

THE MUSIAD

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley."

Ah! Safety at last. What excruciating pain and agony have I survived. My body aches and my heart beats a the mere recollection of it. Its effects are still upon me, and my reeling brain strives to grasp the terrible plight from which I have been fortunate enough to escape.

As I lie surrounded by the darkness that affords me shelter, I think over my folly in setting out upon such a venture. Was I not told by my older and wiser brethren that it might mean my doom? Did I not hear the enemies of our race plotting and planning on our destruction? Oh, how my being revolted at the mention of their cruel intents, of the atrocities which they proposed to inflict upon us! Did I not even see the infernal machines, the dire instruments of torture invented by the diabolical genius and cunning of the ringleader, that he might carry out his evil schemes? How he and his partisans sat and gloated over it all, feasting their eyes, first with satisfaction on the death-dealing contrivance, then with admiration on its inventor, marvelling at his ingenious skill!

Then up he jumped, and, filled with the pride of his achievements, began: "Gentlemen, you well know how I have labored to rid my room of these pests. At last, Gentlemen, my efforts are about to meet with success. And now, out of consideration for you all, I propose to make my inventions serve a double purpose. After the mice have fallen easy prey to my traps, we shall electrocute them by means of my lately perfected discovery, dissect them, and so combine science with the pleasure of seeing them meet with their just punishment." The entire assembly joined heartily with him in the project, and the speech brought forth a great deal of laughter, although the cause of their merriment puzzled me greatly.

And oh, shall I ever forget the sight—how I shudder at the memory of it—of one of my fellow-mice lying distorted and writhing in his death-agony. The hideous drama being enacted before my eyes froze me with terror; yet so fascinated was I by the spectacle that not the smallest detail of it escaped me. I saw their every action, I heard

their every word, I stole out to almost within their reach.

The leader held the unfortunate victim in a vise-like grip. He was a tall, spare youth. Every lineament of his face portrayed his satisfaction at the feat. Grouped about him were his accomplices in the approaching crime. On a raised dais stood a gaunt spectre, dark and forbidding, a dreadful reminder of other ages, his body enveloped in a great loose cloak, his head swathed in a white cloth, twisting in weird contortions, ever and anon uttering unearthly cries that pierced the very marrow of my bones.

I longed to flee, but something held me immovable to the spot. A long pause ensued, and silence reigned, broken at last by the voice of the tall one addressing the executioner:

"O Moonface, Spirit of a thousand years, proceed."

To whom the other answered simply:

"Thou hast spoken."

He then descended majestically from his place of prominence, taking in his hand two cords suspended from above and already prepared for him by the menial of the company, who was diminutive in stature, had fiery hair, and seemed rather afraid of the helpless victim. The executioner walked slowly and with measured steps to his leader, and applied the terminals of the cords to the body of the captive. I saw the little form distend from the pain so peculiarly produced by these cords; then I closed my eyes, for I could not bear to be a witness of what might follow. Not a groan, not a sound of anguish did he utter, but suffered nobly, and I gloried in his bravery. Under the impulse of the moment, filled with a wild desire to die with him, I felt a longing inclination to reveal myself to the cruel band, to upbraid them for their heinous barbarity and then to meet heroically the death of my comrade."

The low chant of the executioner disturbed my thought intoning in a deep bass and in a language unknown to me:

"Electrocutus est mus."

Only then did I realize the peril of my situation. At the same instant I became aware that they had espied me. I turned like lightning towards the place of my entrance, and ran to my friends below with a speed that only terror can lend.

Yes, now I remember the advice and warnings of my friends, but the hunger that gnawed my vitals had to be satisfied. The thought of food was uppermost in my mind overshadowing all fear of the exploit. So, under cover of darkness, I reached the room, ate my fill, and was starting on my return when the odor of **cheese** attracted my attention. It came, as I judged from a square tin box with its cover partially raised. It seemed to me innocent looking enough. I jumped through the opening, to my horror, the cover came down with a crash behind me.

Instantly I heard a great commotion, and through an opening in the top of my prison I could see that the room was flooded with light. I heard someone approach the box and exclaim:

"A mouse! The trap's done its work again. We'll finish him to-morrow."

Darkness again and silence left me alone to think over my plight and to meditate on the horrors that the morrow would bring. No description could justify the wildness of the fancies that blinded my senses and drove me into a state of black despair. Finally, however, the full realization of my predicament came to me. I gradually became more resigned, and recalling the brave death of my comrade such a short time before, I resolved to imitate him as far as it was in my power to do so. Strengthened by this purpose, I soon fell into quiet, peaceful slumber.

The following day was for me one of dread suspense; every footstep alarmed me; the long hours dragged on, each seeming like an eternity of time. At times I grew frantic with fear, then, overpowered by the intense mental strain, sleep would come to relieve me. Thus passed the long day, and lengthened into night.

I began to wonder at the delay and to hope against hope, when of a sudden the heavy sound of many footsteps set my nerves again on edge, and a moment later a relentless hand seized me. I struggled to escape with all the power that I could muster, but all to no avail. A string was fastened to each of my limbs, and by these I was stretched out on the surface of a table. I saw the dread executioner bend over me, murmuring his dismal incantations. I steeled my nerves in anticipation, and a pain such as I had

never experienced shot through my every fibre, followed by an indescribable numbness.

Gradually this sensation left me, and as in a dream the words came to me:

"Listen, Ponty. Is that **he?**"

A pause—then the answer:

"Aw, dry up, Dope. Finish him up."

I opened my eyes, and as I did, there loomed in the doorway a huge, black-gowned form. In a twinkling I was forgotten. The interloper bore down upon my tormentors, scattering them in all directions.

A mighty battle followed. Amid the cries of the disabled, the tumult, and the confusion, I gnawed desperately at the fetters that bound me, and made good my escape.

Ah me, I am weary, and tired of it all, but through the dejection that oppresses me, the exultation in the thought that they met their just deserts makes me wonder if, perhaps, the discomforts that I endured were not worth the while.

G. K. M. '24

