

# GLASS-EYED BILL

By  
LLOYD OSBOURNE



It was plainly new to God's country, and showed it by his artless contempt of the Lord'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 "over there." But the straight-backed, yellow-mustached, soldierly-looking man from "over there" received these advances with inarticulate murmurs of repression; and on their being repeated, turned away the light of his countenance from Robert Hammill, and engrossed himself in the scenery of California. This was a pity, not only for its tacit denial of the brotherhood of man, but as it later on involved the descent of the straight-backed man into what might be called space—together with a dressing-case, dispatch-box, hat-box and a roll of steamer rugs. The stage dropped him at the dusty crossroads, disappearing in the direction of what a rusty iron notice said was Watsonville, while the erstwhile passenger gazed blankly at another, on which was the inscription: "El Nido Ranch."

A little unbending on the part of the man from "over there" 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 hearty "you're welcome" as he whipped up his four horses. But Captain Anstruther was unused to a scheme of things where a ready fellowship counted for more than money. All his life people had automatically arisen to carry his baggage, move him in the proper direction and answer generally for his comfort and well being. To find himself on a dusty road, in the heart of a wild and lonely country, an orphan traveler, so to speak, with nobody to take care of him but himself—was it any wonder that Anstruther looked somewhat depressed, or that the tails of his pug nose drooped limply in the ambient air of the Golden State?

Of course he had a pug nose, and strange, enormous shoes, with hobnails in them, and a wonderful checked knickerbocker costume, involving a weird variety of zester that stopped half way up his calf. He was no less singular inside than out, and next his skin was a leather money-belt, and he was wound round and round with flannel to keep him from having cholera, and concealed about his person was a silver drinking-cup that cost 8 guineas at Silver's, and a compact little filter 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 sailor's needle. He had been "outfitted" in London, at an expense of £100, 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. Perhaps it is because the narrator does not know. Does anybody know, indeed, why the Briton abroad should assume a guise likely to tempt the lightning from its path and interfere with the stars in their courses?

Captain Claude George Pennfield Anstruther regarded his dressing-case, dispatch-box, hat-box, portmanteau, gun-case, portable bath and roll of steamer rugs with a dawning sense that British solidity and dead-weight might be carried too far. He was even more of this opinion by the time he had conveyed these articles to the shelter of some adjacent chapparal and had lopped off (with the help of the knife with the folding spoon, the gimlet, saw and sailor's needle) enough dusty branches to hide them from the gaze of possible passers-by. 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, a Scotch and soda, and a hospitable welcome. On the contrary, he wore the set expression of one engaged with a very disagreeable duty, and his mind, instead of dwelling on the beautiful and romantic scenery, was weighted like lead besides with the memory of a dressing-case, despatch box, hat box, portmanteau, gun case, portable bath, and roll of steamer rugs 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 those little woodmen, the school children, for days afterward. A mile—two miles—and then he came in sight of some strangely red buildings on a hill. The captain pegged away; the red buildings grew redder and larger; one of them, almost a factory for size, curiously informing 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 off 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 tomb-like 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 into action. But the stillness remained unbroken 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 crea-

cha" 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 comin' and goin' as faint as a baby's in a cot, and beauty? Why, it was like seein' the Taj Mahal by moonlight—the same indescribable what'd'ycallum, you know, when something seems to take you by the throat and you gasp, my toy, positively gasp!"

She was dressed in silvery gray, with a wide lace collar about her neck, and in her thick, ruffled chestnut hair there lay a single red carnation. She was as fresh and sweet and exquisite as the flower itself; and in contrast to the dust and heat without, the sight of her was as refreshing as a splashing pool in the depths of a woody canyon. The captain, 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 go gently that it was almost a lullaby, and then by degrees rising to an honest, growling, bull-dogish cough that seemed to say: "Wake up, blast 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 candy 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 flute on the Lake of Selangor, borne over the water at dusk! Or the bulbul in one of those moldy old gardens where the Rajput princes held high revel in the company days!"

"My name is Anstruther," he said, picking chocolate creams off the floor. "Captain Anstruther of the British army." She smiled at him without saying a word.

"You are, I presume, Miss Helen Jaffrey?" 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. I nearly went away."

"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 that you are in charge of this whole establishment?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, I'm 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."

"Oh, it isn't wine," said the captain hastily. "It's—it's something very different!"

"You can ring up pa in the next room," she said helpfully. "Call up Long Distance and ask for Byron Hot Springs."

"It isn't the kind of thing you can very well telephone," said the captain.

"Then you'd better chase him up to Byron," remarked the young lady.

"But you're in it, too," explained Anstruther. "It's really more you than anybody. I've come from England just to see you!"

Do you know what he said to me, sticking his eyeglass in his eye and speaking with his mouth full of chicken tamale? Said he understood now why pigs squealed when they ate! If he hadn't said that I suppose he'd have gone away and that would have been the end of him. But I couldn't resist a man like that, could I? Besides, it was awfully pitiful—he was so evidently the real thing—so handsome even in his terrible clothes—a gentleman, you know."

The captain wriggled nervously on his chair. These recollections seemed to make him acutely uncomfortable. His shrewd fanned face was bright with an interest not untouched with shame. Had Helen needed any reassurance as to his concern in Bill, the expression of his face would have been sufficient.

"We knew he was in very low water," he said. "We knew he had parted from nearly all the associations—the refinements of \* \* \* Had lost caste and sunk lower and lower in the Western Avernus—but we never dreamed he had been reduced to—"

"The chicken of charity," said the girl, filling in the gap.

"I would call it rather the husks of

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 Dago 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 snuggled into the place like a dog that's 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 was waiting around the yard with a pistol to shoot Mr. Jackson with—our chemist, you know, and expert wine-maker—and that he was drawing beads 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 on 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

and I wasn't going to let anybody hurt him. But I had a tough time with Pa. Pa is such a stickler for law and order. Wanted to take him off to the county seat and lay a felony charge against him. He hadn't been deputy sheriff very long, you see, and was doing new broom. Then Bill made it worse by saying it was all about a woman—never mentioning that I was the woman, and Jackson had said something then. \* \* \* Well, Bill was such a gentleman that he wouldn't bring my name into it. Said 'woman,' like that, till I wonder Pa didn't burst."

"It was then that I felt what training can do for a man—with Pa, I mean—and how wise I had been to always keep the upper hand of him. He was determined to settle Bill out of hand—was positively prejudiced against him—and for a time it looked as though I was nowhere in the scrimmage. And I think he was cut up, too, about my liking Bill so well, for of course (didn't I tell you?) Bill was just silly about me—always had been since Ah Sue gave him that chicken tamale on the doorstep—wore things next his heart and all that, and thought anything sacred I had ever touched. The whole ranch is a sort of church to Bill, you know. \* \* \* Well, as I said, Pa was awful. He peaced

and punches their little heads off afterward. Oh, Bill's a great boy, and they're going to make him president. \* \* \* Oh, dear, 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 isn't much about Bill I don't know already—his being sent away from England and how they never wanted to see him again."

"I am out here to take him back," said the Captain.

"He won't go easy," said the girl.

"I am not so sure," said the Captain. "Circumstances have altered. I don't see very well how he can refuse. I—well—the family, I mean, are delighted to hear that he has retrieved himself and risen superior to the boyish follies that threatened 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 coolly. "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 Eton and Oxford as a preparatory step to giving him a thousand pounds and telling him to scoot. 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's 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 had 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 than 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 Watsonville. Never passes there but he says: 'Look at that tallow-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, you know—especially in an elevator. But, as I don't know them, you can't expect me to feel very bad about it, can you?"

"Don't you realize how it will affect William?"

"Oh, he'll be terribly gut 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."

"This makes him Lord Tranton," said the captain.

"I suppose it does," she said. "I had never thought of that."

"We've thought of it a good deal," said Anstruther.

"Lord Tranton," she repeated. "Then won't his wife—be Lady Tranton?"

"That's just it, you see," said the captain. "She will be Lady Tranton."

"What do you mean by that?" said the girl.

"You'll hardly believe it," said the captain, disregarding her question, "but for a time we didn't know where under the sun to find him. They, somebody, said about Lady Grace, you know—I believe it was her maid or housekeeper—and we went over all her letters to try and get track of him."

"Well, you've succeeded," she remarked as he hesitated.

"We got on the track of something else," he went on significantly. "It seemed—indeed there was no doubt about it—his affections—er—were seriously engaged—er—to a young lady—er—"

"Me, I suppose?" she said quite calmly.

"Yes, you," he returned, "though it is only fair to William to say that his letters were expressed—er—with considerable reserve—what you might call perfect respect, you know, and all that kind of thing."

"Of course, I know that," she exclaimed.

"It was very alarming," said the captain.

"Who for? For you or the young lady or Bill?"

The Captain tugged at his yellow mustache.

"I must really beg your indulgence," he said at last. "I am sure the very last thing in the world I wish to do is to offend you. I had hoped, as I told you, to discuss the matter first with your father."

"We'll just leave Pa out," she said. "It's me that Bill's in love with—not Pa."

"Still it's very awkward," murmured the captain. "Very awkward."

"So you read Bill's letters and got quite discouraged," she said, smiling.

"He seemed on the verge of committing an—irrevocable mistake," said the captain.

"Is that how you'd describe my—punching me?" she asked.

There was a pause.

"Frankly—yes," said the captain.

"There are people here who think the irrevocable mistake might be the other way," she remarked.

"Then, my dear young lady," he went on briskly, "the people here have your true interests at heart. Believe me, there can be no lasting happiness in a union that involves a great inequality of station. It is currently said that a man raises his wife to his own level, but a knowledge of the world teaches us that only too often he—er—sinks to hers."

"Bill seems quite satisfied to sink," she returned. "In fact he's been in a panic lest he wouldn't get the chance."

"The Bill of yesterday and the Bill of to-day are two different men," said the Captain. "He has now a great place to fill. He becomes the head of one of the proudest and most aristocratic families in England. It would be too unutterably odd if he failed in the duty he owes both to his class and to his rank."

"His class and his rank never bothered very much about him out here," she said. "They seemed quite happy, in fact, to be quit of him. He might have starved to death for all they cared."



"For Once I Felt Myself Staggering."

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's all. Except for her, he said, there wasn't a soul in England who would have walked around the block to help him."

Captain Anstruther looked depressed.

"He was wrong," he said.

"Of course, the trouble with Bill was that he drank," he said.

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, anyhow, 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 he kind of sobbed 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 went straight up to him and wrestled his gun away and stood in front of him so pa couldn't shoot him from the house. Fine? I should say it was—no body was more surprised than me, I'm sure, and I'm surprised now! But I guess I knew pretty well Bill wouldn't have hurt me for the world; though, looking back at it, I can't see how I didn't choose underneath the bed."

"Well, I led him back to the bunkhouse and made him sit down on the wooden steps. The tears were rolling down his face, and I felt too sorry for him to say a word. They say a girl always likes a bad man—not that Bill was really bad, you know—only unfortunate that he should have complicated his biennial bust with a quarrel with Jackson. When he saw pa prancing toward us he begged like mad for the pistol to kill himself with; and I almost felt like giving it to him when he talked about wearing stripes and perhaps being sent up for years. But I felt sure I could handle Pa; and, anyway, Bill was sort of my dog, you know,

up and down like a royal Nubian lion, while I, with my heart in my mouth, did Little Spangles in the wild beast's 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. But he didn't find Mr. Jackson. Nobody ever has. He disappeared like an orange under a conjuror's hat. All that's left of him is upstairs in two trunks and a debit balance of a hundred and thirteen dollars 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 Dago foreman instead of going into the juke business at San Quentin Prison. I dare say he might never really have gone 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 you 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 the place where he simply couldn't go on, and was so helpless and desperate and miserable. That was his last biennial bust, for now, of course, he has got something to live for, and it's all different, and he's become one of the little saints of the Y. M. C. A. They say he's the pinkest thing in the room when he gets up and goes solemnly warning, though I think it's rather fine of him, don't you? And the fun of it is that he runs a boxing class there, too,

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"His class and his rank never bothered very much about him out here," she said. "They seemed quite happy, in fact, to be quit of him. He might have starved to death for all they cared."

"I know we lay ourselves open to that imputation," went on the Captain, in a tone of depressed suavity. "But, as the dear Duke said in the family council we held at Holderton Abbey, 'Circumstances alter cases.'"

"It's not Bill they're thinking about," she said; "it's their noble and splendid selves."

"They cannot very well detach themselves from the affair, even if they would," continued the Captain. "Tranton's disgrace is necessarily theirs."

"If the dear Duke doesn't want to know me, he needn't," she retorted, with a heightened color. "If he doesn't want to play in my yard he can always have the aristocratic privilege of staying out."

"Then there's the Dowager Lady Tranton," said the Captain; "Bill's stepmother."

"She, too, then," said the girl.

"She really feels it more than anybody," sighed the Captain. "The same name, you know—the possibility of mistakes being made—the inevitable confusion of—"

"It's just what you said before, Captain," she exclaimed, mockingly. "It's too unutterably sad, isn't it?"

"I know I am expressing myself very badly," he said. "I told them at the time they ought to choose somebody better fitted for the task than I. But the dear Duke was so peremptory, and Lady Tranton cried on my shoulder, and the memory of a life-long obligation naturally turned the scale—and so here I am, and making a terrible mess of it, just as Whitcombe said I would."

"It was certainly a long way to come just to talk to a girl," she said.

"And then to do it so badly," added the Captain.

"I can't see that it's any of their business," she exclaimed.

"I was charged to offer—inducements," said the Captain, with embarrassment. "Inducements! What sort of inducements?"

"Oh, I am almost ashamed to say—er—of a monetary nature."

"Well, you ought to be," she said. "How much?"

"Whitcombe said I was to begin at five thousand pounds."

"The point is, where were you to leave off at?"

"Ten thousand!"

"Why didn't you say it sooner?"

"The fact is—er—the dear Duke thought—er—Whitcombe 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 Whitcombe myself I was the last man to talk 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.