

GLASS-EYED BILL

He was plainly new to God's country, and showed it by his artless contempt of God's Own. Bob Hammill, the driver of the Las Vegas stage, condescended a little to his only passenger, offered him a nip, together with a few reflections on the universe—and went out of his way to say some nice things about "covar that."

A little unbending on the part of the gentleman from "over thar" would have resulted in Bob's taking a detour and disembarking him all complete at his destination, and this for no other toll than a grasp of the hand at parting and a hearty "You're welcome" as he whipped up his four horses. But Capt. Anstruther was unused to a scheme of things where ready fellowship counted for more than money.

Of course he had a puggaree and strange, enormous shoes, with hornails in them, and a wonderful checked knickerbocker costume, involving a weird variety of gaiter that stopped half way up his calf. It was no less singular inside than out, and next his skin was a leather money belt, and he was wound round and round with fannel to keep him from having cholera, and concealing his person was a silver drinking cup that cost eight guineas at Silby's, and a compact, a little flitter that weighed only a pound, and an extraordinary knife of extraordinary size, which had a folding spoon in it and a gimlet and a saw and a sailer's needle. He had been "out-fitted" in London at an expense of a hundred pounds sterling, and that was why he clanked as he walked and dug things into him when he sat down. Why California should require such terrific preparations it is not for the narrator to say.

This accomplished, he set off, in no very rosy frame of mind, to follow the road to El Nido Ranch. He did not step out with the air of a man assured of a bath and a hospitable welcome. On the contrary, he wore the set expression of one charged with a very disagreeable duty; and with his mind, instead of dwelling on the beautiful and romantic scenery, was weighted like lead besides with the memory of a dressing-case, dispatch box, hat box, portmanteau, gun case, portable bath and roll of steamer rugs. He left unchecked in the cloak-room of high heaven. However, he advanced manfully, swinging a very thick stick and printing the mountain road with a hobnailed pattern that puzzled the school children for days afterward. A mile—two miles—and then he came in sight of some straggly red buildings on a hill. The Captain pegged away, the red buildings grew redder and larger, one of them, almost a factory for size, curtly informed him in letters, ten feet high that it was a winery.

The stranger breathed a sigh of relief. He knew now that he had arrived at his destination. He struck out a little to the right, where a good-sized private house, surrounded by a paling fence, obviously sheltered the owner, or foreman of the ranch. The privacy of this place was protected by a board which said succinctly: "Keep Out," but the Englishman, undeterred by the warning, kept on, and strode up the gravel walk to the rose-embowered porch beyond. He was a little daunted, however, by the prevailing silence. He would have welcomed the bark of a dog, or some gruff voice demanding what he wanted. To walk into such a tomblike quiet made him uncomfortable. He saw himself in imagination possibly misjudged; beset, maybe, and his hand tightened on his stick, and he set his feet down more loudly than ever to assert the uprightness of his intentions. He tramped up the three steps leading to the porch like a mule battery going in to action. But the stillness remained unbroken, save by any noise but his own.

He looked about in perplexity until at last, in the darkest and furthest corner, he detected a hammock, and saw, not without relief, that it was occupied by a recumbent figure. He went over to it, still in his heavy, soldierly fashion, and looked down on—well, what in his own words he used to describe afterwards as: "Pon my soul, the most beautiful creature I was ever privileged to gaze upon—Gad, a girl of twenty, with her lips a little parted on the whitest teeth you ever saw, and her breath coming and going as faint as a baby's in a cot, and beauty? Why, it was like seeing the Taj Mahal by moonlight—the same indescribable what-d'ye-callum, you know, when something seems to take you by the throat and you gasp, my boy, positively gasp!"

She was dressed in silvery gray, with a lace collar about her neck, and in her left, rumpled chestnut hair there lay a single red carnation. She wore a pair of red and white stockings, and a pair of red and white shoes. Her eyes were closed, and her hands were clasped in her lap.

without the sight of her was as refreshing as a splashing pool in the taint, after his first moment of surprise, began to wonder what steps he ought to take to awaken her. Every instinct as a gentleman bade him cough; so he coughed. At first so gently that it was almost a lullaby, and then by degrees rising to an honest, growling, bulldogish cough that seemed to say, "Wake up, confound you!"

At last she stirred and opened her eyes and met those of the stranger looking down at her. He said hastily, "I beg your pardon," and betrayed enough agitation to spill a box of sweets and a half-opened novel from the chair beside him. The girl sat up in the hammock, still gazing at him with astonishment, and asked him who he was and where he came from.

"Gad, sir, in a voice like a Cashmiri flue on the Lake of Selangor, borne over the water at dusk! Or the bubul in one of those mouldy old gardens where the Rajout princes held high revel in the Company days!"

"My name is Anstruther," he said, picking chocolate creams off the floor. "Capt. Anstruther of the 100th Dragoon Guards—British Army, you know."

"You are, I presume, Miss Helen Jeffrey?" he went on. "She showed the least little sign of embarrassment and colored perceptibly as she assented with a movement of her head.

"Extraordinary," ejaculated the Captain. "Most extraordinary!"

"Why?" she asked. "It was the Captain's turn to look put out. "I'm not accustomed to awaken the young ladies I call on," he said. "I pride myself on being a man of the world, but positively, for once, I felt myself staggered."

"There was my side of it, too," she said. "They both laughed, and the Captain asked permission to take a chair. He could be a very agreeable man when he chose, and it was plain that he was choosing. His manner was almost too ingratiating, and Helen could not but wonder inwardly what he was after."

"My business—is rather with your father," he said. "He's at the Hot Springs, sick," she said. "I'm running the Winery for him. Can't you make me do?" "You don't mean to say you are in charge of this whole establishment?" he said. "Oh, yes, I'm the boss here," she returned, "though, of course, I have pa on the wire, you know. What can I do for you, Captain? We'll only be too glad to make an opening over there for our wines—that is, if your rating is good and you represent responsible people."

"The chicken of charity," said the girl, filling in the gap. "I would call it rather the huss of the Prodigal Son," said the Captain, solemnly.

"Are you the elder brother?" she asked. "No, no," returned the Captain, "only what you might call a—friend, a—"

"Bill didn't have any friends," she said, bitterly. "Only an aunt, that is all. Except for her, he said there wasn't a soul in England who would have walked around the block to help him."

"Capt. Anstruther looked depressed. "He was wrong," he said. "He was wrong." "Of course, the trouble with Bill was that he drank," she said.

"Oh, he did everything," assented the Captain, comprehensively. "He's on the water wagon now," she remarked; "been there for a year and a half. Is going to stay, too."

"Water wagon?" inquired the Captain. "Is that the vernacular for—I mean I have to—him," she explained. "I guess you wouldn't know Bill now. He has money in the bank and drinks coffee with his meals!"

The Captain looked more depressed than ever. "I suppose we ought all to thank you," he said. "Yes, indeed, we are very grateful to you."

"I don't want you to think I am just a little angel," she went on, "or that I go around radiating reform like a lawn-sprinkler sprinkling. I'm quite a believer in letting people mind their own business. But you see, in this case, Bill brought it on his own head."

"That's where he usually brought things," said the Captain. "Often pretty hard, too!" "He never was a nipping kind of man, thank goodness," she said, "but he used to go off on what pa called a biennial bust. He had been here five months, and a perfect pattern before we got on to it. Pa at last made him the foreman, you know, and we were really beginning to think we had found our long-lost child. He was always so polite, you know, and hard-working and reliable; and he just smuggled into the place like a dog that he followed you home. Pa said it was all too good to be true, and I guess pa was right, for one hot Sunday afternoon a man came running in to say that Bill was fighting drunk, and walking round the yard with a pistol to shoot Mr. Jackson with (our chemist, you know, and expert winemaker), and that he was crawling heads on anybody that tried to stop him. Even while he was talking we heard bang! bang! bang! out there, and Mr. Jackson came peeing in like a jack rabbit—not a bit hurt, you know, but like a person of a sinking ship wanting to catch the last boat. I started upstairs to get under the bed, but I hadn't got up a step before I saw pa reaching for his Winchester and pinning his deputy sheriff badge on the lapel of his coat. I knew that was the end of Bill and it came over me I couldn't bear to have him killed—he was too big and splendid to be shot down like a dog, and anyway, I had never liked Jackson since he had tried to kiss me once at a dance—and so I just ran out to see if something couldn't be done."

"I tell you Bill looked eight feet high, and his eyes were bloodshot and crazy, and the kind of sobbing when he breathed—and if you ever looked down the wrong end of a frontier Colt you can imagine my feelings for yourself. But I want straight up to him and wrested his gun away and stood in front of him, so pa couldn't shoot him from the house. Fine? I should say it was—nobody was more surprised than me, I'm sure, and I'm surprised now. But I guess I knew pretty well Bill wouldn't hurt me for the world; though, looking back on it, I can't see how I didn't choose underneath the bed."

Spangles in the wild beasts' cage. Little Spangles won out, of course, though once or twice it was a pretty close call. But at last pa quieted down and went off, quite mild, to find Mr. Jackson. Nobody ever has. He disappeared like an orange under a conjurer's hat! All that's left of Mr. Jackson is upstairs in two trunks and a debt balance of \$113 on the payroll. I think he must have changed his name and quit the country. If you had ever been up against Bill I guess you'd have done it, too. Anyway, peace descended like a beautiful dream, and Bill stayed foreman instead of going into the jute business at San Quentin Prison. I dare say he might never really have got there, but he might have, you know, and he didn't want to try."

"That's all more than a year old now, and Bill has never been on a tear since. He says it was all my running out at him and looking down his pistol, but I tell him it was the scare he got from pa! It wasn't as though he really liked it, you know—drinking, I mean—but sometimes he'd come to a place where he simply couldn't go on, and was so hopeless and desperate and miserable—that was his last biennial bust, for now, of course, he's got something to live for and it's all different. Oh, dear, when once I get started talking about Bill I never seem to know when to stop! Why do you look so grave, Captain? Aren't you pleased?"

"I have something to say about Bill, too," he returned slowly. "His early life and his early scrapes," she said, "and how you don't believe it will last? There is not much about Bill I don't already know—his being sent away from England, and how they never wanted to see him again."

"I am out here to take him back," she said. "He won't go easy," said the girl, said the Captain. "I am not so sure," said the Captain. "Circumstances have altered. I don't see very well how he can refuse. I—we—the family, I mean, are delighted to hear that he has retrieved himself and risen superior to the boyish follies that threaten to engulf him. Let me express to you our deep sense of obligation—our gratitude—for your evident kindness to him at a time when he needed it most."

"I don't think I care to receive the family gratitude," she answered coldly. "What did they ever do for Bill but give him the cold shoulder from the time he was left an orphan at twelve? Sent him to Eaton and Oxford as a preparatory step to giving him a thousand pounds sterling and telling him to scot. You can imagine how well equipped he was to strike out for himself. Couldn't even spell English till I got after him with a speller and had to work nights before he could write a page without at least six schoolboy mistakes. The only thing he really knew was 'Paradise Lost,' which had been crammed into him for the army. He must have found it nice and useful!"

"He was given his chance," said the Captain, "and like many another, he wouldn't take it. He was put into a good regiment and received an allowance that, with economy, would have amply sufficed to let him hold his head up. Then he went the pace and was forgiven. Then he went the pace again, and wasn't. He has no right to complain."

"Oh, but he doesn't," she exclaimed, hastily. "I wouldn't have you think that for anything!" "But you seem to do it for him," said the Captain. "I don't suppose my opinion matters particularly."

"Well, it was enough to bring me from England," said the Captain. "What you think or don't think has suddenly become of great importance to many people."

"Don't you think it is about time to tell me why?" she asked. "You have hinted and hinted till I feel like a person in a detective story—and I no sooner seem to touch something but you continue it in the next number."

"Did Bill—ever tell you of his first cousin, Lord Tranton?" "Only that he held down the title and was the dead image of the postmaster at Las Vegas. Never passes there but he says, 'Look at that tall-faced, wall-eyed old—'" "Hush," said the Captain. "Lord Tranton is dead!" "Dead?" "His two sons with him, and Lady Grace Morrison—William's aunt, you know. All killed in the terrible lift accident at the Hotel des Hesperides in Nice!" "Well, I am sorry," she said, as Anstruther gazed steadfastly at her, as though expecting she knew not what. "Sorry for anybody that gets killed, on know—especially in an elevator. But as I don't know them, you can't expect me to feel bad about it, can you?" "Don't you realize how it will affect William?" "Oh, he'll be terribly cut up about his aunt. She was the only person who was ever kind to him. The only one in England he ever wrote to—or who wrote to him."

Table with 4 columns: DAY OF MONTH, DAY OF WEEK, COLOR OF VEGETATIONS, and Festivals. Includes dates for March 1905, such as St. Joseph's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and various Lenten Sundays.

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"Whitecombe said I was to begin at £5,000." "The point is, where will you leave off?" "Ten thousand!" "Why didn't you say it sooner?" "The fact is—or—the dear Duke thought—er—Whitecombe said—" "That you might pull it off without?" "The Captain hung his head. "They must have thought you more of a spellbinder than you are," she remarked, cruelly.

"I told Whitecombe myself I was the last man to talk to anybody into doing anything," said the Captain. "Well, it's not enough for Bill," said the girl. "The price of a thing is what it's worth to you. Bill's worth lots more than that—to me."

"I will make it fifteen thousand," said the Captain, hesitatingly. "That is, on my own personal responsibility, subject to confirmation by wire." "Where's the thing for me to sign?" she asked.

He drew out from his breast pocket a large, important-looking document engrossed on sheepskin. It cracked richly as he opened it and spread it flat with his big hands. It was beautifully glossy, and Helen thought Magna Charta must have looked like it when it was new. She lay back in the hammock, took a chocolate cream, and gave it her disdainful attention. Bill was renounced with a wealth of legal detail that was positively bewildering; renounced from his head to his heels; renounced awake or sleeping or dining out or sitting up with a sick friend; renounced body and soul, alive or dead, positively and explicitly for all time, past, present or to come. She couldn't even say good morning to Bill without violating two whole pages of it, she couldn't even send him a postcard without incurring fourteen lines of different kinds of penalties, and the whole thing was inexplicably intertwined with the Lord Chancellor's displeasure and the High Court of Chancery. It reminded Helen, in the profuseness of its reprobation of the curse of the Jackdaw of Rheims.

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