The Mill-Hopper Mystery.

BY NEVILLE CAIN.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

Whether the tempest sent, or whether
Tempest blown thee here ashore.

"Ye brave O—ay! it's brave again!" The great voice of Matt Rominy rose above the shriek of the storm and the boom of the thundering brine, as it smote the beach in its wrath and tore savage rifts, sucking back tons of sand into the maw of the sea pull and leaving it well nigh madness to attempt the launching of lifeboat.

Dan Rominy's crew had hearts of oak—and names nearly hard, but "thickness of hairbones ever in mother" and, brought constantly face to face with the eternal naked verities of nature, evincing a bare forehead. Now, a pelaphant and or a troublesome sea, what wonder if in them night and might were often synonymous terms? It was written upon the rocks, it was voiced from the waves.

A vessel had gone up on the rocks of Skull Reef, and was fast breaking up; they said. A plank washed ashore bore the name "Goliath," recognized to some as a whaler which had sailed from Sag Harbor some three years ago.

High upon the summit of a sand dune, her wet hair flying straight out behind her, striving to shut out the flying sand and spray, and to follow with her eyes the boat as it rose and fell, stood mad Mary Heath.

She was always down there, roaming about the shore, gathering shells or crooning upon the dunes gazing seaward. Tonight she scorned the gentle of the storm, leaning, swaying and waving her arms shrill as if beckoning to the sea.

"What ails poor Mary to-night? The storm seems to affect her terribly; she looks a veritable seeress," said Swayn Yarbourne, who stood among the group of villagers gathered upon the beach.

The mournful sound of the bell buoy on the reef came faintly upon the wind, and anon, when a rift in the clouds lighted palely the writhing chaos below, the ship might be perceived on her beam ends pounding the reefs and presently she was seen no more. Then, all at once, from out the hell of waters, was flung high up on the beach, with a grinding crash, the great lifeboat, with its writhing, wriggling crew, only less white and weak than the poor still figure they brought in.

Strong hands clutched and dragged the boat and the falling men far up out of reach of the baffled sea. As they bore the rescued man upon a plank to the lighthouse a scream of triumphant laughter rang out over the roar of the tempest, and "Mad Mary," who had hovered about the edge of the crowd, flitted away over the dunes shrieking, "My dream; my dream!"

Fright at the Miller.

With a long-quivering sigh the pallid figure lying upon the old tarpaulin at length opened its eyes.

Matt Rominy stood over him watching for any sign of life, and with a commanding gesture keeping the throng back.

The eyes, in which consciousness slowly dawned, wandered from point to point and at length rested upon the countenance of the captain of the life-savers, and there they rested, growing gradually rounder as a look of horror crept into them.

At length, with a convulsive start, he strove to rise, but, too weak, sank back screaming:

"Am I dead and in hell? Keep off; keep off!" waving Rominy away with frenzied gesture.

The face of the latter had assumed an inscrutable pallor, and with a harsh, broken voice he snarled:

"Give him a turn over that keg, men, an' git the salt water out of him."

But the fellow, struggling to his feet, ran like the wind, straight toward the sea.

He was soon caught, and, relapsing into unconsciousness, was carried to the cottage of old Jane Chussim, about a mile back from the beach.

Yarbourne had been a silent and much puzzled observer of all this. The storm had apparently driven the man insane, he thought.

The rescued man tossed for a week or two in delirium under the rafters of the old salt box inn.

In the small hours one night Goody Garlic, who was hired to watch at his bedside, was roused from a doze by the voice of the sick man.

"Oh, God! the cruel millstones!" he cried, "they are grinding out blood. Look! Look!" and he would have thrown himself from the bed had not the nurse pinned him down with her sinewy arms. Then she and Mother Chussim sat with their hooked noses very close together in earnest conversation, each "with her yellow finger upon her skinny lip," until dawn, engaged in the interesting occupation of "putting this and that together," by which, says a well known author, "you get a man and a fish apart, or a mermaid together."

The fourth crew dropped in, singly and in pairs, to see how he was getting on. Amos Cartwright, the blacksmith; Ben Strong, the carpenter, and shaky Matt Rominy, the miller and captain, shouldered in, for that was his habitual gait when not in the boat or asleep; a slatter and forbidding man, and it was no wonder that the still half dazed man was seized again with a panic of fear and covered his head with the bedclothes, shuddering.

Rominy went away, muttering under his breath: "What's the feller got agin me? If it wasn't for me he'd be shark's meat by now."

Yarbourne stopped in daily on his way out the lane, where he was completing a restoration of the mill. The two hellhames told him of the singular night cry and of the mad's terror at the sight of the miller, and the log painter went away to his work ruminating profoundly.

Blood at the Mill.

Three years before the town of East Brompton was roused from its lethargy by one of those happenings which contrasted so sharply with its dreamy life, as a charm shining in a sunny plain.

One morning, when the gray cliff was shot with red, Mary Heath stole into town, wild eyed and drenched with dew, and rapped hardly at Justice Lazy Osborn's door.

"There's somethin' wrong over t' the mill," she panted in answer to his gruff query. "Has anybody seen Gideon? I been settin' up all night waitin' for him. He started out last night with the meal bag an' I haven't seen him since!"

"What's the matter at the mill?"

"There's—there's" she clutched at the door facing—"blood—paint' out from under the mill door, an' when I looked in the window the hopper was all splashed with it an'"—and she swooned upon the doorstep.

There were nine days of wonder and speculation and investigation. Rominy was at a standstill, he managed to prove and know nothing, and Mary Heath still watched and waited in her hovel for the Gideon who came not, but in his place the wolf.

The village beauty, she might have been Mrs. Rominy. The dove might have shared the goshawk's nest and been mistress of the mill; but she married the man of her heart, the penniless son of a once prosperous farmer; a handsome "feller all round," and their oath had proved more rugged than that of true love is usually said to be. Want stared them in the face; hunger perched vulturelike over the door.

One night Gideon started on his rounds bloodshot with drink and despair, and swinging the meal bag over his shoulder, staggered forth into the night.

It was one of those white, slight characteristic of Long Island; no moon or stars, but more like deep twilight.

Mary stood long at the gate, waiting for her husband. Suddenly there was borne upon the night wind the creaking of the arms of the old mill as it turned and its nightly grist. But never had it creaked so loud. Round and round went the great sails in the gloom, and screech after screech pierced the night, and then suddenly all was still.

As she stared her took in startled attention, the figure of a man, a sailor by his garb, passed quickly up the lane.

For one instant he turned a white face upon her and pointed to the mill as he ran, speechless with fear. That face was graven upon her memory.

In her agony of fear she barred the door and stared from the window all night long, and when the dawn reddened the east set out for town.

Grinding Once Again.

The mills of the gods grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.
* * * * * * *
With exactness grind they all.

Surveyor Yarbourne murmured these words pensively as he wrought in the deepening twilight to obtain an ensemble of the old mill, whose gaunt arms spread spectrelike across the saffron sky.

"But who comes here?"

Seated astride his "bonnie," riding slowly up the lane, was Matt Rominy, the ex-mill keeper—for since the tragic occurrence of three years before, still enveloped in mystery, his mill stood there abandoned, like a thing accursed; the evil grist of that dreadful night being the last it ever turned out. Something disturbed Yarbourne's vision. Was his drawing wrong, or had the arms of the mill moved?

High over the crest of the dim hill against the fast-fading sky, between the rows of sorrowfully trailing willows that stood lamenting over the salt marsh, the great wings of the accursed mill were slowly beginning to move, and from its unused hinges came creakings as of a thing in pain.

Faster turned the skeleton arms and louder came the dismal creaking, which rose to a shriek—a chattering, broken, awful sound, which ceased suddenly as the arms stopped turning.

Yarbourne had risen to his feet, and was gazing fixedly, scarce believing his eyes, when a something seemed to leave from the mill and slide and gyrate adown the hill. On it came, past the salt tarn, under the willows, upon melting in the twilight.

"Pshaw!" said Yarbourne. "It's only Tyler's red colt, must have got through the gap. Oh! my God, look!"

Not twenty yards from him, hovering limply over the road, was a dark, red figure, with flowing mane, and for a moment it plunged in his loosing eyes of what might have been a face.

As it wavered, Yarbourne heard a gurgling cry behind him, and, turning, he beheld the miller on his knees, whiter than stone, with both arms stretched out before him.

"Let me alone!" he screamed. "I won't go along. Look! look! Where are his arms?" And he fell fainting in the road.

Yarbourne bent over him, and shook him. He sat up with a ghastly smile.

"It's nothin', Mr. Yarbourne—a tech o' the fingjums, that's all. That Sig Harbor whisky always does it."

He mounted his horse and disappeared in the dusk.

Yarbourne, much shaken, packed his traps hastily, and stalked homeward, muttering

The mills of the gods grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.

A dog howled plaintively as he passed Mary Heath's cottage, and over the dark ridge of its roof hung a gibbous moon.

The Sailor's Story.

Yarbourne went that evening to Mother Chussim's to see the convalescent sailor.

He sat long, smoking and observing him.

Incidentally he mentioned that he had been sketching the old mill.

The man immediately showed so much agitation that the artist became apprehensive, and passed him his pocket flask.

"There! Take a sip of that, and you'll feel better."

The sailor did so, and Yarbourne began to talk about the rescue and Rominy's bravery.

"Brave!" whispered the man; "and so's the devil brave, I reckon," and, showing signs of going to pieces again, he took another pull at the flask at Yarbourne's suggestion, and, motioning to the door, said:

"Shut it tight an' fast an' listen to what I tell ye. It's been on my mind to make this here deposition many a day, but I've had no chance. An' I'm a gone 'coon now, being struck by a spar, so make the most on what I says.

"I come from down the island, an' about three years ago I was on my way to Sag Harbor, to ship abroad the Goliath, a whaler, goin' for a three-years' cruise. It was night when I passed in the lane by the mill, and, bein' tired out, I perched on a fence to rest a bit.

"I was looking up at the big mill, when all on a sudden the arms began to go 'roun' with a terrible creaking, an' seemed to me they was the sound uv voices mixed with it. I didn't see no light in the winders, an' I walked over thar wonderin' why they wuz workin' without any light.

"'Twas what you call a white night—you could see as plain as day, an' as I got nearer there wuz sech a screechin' and chatterin' as made my blood run cold; 'thout knowin' exactly why. I looked in at the winder—give me some more o' that!—the mill had stopped, an' the noise, too—and—O Lord!—that devil of a boat's captain wuz pullin' away from the grindstones the armless body of a man.

"'There!' says he. 'Damn ye; ye'll steal no more corn, nor sweethearts, nuther.' He came creepin' out the door, and I hid in the bushes. For an hour he was diggin' a hole down the hill, near the swamp, under the forked willow—you kin find it.

"I dasn't move. Pretty soon he went into the mill, an' come out draggin' the body. He drug it down an' chucked it in the hole, an' while he wuz fillin' it in I fell over an' cracked a dry branch. He come boundin up the hill with a cocked pistol, but I got away without him seein' me.

"I passed a woman standin' at the gate, but I wuz too skeered to stop—only motioned back.

"My ship had anchor up and wuz ready to put to sea as soon as I got aboard, night though it wuz, as time had been lost the day before. The captain wuz that mad he wouldn't listen to what I had to tell.

"We had good luck an' were nearing home again when the squall struck us that drove us onto Skull Reef."

* * * *

That morning, as the mists were vanishing like ghosts before the approaching dawn, Matt Rominy walked past his mill for the last time, with irons upon his wrists.

"FROM OUT THE HELL OF WATERS WAS FLUNG THE LIFE BOAT."

REVIVING THE ORIGINAL STOCK COMPANY IDEA.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

In the course of time the stock company is returning to its original form and before many years, from present indications, the various stock companies will have gone back to the original idea which was in vogue thirty years ago.

Old St. Louis residents remember when the stock companies were the only theatrical enterprises and when stars came and went while the regular supporting company remained to produce the play. Recent changes at Hopkins's Theater are indicative of this evolution. Manager Gumpertz has tried several women in star parts for week dates and supported them with the regular company. The announcement that he will bring Neill Burgess here to play the original part in the County Fair, with the regular dramatic company to support him, is of interest. It indicates a return to the old stock system. It will be the first time that this had been tried in twenty-five years.

St. Louisans who attended the playhouses that flourished before the war will remember the stock companies, excellent organizations. There were fewer companies in those days and the work exacted of the company was much greater than it is now, when modern conveniences and modern plays are always to be had. The recollection of the old stock companies of St. Louis by playgoers is one of the most interesting of reminiscences. No place in the country was better known than Ben De Bar's playhouse. It was situated on Pine street in what was then an exceedingly fashionable part of the city. It was afterwards moved to Walnut street. What was then the De Bar Theater has had half a dozen names. Ingle's Theater was another famous St. Louis playhouse. It was on the grounds where the Merchants' Exchange now is. Still another famous house was the St. Louis Opera-House, on Olive street between Third and Fourth streets.

Thirty years ago St. Louis was a smaller place than it now is, yet it accorded to these three playhouses patronage that made fortunes for many people.

Stock companies were bigger things in those days than they are now, when actors can be picked up at a moment's notice to fill parts in plays that require large casts. In the old stock days, good actors were few, and a manager could not telegraph to New York and have a first-class actor on the scene in two days, as he can do now. For this reason, managers selected their companies carefully and retained the favorites for the season after season. Only the stars traveled and the star actor of that time often used a saddle horse, a canal boat or a steamboat as means of transportation. Stars came for engagements of from two to ten weeks. The parts were sent to them in advance and the companies were rehearsed before they arrived, so that by the time they reached St. Louis all was ready for a dress rehearsal, and the play was given, perhaps, the same day.

It is a famous list of people, the one containing the names of those who filled these star parts—John Mc'Cullough, Edwin Booth, Joe Emmett, Edwin Forest are the men who played the heavy roles and gave "Richard III" and other of Shakespeare's tragedies. Billy Florence was the prime comedian and Ada Menken and her sister were the emotional actresses of that time. Some of the others best remembered were Lydia Thompson, Maggie Mitchell, Joe Jefferson and Murdoch, the tragedian.

In the last few years the stock company has become a necessity, every town has one. Since the revival of the stock company, a permanent leading man as well as permanent leading woman has been considered a necessity, but from present indications the old stock system is to be revived. When Mr. Burgess comes to play the "County Fair," it will mark an epoch in stock work. Mr. Gumpertz has already had Miss Margaret May play a leading role for a week, but now contemplates putting in a permanent leading woman. He will, whenever the opportunity offers, bring some star to St. Louis to play in some success of past years.

Mr. Stead, the London Outlook understands, was moved to send a copy of his brochure, "Shall I Slay My Brother Boer?" to two London editors. One replied somewhat thus:

"Dear Mr. Stead—What, in heaven's name, have I to do with your family affairs? Yours sincerely, ——"

And the other:

"My Dear Sir—By all means—if he insists upon it. Yours faithfully, ——"

CECIL RHODES, MILLIONAIRE.

From Ainslee's Magazine.

"IN the genus millionaire Cecil Rhodes is unique. On the face of the earth to-day there is probably no other rich man who would use his private fortune to build a railroad in a savage country or defray the expenses of a war, not knowing whether there shall be a reimbursement. It is sacrifice of this unusual sort, in an age when money is king, that commands the admiration of statesman and mechanic alike; while capitalists from very wonderment are constrained to give aid.

"This explains why, through the length and breadth of South Africa you cannot find a man that envies Rhodes his fortune, since he neither spends his money on himself nor does he hoard it for posterity. 'If I had a son he would get no legacy from me,' says this world-unique millionaire. 'I like to see a young man begin poor. It will bring out the best that is in him.'

"To a Rockefeller, Gould or Vanderbilt, such disinterested use of millions must seem like insanity. Here is a man that husbands his fortune with one hand and lavishes it with the other, much as Napoleon kept the recruiting Sergeant busy at one end of the scale, while he never hesitated to fling a few thousand men to certain death at the other. He lives a plainer life than his associates. He owns no steam yachts or private cars, and consistently declines all titles and peerage honors. He shuns society and prefers knocking about on the veldt in a khaki suit to attending a court reception. He has spent a million dollars to provide Cape Town a zoological garden and beautiful park, yet he lives himself for the most part in a thatched hut in Matabeleland. Three times have incendiaries burned down his villa at Groot Schuur. On each occasion has he rebuilt it at greater expense, though he is seldom there to enjoy its luxuries. It is a good way to distribute money to the workingman,' he says."

The Sweetest One.

He de sweetest' lit' feller dat de country ever seen,
Wif a voice er full er music ez a tinklin' tambourine,
In de parties' er eyes,
Lak' de blue er summer skies,
En' he sevin' up en' sluggin', en' he lookin' mighty wise!

He de sweetest' lit' feller in de country 'roun' erbouts,
En' you enter see de dimples des a-runnin' in en' out!
Fer ever' sight er day
He a laughin' life away,
'Twen de winter wear de blossoms er de April en' de May!

He de sweetest' lit' feller, en' dey say he gwine ter be
Do' owner er his daddy—en he sittin' on his knee;
Ef he mammy say, "I know,
Ef she set en' watch him grow,
He 'bleege ter look lak' she look, kase she lovin' er him so."

—Frank L. Stanton in the Atlanta Constitution.