as you and young Brabazon sent in that pretty tale about the Mammoth playing ball by moonlight, I began to wonder."

"Get off my bosom, you big piece of cheese, and I'll tell you all about it."

There was not much to tell. The Great Mammoth Story was rapidly dwindling into prose: and the story of how young Claude revived the Edwardian mania for practical joking on a Homeric scale, and won his small but secure place in the records of the social historians is another story, spread over many years.

"Brabazon and I made Belisha (that's his name) in Brabazon's studio in Brightbourne. It was quite easy for us to slip out in the evening in the car, wait till it got dark, and then blow Belisha up. He was as easy to pull along as a toy motor-car; you just got behind one of his legs and hauled away. It was child's play. Honestly, I never thought it would go down half as well as it has."

He paused. They were strolling back towards the forlorn, deflated mass of silk and hair that was Belisha.
Brabazon had escaped the keepers, and driven off in Claude’s car.

“You see,” pursued Claude, “I was tired of being told at Cosmos that I couldn’t think up stunts. I hope this will show the people there that I’m not cut out for routine.”

He paused again. When he spoke again his tone was a little less complacent.

“It’s just father I’m thinking about, as a matter of fact. He may think it an undignified way of securing votes.”

He sighed.

“Older people are so amazingly rabid about their dignity, aren’t they? Oh well . . . it was a good stunt, though I says it as shouldn’t.”

And thus ended the Great Mammoth Story.
HOMING JANE

BEN TRAVERS
Ben Travers is the author of many novels and short stories, but the field in which he has won an international reputation is in drama of the lighter kind. He wrote those famous Aldwych plays A Cuckoo in the Nest, Rookery Nook, and many others which have had long runs.
HOMING JANE

I

AFTER four long years he returned to her. And at his coming she veiled her face from him. He was Maurice Wincott, from Ceylon; she, his mother city. And even as he stepped from the train London wrapped herself in the shrouds of a thick November fog.

He deliberately accepted the challenge of the grumpy old metropolis. He booked a room at an hotel and indulged in a very prolonged and very warm bath. In this he reclined, lazily replenishing the hot-water supply with his big toe and forming dreamy plans for an enjoyable evening.

The first essential, of course, was company. Now who was there in London—excluding, naturally, relations and men? Was there no one he could discover and lug out to dinner—no pleasing female acquaintance of the past? And suddenly, in the bathroom vapours of luxurious indetermination, gleamed the half-forgotten features of Belle Bellamy.

Belle Bellamy, good Lord, yes!

He hadn’t heard of her for four years, but she might still be living in that converted maisonette in those mews—No. 1 Something Mews, Knightsbridge. He left the bath and returned to his bedroom, where he ransacked a telephone directory.

Alas! there were no Miss Bellamys in mews. He tried what Miss Bellamys there were, but none of them was Belle. He would gladly, in his growing desperation, have struck up a chance acquaintance with any other of the Miss Bellamys and taken her to dinner, had she but known. But not one of the Miss Bellamys appeared to guess this.

Well, he’d have to go and investigate, that was all. He’d dress and find his way to the mews.
At No. 1 Radnor Mews, Knightsbridge, Mr. Percival Thurlowe was in his dressing-room. His mirror reflected strange contortions of his plump face. He was battling with a white tie, and before him, propped against the hair-brush, was a leaflet of illustrated instructions in the correct tying of white ties, a stroke of commercial genius which has resulted in the destruction of thousands of white ties and the subsequent purchase of thousands more.

Mr. Thurlowe, a man of fifty-five and capable of moments of strong passion, finally tore the tie from his collar and clenched it in a quivering fist. A very regrettable expression re white ties boiled to his lips.

This despairing toilet cry brought in his wife, who tied the tie for him and encouraged him into his tail-coat. He was dressing to attend a City banquet with the Worshipful Company of Flannel Vendors, but by this time he was grumbling against his tie, the fog and the very underrated pastime of banqueting in general. At which did the wife, who was only about half his age and little more than a bride, joyfully acquiesce and urge him to remain and keep her company? She did not.

"I should make an early start," she said, and she called to the maid below: "Florence, get a taxi!"

"No, Florence!" cried the husband. "A taxi! All the way to the City? Think of the fare."

"There are no taxis left in the mews, madam," reported Florence. "Only the old man at the far end with the horse-cab."

"You needn't think I'm going to drive to the City in that broken-down cab."

"Then take the Underground," said Mrs. Thurlowe.

She bore him to the front door, where he stood and scented the heavy atmosphere with foreboding.

"You'll stay in to-night, mind," he said. "I won't have you going over to Eileen's on a night like this."

Eileen, who supplied Cora Thurlowe with a permanent excuse for evening excursions, was her stepdaughter, a girl in the early twenties, who occupied two rooms in a neighbouring block of flats and performed secretarial work by day.
This made her too tired to visit the maisonette after working hours; so Cora would frequently pop over and see Eileen. Percival didn’t mind much so long as she walked and didn’t squander a shilling on a taxi.

Cora closed the front door on her gloomily-departing spouse and hastened back to the telephone. To inform Eileen that she had been bidden to remain within doors? Not at all. To ask to speak to a Mr. Morris.

“If,” says the French phrase-book in a passage of inspired philosophy, “if one is not beautiful it is admirable to be good.” So, presumably, as one deviates from the strait and narrow path of utter virtue one may be expected to gain proportionately in good looks. Cora could not be termed actually beautiful, and she was by no means immoral. What perhaps robbed her of beauty was a certain piquancy of expression; you know, that cheekily-tilted nose typical of some of our merry blondes whom gentlemen prefer. And a corresponding germ of mischief in her nature may have beckoned her occasionally from the stony path of rigorous probity to the smoother tracks of fun—though, indeed, she never wandered very far afield.

But fun has its reckoning; in this instance the payee being this Mr. Morris. As Cora discoursed with him on the telephone that attractive smile which telephoning persons assume automatically—as though it could be observed by the interlocutor—played on her lips; but her eyes were widened and seemed to stare through the wall opposite at some visionary menace beyond.

“I know I said I’d pay to-night; but I can’t. You shall have the money to-morrow, or quite soon... No, you can’t possibly see my husband. He’s out to-night; besides, he doesn’t know about it, and if he did... What? Mr. Morris, you wouldn’t do a thing like that!... I know; I know. I thought I could raise it by to-night. I’m sorry, but you shall have it. You can trust me... No, you can’t see him, you can’t. He won’t be in till late. Besides, you needn’t think you’d get anything out of him... Not what? Not a large sum? Not to you, perhaps. All the more reason why you can afford to wait a little longer... You won’t wait?... Hallo? Hallo?” But Mr. Morris had rung off.

She sat deep in thought, her fingers tapping an aimless
tune on the table. From somewhere, within the next hour or two, she must raise £300, or Percival would get to hear about it. What should she do? Her bank balance—well, she had had to nip into a taxi only yesterday to avoid meeting her bank manager in the street. Her few securities were in trust—curse this trust business. Who was there?

There was Ella Moone, for instance. She knew Ella well enough to confide in her; but look at the way Ella carried on if she lost half a crown at bridge! Still, Ella might be able to suggest something. Cora titivated hastily before her drawing-room mirror, hurried to the front door, and opened it to peer into the bland, expectant countenance of Maurice Wincott.

"Belle!" he cried. "No. Dash! So sorry. I came to see a lady who lived here. She evidently doesn’t. I beg your pardon. A Miss Bellamy. You don’t happen to know?"

"Oh, she’s gone to live at Brighton, I believe."

"Oh. Sorry. You see, I’ve been abroad for four years, so I didn’t know. This is my first night back in London. What a night for it, isn’t it? Well, thank you."

He raised his opera hat and turned, with perhaps just the smallest hint of reluctance, to depart. A well-dressed, well-spoken man with a pleasant, open smile. "Hold him!" cried every instinct in Cora’s constitution. "Hold him! This may be! your guardian angel unawares. Hold him; take him in and try him out."

"Oh, but now you’re here—won’t you come in and warm yourself for a moment?" she said.

"Really? Oh, how kind! But you were going out."

"No hurry."

"She led the way back to the little drawing-room and turned to face him again. They inspected each other in the better light with interest and, it appeared, mutual satisfaction. He was a bronzed, clean-shaven man of about forty. Not even the traces of fog could dim the benevolent gleam of admiration in his eyes.

"You know Miss Bellamy?" he asked.

"I met her when we took over the maisonette."

"Yes; a plain—well, a comparatively plain woman, but a kind heart. I came to see her because I couldn’t think of anyone else."
"You've only just got back to London, you say?"
"To-day. After four years in Ceylon. And look at London! Gloom and fog. I went out into Piccadilly. I've never felt so lonely in my life. I've been whole days and nights in the jungle with only the monkeys, but I found it twice as sociable as Piccadilly."
"You wanted—company?"
"Company. Exactly. How quick of you!"
"Have a cigarette," said Cora.
"You're more than kind," he said. "I'm getting warmer. Am I keeping you?"
"Not at all."
"What were we saying? Oh, yes—company. Well, you know, everywhere I went in the fog in Piccadilly I saw or encountered couples. Happy little couples—sweethearts and wives—possibly some one's sweetheart who'd fallen in with some one else's wife in the fog—but no matter; anyhow, couples. Well, naturally I didn't feel like spending my first evening alone, so, in lieu of a better, I came to seek out Belle Bellamy."
"And what will you do now?" asked Cora.
"Well, I certainly shan't go to Brighton. I must dine at some lugubrious club, I suppose. And I'd pictured such a delightful little dinner in some lively restaurant; you know—sparkling wines, sparkling eyes—the soothing murmur of the saxophone—all that stuff. But, alas! it is not to be."
He sighed and examined the glow of his cigarette. "I suppose," he added wistfully.
She too displayed interest in her cigarette.
"Well, I really don't know what I can do to help you," she said.
"Oh, nothing—naturally, nothing. But you so kindly asked me in and registered sympathy, that's all. You're married, I see."
"Yes. I live here with my husband. He's gone out to a City dinner."
"And left you to dine alone?"
"Yes."
"Oh, why?" He spoke in a whisper so soft that it scarcely seemed more than a part of his smile.
She glanced at him quickly, and he plunged. Told her his name, his circumstances, advertised modestly his
unimpeachable character. Sobering somewhat, paid restrained tribute to her infectious charm and its natural effect on one reclaimed from the rubber plantations.

"You must pardon me," he urged, "but, really, think of my case. For months together I haven't seen a white woman's face. Occasionally, perhaps, a little treat in the shape of a female missionary, and usually a very queer shape too. Well, you ask, how can you help me. And I tell you. You can help me by coming out with me to some tip-top restaurant and having a dashed good dinner."

She crossed to the sofa. He remained standing in the centre of the room, looking like a patient awaiting the verdict of a specialist.

"It's funny," she said, "that anyone should walk in here like this and ask me to help him, because if there's anyone in London who wants help to-night, it's me."

He came deliberately to the sofa and sat beside her. "Come on. Tell me," he said.

"Look here," she replied; "I should think you're a pretty broadminded man."

"Broadminded? I come from the island of Ceylon—a land where every prospect pleases and only man is vile. I tell you, you get broadminded soon enough, living among vile men with pleasing prospects."

"All right, then. Listen . . ."

III

For a stepdaughter, Eileen was certainly a sport. She never let on that Cora's evening visits to her rooms were less frequent and of briefer duration than Percival supposed. Eileen perhaps found it easy to forgive a little harmless recreation to anyone who had married her father. She knew that Cora was wont to look in at Mr. Morris's flat hard by and indulge in a taste for roulette, which Eileen personally considered a particularly footling form of amusement.

Cora, who had met Mr. Morris through her bookmaker, became rather intrigued by the little parties in his rooms. They were admittedly below her social standard. She had lost steadily and had presented Mr. Morris with IOU's. In
short, this was Cora’s folly; just as you and I have doubtless
our own little follies carefully guarded and, with any luck,
undreamt of at the other end of the dinner-table. Mr. Morris
was very suave and hand-lathering about the IOU’s at first;
then changed his demeanour. Cora’s face when he threatened
to apply to Mr. Thurlowe told him that this was a very
disagreeable idea to her; told him, moreover, that the fifth
of November would be the most appropriate date for the
revelation. So he told Mrs. Thurlowe that unless she paid
by the fifth he’d call on her husband. Only he didn’t say
“your husband.” He said “hubby.” Well, here was the
fifth, and what had Cora done? Raised what ready money
she could and tried to augment it by laying it on a sequence
of disappointing racehorses. Such was the sad tale related,
without elaboration or apology, to Maurice Wincott as she
sat there in the midst of the poor little Jericho maisonette
with Joshua Morris already tuning up his trumpet at the
gates.

“I’ve come home with an almost indecent amount of
cash,” he said. “I’ll let you have three hundred if you’ll
pay me back some time.”

“You think,” she expostulated, “that I only told you
because I wanted you to lend me the money?”

“Well, yes,” he answered obviously.

She looked at him searchingly, almost accusingly; then
relapsed. “Well, so I did,” she confessed.

He rose. “Right. I’ll wait while you dress. We’ll
dine. Then we’ll call on this blighter and fix him. I’ve
got my cheque-book in my pocket. I half guessed I might
want it to-night.”

“Twenty minutes ago you’d never heard of me,” she
said. “You mean to say you’ll lend me this money without
security?”

“Yes. I can see exactly the sort of person you are.
Of course I’ll help you, with pleasure.”

“And you mean to say that it’s possible for a man to do
this for a woman without the faintest glimmer of an ulterior
motive?”

“It is possible,” he replied. He looked at her and smiled
briefly. “It’s difficult, but possible.”

Two minutes later she was dressing as light-heartedly
as a schoolgirl on an outing. What elation is there in the
world to compare with that which celebrates a menace parried? It is sufficient to supply a recreant philosopher with a handy excuse for seeking trouble.

IV

At 9.45 Cora brought him into Eileen’s two-roomed quarters and introduced him to her—Mr. Wincott, a friend of her youth just returned from Ceylon. Eileen took good stock of him, and liked the look of him very much. As for him, he sat positively staggered by the glory of Eileen, the sweet, graceful creature, with her trimly-shingled brown locks and complexion of peaches.

By George, how delightful these girls appeared after a long sojourn in the sallow East! Cora could not fail to notice his keen appreciation of Eileen, but she didn’t appear to resent it. On the contrary, she rather encouraged it.

The main object of the evening was still to be achieved. They had called at Mr. Morris’s, but he was out. There was no party there that night. They must call again, that was all. So they crossed the road to Eileen’s rooms to pass the time.

It passed all too quickly for Wincott. At ten o’clock they went out and tried again. No luck; Mr. Morris had not returned. There was no little roulette party that evening.

“What if he’s done what he threatened and gone round to the mews?” said Cora.

“What if he has?” replied Wincott. “He won’t have found anyone there, and you don’t expect a man like that to hang about indefinitely in mews in a fog.”

Cora shrugged. “Anyhow, I must get back. Percival will be home soon. Hadn’t I better perhaps have the money with me, just in case Morris should turn up? Then, if he doesn’t, I could settle with him to-morrow.”

Wincott seated himself on a damp but convenient doorstep with his cheque book and a fountain pen, and presented Cora with £300. Her expressions of gratitude were cut short, for a stray taxi came looming up, and taxis were not easy to find in the fog.

“Are you coming with me as far as the mews?” she asked.

“You bet I am.”
"Or would you rather go and take Eileen out to supper?"

"What?" he said quickly.

Cora laughed. "There are not many ways in which I can show my gratitude, but if that's one of them, you carry on."

As he hesitated she stepped into the taxi and stretched a hand out to him through its open doorway. He kissed it. She laughed again and drove away.

There met her, at the maisonette, a distracted Florence.

"Oh, madam, there's a strange man in the drawing-room. He insisted on coming in. Said he had very important business with the master and would wait."

"What? He's really had the cheek? All right," said Cora. "I know about it. I'll see him."

"Oh, but, madam! The master's been back. He came and went again just before this gentleman arrived. He thought you were at Miss Eileen's, and went to fetch you back."

Cora bit her lip. Delicate business, this. "How long ago when he went?"

"About a quarter of an hour."

"Did he walk?"

"No. He wanted a taxi, but couldn't get one. That old cabman was just starting out looking for a fare in the fog, so he took him."

"Oh, he'll be back pretty soon," said Cora. "All right, Florence."

V

"Righto," said Eileen; "I'm on. We'll go to the Beaux Arts."

"The Beaux Arts," said Wincott. "Splendid! Go into your bedroom and put on your prettiest evening frock. I'll wait here."

For the second time that evening he reclined in a sitting-room while a feminine member of the Thurlowe family performed an adjacent toilet for his benefit. But suddenly there came a sharp rap at the outer door, and a thick masculine voice: "Eileen!"

Eileen appeared from the bedroom. She was not entirely
dressed, but near enough. Her pretty features were puckered in annoyance.

"It's father," she said.
"Does that matter much?" he inquired.
"Not in the least," said Eileen. "Half a tick."

She admitted a study in feasted and massive indignation. His greatcoat was open and flapping. He wore a tall hat at an imperious tilt. His ponderous jaw was working at some private rehearsal of wrathful remonstrance. It dropped, and he blinked in surprised challenge at Wincott, who rose and bowed ceremoniously. "Father, I believe?" he said.

"Who the devil is this man, and what's he doing here, and where is your mother, and what are you in this half-clad condition for?" demanded Mr. Thurlowe.

"Mr. Wincott, from Ceylon. Because he's going to take me out to supper. Gone home. Because you can't go to the Beaux Arts in a blouse," replied Eileen patiently.

"I was told your mother was here. What's she been up to? And what are you up to with this man?"

"Now, now, now," said Wincott soothingly. "Finish your dressing. Leave father to me."

Eileen assented and withdrew. Wincott led the protesting parent to the sofa.

"Now, don't you worry about me," he said. "I'm a fine feller. So are you, I'm sure. Only just at the moment you're feeling—well, I know what it is; I've been through it myself. Only last time I was on leave I dined with the Worshipful Company of Milkmen. I remember it well. We all went home with each other."

"You insinuate that I'm drunk?"

"Drank? No, certainly not; not—not quite. But you mustn't trot about around town in a fog worrying about people. Do let me advise you to go home to bed."

"Who are you, and how dare you—"

"I'm only trying to do you a kindness, sir. I ask you, look at yourself. Look at your tie—well, you can't, I suppose; but I mean, for instance, look here—what's this on your trousers? Horrible! A piece of pineapple."

"I'm ready," said Eileen, reappearing.

"I forbid you to go out with this man, whoever he is!" cried Mr. Thurlowe.

"Nonsense," said Eileen. "He's a very nice man, as
far as I know; and even if he isn’t, I’ve enough sense to be able to look after myself.”

She escorted Wincott away. Mr. Thurlowe remained on the sofa and drew a podgy hand across his brow.

The fog had doubled in intensity—a deepening blackness had stolen into it, shrouding everything outside a few yards radius.

“We shall never find a taxi,” said Eileen.

“Something’s standing here,” said Wincott. “I see lights.”

He advanced a step or two to the kerb. “Here, I say, can you—Oh, good Lord, I’m talking to a horse!”

“Engaged,” said something in the darkness.

“But where? I can’t find you. Is this you? With a beard? No, that’s the other end of the horse.” An aged cabman floated into their ken.

“Can’t take yer, sir. I brought a gent here from Radner Moos.”

“Father’s cab,” said Eileen. “That’s all right. We’ll take it on. He’ll walk home.”

“Ah, but he said ‘Wait,’” said the cabman.

“Oh, but we’re all in the family,” replied Wincott. “Here you are. Here’s your fare for bringing him here. Now take us to the Beaux Arts.”

“The bazaar?”

“No, no; the Beaux——”

“Rupert Street,” said Eileen, already inside the cab.

The cabman, somewhat reassured by five shillings, slowly turned his horse.

“I suppose your old horse can get there?” asked Wincott.

“Old Jane,” replied the cabman, “she be better than any o’ they taxis in a fog. But, you know, sir, that other gent, ’e said ‘Wait.’”

“You’re through with him, I tell you. Come on, now. Wake Jane up and urge her to the Beaux Arts.” He got in beside Eileen and closed the door. “Are you as comfortable as possible?” he inquired. “I would suggest you sit fairly close, if only on account of the cold.”

The cabman mounted; but before Jane had gone a dozen paces he heard the voice of his ex-fare hailing him in no measured terms. Perplexed, he whoa’d Jane, slid from the box and returned to the pavement to argue the matter.
While he was yet searching, a group of overgrown boys, fresh from some fifth of November spree, passed Mr. Thurlowe, jostling him in a very offensive manner. A few yards farther on they discovered an invaluable butt for their humour in the form of an apparently derelict growler. Jane, with a cracker leaping and exploding astern of her, awoke in earnest and lunged away into obscurity.

"We're off at last," said Wincott.

The fog surged against the cab windows. In complete darkness they jogged contentedly along for some considerable time. Suddenly, and apparently for good, the cab came to rest. Maurice opened the door and peered out. He hailed the cabman, who made no reply. He turned with a puzzled smile to Eileen.

"Is this the Beaux Arts?" he asked.

"It doesn't look like it," said Eileen, descending.

VI

"You mean," said Cora, "you won't accept this cheque?"

"Not like it is now," said Mr. Morris. "Your clever friend, whoever he is, has drawn it to 'self' and forgotten to endorse it."

Cora took the cheque, examined it with a frown, and replaced it in her handbag.

"Well, leave it till to-morrow. I'll get it endorsed."

"No," said Mr. Morris. "I'm through with all this, Mrs. Thurlowe. Broken promises—useless cheques—no thanks. I'm going to wait and see your husband."

"You needn't think you'll get a penny out of him."

Mr. Morris, five feet three inches of flaccid self-possession, eyed her dully.

"Go on," he retorted. "Why not admit straight out you'd give anything for hubby not to be told."

Her pride rose in a wave of indignation.

"So I would," she said. "But he's got to be told, that's all. Now you can get out, please."

"I shall only wait on the doorstep if I do," replied Mr. Morris.

She hesitated. After all, she'd better see Percival first
and try to make what explanation she could. "All right, stay where you are," she said.

The imperturbable Mr. Morris complied, and so they remained, he in the drawing-room, she in the dining-room, trying vaguely to formulate her unhappy confession.

At length she looked up quickly. She heard the sound of the cab returning to the mews outside. She rose and stood in the hall waiting for Percival to enter.

Whole minutes passed, and he made no appearance. Finally, unable to bear the suspense, she stepped forward and opened the front door. Again, like a recurring dream, in that doorway appeared Maurice Wincott, wearing an expression of bewildered amusement.

"Shall we come in," he asked, "Eileen and I? The most amazing thing has happened. We took father's cab. The cabby must have fallen off the box. And Jane homed."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"You've heard of a homing pigeon?" he replied. "Well, Jane is a homing horse. She homed through the fog to the mews."

"Blessings on Jane!" exclaimed Cora. "Because this is the one place in all the world where you're really wanted at this moment."

Wincott and Eileen followed her into the dining-room. Five minutes later he opened the drawing-room door and confronted the intruder.

"Impossible!" he was saying as he entered. "My wife guilty of such a thing—incredible! Are you this man?"

"Yes, Mr. Thurlowe. Sorry to have to cause a little flutter in the home circle."

"But it's a lie. It's unbelievable. What proof have you got?"

Mr. Morris produced his IOU's with a flourish. Wincott received them with trembling fingers. He moaned aloud as he examined them. "My heavens!" he murmured. "My wife!"

Cora hovered in the doorway. He rounded upon her.

"All this money!" he cried. "Oh, you wicked woman! Oh, you rotten player!"

Then with a sudden gesture of loathing he cast the slips of paper into the back of the fire.

"Get out!" he said, and indicated the door very unmistakably to Mr. Morris.
That gentleman raised a hand, less in protest than in defiance.

"Look here—" he began.

"No," said Wincott. "You look at me. You ran this beastly little roulette table and held the bank, and advanced my poor wife money to lose to you. Every bob you lent her you scooped back. You're not out of pocket a cent. And if you don't get out I shall have to kick you out. And then I shall ring up the police and report you for running a gaming saloon, you naughty little man."

"I handed you those IOU's in good faith," cried Mr. Morris.

"Oh, ridiculous! You haven't any good faith to hand anyone anything in. Run away, now."

Mr. Morris, for once thoroughly roused, was not to be so easily ejected. It took over ten minutes to get him into the outer mews. The door had finally been closed upon him, and he was venting a few farewell threats as he departed, when he butted into the stomach of a stout gentleman who was being accompanied home by a cableless cabman. Mr. Morris was, however, in small temper for apology and explanation.

"Keep it to yourself," he snarled, "can't you?" And he disappeared, fortunately, into the fog and was no more seen.

Percival Thurlowe unlocked and opened his front door. Then he stood back heavily on the toe of the cabman. His whole countenance seemed slowly to open. His opera hat fell with a thud.

"You!" he cried. "Again! Here?"

Wincott advanced to meet him. The staring cabman supported himself by the doorpost and quoted a brief passage of Holy Writ.

Then Mr. Thurlowe saw his wife leaving the drawing-room with Wincott, and swept forward across the narrow hall.

"Who and what is this infernal person?" he began. But she made so horrified a gesture that he paused.

"Really, Percival! Don't be so rude. How can you? This is a very old friend of mine, home from Ceylon. He came in just after you left to-night. He's been entertaining us most liberally."

"But he took my cab——"