

The Unspeakable Egg, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

When Fifi visited her Long Island aunts the first time she was only ten years old, but after she went back to New York the man who worked around the place said that the sand dunes would never be the same again. She had spoiled them. When she left, everything on Montauk Point seemed sad and futile and broken and old. Even the gulls wheeled about less enthusiastically, as if they missed the brown, hardy little girl with big eyes who played barefoot in the sand.

The years bleached out Fifi's tan and turned her a pale-pink color, but she still managed to spoil many places and plans for many hopeful men. So when at last it was announced in the best newspapers that she had concentrated on a gentleman named Van Tyne everyone was rather glad that all the sadness and longing that followed in her wake should become the responsibility of one self-sacrificing individual; not better for the individual, but for Fifi's little world very much better indeed.

The engagement was not announced on the sporting page, nor even in the help-wanted column, because Fifi's family belonged to the Society for the Preservation of Large Fortunes; and Mr. Van Tyne was descended from the man who accidentally founded that society, back before the Civil War. It appeared on the page of great names and was illustrated by a picture of a cross-eyed young lady holding the hand of a savage gentleman with four rows of teeth. That was how their pictures came out, anyhow, and the public was pleased to know that they were ugly monsters for all their money, and everyone was satisfied all around. The society editor set up a column telling how Mrs. Van Tyne started off in the Aquitania wearing a blue traveling dress of starched felt with a round square hat to match; and so far as human events can be prophesied, Fifi was as good as married; or, as not a few young men considered, as bad as married.

"An exceptionally brilliant match," remarked Aunt Cal on the eve of the wedding, as she sat in her house on Montauk Point and clipped the notice for the cousins in Scotland, and then she added abstractedly, "All is forgiven."

"Why, Cal!" cried Aunt Josephine. "What do you mean when you say all is forgiven? Fifi has never injured you in any way."

"In the past nine years she has not seen fit to visit us here at Montauk Point, though we have invited her over and over again."

"But I don't blame her," said Aunt Josephine, who was only thirty-one herself. "What would a young pretty girl do down here with all this sand?"

"We like the sand, Jo."

"But we're old maids, Cal, with no vices except cigarettes and double-dummy mah-jongg. Now Fifi, being young, naturally likes exciting, vicious

things—late hours, dice playing, all the diversions we read about in these books."

She waved her hand vaguely.

"I don't blame her for not coming down here. If I were in her place—"

What unnatural ambitions lurked in Aunt Jo's head were never disclosed, for the sentence remained unfinished. The front door of the house opened in an abrupt, startled way, and a young lady walked into the room in a dress marked "Paris, France."

"Good evening, dear ladies," she cried, smiling radiantly from one to the other. "I've come down here for an indefinite time in order to play in the sand."

"Fifi!"

"Fifi!"

"Aunts!"

"But, my dear child," cried Aunt Jo, "I thought this was the night of the bridal dinner."

"It is," admitted Fifi cheerfully. "But I didn't go. I'm not going to the wedding either. I sent in my regrets today."

It was all very vague; but it seemed, as far as her aunts could gather, that young Van Tyne was too perfect—whatever that meant. After much urging Fifi finally explained that he reminded her of an advertisement for a new car.

"A new car?" inquired Aunt Cal, wide eyed. "What new car?"

"Any new car."

"Do you mean—"

Aunt Cal blushed.

"I don't understand this new slang, but isn't there some part of a car that's called the—the clutch?"

"Oh, I like him physically," remarked Fifi coolly. Her aunts started in unison. "But he was just— Oh, too perfect, too new; as if they'd fooled over him at the factory for a long time and put special curtains on him—"

Aunt Jo had visions of a black-leather sheik.

"—and balloon tires and a permanent shave. He was too civilized for me, Aunt Cal." She sighed. "I must be one of the rougher girls, after all."

She was as immaculate and dainty sitting there as though she were the portrait of a young lady and about to be hung on the wall. But underneath her cheerfulness her aunts saw that she was in a state of hysterical excitement, and they persisted in suspecting that something more definite and shameful was the matter.

"But it isn't," insisted Fifi. "Our engagement was announced three months ago, and not a single chorus girl has sued George for breach of promise. Not one! He doesn't use alcohol in any form except as hair tonic. Why, we've never even quarreled until today!"

"You've made a serious mistake," said Aunt Cal.

Fifi nodded.

"I'm afraid I've broken the heart of the nicest man I ever met in my life, but it can't be helped. Immaculate! Why, what's the use of being immaculate when, no matter how hard you try, you can't be half so immaculate as your husband? And tactful? George could introduce Mr. Trotzky to Mr. Rockefeller and there wouldn't be a single blow. But after a certain point, I want to have all the tact in my family, and I told him so. I've never left a man practically at the church door before, so I'm going to stay here until everyone has had a chance to forget."

And stay she did—rather to the surprise of her aunts, who expected that next morning she would rush wildly and remorsefully back to New York. She appeared at breakfast very calm and fresh and cool, and as though she had slept soundly all night, and spent the day reclining under a red parasol beside the sunny dunes, watching the Atlantic roll in from the east. Her aunts intercepted the evening paper and burnt it unseen in the open fire, under the impression that Fifi's flight would be recorded in red headlines across the front page. They accepted the fact that Fifi was here, and except that Aunt Jo was inclined to go mah-jongg without a pair when she speculated on the too perfect man, their lives went along very much the same. But not quite the same.

"What's the matter with that niece of yours?" demanded the yardman gloomily of Aunt Josephine. "What's a young pretty girl want to come and hide herself down here for?"

"My niece is resting," declared Aunt Josephine stiffly.

"Them dunes ain't good for wore-out people," objected the yardman, soothing his head with his fingers. "There's a monoteness about them. I seen her yesterday take her parasol and like to beat one down, she got so mad at it. Some day she's going to notice how many of them there are, and all of a sudden go loony." He sniffed. "And then what kind of a proposition we going to have on our hands?"

"That will do, Percy," snapped Aunt Jo. "Go about your business. I want ten pounds of broken-up shells rolled into the front walk."

"What'll I do with that parasol?" he demanded. "I picked up the pieces."

"It's not my parasol," said Aunt Jo tartly. "You can take the pieces and roll them into the front walk too."

And so the June of Fifi's abandoned honeymoon drifted away, and every morning her rubber shoes left wet footprints along a desolate shore at the end of nowhere. For a while she seemed to thrive on the isolation, and the sea wind blew her cheeks scarlet with health; but after a week had passed, her aunts saw that she was noticeably restless and less cheerful even than when she came.

"I'm afraid it's getting on your nerves, my dear," said Aunt Cal one particularly wild and windy afternoon. "We love to have you here, but we hate to see you looking so sad. Why don't you ask your mother to take you to Europe for the summer?"

"Europe's too dressed up," objected Fifi wearily. "I like it here where everything's rugged and harsh and rude, like the end of the world. If you don't mind, I'd like to stay longer."

She stayed longer, and seemed to grow more and more melancholy as the days slipped by to the raucous calls of the gulls and the flashing tumult of the waves along the shore. Then one afternoon she returned at twilight from the longest of her long walks with a strange derelict of a man. And after one look at him her aunts thought that the gardener's prophecy had come true and that solitude had driven Fifi mad at last.

II

He was a very ragged wreck of a man as he stood in the doorway on that summer evening, blinking into Aunt Cal's eyes; rather like a beachcomber who had wandered accidentally out of a movie of the South Seas. In his hands he carried a knotted stick of a brutal, treacherous shape. It was a murderous-looking stick, and the sight of it caused Aunt Cal to shrink back a little into the room.

Fifi shut the door behind them and turned to her aunts as if this were the most natural occasion in the world.

"This is Mr. Hopkins," she announced, and then turned to her companion for corroboration. "Or is it Hopwood?"

"Hopkins," said the man hoarsely. "Hopkins."

Fifi nodded cheerfully.

"I've asked Mr. Hopkins to dinner," she said.

There was some dignity which Aunt Cal and Aunt Josephine had acquired, living here beside the proud sea, that would not let them show surprise. The man was a guest now; that was enough. But in their hearts all was turmoil and confusion. They would have been no more surprised had Fifi brought in a many-headed monster out of the Atlantic.

"Won't you—won't you sit down, Mr. Hopkins?" said Aunt Cal nervously.

Mr. Hopkins looked at her blankly for a moment, and then made a loud clicking sound in the back of his mouth. He took a step toward a chair and sank down on its gilt frailty as though he meant to annihilate it immediately. Aunt Cal and Aunt Josephine collapsed rather weakly on the sofa.

"Mr. Hopkins and I struck up an acquaintance on the beach," explained Fifi. "He's been spending the summer down here for his health."

Mr. Hopkins fixed his eyes glassily on the two aunts.

"I come down for my health," he said.

Aunt Cal made some small sound; but recovering herself quickly, joined Aunt Jo in nodding eagerly at the visitor, as if they deeply sympathized.

"Yeah," he repeated cheerfully.

"He thought the sea air would make him well and strong again," said Fifi eagerly. "That's why he came down here. Isn't that it, Mr. Hopkins?"

"You said it, sister," agreed Mr. Hopkins, nodding.

"So you see, Aunt Cal," smiled Fifi, "you and Aunt Jo aren't the only two people who believe in the medicinal quality of this location."

"No," agreed Aunt Cal faintly. "There are—there are three of us now."

Dinner was announced.

"Would you—would you"—Aunt Cal braced herself and looked Mr. Hopkins in the eye—"would you like to wash your hands before dinner?"

"Don't mention it." Mr. Hopkins waved his fingers at her carelessly.

They went in to dinner, and after some furtive backing and bumping due to the two aunts trying to keep as far as possible from Mr. Hopkins, sat down at table.

"Mr. Hopkins lives in the woods," said Fifi. "He has a little house all by himself, where he cooks his own meals and does his own washing week in and week out."

"How fascinating!" said Aunt Jo, looking searchingly at their guest for some signs of the scholarly recluse. "Have you been living near here for some time?"

"Not so long," he answered with a leer. "But I'm stuck on it, see? I'll maybe stay here till I rot."

"Are you—do you live far away?" Aunt Cal was wondering what price she could get for the house at a forced sale, and how she and her sister could ever bear to move.

"Just a mile down the line... This is a pretty gal you got here," he added, indicating their niece with his spoon.

"Why—yes." The two ladies glanced uneasily at Fifi.

"Some day I'm going to pick her up and run away with her," he added pleasantly.

Aunt Cal, with a heroic effort, switched the subject away from their niece. They discussed Mr. Hopkins' shack in the woods. Mr. Hopkins liked it well enough, he confessed, except for the presence of minute animal life, a small fault in an otherwise excellent habitat.

After dinner Fifi and Mr. Hopkins went out to the porch, while her aunts sat side by side on the sofa turning over the pages of magazines and from time to time glancing at each other with stricken eyes. That a savage had a few minutes since been sitting at their dinner table, that he was now alone with their niece on the dark veranda—no such terrible adventure had ever been allotted to their prim, quiet lives before.

Aunt Cal determined that at nine, whatever the consequences, she would call Fifi inside; but she was saved this necessity, for after half an hour the young lady strolled in calmly and announced that Mr. Hopkins had gone home. They looked at her, speechless.

"Fifi!" groaned Aunt Cal. "My poor child! Sorrow and loneliness have driven you insane!"

"We understand, my dear," said Aunt Jo, touching her handkerchief to her eyes. "It's our fault for letting you stay. A few weeks in one of those rest-cure places, or perhaps even a good cabaret, will—"

"What do you mean?" Fifi looked from one to the other in surprise. "Do you mean you object to my bringing Mr. Hopkins here?"

Aunt Cal flushed a dull red and her lips shut tight together.

"'Object' is not the word. You find some horrible, brutal roust-about along the beach—"

She broke off and gave a little cry. The door had swung open suddenly and a hairy face was peering into the room.

"I left my stick."

Mr. Hopkins discovered the unpleasant weapon leaning in the corner and withdrew as unceremoniously as he had come, banging the door shut behind him. Fifi's aunt sat motionless until his footsteps left the porch. Then Aunt Cal went swiftly to the door and pulled down the latch.

"I don't suppose he'll try to rob us tonight," she said grimly, "because he must know we'll be prepared. But I'll warn Percy to go around the yard several times during the night."

"Rob you!" cried Fifi incredulously.

"Don't excite yourself, Fifi," commanded Aunt Cal. "Just rest quietly in that chair while I call up your mother."

"I don't want you to call up my mother."

"Sit calmly and close your eyes and try to-try to count sheep jumping over a fence."

"Am I never to see another man unless he has a cutaway coat on?" exclaimed Fifi with flashing eyes. "Is this the Dark Ages, or the century of-of illumination? Mr. Hopkins is one of the most attractive eggs I've ever met in my life."

"Mr. Hopkins is a savage!" said Aunt Cal succinctly.

"Mr. Hopkins is a very attractive egg."

"A very attractive what?"

"A very attractive egg."

"Mr. Hopkins is a-a-an unspeakable egg," proclaimed Aunt Cal, adopting Fifi's locution.

"Just because he's natural," cried Fifi impatiently. "All right, I don't care; he's good enough for me."

The situation, it seemed, was even worse than they thought. This was no temporary aberration; evidently Fifi, in the reaction from her recent fiancé, was interested in this outrageous man. She had met him several days ago, she confessed, and she intended to see him tomorrow. They had a date to go walking.

The worst of it was that after Fifi had gone scornfully to bed, Aunt Cal called up her mother—and found that her mother was not at home; her mother had gone to White Sulphur Springs and wouldn't be home for a week. It left the situation definitely in the hands of Aunt Cal and Aunt Jo, and the situation came to a head the next afternoon at tea time, when Percy rushed in upon them excitedly through the kitchen door.

"Miss Marsden," he exclaimed in a shocked, offended voice, "I want to give up my position!"

"Why, Percy!"

"I can't help it. I lived here on the Point for more'n forty-five years, and I never seen such a sight as I seen just now."

"What's the matter?" cried the two ladies, springing up in wild alarm.

"Go to the window and look for yourself. Miss Fifi is kissing a tramp in broad daylight, down on the beach!"

III

Five minutes later two maiden ladies were making their way across the sand toward a couple who stood close together on the shore, sharply outlined against the bright afternoon sky. As they came closer Fifi and Mr. Hopkins, absorbed in the contemplation of each other, perceived them and drew lingeringly apart. Aunt Cal began to speak when they were still thirty yards away.

"Go into the house, Fifi!" she cried.

Fifi looked at Mr. Hopkins, who touched her hand reassuringly and nodded. As if under the influence of a charm, Fifi turned away from him, and with her head lowered walked with slender grace toward the house.

"Now, my man," said Aunt Cal, folding her arms, "what are your intentions?"

Mr. Hopkins returned her glare rudely. Then he gave a low hoarse laugh.

"What's that to you?" he demanded.

"It's everything to us. Miss Marsden is our niece, and your attentions are unwelcome—not to say obnoxious."

Mr. Hopkins turned half away.

"Aw, go on and blab your mouth out!" he advised her.

Aunt Cal tried a new approach.

"What if I were to tell you that Miss Marsden were mentally deranged?"

"What's that?"

"She's—she's a little crazy."

He smiled contemptuously.

"What's the idea? Crazy 'cause she likes me?"

"That merely indicates it," answered Aunt Cal bravely. "She's had an unfortunate love affair and it's affected her mind. Look here!" She opened the purse that swung at her waist. "If I give you fifty—a hundred dollars right now in cash, will you promise to move yourself ten miles up the beach?"

"Ah-h-h-h!" he exclaimed, so venomously that the two ladies swayed together.

"Two hundred!" cried Aunt Cal, with a catch in her voice.



He shook his finger at them.

"You can't buy me!" he growled. "I'm as good as anybody. There's chauffeurs and such that marry millionaires' daughters every day in the week. This is Umerica, a free country, see?"

"You won't give her up?" Aunt Cal swallowed hard on the words. "You won't stop bothering her and go away?"

He bent over suddenly and scooped up a large double handful of sand, which he threw in a high parabola so that it scattered down upon the horrified ladies, enveloping them for a moment in a thick mist. Then laughing once again in his hoarse, boorish way, he turned and set off at a loping run along the sand.

In a daze the two women brushed the casual sand from their shoulders and walked stiffly toward the house.

"I'm younger than you are," said Aunt Jo firmly when they reached the living room. "I want a chance now to see what I can do."

She went to the telephone and called a New York number.

"Doctor Roswell Gallup's office? Is Doctor Gallup there?" Aunt Cal sat down on the sofa and gazed tragically at the ceiling. "Doctor Gallup? This is Miss Josephine Marsden, of Montauk Point... Doctor Gallup, a very curious state of affairs has arisen concerning my niece. She has become entangled with a-a-an unspeakable egg." She gasped as she said this, and went on to explain in a few words the uncanny nature of the situation.

"And I think that perhaps psychoanalysis might clear up what my sister and I have been unable to handle."

Doctor Gallup was interested. It appeared to be exactly his sort of a case.

"There's a train in half an hour that will get you here at nine o'clock," said Aunt Jo. "We can give you dinner and accommodate you overnight."

She hung up the receiver.

"There! Except for our change from bridge to mah-jongg, this will be the first really modern step we've ever taken in our lives."

The hours passed slowly. At seven Fifi came down to dinner, as unperturbed as though nothing had happened; and her aunts played up bravely to her calmness, determined to say nothing until the doctor had actually arrived. After dinner Aunt Jo suggested mah-jongg, but Fifi declared that she would rather read, and settled on the sofa with a volume of the encyclopedia. Looking over her shoulder, Aunt Cal noted with alarm that she had turned to the article on the Australian bush.

It was very quiet in the room. Several times Fifi raised her head as if listening, and once she got up and went to the door and stared out for a long time into the night. Her aunts were both poised in their chairs to rush after her if she showed signs of bolting, but after a moment she closed the door with a sigh and returned to her chair. It was with relief that a little after nine they heard the sound of automobile wheels on the shell drive and knew that Doctor Gallup had arrived at last.

He was a short, stoutish man, with alert black eyes and an intense manner. He came in, glancing eagerly about him, and his eye brightened as it fell on Fifi like the eye of a hungry man when he sees prospective food. Fifi returned his gaze curiously, evidently unaware that his arrival had anything to do with herself.

"Is this the lady?" he cried, dismissing her aunts with a perfunctory handshake and approaching Fifi at a lively hop.

"This gentleman is Doctor Gallup, dear," beamed Aunt Jo, expectant and reassured. "He's an old friend of mine who's going to help you."

"Of course I am!" insisted Doctor Gallup, jumping around her cordially. "I'm going to fix her up just fine."

"He understands everything about the human mind," said Aunt Jo.

"Not everything," admitted Doctor Gallup, smiling modestly. "But we often make the regular doctors wonder." He turned roguishly to Fifi. "Yes, young lady, we often make the regular doctors wonder."

Clapping his hands together decisively, he drew up a chair in front of Fifi.

"Come," he cried, "let us see what can be the matter. We'll start by having you tell me the whole story in your own way. Begin."

"The story," remarked Fifi, with a slight yawn, "happens to be none of your business."

"None of my business!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Why, my girl, I'm trying to help you! Come now, tell old Doctor Gallup the whole story."

"Let my aunts tell you," said Fifi coldly. "They seem to know more about it than I do."

Doctor Gallup frowned.

"They've already outlined the situation. Perhaps I'd better begin by asking you questions."

"You'll answer the doctor's questions, won't you, dear?" coaxed Aunt Jo. "Doctor Gallup is one of the most modern doctors in New York."

"I'm an old-fashioned girl," objected Fifi maliciously. "And I think it's immoral to pry into people's affairs. But go ahead and I'll try to think up a comeback for everything you say."

Doctor Gallup overlooked the unnecessary rudeness of this remark and mustered a professional smile.

"Now, Miss Marsden, I understand that about a month ago you came out here for a rest."

Fifi shook her head.

"No, I came out to hide my face."

"You were ashamed because you had broken your engagement?"

"Terribly. If you desert a man at the altar you brand him for the rest of his life."

"Why?" he demanded sharply.

"Why not?"

"You're not asking me. I'm asking you... However, let that pass. Now, when you arrived here, how did you pass your time?"

"I walked mostly—walked along the beach."

"It was on one of these walks that you met the—ah—person your aunt told me of over the telephone?"

Fifi pinkened slightly.

"Yes."

"What was he doing when you first saw him?"

"He was looking down at me out of a tree."

There was a general exclamation from her aunts, in which the word "monkey" figured.

"Did he attract you immediately?" demanded Doctor Gallup.

"Why, not especially. At first I only laughed."

"I see. Now, as I understand, this man was very—ah—very originally clad."

"Yes," agreed Fifi.

"He was unshaven?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" Doctor Gallup seemed to go through a sort of convulsion like a medium coming out of a trance. "Miss Fifi," he cried out triumphantly, "did you ever read *The Sheik*?"

"Never heard of it."

"Did you ever read any book in which a girl was wooed by a so-called sheik or cave man?"

"Not that I remember."

"What, then, was your favorite book when you were a girl?"

"*Little Lord Fauntleroy*."

Doctor Gallup was considerably disappointed. He decided to approach the case from a new angle.

"Miss Fifi, won't you admit that there's nothing behind this but some fancy in your head?"

"On the contrary," said Fifi startingly, "there's a great deal more behind it than any of you suspect. He's changed my entire attitude on life."

"What do you mean?"

She seemed on the point of making some declaration, but after a moment her lovely eyes narrowed obstinately and she remained silent.

"Miss Fifi"—Doctor Gallup raised his voice sharply—"the daughter of C. T. J. Calhoun, the biscuit man, ran away with a taxi driver. Do you know what she's doing now?"

"No."

"She's working in a laundry on the East Side, trying to keep her child's body and soul together."

He looked at her keenly; there were signs of agitation in her face.

"Estelle Holliday ran away in 1920 with her father's second man!" he cried. "Shall I tell you where I heard of her last? She stumbled into a charity hospital, bruised from head to foot, because her drunken husband had beaten her to within an inch of her life!"

Fifi was breathing hard. Her aunts leaned forward. Doctor Gallup sprang suddenly to his feet.

"But they were playing safe compared to you!" he shouted. "They didn't woo an ex-convict with blood on his hands."

And now Fifi was on her feet, too, her eyes flashing fire.

"Be careful!" she cried. "Don't go too far!"

"I can't go too far!" He reached in his pocket, plucked out a folded evening paper and slapped it down on the table.

"Read that, Miss Fifi!" he shouted. "It'll tell you how four man-killers entered a bank in West Crampton three weeks ago. It'll tell you how they shot down the cashier in cold blood, and how one of them, the most brutal, the most ferocious, the most inhuman, got away. And it will tell you that that human gorilla is now supposed to be hiding in the neighborhood of Montauk Point!"

There was a short stifled sound as Aunt Jo and Aunt Cal, who had always done everything in complete unison, fainted away together. At the same moment there was loud, violent knocking, like the knocking of a heavy club, upon the barred front door.

IV

"Who's there?" cried Doctor Gallup, starting. "Who's there—or I'll shoot!"

His eyes roved quickly about the room, looking for a possible weapon.

"Who are you?" shouted a voice from the porch. "You better open up or I'll blow a hole through the door."

"What'll we do?" exclaimed Doctor Gallup, perspiring freely.

Fifi, who had been sprinkling water impartially upon her aunts, turned around with a scornful smile.

"It's just Percy, the yardman," she explained. "He probably thinks that you're a burglar."

She went to the door and lifted the latch. Percy, gun in hand, peered cautiously into the room.

"It's all right, Percy. This is just an insane specialist from New York."

"Everything's a little insane tonight," announced Percy in a frightened voice. "For the last hour I've been hearing the sound of oars."

The eyes of Aunt Jo and Aunt Cal fluttered open simultaneously.

"There's a fog all over the Point," went on Percy dazedly, "and it's got voices in it. I couldn't see a foot before my face, but I could swear there was boats offshore, and I heard a dozen people talkin' and callin' to each other, just as if a lot of ghosts was havin' a picnic supper on the beach."

"What was that noise?" cried Aunt Jo, sitting upright.

"The door was locked," explained Percy, "so I knocked on it with my gun."

"No, I mean now!"

They listened. Through the open door came a low, groaning sound, issuing out of the dark mist which covered shore and sea alike.

"We'll go right down and find out!" cried Doctor Gallup, who had recovered his shattered equilibrium; and, as the moaning sound drifted in again, like the last agony of some monster from the deep, he added, "I think you needed more than a psychoanalyst here tonight. Is there another gun in the house?"

Aunt Cal got up and took a small pearl-mounted revolver from the desk drawer.

"You can't leave us in this house alone," she declared emphatically. "Wherever you go we're going too!"

Keeping close together, the four of them, for Fifi had suddenly disappeared, made their way outdoors and down the porch steps, where they hesitated a moment, peering into the impenetrable haze, more mysterious than darkness upon their eyes.

"It's out there," whispered Percy, facing the sea.

"Forward we go!" muttered Doctor Gallup tensely. "I'm inclined to think this is all a question of nerves."

They moved slowly and silently along the sand, until suddenly Percy caught hold of the doctor's arm.

"Listen!" he whispered sharply.

They all became motionless. Out of the neighboring darkness a dim, indistinguishable figure had materialized, walking with unnatural rigidity along the shore. Pressed against his body he carried some long, dark drape that hung almost to the sand. Immediately he disappeared into the mist, to be succeeded by another phantom walking at the same military gait, this one with something white and faintly terrible dangling from his arm. A moment later, not ten yards away from them, in the direction in which the figure had gone, a faint dull glow sprang into life, proceeding apparently from behind the largest of the dunes.

Huddled together, they advanced toward the dune, hesitated, and then, following Doctor Gallup's example, dropped to their knees and began to crawl cautiously up its shoreward side. The glow became stronger as they reached the top, and at the same moment their heads popped up over the crest. This is what they saw:

In the light of four strong pocket flash lights, borne by four sailors in spotless white, a gentleman was shaving himself, standing clad only in athletic underwear upon the sand. Before his eyes an irreproachable valet held a silver mirror which gave back the soapy reflection of his face. To right and left stood two additional men-servants, one with a dinner coat

and trousers hanging from his arm and the other bearing a white stiff shirt whose studs glistened in the glow of the electric lamps. There was not a sound except the dull scrape of the razor along its wielder's face and the intermittent groaning sound that blew in out of the sea.

But it was not the bizarre nature of the ceremony, with its dim, weird surroundings under the unsteady light, that drew from the two women a short, involuntary sigh. It was the fact that the face in the mirror, the unshaven half of it, was terribly familiar, and in a moment they knew to whom that half face belonged—it was the countenance of their niece's savage wooer who had lately prowled half naked along the beach.

Even as they looked he completed one side of his face, whereupon a valet stepped forward and with a scissors sheared off the exterior growth on the other, disclosing, in its entirety now, the symmetrical visage of a young, somewhat haggard but not unhandsome man. He lathered the bearded side, pulled the razor quickly over it and then applied a lotion to the whole surface, and inspected himself with considerable interest in the mirror. The sight seemed to please him, for he smiled. At a word one of the valets held forth the trousers in which he now incased his likely legs. Diving into his open shirt, he procured the collar, flipped a proper black bow with a practiced hand and slipped into the waiting dinner coat. After a transformation which had taken place before their very eyes, Aunt Cal and Aunt Jo found themselves gazing upon as immaculate and impeccable a young man as they had ever seen.

"Walters!" he said suddenly, in a clear, cultured voice.

One of the white-clad sailors stepped forward and saluted.

"You can take the boats back to the yacht. You ought to be able to find it all right by the foghorn."

"Yes, sir."

"When the fog lifts you'd better stand out to sea. Meanwhile, wireless New York to send down my car. It's to call for me at the Marsden house on Montauk Point."

As the sailor turned away, his torch flashed upward accidentally wavering upon the four amazed faces which were peering down at the curious scene.

"Look there, sir!" he exclaimed.

The four torches picked out the eavesdropping party at the top of the hill.

"Hands up, there!" cried Percy, pointing his rifle down into the glare of light.

"Miss Marsden!" called the young man eagerly. "I was just coming to call."

"Don't move!" shouted Percy; and then to the doctor, "Had I better fire?"

"Certainly not!" cried Doctor Gallup. "Young man, does your name happen to be what I think it is?"

The young man bowed politely.

"My name is George Van Tyne."

A few minutes later the immaculate young man and two completely bewildered ladies were shaking hands. "I owe you more apologies than I can ever make," he confessed, "for having sacrificed you to the strange whim of a young girl."

"What whim?" demanded Aunt Cal.

"Why"—he hesitated—"you see, all my life I have devoted much attention to the so-called niceties of conduct; niceties of dress, of manners, of behavior—"

He broke off apologetically.

"Go on," commanded Aunt Cal.

"And your niece has too. She always considered herself rather a model of—of civilized behavior"—he flushed—"until she met me."

"I see," Doctor Gallup nodded. "She couldn't bear to marry anyone who was more of a—shall we say, a dandy?—than herself."

"Exactly," said George Van Tyne, with a perfect eighteenth-century bow. "It was necessary to show her what a—what an—"

"—unspeakable egg," supplied Aunt Josephine.

"—what an unspeakable egg I could be. It was difficult, but not impossible. If you know what's correct, you must necessarily know what's incorrect; and my aim was to be as ferociously incorrect as possible. My one hope is that some day you'll be able to forgive me for throwing the sand—I'm afraid that my impersonation ran away with me."

A moment later they were all walking toward the house.

"But I still can't believe that a gentleman could be so—so unspeakable," gasped Aunt Jo. "And what will Fifi say?"

"Nothing," answered Van Tyne cheerfully. "You see, Fifi knew about it all along. She even recognized me in the tree that first day. She begged me to—to desist until this afternoon; but I refused until she had kissed me tenderly, beard and all."

Aunt Cal stopped suddenly.



"This is all very well, young man," she said sternly; "but since you have so many sides to you, how do we know that in one of your off moments you aren't the murderer who's hiding out on the Point?"

"The murderer?" asked Van Tyne blankly. "What murderer?"

"Ah, I can explain that, Miss Marsden." Doctor Gallup smiled apologetically. "As a matter of fact, there wasn't any murderer."

"No murderer?" Aunt Cal looked at him sharply.

"No, I invented the bank robbery and the escaped murderer and all. I was merely applying a form of strong medicine to your niece."

Aunt Cal looked at him scornfully and turned to her sister. "All your modern ideas are not so successful as mah-jongg," she remarked significantly.

The fog had blown back to sea, and as they came in sight of the house the lamps were glowing out into the darkness. On the porch waited an immaculate girl in a gleaming white dress, strung with beads which glistened in the new moonlight.

"The perfect man," murmured Aunt Jo, flushing, "is, of course, he who will make any sacrifice."

Van Tyne did not answer; he was engaged in removing some imperceptible flaw, less visible than a hair, from his elbow, and when he had finished he smiled. There was now not the faintest imperfection anywhere about him, except where the strong beating of his heart disturbed faintly the satin facing of his coat.