

"Not for you. A thousand times no. For you it is right.... I am grateful to you beyond words. For me it would be wrong. For me only...."

"Why?" she said, but passed her hand before her face as she had done at our second meeting in the wood. "Oh, I see," she went on simply as a child. "For you it would be wrong." Then with a little indrawn laugh, "and, d'you remember, I called you lucky--once--at first. You who must never come here again!"

She left me to sit a little longer by the screen, and I heard the sound of her feet die out along the gallery above.

MRS. BATHURST

FROM LYDEN'S "IRENIUS"

ACT III. Sc. II.

Gow.--Had it been your Prince instead of a groom caught in this noose there's not an astrologer of the city----

PRINCE.--Sacked! Sacked! We were a city yesterday.

Gow.--So be it, but I was not governor. Not an astrologer, but would ha'

sworn he'd foreseen it at the last versary of Venus, when Vulcan caught her with Mars in the house of stinking Capricorn. But since 'tis Jack of the Straw that hangs, the forgetful stars had it not on their tablets.

PRINCE.--Another life! Were there any left to die? How did the poor fool come by it?

Gow.--Simpliciter thus. She that damned him to death knew not that she did it, or would have died ere she had done it. For she loved him. He that hangs him does so in obedience to the Duke, and asks no more than "Where is the rope?" The Duke, very exactly he hath told us, works God's will, in which holy employ he's not to be questioned. We have then left upon this finger, only Jack whose soul now plucks the left sleeve of Destiny in Hell to overtake why she clapped him up like a fly on a sunny wall. Whuff! Soh!

PRINCE.--Your cloak, Ferdinand. I'll sleep now.

FERDINAND.--Sleep, then.. He too, loved his life?

Gow.--He was born of woman ... but at the end threw life from him, like your Prince, for a little sleep ... "Have I any look of a King?" said he, clanking his chain--"to be so baited on all sides by Fortune, that I must e'en die now to live with myself one day longer?" I left him railing at Fortune and woman's love.

FERDINAND.--Ah, woman's love!

(Aside) Who knows not Fortune, glutted on easy thrones, Stealing from feasts as rare to coneycatch, Privily in the hedgerows for a clown With that same cruel-lustful hand and eye, Those nails and wedges, that one hammer and lead, And the very gerb of long-stored lightnings loosed Yesterday 'gainst some King.

MRS. BATHURST

The day that I chose to visit H.M.S. Peridot in Simon's Bay was the day that the Admiral had chosen to send her up the coast. She was just steaming out to sea as my train came in, and since the rest of the Fleet were either coaling or busy at the rifle-ranges a thousand feet up the hill, I found myself stranded, lunchless, on the sea-front with no hope of return to Cape Town before five P.M. At this crisis I had the luck to come across my friend Inspector Hooper, Cape Government Railways, in command of an engine and a brake-van chalked for repair.

"If you get something to eat," he said, "I'll run you down to Glengariff siding till the goods comes along. It's cooler there than here, you see."

I got food and drink from the Greeks who sell all things at a price, and the engine trotted us a couple of miles up the line to a bay of drifted sand and a plank-platform half buried in sand not a hundred yards from the edge of the surf. Moulded dunes, whiter than any snow, rolled far inland up a brown and purple valley of splintered rocks and dry scrub. A crowd of

Malays hauled at a net beside two blue and green boats on the beach; a picnic party danced and shouted barefoot where a tiny river trickled across the flat, and a circle of dry hills, whose feet were set in sands of silver, locked us in against a seven-coloured sea. At either horn of the bay the railway line, cut just above high water-mark, ran round a shoulder of piled rocks, and disappeared.

"You see there's always a breeze here," said Hooper, opening the door as the engine left us in the siding on the sand, and the strong south-easter buffeting under Elsie's Peak dusted sand into our tickey beer. Presently he sat down to a file full of spiked documents. He had returned from a long trip up-country, where he had been reporting on damaged rolling-stock, as far away as Rhodesia. The weight of the bland wind on my eyelids; the song of it under the car roof, and high up among the rocks; the drift of fine grains chasing each other musically ashore; the tramp of the surf; the voices of the picnickers; the rustle of Hooper's file, and the presence of the assured sun, joined with the beer to cast me into magical slumber. The hills of False Bay were just dissolving into those of fairyland when I heard footsteps on the sand outside, and the clink of our couplings.

"Stop that!" snapped Hooper, without raising his head from his work. "It's those dirty little Malay boys, you see: they're always playing with the trucks...."

"Don't be hard on 'em. The railway's a general refuge in Africa," I replied.

"'Tis--up-country at any rate. That reminds me," he felt in his waistcoat-pocket, "I've got a curiosity for you from Wankies--beyond Buluwayo. It's more of a souvenir perhaps than----"

"The old hotel's inhabited," cried a voice. "White men from the language. Marines to the front! Come on, Pritch. Here's your Belmont. Wha--i--i!"

The last word dragged like a rope as Mr. Pyecroft ran round to the open door, and stood looking up into my face. Behind him an enormous Sergeant of Marines trailed a stalk of dried seaweed, and dusted the sand nervously from his fingers.

"What are you doing here?" I asked. "I thought the Hierophant was down the coast?"

"We came in last Tuesday--from Tristan D'Acunha--for overhaul, and we shall be in dockyard 'ands for two months, with boiler-seatings."

"Come and sit down," Hooper put away the file.

"This is Mr. Hooper of the Railway," I exclaimed, as Pyecroft turned to haul up the black-moustached sergeant.

"This is Sergeant Pritchard, of the Agaric, an old shipmate," said he.

"We were strollin' on the beach." The monster blushed and nodded. He filled up one side of the van when he sat down.

"And this is my friend, Mr. Pyecroft," I added to Hooper, already busy with the extra beer which my prophetic soul had bought from the Greeks.

"Moi aussi" quoth Pyecroft, and drew out beneath his coat a labelled quart bottle.

"Why, it's Bass," cried Hooper.

"It was Pritchard," said Pyecroft. "They can't resist him."

"That's not so," said Pritchard, mildly.

"Not verbatim per'aps, but the look in the eye came to the same thing."

"Where was it?" I demanded.

"Just on beyond here--at Kalk Bay. She was slappin' a rug in a back verandah. Pritch hadn't more than brought his batteries to bear, before she stepped indoors an' sent it flyin' over the wall."

Pyecroft patted the warm bottle.

"It was all a mistake," said Pritchard. "I shouldn't wonder if she mistook me for Maclean. We're about of a size."

I had heard householders of Muizenburg, St. James's, and Kalk Bay complain

of the difficulty of keeping beer or good servants at the seaside, and I began to see the reason. None the less, it was excellent Bass, and I too drank to the health of that large-minded maid.

"It's the uniform that fetches 'em, an' they fetch it," said Pyecroft. "My simple navy blue is respectable, but not fascinatin'. Now Pritch in 'is Number One rig is always 'purr Mary, on the terrace'--ex officio as you might say."

"She took me for Maclean, I tell you," Pritchard insisted. "Why--why--to listen to him you wouldn't think that only yesterday----"

"Pritch," said Pyecroft, "be warned in time. If we begin tellin' what we know about each other we'll be turned out of the pub. Not to mention aggravated desertion on several occasions----"

"Never anything more than absence without leaf--I defy you to prove it," said the Sergeant hotly. "An' if it comes to that how about Vancouver in '87?"

"How about it? Who pulled bow in the gig going ashore? Who told Boy Niven...?"

"Surely you were court martialled for that?" I said. The story of Boy Niven who lured seven or eight able-bodied seamen and marines into the woods of British Columbia used to be a legend of the Fleet.

"Yes, we were court-martialled to rights," said Pritchard, "but we should have been tried for murder if Boy Niven 'adn't been unusually tough. He told us he had an uncle 'oo'd give us land to farm. 'E said he was born at the back o' Vancouver Island, and all the time the beggar was a balmy Barnado Orphan!"

"But we believed him," said Pyecroft. "I did--you did--Paterson did--an' 'oo was the Marine that married the cocoanut-woman afterwards--him with the mouth?"

"Oh, Jones, Spit-Kid Jones. I 'aven't thought of 'im in years," said Pritchard. "Yes, Spit-Kid believed it, an' George Anstey and Moon. We were very young an' very curious."

"But lovin' an' trustful to a degree," said Pyecroft.

"Remember when 'e told us to walk in single file for fear o' bears?  
'Remember, Pye, when 'e 'opped about in that bog full o' ferns an' sniffed an' said 'e could smell the smoke of 'is uncle's farm? An' all the time it was a dirty little out-lyin' uninhabited island. We walked round it in a day, an' come back to our boat lyin' on the beach. A whole day Boy Niven kept us walkin' in circles lookin' for 'is uncle's farm! He said his uncle was compelled by the law of the land to give us a farm!"

"Don't get hot, Pritch. We believed," said Pyecroft.

"He'd been readin' books. He only did it to get a run ashore an' have



himself talked of. A day an' a night--eight of us--followin' Boy Niven round an uninhabited island in the Vancouver archipelago! Then the picket came for us an' a nice pack o' idiots we looked!"

"What did you get for it?" Hooper asked.

"Heavy thunder with continuous lightning for two hours. Thereafter sleet-squalls, a confused sea, and cold, unfriendly weather till conclusion o' cruise," said Pyecroft. "It was only what we expected, but what we felt, an' I assure you, Mr. Hooper, even a sailor-man has a heart to break, was bein' told that we able seamen an' promisin' marines 'ad misled Boy Niven. Yes, we poor back-to-the-landers was supposed to 'ave misled him! He rounded on us, o' course, an' got off easy."

"Excep' for what we gave him in the steerin'-flat when we came out o' cells. 'Eard anything of 'im lately, Pye?"

"Signal Boatswain in the Channel Fleet, I believe--Mr. L.L. Niven is."

"An' Anstey died o' fever in Benin," Pritchard mused. "What come to Moon? Spit-Kid we know about."

"Moon--Moon! Now where did I last...? Oh yes, when I was in the Palladium! I met Quigley at Buncrana Station. He told me Moon 'ad run when the Astrild sloop was cruising among the South Seas three years back. He always showed signs o' bein' a Mormonastic beggar. Yes, he slipped off quietly an' they 'adn't time to chase 'im round the islands

even if the navigatin' officer 'ad been equal to the job."

"Wasn't he?" said Hooper.

"Not so. Accordin' to Quigley the Astrild spent half her commission rompin' up the beach like a she-turtle, an' the other half hatchin' turtles' eggs on the top o' numerous reefs. When she was docked at Sydney her copper looked like Aunt Maria's washing on the line--an' her 'midship frames was sprung. The commander swore the dockyard 'ad done it haulin' the pore thing on to the slips. They do do strange things at sea, Mr. Hooper."

"Ah! I'm not a tax-payer," said Hooper, and opened a fresh bottle. The Sergeant seemed to be one who had a difficulty in dropping subjects.

"How it all comes back, don't it?" he said. "Why Moon must 'ave 'ad sixteen years' service before he ran."

"It takes 'em at all ages. Look at--you know," said Pyecroft.

"Who?" I asked.

"A service man within eighteen months of his pension, is the party you're thinkin' of," said Pritchard. "A warrant 'oose name begins with a V., isn't it?"

"But, in a way o' puttin' it, we can't say that he actually did desert,"

Pyecroft suggested.

"Oh, no," said Pritchard. "It was only permanent absence up country without leaf. That was all."

"Up country?" said Hooper. "Did they circulate his description?"

"What for?" said Pritchard, most impolitely.

"Because deserters are like columns in the war. They don't move away from the line, you see. I've known a chap caught at Salisbury that way tryin' to get to Nyassa. They tell me, but o' course I don't know, that they don't ask questions on the Nyassa Lake Flotilla up there. I've heard of a P. and O. quartermaster in full command of an armed launch there."

"Do you think Click 'ud ha' gone up that way?" Pritchard asked.

"There's no saying. He was sent up to Bloemfontein to take over some Navy ammunition left in the fort. We know he took it over and saw it into the trucks. Then there was no more Click--then or thereafter. Four months ago it transpired, and thus the casus belli stands at present," said Pyecroft.

"What were his marks?" said Hooper again.

"Does the Railway get a reward for returnin' 'em, then?" said Pritchard.

"If I did d'you suppose I'd talk about it?" Hooper retorted angrily.

"You seemed so very interested," said Pritchard with equal crispness.

"Why was he called Click?" I asked to tide over an uneasy little break in the conversation. The two men were staring at each other very fixedly.

"Because of an ammunition hoist carryin' away," said Pyecroft. "And it carried away four of 'is teeth--on the lower port side, wasn't it, Pritch? The substitutes which he bought weren't screwed home in a manner o' sayin'. When he talked fast they used to lift a little on the bed plate. 'Ence, 'Click.' They called 'im a superior man which is what we'd call a long, black-'aired, genteely speakin', 'alf-bred beggar on the lower deck."

"Four false teeth on the lower left jaw," said Hooper, his hand in his waistcoat pocket. "What tattoo marks?"

"Look here," began Pritchard, half rising. "I'm sure we're very grateful to you as a gentleman for your 'orspitality, but per'aps we may 'ave made an error in--"

I looked at Pyecroft for aid, Hooper was crimsoning rapidly.

"If the fat marine now occupying the foc'sle will kindly bring 'is status quo to an anchor yet once more, we may be able to talk like gentlemen--not to say friends," said Pyecroft. "He regards you, Mr. Hooper, as a

emissary of the Law."

"I only wish to observe that when a gentleman exhibits such a peculiar, or I should rather say, such a bloomin' curiosity in identification marks as our friend here----"

"Mr. Pritchard," I interposed, "I'll take all the responsibility for Mr. Hooper."

"An' you'll apologise all round," said Pyecroft. "You're a rude little man, Pritch."

"But how was I----" he began, wavering.

"I don't know an' I don't care. Apologise!"

The giant looked round bewildered and took our little hands into his vast grip, one by one. "I was wrong," he said meekly as a sheep. "My suspicions was unfounded. Mr. Hooper, I apologise."

"You did quite right to look out for your own end o' the line," said Hooper. "I'd ha' done the same with a gentleman I didn't know, you see. If you don't mind I'd like to hear a little more o' your Mr. Vickery. It's safe with me, you see."

"Why did Vickery run," I began, but Pyecroft's smile made me turn my question to "Who was she?"

"She kep' a little hotel at Hauraki--near Auckland," said Pyecroft.

"By Gawd!" roared Pritchard, slapping his hand on his leg. "Not Mrs. Bathurst!"

Pyecroft nodded slowly, and the Sergeant called all the powers of darkness to witness his bewilderment.

"So far as I could get at it Mrs. B. was the lady in question."

"But Click was married," cried Pritchard.

"An' 'ad a fifteen year old daughter. 'E's shown me her photograph. Settin' that aside, so to say, 'ave you ever found these little things make much difference? Because I haven't."

"Good Lord Alive an' Watchin'!... Mrs. Bathurst...." Then with another roar: "You can say what you please, Pye, but you don't make me believe it was any of 'er fault. She wasn't that!"

"If I was going to say what I please, I'd begin by callin' you a silly ox an' work up to the higher pressures at leisure. I'm trying to say solely what transpired. M'rover, for once you're right. It wasn't her fault."

"You couldn't 'aven't made me believe it if it 'ad been," was the answer.

Such faith in a Sergeant of Marines interested me greatly. "Never mind about that," I cried. "Tell me what she was like."

"She was a widow," said Pyecroft. "Left so very young and never re-spliced. She kep' a little hotel for warrants and non-coms close to Auckland, an' she always wore black silk, and 'er neck--"

"You ask what she was like," Pritchard broke in. "Let me give you an instance. I was at Auckland first in '97, at the end o' the Marroquin's commission, an' as I'd been promoted I went up with the others. She used to look after us all, an' she never lost by it--not a penny! 'Pay me now,' she'd say, 'or settle later. I know you won't let me suffer. Send the money from home if you like,' Why, gentlemen all, I tell you I've seen that lady take her own gold watch an' chain off her neck in the bar an' pass it to a bosun 'oo'd come ashore without 'is ticker an' 'ad to catch the last boat. 'I don't know your name,' she said, 'but when you've done with it, you'll find plenty that know me on the front. Send it back by one o' them.' And it was worth thirty pounds if it was worth 'arf a crown. The little gold watch, Pye, with the blue monogram at the back. But, as I was sayin', in those days she kep' a beer that agreed with me--Slits it was called. One way an' another I must 'ave punished a good few bottles of it while we was in the bay--comin' ashore every night or so. Chaffin across the bar like, once when we were alone, 'Mrs. B.,' I said, 'when next I call I want you to remember that this is my particular--just as you're my particular?' (She'd let you go that far!) 'Just as you're my particular,' I said. 'Oh, thank you, Sergeant Pritchard,' she says, an' put 'er hand up to the curl be'ind 'er ear. Remember that way she had,

Pye?"

"I think so," said the sailor.

"Yes, 'Thank you, Sergeant Pritchard,' she says. 'The least I can do is to mark it for you in case you change your mind. There's no great demand for it in the Fleet,' she says, 'but to make sure I'll put it at the back o' the shelf,' an' she snipped off a piece of her hair ribbon with that old dolphin cigar cutter on the bar--remember it, Pye?--an' she tied a bow round what was left--just four bottles. That was '97--no, '96. In '98 I was in the Resilient--China station--full commission. In Nineteen One, mark you, I was in the Carthusian, back in Auckland Bay again. Of course I went up to Mrs. B.'s with the rest of us to see how things were goin'. They were the same as ever. (Remember the big tree on the pavement by the side-bar, Pye?) I never said anythin' in special (there was too many of us talkin' to her), but she saw me at once."

"That wasn't difficult?" I ventured.

"Ah, but wait. I was comin' up to the bar, when, 'Ada,' she says to her niece, 'get me Sergeant Pritchard's particular,' and, gentlemen all, I tell you before I could shake 'ands with the lady, there were those four bottles o' Slits, with 'er 'air ribbon in a bow round each o' their necks, set down in front o' me, an' as she drew the cork she looked at me under her eyebrows in that blindish way she had o' lookin', an', 'Sergeant Pritchard,' she says, 'I do 'ope you 'aven't changed your mind about your particulars.' That's the kind o' woman she was--after five years!"



"I don't see her yet somehow," said Hooper, but with sympathy.

"She--she never scrupled to feed a lame duck or set 'er foot on a scorpion at any time of 'er life," Pritchard added valiantly.

"That don't help me either. My mother's like that for one."

The giant heaved inside his uniform and rolled his eyes at the car-roof.

Said Pyecroft suddenly:--

"How many women have you been intimate with all over the world, Pritch?"

Pritchard blushed plum colour to the short hairs of his seventeen-inch neck.

"Undreds," said Pyecroft. "So've I. How many of 'em can you remember in your own mind, settin' aside the first--an' per'aps the last--and one more?"

"Few, wonderful few, now I tax myself," said Sergeant Pritchard, relievedly.

"An' how many times might you 'ave been at Aukland?"

"One--two," he began. "Why, I can't make it more than three times in ten years. But I can remember every time that I ever saw Mrs. B."

"So can I--an' I've only been to Auckland twice--how she stood an' what she was sayin' an' what she looked like. That's the secret. 'Tisn't beauty, so to speak, nor good talk necessarily. It's just It. Some women'll stay in a man's memory if they once walked down a street, but most of 'em you can live with a month on end, an' next commission you'd be put to it to certify whether they talked in their sleep or not, as one might say."

"Ah," said Hooper. "That's more the idea. I've known just two women of that nature."

"An' it was no fault o' theirs?" asked Pritchard.

"None whatever. I know that!"

"An' if a man gets struck with that kind o' woman, Mr. Hooper?" Pritchard went on.

"He goes crazy--or just saves himself," was the slow answer.

"You've hit it," said the Sergeant. "You've seen an' known somethin' in the course o' your life, Mr. Hooper. I'm lookin' at you!" He set down his bottle.

"And how often had Vickery seen her?" I asked.

"That's the dark an' bloody mystery," Pyecroft answered. "I'd never come across him till I come out in the Hierophant just now, an' there wasn't any one in the ship who knew much about him. You see, he was what you call a superior man. 'E spoke to me once or twice about Auckland and Mrs. B. on the voyage out. I called that to mind subsequently. There must 'ave been a good deal between 'em, to my way o' thinkin'. Mind you I'm only giving you my sum of it all, because all I know is second-hand so to speak, or rather I should say more than second-'and."

"How?" said Hooper peremptorily. "You must have seen it or heard it."

"Yes," said Pyecroft. "I used to think seein' and hearin' was the only regulation aids to ascertainin' facts, but as we get older we get more accommodatin'. The cylinders work easier, I suppose.... Were you in Cape Town last December when Phyllis's Circus came?"

"No--up country," said Hooper, a little nettled at the change of venue.

"I ask because they had a new turn of a scientific nature called 'Home and Friends for a Tickey.'"

"Oh, you mean the cinematograph--the pictures of prize-fights and steamers. I've seen 'em up country."

"Biograph or cinematograph was what I was alludin' to. London Bridge with the omnibuses--a troopship goin' to the war--marines on parade at Portsmouth an' the Plymouth Express arrivin' at Paddin'ton."

"Seen 'em all. Seen 'em all," said Hooper impatiently.

"We Hierophants came in just before Christmas week an' leaf was easy."

"I think a man gets fed up with Cape Town quicker than anywhere else on the station. Why, even Durban's more like Nature. We was there for Christmas," Pritchard put in.

"Not bein' a devotee of Indian peeris, as our Doctor said to the Pusser, I can't exactly say. Phyllis's was good enough after musketry practice at Mozambique. I couldn't get off the first two or three nights on account of what you might call an imbroglio with our Torpedo Lieutenant in the submerged flat, where some pride of the West country had sugared up a gyroscope; but I remember Vickery went ashore with our Carpenter Rigdon--old Crocus we called him. As a general rule Crocus never left 'is ship unless an' until he was 'oisted out with a winch, but when 'e went 'e would return noddin' like a lily gemmed with dew. We smothered him down below that night, but the things 'e said about Vickery as a fittin' playmate for a Warrant Officer of 'is cubic capacity, before we got him quiet, was what I should call pointed."

"I've been with Crocus--in the Redoubtable," said the Sergeant. "He's a character if there is one."

"Next night I went into Cape Town with Dawson and Pratt; but just at the door of the Circus I came across Vickery. 'Oh!' he says, 'you're the man

I'm looking for. Come and sit next me. This way to the shillin' places!' I went astern at once, protestin' because tickey seats better suited my so-called finances. 'Come on,' says Vickery, 'I'm payin'.' Naturally I abandoned Pratt and Dawson in anticipation o' drinks to match the seats. 'No,' he says, when this was 'inted--'not now. Not now. As many as you please afterwards, but I want you sober for the occasion.' I caught 'is face under a lamp just then, an' the appearance of it quite cured me of my thirsts. Don't mistake. It didn't frighten me. It made me anxious. I can't tell you what it was like, but that was the effect which it 'ad on me. If you want to know, it reminded me of those things in bottles in those herbalistic shops at Plymouth--preserved in spirits of wine. White an' crumply things--previous to birth as you might say."

"You 'ave a beastial mind, Pye," said the Sergeant, relighting his pipe.

"Perhaps. We were in the front row, an' 'Home an' Friends' came on early. Vickery touched me on the knee when the number went up. 'If you see anything that strikes you,' he says, 'drop me a hint'; then he went on clicking. We saw London Bridge an' so forth an' so on, an' it was most interestin'. I'd never seen it before. You 'eard a little dynamo like buzzin', but the pictures were the real thing--alive an' movin'."

"I've seen 'em," said Hooper. "Of course they are taken from the very thing itself--you see."

"Then the Western Mail came in to Paddin'ton on the big magic lantern sheet. First we saw the platform empty an' the porters standin' by. Then

the engine come in, head on, an' the women in the front row jumped: she headed so straight. Then the doors opened and the passengers came out and the porters got the luggage--just like life. Only--only when any one came down too far towards us that was watchin', they walked right out o' the picture, so to speak. I was 'ighly interested, I can tell you. So were all of us. I watched an old man with a rug 'oo'd dropped a book an' was tryin' to pick it up, when quite slowly, from be'ind two porters--carryin' a little reticule an' lookin' from side to side--comes out Mrs. Bathurst. There was no mistakin' the walk in a hundred thousand. She come forward--right forward--she looked out straight at us with that blindish look which Pritch alluded to. She walked on and on till she melted out of the picture--like--like a shadow jumpin' over a candle, an' as she went I 'eard Dawson in the ticky seats be'ind sing out: 'Christ! There's Mrs. B.!'"

Hooper swallowed his spittle and leaned forward intently.

"Vickery touched me on the knee again. He was clickin' his four false teeth with his jaw down like an enteric at the last kick. 'Are you sure?' says he. 'Sure,' I says, 'didn't you 'ear Dawson give tongue? Why, it's the woman herself.' 'I was sure before,' he says, 'but I brought you to make sure. Will you come again with me to-morrow?'

"'Willingly,' I says, 'it's like meetin' old friends.'

"'Yes,' he says, openin' his watch, 'very like. It will be four-and-twenty hours less four minutes before I see her again. Come and have a drink,' he

says. 'It may amuse you, but it's no sort of earthly use to me.' He went out shaking his head an' stumblin' over people's feet as if he was drunk already. I anticipated a swift drink an' a speedy return, because I wanted to see the performin' elephants. Instead o' which Vickery began to navigate the town at the rate o' knots, lookin' in at a bar every three minutes approximate Greenwich time. I'm not a drinkin' man, though there are those present"--he cocked his unforgettable eye at me--"who may have seen me more or less imbued with the fragrant spirit. None the less, when I drink I like to do it at anchor an' not at an average speed of eighteen knots on the measured mile. There's a tank as you might say at the back o' that big hotel up the hill--what do they call it?"

"The Molteno Reservoir," I suggested, and Hooper nodded.

"That was his limit o' drift. We walked there an' we come down through the Gardens--there was a South-Easter blowin'--an' we finished up by the Docks. Then we bore up the road to Salt River, and wherever there was a pub Vickery put in sweatin'. He didn't look at what he drunk--he didn't look at the change. He walked an' he drunk an' he perspired in rivers. I understood why old Crocus 'ad come back in the condition 'e did, because Vickery an' I 'ad two an' a half hours o' this gipsy manoeuvre an' when we got back to the station there wasn't a dry atom on or in me."

"Did he say anything?" Pritchard asked.

"The sum total of 'is conversation from 7.45 P.M. till 11.15 P.M. was 'Let's have another.' Thus the mornin' an' the evenin' were the first day,

as Scripture says.... To abbreviate a lengthy narrative, I went into Cape Town for five consecutive nights with Master Vickery, and in that time I must 'ave logged about fifty knots over the ground an' taken in two gallon o' all the worst spirits south the Equator. The evolution never varied. Two shilling seats for us two; five minutes o' the pictures, an' perhaps forty-five seconds o' Mrs. B. walking down towards us with that blindish look in her eyes an' the reticule in her hand. Then out walk--and drink till train time."

"What did you think?" said Hooper, his hand fingering his waistcoat pocket.

"Several things," said Pyecroft. "To tell you the truth, I aren't quite done thinkin' about it yet. Mad? The man was a dumb lunatic--must 'ave been for months--years p'raps. I know somethin' o' maniacs, as every man in the Service must. I've been shipmates with a mad skipper--an' a lunatic Number One, but never both together I thank 'Eaven. I could give you the names o' three captains now 'oo ought to be in an asylum, but you don't find me interferin' with the mentally afflicted till they begin to lay about 'em with rammers an' winch-handles. Only once I crept up a little into the wind towards Master Vickery. 'I wonder what she's doin' in England,' I says. 'Don't it seem to you she's lookin' for somebody?' That was in the Gardens again, with the South-Easter blowin' as we were makin' our desperate round. 'She's lookin' for me,' he says, stoppin' dead under a lamp an' clickin'. When he wasn't drinkin', in which case all 'is teeth clicked on the glass, 'e was clickin' 'is four false teeth like a Marconi ticker. 'Yes! lookin' for me,' he said, an' he went on very softly an' as



you might say affectionately. 'But? he went on, 'in future, Mr. Pyecroft, I should take it kindly of you if you'd confine your remarks to the drinks set before you. Otherwise,' he says, 'with the best will in the world towards you, I may find myself guilty of murder! Do you understand?' he says. 'Perfectly,' I says, 'but would it at all soothe you to know that in such a case the chances o' your being killed are precisely equivalent to the chances o' me being outed.' 'Why, no,' he says, 'I'm almost afraid that 'ud be a temptation,'

"Then I said--we was right under the lamp by that arch at the end o' the Gardens where the trams came round--'Assumin' murder was done--or attempted murder--I put it to you that you would still be left so badly crippled, as one might say, that your subsequent capture by the police--to 'oom you would 'ave to explain--would be largely inevitable.' 'That's better,' 'e says, passin' 'is hands over his forehead. 'That's much better, because,' he says, 'do you know, as I am now, Pye, I'm not so sure if I could explain anything much.' Those were the only particular words I had with 'im in our walks as I remember."

"What walks!" said Hooper. "Oh my soul, what walks!"

"They were chronic," said Pyecroft gravely, "but I didn't anticipate any danger till the Circus left. Then I anticipated that, bein' deprived of 'is stimulant, he might react on me, so to say, with a hatchet. Consequently, after the final performance an' the ensuin' wet walk, I kep' myself aloof from my superior officer on board in the execution of 'is duty as you might put it. Consequently, I was interested when the sentry

informs me while I was passin' on my lawful occasions that Click had asked to see the captain. As a general rule warrant officers don't dissipate much of the owner's time, but Click put in an hour and more be'ind that door. My duties kep' me within eyeshot of it. Vickery came out first, an' 'e actually nodded at me an' smiled. This knocked me out o' the boat, because, havin' seen 'is face for five consecutive nights, I didn't anticipate any change there more than a condenser in hell, so to speak. The owner emerged later. His face didn't read off at all, so I fell back on his cox, 'oo'd been eight years with him and knew him better than boat signals. Lamson--that was the cox's name--crossed 'is bows once or twice at low speeds an' dropped down to me visibly concerned. 'He's shipped 'is court-martial face,' says Lamson. 'Some one's goin' to be 'ung. I've never seen that look but once before when they chucked the gun-sights overboard in the Fantastic.' Throwin' gun-sights overboard, Mr. Hooper, is the equivalent for mutiny in these degenerate days. It's done to attract the notice of the authorities an' the Western Mornin' News--generally by a stoker. Naturally, word went round the lower deck an' we had a private over'aul of our little consciences. But, barrin' a shirt which a second-class stoker said 'ad walked into 'is bag from the marines flat by itself, nothin' vital transpired. The owner went about flyin' the signal for 'attend public execution,' so to say, but there was no corpse at the yardarm. 'E lunched on the beach an' 'e returned with 'is regulation harbour-routine face about 3 P. M. Thus Lamson lost prestige for raising false alarms. The only person 'oo might 'ave connected the epicycloidal gears correctly was one Pyecroft, when he was told that Mr. Vickery would go up country that same evening to take over certain naval ammunition left after the war in Bloemfontein Fort. No details was ordered to accompany

Master Vickery. He was told off first person singular--as a unit---by himself."

The marine whistled penetratingly.

"That's what I thought," said Pycroft. "I went ashore with him in the cutter an' 'e asked me to walk through the station. He was clickin' audibly, but otherwise seemed happy-ish.

"'You might like to know,' he says, stoppin' just opposite the Admiral's front gate, 'that Phyllis's Circus will be performin' at Worcester to-morrow night. So I shall see 'er yet once again. You've been very patient with me,' he says.

"'Look here, Vickery,' I said, 'this thing's come to be just as much as I can stand. Consume your own smoke. I don't want to know any more.'

"'You!' he said. 'What have you got to complain of?--you've only 'ad to watch. I'm it,' he says, 'but that's neither here nor there,' he says.

'I've one thing to say before shakin' 'ands. Remember,' 'e says--we were just by the Admiral's garden-gate then--'remember, that I am not a murderer, because my lawful wife died in childbed six weeks after I came out. That much at least I am clear of,' 'e says.

"'Then what have you done that signifies?' I said. 'What's the rest of it?'

"The rest,' e says, 'is silence,' an' he shook 'ands and went clickin' into Simons Town station."

"Did he stop to see Mrs. Bathurst at Worcester?" I asked.

"It's not known. He reported at Bloemfontein, saw the ammunition into the trucks, and then 'e disappeared. Went out--deserted, if you care to put it so--within eighteen months of his pension, an' if what 'e said about 'is wife was true he was a free man as 'e then stood. How do you read it off?"

"Poor devil!" said Hooper. "To see her that way every night! I wonder what it was."

"I've made my 'ead ache in that direction many a long night."

"But I'll swear Mrs. B. 'ad no 'and in it," said the Sergeant unshaken.

"No. Whatever the wrong or deceit was, he did it, I'm sure o' that. I 'ad to look at 'is face for five consecutive nights. I'm not so fond o' navigatin' about Cape Town with a South-Easter blowin' these days. I can hear those teeth click, so to say."

"Ah, those teeth," said Hooper, and his hand went to his waistcoat pocket once more. "Permanent things false teeth are. You read about 'em in all the murder trials."

"What d'you suppose the captain knew--or did?" I asked.

"I never turned my searchlight that way," Pyecroft answered unblushingly.

We all reflected together, and drummed on empty beer bottles as the picnic-party, sunburned, wet, and sandy, passed our door singing "The Honeysuckle and the Bee."

"Pretty girl under that kapje," said Pyecroft.

"They never circulated his description?" said Pritchard.

"I was askin' you before these gentlemen came," said Hooper to me, "whether you knew Wankies--on the way to the Zambesi--beyond Buluwayo?"

"Would he pass there--tryin' to get to that Lake what's 'is name?" said Pritchard.

Hooper shook his head and went on: "There's a curious bit o' line there, you see. It runs through solid teak forest--a sort o' mahogany really--seventy-two miles without a curve. I've had a train derailed there twenty-three times in forty miles. I was up there a month ago relievin' a sick inspector, you see. He told me to look out for a couple of tramps in the teak."

"Two?" Pyecroft said. "I don't envy that other man if---"

"We get heaps of tramps up there since the war. The inspector told me I'd

find 'em at M'Bindwe siding waiting to go North. He'd given 'em some grub and quinine, you see. I went up on a construction train. I looked out for 'em. I saw them miles ahead along the straight, waiting in the teak. One of 'em was standin' up by the dead-end of tke siding an' the other was squattin' down lookin' up at 'im, you see."

"What did you do for 'em?" said Pritchard.

"There wasn't much I could do, except bury 'em. There'd been a bit of a thunderstorm in the teak, you see, and they were both stone dead and as black as charcoal. That's what they really were, you see--charcoal. They fell to bits when we tried to shift 'em. The man who was standin' up had the false teeth. I saw 'em shinin' against the black. Fell to bits he did too, like his mate squatting down an' watchin' him, both of 'em all wet in the rain. Both burned to charcoal, you see. And--that's what made me ask about marks just now--the false-toother was tattoed on the arms and chest--a crown and fowl anchor with M.V. above."

"I've seen that," said Pycroft quickly. "It was so."

"But if he was all charcoal-like?" said Pritchard, shuddering.

"You know how writing shows up white on a burned letter? Well, it was like that, you see. We buried 'em in the teak and I kept... But he was a friend of you two gentlemen, you see."

Mr. Hooper brought his hand away from his waistcoat-pocket--empty.

Pritchard covered his face with his hands for a moment, like a child shutting out an ugliness.

"And to think of her at Hauraki!" he murmured--"with 'er 'air-ribbon on my beer. 'Ada,' she said to her niece... Oh, my Gawd!"...

"On a summer afternoon, when the honeysuckle blooms,  
And all Nature seems at rest,  
Underneath the bower, 'mid the perfume of the flower,  
Sat a maiden with the one she loves the best----"

sang the picnic-party waiting for their train at Glengariff.

"Well, I don't know how you feel about it," said Pyecroft, "but 'avin' seen 'is face for five consecutive nights on end, I'm inclined to finish what's left of the beer an' thank Gawd he's dead!"

BELOW THE MILL DAM

"OUR FATHERS ALSO"

By--they are by with mirth and tears,

Wit or the works of Desire--