

# The Eggs of the Silver Moon

By Robert W. Chambers

In the new white marble Administration Building at Bronx Park, my private office separated the offices of Dr. Silas Quint and Professor Boomly; and it had been arranged so on purpose, because of the increasingly frequent personal misunderstanding between these two celebrated entomologists. It was very plain to me that a crisis in this quarrel was rapidly approaching.

A bitter animosity had for some months existed on both sides, born of the most intense professional jealousy. They had been friends for years. No unseemly rivalry disturbed this friendship as long as it was merely a question of collecting, preparing, and mounting for exhibition the vast numbers of butterflies and moths which haunt this insectivorous earth. Even their zeal in the eternal hunt for new and undescribed species had not made them enemies.

I am afraid that my suggestion for the construction of a great glass flying-cage for *living* specimens of moths and butterflies started the trouble between these hitherto godly and middle-aged men. That, and the Carnegie Educational Medal were the causes which began this deplorable affair.

Various field collectors, employed by both Quint and Boomly, were always out all over the world foraging for specimens; also, they were constantly returning with spoils from every quarter of the globe.

Now, to secure rare and beautiful living specimens of butterflies and moths for the crystal flying-cage was a serious and delicate job. Such tropical insects could not survive the journey of several months from the wilds of Australia, India, Asia, Africa, or the jungles of South America—nor could semi-tropical species endure the captivity of a few weeks on even days, when captured in the West Indies, Mexico, or Florida. Only our duller-coloured, smaller, and handier native species tolerated capture and exhibition.

Therefore, the mode of procedure which I suggested was for our field expeditions to obtain males and females of the same species of butterfly or moth, mate them, and, as soon as any female deposited her eggs, place the tiny pearl-like eggs in cold storage to retard their hatching, which normally occurs, in the majority of species, within ten days or two weeks.

This now was the usual mode of procedure followed by the field collectors employed by Dr. Quint and Professor Boomly. And not only were the eggs of various butterflies and moths so packed for transportation, but a sufficient store of their various native food-plants was also preserved, where such food-plants could not be procured in the United States. So when the eggs arrived at Bronx Park, and were hatched there in due time, the young caterpillars had plenty of nourishment ready for them in cold storage.

Might I not, legitimately, have expected the Carnegie Educational Medal for all this? I have never received it. I say this without indignation—even without sorrow. I merely make the statement.

Yet, my system was really a very beautiful system; a tiny batch of eggs would arrive from Ceylon, or Sumatra, or Africa; when taken from cold storage and placed in the herbarium they would presently hatch; the caterpillars were fed with their accustomed food-plant—a few leaves being taken from cold storage every day for them—they would pass through their three or four moulting periods, cease feeding in due time, transform into the chrysalis stage, and finally appear in all the splendour and magnificence of butterfly or moth.

The great glass flying-cage was now alive with superb moths and butterflies, flitting, darting, fluttering among the flowering bushes on feeding along the sandy banks of the brook which flowed through the flying-cage, bordered by thickets of scented flowers. And it was like looking at a meteoric shower of winged jewels, where the huge metallic-blue *Morphos* from South America flapped and sailed, and the orange and gold and green *Ornithoptera* from Borneo pursued their majestic, birdlike flight—where big, glittering *Papilios* flashed through the bushes or alighted nervously to feed for a few moments on jasmine and phlox, and where the slowly flopping *Heliconians* winged their way amid the denser tangles of tropical vegetation.

Nothing like this flying-cage had even before been seen in New York; thousands and thousands of men, women, and children thronged the lawn about the flying-cage all day long.

By night, also, the effect was wonderful; the electric lights among the foliage broke out; the great downy-winged moths, which had been asleep all day while the butterflies flitted through the sunshine, now came out to display their crimson on peacock-spotted wings, and the butterflies folded their wings and went to bed for the night.

The public was enchanted, the authorities of the Bronx proud and delighted; all apparently was happiness and harmony. Except that nobody offered me the Carnegie medal.

I was sitting one morning in my office, which, as I have said, separated the offices of Dr. Quint and Professor Boomly, when there came a loud napping on my door, and, at my invitation, Dr. Quint bustled in—a little, meagre, excitable, near-sighted man with pointed mustaches and a fleck of an imperial smudging his lower lip.

“Last week,” he began angrily, “young Jones arrived from Singapore bringing me the eggs of *Erebia astarte*, the great Silver Moon butterfly. Attempts to destroy them have been made. Last night I left them in a breeding-cage on my desk. Has anybody been in there?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “What has happened?”

“I found an ichneumon fly in the cage yesterday!” he shouted; “and this morning the eggs have either shrunk to half their size or else the eggs of another species have been secretly substituted for them and the Silver Moon eggs stolen! Has *he* been in there?”

“Who?” I asked, pretending to misunderstand.

“*He!*” demanded Quint fiercely. “If he has I’ll kill him some day.”

*He* meant his one-time friend, Dr. Boomly. Alas!

“For heaven’s sake, why are you two perpetually squabbling?” I asked wearily. “You used to be inseparable friends. Why can’t you make up?”

“Because I’ve come to know him. That’s why! I have unmasked this—this Borgia—this Machiavelli—this monster of duplicity! Matters are approaching a point where something has got to be done short of murder. I’ve stood all his envy and jealousy and cheap imputations and hints and contemptible innuendoes that I’m going to—”

He stopped short, glaring at the doorway, which had suddenly been darkened by the vast bulk of Professor Boomly—a figure abdominal but majestic-like the massive butt end of an elephant. For the rest, he had a rather insignificant and peevish face and a melancholy mustache that usually looked damp.

“Mr. Smith,” he said to me, in his thin, high, sarcastic voice—a voice incongruously at variance with his bulk—“has anybody had the infernal impudence to enter my room and nose about my desk?”

“Yes, *I* have!” replied Quint excitedly. “I’ve been in your room. What of it? What about it?”

Boomly permitted his heavy-lidded eyes to rest on Quint for a moment, then, turning to me:

“I want a patent lock put on my door. Will you speak to Professor Farrago?”

“I want one put on mine, too!” cried Quint. “I want a lock put on my door which will keep envious, dull-minded, mentally broken-down, impertinent, and fat people out of my office!”

Boomly flushed heavily:

“Fat?” he repeated, glaring at Quint. “Did you say ‘fat’?”

“Yes, *fat*—intellectually and corporeally fat! I want that kind of individual kept out. I don’t trust them. I’m afraid of them. Their minds are atrophied. They are unmoral, possibly even criminal! I don’t want them in my room snooping about to see what I have and what I’m doing. I don’t want them to sneak in, eaten up with jealousy and envy, and try to damage the eggs of the Silver Moon butterfly because the honour and glory of hatching them would probably procure for me the Carnegie Educational Medal—”

“Why, you little, dried-up, protoplasmic atom!” burst out Boomly, his face suffused with passion. “Are you insinuating that I have any designs on your batch of eggs?”

“It’s my belief,” shouted Quint, “that you want that medal yourself, and that you put an ichneumon fly in my breeding-cage in hopes it would sting the eggs of the Silver Moon.”

“If you found an ichneumon fly there,” retorted Boomly, “you probably hatched it in mistake for a butterfly!” And he burst into a peal of contemptuous laughter, but his little, pig-like eyes under the heavy lids were furious.

“I now believe,” said Quint, trembling with rage, “that you have criminally substituted a batch of common *Plexippus* eggs for the Silver Moon eggs I had in my breeding-cage! I believe you are sufficiently abandoned to do it!”

“Ha! Ha!” retorted Boomly scornfully. “I don’t believe you ever had anything in your breeding-cage except a few clothes moths and cockroaches!”

Quint began to dance:

“You *did* take them!” he yelled; “and you left me a bunch of milkweed butterflies’ eggs! Give me my eggs on I shall violently assault you!”

“Assault your grandmother!” remarked Boomly, with unscientific brevity. “What do you suppose I want of your ridiculous eggs? Haven’t I enough eggs of *Heliconius salome* hatching to give me the Carnegie medal if I want it?”

“The Silver Moon eggs are unique!” cried Quint. “You know it! You know that if they hatch, pupate, and become perfect insects that I shall certainly be awarded—”

“You’ll be awarded the Matteawan medal,” remarked Boomly with venom.

Quint ran at him with a half-suppressed howl, his momentum carrying him halfway up Professor Boomly’s person. Then, losing foothold, he fell to the floor and began to kick in the general direction of Professor Boomly. It was a sorrowful sight to see these two celebrated scientists panting, mauling, scuffling and punching each other around the room, tables and chairs and scapbaskets flying in every direction, and I mounted on the windowsill horrified, speechless, trying to keep clear of the revolving storm centre.

“Where are my Silver Moon eggs!” screamed Dr. Quint. “Where are my eggs that Jones brought me from Singapore—you entomological robber! You’ve got ’em somewhere! If you don’t give ’em up I’ll find means to destroy you!”

“You insignificant pain of maxillary palpi!” bellowed Professor Boomly, galloping after Dr. Quint as he dodged around my desk. “I’ll pull off those antennae you call whiskers if I can get hold of ’em—”

Dr. Quint’s threatened mustaches bristled as he fled before the elephantine charge of Professor Boomly—once again around my desk, then out into the hall, where I heard the door of his office

slam, and Boomly, gasping, panting, breathing vengeance outside, and vowing to leave Quint quite whiskerless when he caught him.

It was a painful scene for scientists to figure in on to gaze upon. Profoundly shocked and upset, I locked up the anthropological department offices and went out into the Park, where the sun was shining and a gentle June wind stirred the trees.

Too completely upset to do any more work that day, I wandered about amid the gaily dressed crowds at hazard; sometimes I contemplated the monkeys; sometimes gazed sadly upon the seals. They dashed and splashed and raced round and round their tank, on crawled up on the rocks, craned their wet, sleek necks, and barked-houp! houp! houp!

For luncheon I went over to the Rolling Stone Restaurant. There was a very pretty girl there—an unusually pretty girl—on perhaps it was one of those days on which every girl looked unusually pretty to me. There are such days.

Her voice was exquisite when she spoke. She said:

“We have, today, corned beef hash, fried ham and eggs, liver and bacon—” but let that pass, too.

I took my tea very weak; by that time I learned that her name was Mildred Case; that she had been a private detective employed in a department store, and that her duties had been to nab wealthy ladies who forgot to pay for objects usually discovered in their reticules, bosoms, and sometimes in their stockings.

But the confinement of indoor work had been too much for Mildred Case, and the only outdoor job she could find was the position of lady waitress in the rustic Rolling Stone Inn.

She was very, very beautiful, on perhaps it was one of those days—but let that pass, too.

“You are the great Mr. Percy Smith, Curator of the Anthropological Department, are you not?” she asked shyly.

“Yes,” I said modestly; and, to slightly rebuke any superfluous pride in me, I paraphrased with becoming humility, pointing upward: “but remember, Mildred, there is One greater than I.”

“Mr. Carnegie?” she nodded innocently. That was true, too. I let it go at that.

We chatted: she mentioned Professor Boomly and Dr. Quint, gently deploring the rupture of their friendship. Both gentlemen, in common with the majority of the administration personnel, were daily customers at the Rolling Stone Inn. I usually took my lunch from my boarding-house to my office, being too busy to go out for mere nourishment.

That is why I had hitherto missed Mildred Case.

“Mildred,” I said, “I do not believe it can be wholesome for a man to eat sandwiches while taking minute measurements of defunct monkeys. Also, it is not a fragrant pastime. Hereafter I shall lunch here.”

“It will be a pleasure to serve you,” said that unusually—there I go again! It was an unusually beautiful day in June. Which careful, exact, and scientific statement, I think ought to cover the subject under consideration.

After luncheon I sadly selected a five-cent cigar; and, as I hesitated, lingering over the glass case, undecided still whether to give full rein to this contemplated extravagance, I looked up and found her beautiful grey eyes gazing into mine.

“What gentle thoughts are yours, Mildred?” I said softly.

“The cigar you have selected,” she murmured, “is fly-specked.”

Deeply touched that this young girl should have cared—that she should have expressed her solicitude so modestly, so sweetly, concerning the maculatory condition of my cigar, I thanked her and purchased, for the same sum, a packet of cigarettes.

That was going somewhat far for me. I had never in all my life even dreamed of smoking a cigarette. To a reserved, thoughtful, and scientific mind there is, about a packet of cigarettes, something undignified, something vaguely frolicsome.

When I paid her for them I felt as though, for the first time in my life, I had let myself go.

Oddly enough, in this uneasy feeling of gaiety and abandon, a curious sensation of exhilaration persisted.

We had quite a merry little contretemps when I tried to light my cigarette and the match went out, and then *she* struck another match, and we both laughed, and *that* match was extinguished by her breath.

Instantly I quoted: “ ‘Her breath was like the new-mown hay—a’ ”

“Mr. Smith!” she said, flushing slightly.

“ ‘Her eyes,’ I quoted, ‘were like the stars at even!’ ”

“You don’t mean *my* eyes, do you?”

I took a puff at my unlighted cigarette. It also smelled like recently mown hay. I felt that I was slipping my cables and heading toward an unknown and tempestuous sea.

“What time are you free, Mildred?” I asked, scarcely recognising my own voice in such reckless apropos.

She shyly informed me.

I struck a match, re-lighted my cigarette, and took one puff. That was sufficient: I was adrift. I realised it, trembled internally, took another puff.

“If,” said I carelessly, “on your way home you should chance to stroll along the path beyond the path that leads to the path which—”

I paused, checked by her bewildered eyes. We both blushed.

“Which way do you usually go home?” I asked, my ears afire.

She told me. It was a suitably unfrequented path.

So presently I strolled thither; and seated myself under the trees in a bosky dell.

Now, there is a quality in boskiness not inappropriate to romantic thoughts. Boskiness, cigarettes, a soft afternoon in June, the hum of bees and the distant barking of the seals, all these were delicately blending to inspire in me a bashful sentiment.

A specimen of *Papilio turnus*, di-morphic form, *Glaucus*, alighted near me; I marked its flight with scientific indifference. Yet it is a rare species in Bronx Park.

A mock-orange bush was in snowy bloom behind me; great bunches of wistaria hung oven the rock beside me.

The combination of these two exquisite perfumes seemed to make the boskiness more bosky.

There was an unaccustomed and spontive lightness to my step when I nose to meet Mildred, where she came loitering along the shadow-dappled path.

She seemed surprised to see me.

She thought it rather late to sit down, but she seated herself I talked to her enthusiastically about anthropology. She was so interested that after a while she could scarcely keep still, moving her slim little feet restlessly, biting her pretty lower lip, shifting her position—all certain symptoms of an interest in science which even approached excitement.

Warmed to the heart by her eager and sympathetic interest in the noble science so precious, so dear to me, I took her little hand to soothe and quiet her, realizing that she might become overexcited as I described the pituitary body and why its former functions had become atrophied until the gland itself was nearly obsolete.

So intense her interest had been that she seemed a little tired. I decided to give adequate material support to her spinal process. It seemed to nest and soothe her. I don't remember that she said anything except: "Mr. *Smith!*" I don't recollect what we were saying when she mentioned me by name rather abruptly.

The afternoon was wonderfully still and calm. The month was June.

After a while—quite a while—some little time in point of accurate fact—she detected the sound of approaching footsteps. I remember that she was seated at the opposite end of the bench, rather feverishly occupied with her hat and her hair, when young Jones came hastily along the path, caught sight of us, halted, turned violently red—being a shy young man—but instead of taking himself off, he seemed to recover from a momentary paralysis.

"Mr. Smith!" he said sharply. "Professor Boomly has disappeared; there's a pool of blood on his desk; his coat, hat, and waistcoat are lying on the floor, the room is a wreck, and Dr. Quint is in there tearing up the carpet and behaving like a madman. We think he suddenly went insane and murdered Professor Boomly. What is to be done?"

Horrified, I had risen at his first word. And now, as I understood the full purport of his dreadful message, my hair stirred under my hat and I gazed at him, appalled.

"What is to be done?" he demanded. "Shall I telephone for the police?"

"Do you actually believe," I faltered, "that this unfortunate man has murdered Boomly?"

"I don't know. I looked over the transom, but I couldn't see Professor Boomly. Dr. Quint has locked the door."

'And he's tearing up the carpet?'

"Like a lunatic. I didn't want to call in the police until I'd asked you. Such a scandal in Bronx Park would be a frightful thing for us all—" He hesitated, looked around, coldly, it seemed to me, at Mildred Case. "A scandal," he repeated, "is scarcely what might be expected among a harmonious and earnest band of seekers after scientific knowledge. Is it, Mil—Miss Case?"

Now, I don't know why Mildred should have blushed. There was nothing that I could see in this young man's question to embarrass her.

Preoccupied, still confused by the shock of this terrible news, I looked at Jones and at Mildred; and they were staring rather oddly at each other.

I said: "If this affair turns out to be as ghastly as it seems to promise, we'll have to call in a detective. I'll go back immediately—"

"Why not take me, also?" asked Mildred Case, quietly.

"What?" I asked, looking at her.

"Why not, Mr. Smith? I was once a private detective.

Surprised at the suggestion, I hesitated.

"If you desire to keep this matter secret—if you wish to have it first investigated privately and quietly—would it not be a good idea to let me use my professional knowledge before you call in the police? Because as soon as the police are summoned all hope of avoiding publicity is at an end."

She spoke so sensibly, so quietly, so modestly, that her offer of assistance deeply impressed me.

As for young Jones, he looked at her steadily in that odd, chilling manner, which finally annoyed me. There was no need of his being snobbish because this very lovely and intelligent young girl happened to be a waitress at the Rolling Stone Inn.

“Come,” I said unsteadily, again a prey to terrifying emotions; “let us go to the Administration Building and learn how matters stand. If this affair is as terrible as I fear it to be, science has received the deadliest blow ever dealt it since Cagliostro perished.”

As we three strode hastily along the path in the direction of the Administration Building, I took that opportunity to read these two youthful fellow beings a sermon on envy, jealousy, and covetousness.

“See,” said I, “to what a miserable condition the desire for notoriety and fame has brought two learned and enthusiastic delvers in the vineyard of endeavor! The mad desire for the Carnegie medal completely turned the hitherto perfectly balanced brains of these devoted disciples of Science. Envy begat envy, jealousy begat jealousy, pride begat pride, hatred begat hatred—”

“It’s like that book in the Bible where everybody begat everybody else,” said Mildred seriously.

At first I thought she had made an apt and clever remark; but on thinking it over I couldn’t quite see its relevancy. I turned and looked into her sweet face. Her eyes were dancing with brilliancy and her sensitive lips quivered. I feared she was near to tears from the reaction of the shock. Had Jones not been walking with us—but let that go, too. We were now entering the Administration Building, almost running; and as soon as we came to the closed door of Dr. Quint’s room, I could hear a commotion inside—desk drawers being pulled out and their contents dumped, curtains being jerked from their rings, an unmistakable sound indicating the ripping up of a carpet—and through all this din the agitated scuffle of footsteps.

I rapped on the door. No notice taken. I rapped and knocked and called in a low, distinct voice.

Suddenly I recollected I had a general pass-key on my ring which unlocked any door in the building. I nodded to Jones and to Mildred to stand aside, then, gently fitting the key, I suddenly pushed out the key which remained on the inside, turned the lock, and flung open the door.

A terrible sight presented itself: Dr. Quint, hair on end, both mustaches pulled out, shirt, cuffs, and white waistcoat smeared with blood, knelt amid the general wreckage on the floor, in the act of nipping up the carpet.

“Doctor!” I cried in a trembling voice. “What have you done to Professor Boomly?”

He paused in his carpet ripping and looked around at us with a terrifying laugh.

“I’ve settled *him!*” he said. “If you don’t want to get all over dust you’d better keep out—”

“Quint!” I cried. “Are you crazy?”

“Pretty nearly. Let me alone—”

“Where is Boomly!” I demanded in a tragic voice. “Where is your old friend, Billy Boomly? Where is he, Quint? And what does *that* mean—that pool of blood on the floor? Whose is it?”

“It’s Bill’s,” said Quint, coolly nipping up another breadth of carpet and peering under it.

“What!” I exclaimed. “Do you admit that?”

“Certainly I admit it. I told him I’d terminate him if he meddled with my Silver Moon eggs.”

“You mean to say that you shed blood—the blood of your old friend—merely because he meddled with a miserable batch of butterfly’s eggs?” I asked, astounded.

“I certainly did shed his blood for just that particular thing! And listen; you’re in my way—you’re standing on a part of the carpet which I want to tear up. Do you mind moving?”

Such cold-blooded calmness infuriated me. I sprang at Quint, seized him, and shouted to Jones to tie his hands behind him with the blood-soaked handkerchief which lay on the floor.

At first, while Jones and I were engaged in the operation of securing the wretched man, Quint looked at us both as though surprised; then he grew angry and asked us what the devil we were about.

“Those who shed blood must answer for it!” I said solemnly.

“What? What’s the matter with you?” he demanded in a rage. “Shed blood? What if I did? What’s that to you? Untie this handkerchief, you unmentionable idiot!”

I looked at Jones:

“His mind totters,” I said hoarsely.

“What’s that!” cried Quint, struggling to get off the chain whither I had pushed him: but with my handkerchief we tied his ankles to the rung of the chain, heedless of his attempts to kick us, and sprang back out of range.

“Now,” I said, “what have you done with the poor victim of your fury? Where is he? Where is all that remains of Professor Boomly?”

“Boomly? I don’t know where he is. How the devil should I know?”

“Don’t lie,” I said solemnly.

“Lie! See here, Smith, when I get out of this chain I’ll settle you, too—”

“Quint! There is another and more terrible chair which awaits such criminals as you!”

“You old fluff!” he shouted. “I’ll knock your head off, too. Do you understand? I’ll attend to you as I attended to Boomly—”

“Assassin!” I retorted calmly. “Only an alienist can save you now. In this awful moment—”

A light touch on my arm interrupted me, and, a trifle irritated, as any man might be when checked in the full flow of eloquence, I turned to find Mildred at my elbow.

“Let me talk to him,” she said in a quiet voice. “Perhaps I may not irritate him as you seem to.

“Very well,” I said. “Jones and I are here as witnesses.” And I folded my arms in an attitude not, perhaps, unpicturesque.

“Dr. Quint,” said Mildred in her soft, agreeable voice, and actually smiling slightly at the self-confessed murderer, “is it really true that you are guilty of shedding the blood of Professor Boomly?”

“It is,” said Quint, coolly.

She seemed rather taken aback at that, but presently recovered her equanimity.

“Why?” she asked gently.

“Because he attempted a most hellish crime!” yelled Quint.

“W-what crime?” she asked faintly.

“I’ll tell you. He wanted the Carnegie medal, and he knew it would be given to me if I could incubate and hatch my batch of Silver Moon butterfly eggs. He realised well enough that his Heliconian eggs were not as valuable as my Silver Moon eggs. So first he sneaked in here and put an ichneumon fly in my breeding-cage. And next he stole the Silver Moon eggs and left in their place some common *Plexippus* eggs, thinking that because they were very similar I would not notice the substitution.

“I did notice it! I charged him with that cataclysmic outrage. He laughed. We came into personal collision. He chased me into my room.”

Panting, breathless with rage at the memory of the morning’s defeat which I had witnessed, Quint glared at me for a moment. Then he jerked his head toward Mildred:

“As soon as he went to luncheon—Boomly, I mean—I climbed over that transom and dropped into this room. I had been hunting for ten minutes before I found my Silver Moon eggs hidden under the carpet. So I pocketed them, climbed back over the transom, and went to my room.

He paused dramatically, staring from one to another of us:

“Boomly was there!” he said slowly.

“Where?” asked Mildred with a shudder.

“In my room. He had picked the lock. I told him to get out! He went. I shouted after him that I had recovered the Silver Moon eggs and that I should certainly be awarded the Carnegie medal.

“Then that monster in human form laughed a horrible laugh, avowing himself guilty of a crime still more hideous than the theft of the Silver Moon eggs! Do you know what he had done?”

“W-what?” faltered Mildred.

“He had stolen from cold storage and had concealed the leaves of the Bimba bush, brought from Singapore to feed the Silver Moon caterpillars! *That’s* what Boomly had done!

*“And my Silver Moon eggs had already begun to hatch!!! And my caterpillars would starve!!!!”*

His voice ended in a yell; he struggled on his chair until it nearly upset.

“You lunatic!” I shouted. “Was that a reason for spilling the blood of a human being!”

“It was reason enough for me!”

“Madman!”

“Let me loose! He’s hidden those leaves somewhere or other! I’ve torn this place to pieces looking for them. I’ve got to find them, I tell you—”

Mildred went to the infuriated entomologist and laid a firm hand on his shoulder:

“Listen,” she said: “how do you know that Professor Boomly has not concealed these Bimba leaves on his own person?”

Quint ceased his contortions and gaped at her.

“I never thought of that,” he said.

“What have you done with him?” she asked, very pale.

“I tell you, I don’t know.”

“You must know what you did with him,” she insisted.

Quint shook his head impatiently, apparently preoccupied with other thoughts. We stood watching him in silence until he looked up and became conscious of our concentrated gaze.

“My caterpillars are starving,” he began violently. “I haven’t anything else they’ll eat. They feed only on the Bimba leaf. They *won’t* eat anything else. It’s a well-known fact that they won’t. Why, in Johore, where they came from, they’ll travel miles over the ground to find a Bimba bush—”

“What!” exclaimed Mildred.

“Certainly—miles! They’d starve sooner than eat anything except Bimba leaves. If there’s a bush within twenty miles they’ll find it—”

“Wait,” said Mildred quietly. “Where are these starving caterpillars?”

“In a glass jar in my pocket—here! What the devil are you doing!” For the girl had dexterously slipped the glass jar from his coat pocket and was holding it up to the light.

Inside it were several dozen tiny, dank caterpillars, some nesting disconsolately on the sides of the glass, some hungrily travelling over the bottom in pitiful and hopeless quest of nourishment.

Heedless of the shouts and threats of Dr. Quint, the girl calmly uncorked the jar, took on her slender forefinger a single little caterpillar, replaced the cork, and, kneeling down, gently disengaged the caterpillar. It dropped upon the floor, remained motionless for a moment, then, turning, began to travel rapidly toward the doorway behind us.

“Now,” she said, “if poor Professor Boomly really has concealed these Bimba leaves upon his own person, this little caterpillar, according to Dr. Quint, is certain to find those leaves.”

Overcome with excitement and admiration for this intelligent and unusually beautiful girl, I seized her hands and congratulated her.

“Murder,” said I to the miserable Quint, “will out! This infant caterpillar shall lead us to that dark and secret spot where you had hoped to conceal the horrid evidence of your guilt. Three things have undone you—a caterpillar replete with mysterious instinct, a humble bunch of Bimba leaves, and the marvellous intelligence of this young and lovely girl. Madman, your hour has struck!”

He looked at me in a dazed sort of way, as though astonishment had left him unable to articulate. But I had become tired of his violence and his shouts and yells; so I asked Jones for his handkerchief, and, before Quint knew what I was up to I had tied it over his mouth.

He became a brilliant purple, but all he could utter was a furious humming, buzzing noise.

Meanwhile, Jones had opened the door; the little caterpillar, followed by Mildred and myself, continued to hustle along as though he knew quite well where he was going.

Down the hallway he went in undulating haste, past my door, we all following in silent excitement as we discovered that, parallel to the caterpillar’s course, ran a gruesome trail of blood drops.

And when the little creature turned and made straight for the door of Professor Farrago, our revered chief, the excitement among us was terrific.

The caterpillar halted; I gently tried the door; it was open.

Instantly the caterpillar crossed the threshold, wriggling forward at top speed. We followed, peering fearfully around us. Nobody was visible.

Could Quint have dragged his victim here? By Heaven, he had! For the caterpillar was travelling straight under the lounge upon which Professor Farrago was accustomed to repose after luncheon, and, dropping on one knee, I saw a fat foot partly protruding from under the shinned edges of the fringed drapery.

“He’s there!” I whispered, in an awed voice to the others.

“Courage, Miss Case! Try not to faint.”

Jones turned and looked at her with that same odd expression; then he went over to where she stood and coolly passed one arm around her waist.

“Try not to faint, Mildred,” he said. “It might muss your hair.”

It was a strange thing to say, but I had no time then to analyze it, for I had seized the fat foot which partly protruded from under the sofa, clad in a low-cut congress-gaiter and a white sock.

And then *I* nearly fainted, for instead of the dreadful, inert resistance of lifeless clay, the foot wriggled and tried to kick at me.

“Help!” came a thin but muffled voice. “Help! Help, in the name of Heaven!”

“Boomly!” I cried, scarcely believing my ears.

“Take that man away, Smith!” whimpered Boomly. “He’s a devil! He’ll murder me! He made my nose bleed all over everything!”

“Boomly! You’re *not* dead!”

“Yes, I am!” he whined. “I’m dead enough to suit me. Keep that little lunatic off—that’s all I ask. He can have his Carnegie medal for all I care, only tie him up somewhere—”

“Professor Boomly!” cried Mildred excitedly. “Have you any Bimba leaves concealed about your person?”

“Yes, I have,” he said sulkily. There came a hitch of the fat foot, a heavy scuffling sound, heavy panting, and then, skittering out across the floor came a flat, sealed parcel.

“There you are,” he said; “now, let me alone until that fiend has gone home.”

“He won’t attack you again,” I said. “Come out.”

But Professor Boomly flatly declined to stir.

I looked at the parcel: it was marked: "Bimba leaves; Johore."

With a sigh of unutterable relief, I picked up the ravenous little caterpillar, placed him on the packet, and turned to go. And didn't.

It is a very sickening fact I have now to record. But to a scientist all facts are sacred, sickening on otherwise.

For what I caught a glimpse of, just outside the door in the hallway, was Jones kissing Mildred Case. And being shyly indemnified for his trouble with a gentle return in kind. Both his arms were around her waist; both her hands nested upon his shoulders; and, as I looked—but let it pass!—let it pass.

Deliberately I fished in my pocket, found my packet of cigarettes, lighted one.

*Tobacco diffugiunt mordaces curae et laetificat cor hominis!*