[Written for the Flag of Our Union]

In the Cellar

by W. W.
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IF I should live to hold my own in the force for twenty years more I shall never forget those dreary night patrols which I had to perform in front of the Treasury, at Maryborough. It was during the very last weeks of my being connected with the ordinary police, and before I was gratified by being at last admitted to the more pleasant duties of a detective.

Maryborough was at that time in a state of unenviable dullness; it was just after the "Camp" had been shifted from the old ground that had served so well when the men had twice as much to do, and when all those grand and useless buildings were standing in a state of new "rawness" on the hill at the back of the Treasury. It used to aggravate me beyond measure to see that gaol and police-court, the county court, and expansive camp, and nothing to do in one of them; but there was comfort hard by, in the sight of the less aspiring hospital, that stood, and still stands, in good stead to many a poor penniless fellow in his last extremity.

However, that has nothing to do with my being on guard at the Treasury, or with the many anathemas I used to favour our martinet of a sergeant with, as, on a raw, chilly, moonless night in winter, I paced up and down the dull pavement for four wretched hours. There were, all told, some thirteen members of the force in and about the camp at that time, but I fancied Sergeant B—— had a down on me, and gave me that particular duty to perform six times oftener than was my share.

I used to generally stand it patiently for the first two hours, while there was some slight chance of a passer-by, to arouse the echoes of the lonely back street; but after two o'clock, when the cold was at its worst, and, perhaps, a raw drizzle wetting a fellow into his marrow, the old boy himself could not be expected to take it calmly, so when four o'clock a.m. brought one of my mates to relieve me, he generally found me in too confounded a bad humour to answer the barest words of civility.

It was upon one of these occasions that I took my sulky way up the rise behind the Treasury, on my way to the camp. It was a pitchy dark night, and I had considerable difficulty in finding my way, as there was no decided road-mark. Fixing my eye upon what seemed to be a huge oblong lantern directly on my route, however, I managed to overcome all the obstacles, in the shape of shallow holes and blackened stumps, until I stood parallel with the object which had guided me.

Now, this object had some little interest for me, and had attracted many a glance in my way to and from my duties. It was a calico tent, small in size, and of the most simple construction. There was not a bit of lining in it; and the natural consequence was that, upon a dark night, when a light was burning within, it did present the appearance I have alluded to, and resembled nothing so much as a huge lantern of oiled paper.

It must have been very inconvenient to the owners, for every word, save a whisper, was audible to the passer-by, and every movement was seen, as it was thrown in shadow upon the thin walls of poor calico. I used to think when first I was stationed at this township, that people who lived so entirely in public could have no fear of police supervision, but I am a suspicious fellow, and I soon changed my opinion on that subject.

The tent was inhabited by a digger and his wife. They appeared to be childless, and the woman was the most wretched and miserable being I had ever beheld. She seemed quite young, but ill and broken-hearted, and had a despairing look in her eyes, that used to haunt me for days after I had last seen it. At last I saw it no more for months, and gossip assured me that the poor creature was confined to her bed, ill and helpless.

The husband used to work in the Deep Lead, I believe, and I had no reason to doubt that the woman had every necessary comfort, save that of attendance; but *that* she certainly had not, for no doctor was summoned, and no one ever went or came about her, as far as I could see; although I often noticed the man spending his money at the counter of a store where drink was sold, or carrying home parcels for household use.

This sort of thing had gone on for months; and often when I passed the tent at nights, and saw that lonely light burning still and shadowless within, I used to pause and listen, fearing the helpless woman lay alone in her sick-bed, while the surly-looking man drank his earnings at the Talbot.

It was the case on the particular night I am writing of, and I stopped for a moment to hear if there was any sound audible in the tent. There was none, save the flapping of canvas in the breeze that had sprang up, and I went quietly round to the side of the tent opposite to where I stood; for I guessed it was the unfastened entrance to the place that made the unpleasant noise. It was—the calico remained untied, and within, sitting at a table, with his arms resting upon it, and his head in dangerous proximity to the flaring candle, was the man himself, fast asleep.

I was just in the humour to inflict upon others some of that officialism under which I myself had so often writhed, upon those who could not help submitting to it; and, besides, I was not going out of the strict path of my duty in interfering; besides giving myself an opportunity of learning something more about this strangely-neglected woman. Entering the tent quietly, then I laid my hand upon the sleeper's shoulder and awoke him.

He started up in fear, as it were, and such a look of terror in his eyes as he recognized the uniform; but as I spoke, the old sullen look gradually resumed its wont in his features.

"What time of night is this to be sitting asleep with the tent door open, and a blazing candle within an inch of the calico!"

"What business is that of yours?" he retorted; "I can burn my own tent if I like, I suppose—it isn't insured."

“No, you can’t,” I said; “and neither can you burn your sick wife; and more than that, if I see the door of the tent open again, with a wet southerly wind blowing in all night on her, I’ll report you. What doctor’s attending her!”

“None,” he replied, with a look that spoke volumes of anger.

“None! She’s been laid up—let me see—five months now, and you’ve had no advice. Come, it’s time for me to look after this business—I thought Dr. Sartain was attending her.”

“No, he wasn’t! I’ve no money to put into Sartain’s pocket, and, besides, she don’t want a doctor, and she won’t have one, she says.”

“Well, I’ll see about it to-morrow; and see and don’t set the place on fire in the meantime.”

During the conversation I had kept my eyes fixed upon the end of the little tent, where I knew the invalid must lie. Nothing but a rag of a curtain separated the bed from us, and as I spoke those concluding words, it was drawn aside, and a white death-stricken face peeped out.

“Ned,” it said, “give me a drink of water, for the love of heaven!”

“There isn’t a drop in the place,” the husband replied, angrily.

“Go and get it, then,” I ordered; “a pretty to do, if a dying woman can’t get a drink of water in Maryborough! Go at once, and I’ll watch till you come back.”

With a muttered curse at the pale tenant of the comfortless bed, the man took a billy, and went out. As he did so the sick woman beckoned me toward her, holding back with the other hand the thin curtain with a trembling hand.

“It’s no use,” she whispered, as I approached to her side; “I’m nearly gone. Don’t forget. At Amherst, where we lived before—in the cellar”—and as she gasped the last of these weakly-uttered words, she fell back, still clutching the curtain, which even her weight dragged from its weak supports. At this moment, the husband—whom I shall in future call Ned—returned and advanced towards the bed, with an anger in his eyes that he appeared incapable of controlling.

“What is she bothering about now?” he asked; “has she been speaking?”

“She’ll bother you no more, my man,” I replied; “the poor woman is going home.”

The sound of her husband’s voice appeared to give her one last moment of remembrance; she opened her eyes, and turned them dimly towards him; a spasm passed over her face, and faintly she uttered—“God forgive you, poor unfortunate”—and she died.

Ned fell into the seat in which he had lately slept, and, with the billy of water in his hand still, stared with a bewildered look at the corpse, as if her last words had stupefied him.

I doubted much if his end would be so quiet, but it was not my business to say so, and so I turned and went onward to the camp, to send some of my mates to take charge of the body, as, there having been no medical attendance, an inquest was inevitable.

It was nearly morning when I went to bed, and tried to get two or three hours' sleep, but I found it an utter impossibility; turn and twist as I would, I could not forget the strange words of the dying woman. What ever could they mean? What interest had that cellar for her in such a terrible moment? or how could I ever discover the secret, now that it rested in a dead bosom, and would soon be buried from the light for ever? Sleep was impossible—my thoughts kept revolving in a maze around those singular words, "In the cellar."

Finding rest was not to be won, I arose at eight o'clock and proceeded to relieve the constable in whose charge the body had been left, hoping thereby to have an opportunity of learning something to throw light on the affair from the lips of Ned himself. In this I was disappointed; as I reached the tent he intimated that he must go and tell his mate that he could not work that day; and then he went off in the direction of the Deep Lead.

About two hours after, a cheery-looking man in digger's attire, came to the tent and inquired for Ned.

"I'm his mate," he said; "I thought I might be able to help some way or other, and so I came down."

"Have you not seen him?["] I asked[;] "he said he was going up to you."

"Oh, yes, he came to the shaft and told me, but he left almost immediately, saying he was coming straight back."

"I dare say he won't be long," was my reply; and the new comer seated himself beside me upon a piece of wood at the door, and taking out his pipe, commenced smoking.

"It's a sad job," he said; "Ned's had a hard time of it with the poor thing ever since we've been mates."

"Have you been mates long?" I inquired.

"Only since he came to Maryborough; for my own part, I wish I'd never seen the blessed hole."

"No luck, eh?"

"Luck! I've spent every shilling I had in that shaft, and now I don't believe I could get pounds for my share to-morrow."

"Ned doesn't seem to be hard-up, does he?"

"Not he; wherever he gets it—he has lots of cash."

“And yet this poor woman has been lying here for months without seeing a doctor.”

“It was her own fault, I believe; she had a great dislike to doctors; but I never thought she was so bad—only a weakly, useless woman.”

“Do you know where Ned was before he came here?” I once more questioned my communicative companion.

“He once told me he had a store at Amherst, about a year and a half ago; but Ned’s no fellow to tell much of his business, and I never asked any questions.”

In a short time after this conversation I left the spot, and during the afternoon the inquest was held. The medical gentlemen found nothing to excite their suspicions in the woman’s death. She appeared to have simply died of debility and an utter prostration of energy; and so the thing was over.

I asked a digger’s wife, who lived close by the camp, to assist in laying the poor woman out, etc., as there appeared to be no single friend to come forward; and then she was buried, Ned requested this woman to take away every article of clothing belonging to his wife, saying at the time, “There’s not much, but I’ve no use for woman’s clothes now, and I’d rather, to tell the truth, see them out of the place;” And so the woman gathered the few articles of attire together, and carried them home.

The affair seemed to be ended as far as I was concerned; but I could not forget it—I was haunted by the words, “Don’t forget—in the cellar.”

Turn where I would, on duty and off it, morning, noon, and night, I was “in the cellar;” in short, there was a secret, and that was quite sufficient for me—I wanted to find it out.

At this time I had considerable hopes of gaining my detective card, and I determined, if it should be so, that the very first of my leisure time should be spent in trying to discover that particular cellar at Amherst.

One day, shortly after the inquest, I had just returned from mounted patrol to “Chinaman’s,” and having stabled and cleaned my horse, was passing toward the boarding-room for my supper, when the digger’s wife I have spoken of beckoned to me. I was somewhat surprised to see the air of mystery she assumed as I approached, and how carefully she went inside before she spoke a syllable.

There was a pair of women’s scarlet corsets lying on the bed, and, lifting them, she came to me, as I stood at the table in wondering expectation.

“I was going to take it over to Ned,” she said, “but I thought as ’twas hided like, perhaps I’d better show it to yourself first, sir.”

"What is it?" I asked, looking at the soiled article she held in her hand, and was seemingly alluding to it.

"You know Ned gave me the poor thing's clothes; and as I was having a bit of a wash to-day, I thought I'd rub them all through, in fear of sickness or anything. The stays wanted a stitch or two in the linin', and I wondered what way she'd fixed the front o' them with a fresh linin' like. There was something rustling, too, and thinking I'd struck a patch, I ripped the rag off. There it is you see, sir; she sewed that inside, and that was all."

Slipping back a bit of lining as she spoke, the woman drew out an envelope and handed it to me. It was worn a little, but had evidently been carefully preserved, and upon it was a simple address.

"Mrs. Edward Corcoran," I read aloud, "Rush Store, Smyth's Lead, Amherst. Was that her name?"

"I've heard so, sir."

Opening the envelope, which was simply the cover of a posted letter, I drew out the enclosure. It was a *carte de visite*, also carefully folded in a bit of tissue paper. I looked at it, and perceived that, although the portrait of a male, it bore no resemblance whatever to Ned, her husband. It represented a much younger man, with strongly-marked features; and the strong marks were decidedly Israelitish. An abundance of black hair, a decidedly hooked nose, and the ordinary attire of an office clerk or salesman; and that was all I could see of the portrait.

"There's some writing at the back, sir," observed the woman, as I still gazed, "but I couldn't read it, though not bein' a scholar."

Turning it round hastily, I perceived indeed some writing. First a name—written evidently by the same hand as the address on the envelope; the name was "Reuben Jacobs;" and it entirely corresponded with the Israelitish cast of feature I had already recognized in the *carte*; under the name, however, I perceived some ill-defined pencil marks; and holding it more closely to my eyes, the reader must try to guess my feelings when I traced, in a trembling and ill-written hand, the same words already so productive of interest to me—"In the cellar." Yes, there they were, sure enough, and several other words before and after them; but my efforts were vain to decipher one other syllable.

Giving the good woman strict injunctions to keep silence in the matter for a time at least, I put the precious find in my pocket, and I would not have exchanged it for five pounds of the newest notes in Australia. How many hours of day and lamp light I spent over those few pencilled scrawls I leave you to guess, but more than "In the cellar" I could not make of it, under any influence I brought to bear upon it.

The poor woman had some reason for hiding this little portrait on her person, there could be no possible doubt; and, after many guesses, I decided that the most feasible explanation of the pencil marks was, that they had been made stealthily during her last illness, and that her hand was incapable of forming the characters, even had she been possessed of more durable material

than a wretched lead-pencil. At any rate, the marks were almost obliterated, and human ingenuity could make out no more than what I have stated.

About this time I received my coveted appointment to the detective force; but before I made my arrangements concerning the change, my friend Ned had disappeared from Maryborough, having, as I learned from his late mate, put his tent on his back and tramped it for some other diggings. This, however, was a matter of very little consequence to me, as I knew that, unless he left the colony, I could easily trace him at any time.

I was not sorry to leave my late quarters, and was appointed to the Ballarat district. At this I was really delighted, as, of course, Amherst would be within my own especial beat; and for the first month of my sojourn at my new quarters, I enjoyed myself perfectly. It was so pleasant to get up when you liked, and lie down ditto; to wear any clothes you had a mind to; to come and go at any hour or day whenever you chose, without consulting in one degree either sergeant or constable in charge; and that is nearly the position an up-country detective holds.

There was nothing doing in my line—I hadn't even the excuse of a hunt for Chinese thieves—and so one morning I saddled my horse and went to Amherst, to look after the "cellar." It was but a pleasant ride of two hours or so, and then I found myself at Amherst, but, of course, as ignorant as the man in the moon of the whereabouts of the object of my search. Recollecting the address upon the envelope, however, I inquired for Smyth's Lead, and soon found myself among the ruins of a line of erections that had evidently bordered the Lead in its palmiest days.

A few scattered places of business still remain at its upper end, but I passed them one by one, in vain search for the "Rush Store," until I stood at the end of the gully, and nothing within sight but one slab hut that stood upon the rise at the side of the road. This hut appeared to have been longer there than most of the places I had passed, and it was evidently a single man's home, as it was barely enough to accommodate one person.

You will recollect I was in plain clothes, and as I stood looking up and down the road, and examining the appearance of camping places and half tumbled-down chimneys that marked the line of the road, a digger approached from the Lead, carrying the inevitable billy in his hand. It was the owner of the lone hut, and as it was near dinner time, I concluded he was making home for a spell.

"Good day to you," I said. "Are there any business places further on?"

"No," he replied; "there's no business now, only what's up at the upper end. Are you in search of anything?"

"I was looking for the 'Rush Store.' It used to be kept somewhere about here by one of the name of Corcoran."

"Oh, they've gone long ago. Corcoran sold the place, and 'twas shifted before he went. Why, you're standing right on the old site this moment."

The devil I was! I looked around with a start. How did I know that I mightn't tumble into that very cellar before I knew where I was? I had climbed up from the road to get a better view from the rise, near which stood the slab hut of the speaker, and sure enough I had unconsciously lit upon the very spot of which I was in search. There were the marks, still very distinct, of the corner and partition posts, the rough counter supports, and the fallen down chimney of stones and poles. The floor still bore the evident traces of many feet, and some pipeclay held its own upon the rude hearth, but not a sign could I see of cellar or underground excavation of any description.

"Have you lived long here, mate?" I asked the man, who stood looking curiously at me as I examined the premises, or rather their site.

"I came about the same time as the Corcorans," he answered. "Perhaps I might be able to help you with my memory some way. Will you walk to my hut and sit down?"

I gladly accepted the invitation. There was a superiority in this man's appearance that made me feel like trusting him with my secret. I wouldn't do it now under the circumstances; but I was younger then, and had no cause to regret having done so.

I sat down on a three-legged stool at the door, and when my friend had gathered his fire together and fried some steak, I cheerfully accepted his offer of a share of his humble dinner.

"Now," says he, when our appetites were satisfied, "I see you're anxious in some way about these Corcorans, and I'm no rogue, so if you'll trust me, I'll help you to the best of my ability."

"Had they a cellar in that store?" I asked, pointing to the site.

"A cellar! what a strange question! But I'm blest if I know. I never heard of one. What the devil are you? You're no digger; one can easily see that."

"I'm a detective, that's what I am," I said; "and I have very particular reasons for finding a cellar at the Rush Store."

"A detective! whew!"

And my friend the digger's astonished whistle rang through the hut.

"Did you ever see a face like that?" I asked, handing him the *carte* so interesting to me.

"Often," he replied, as he examined it. "It is a Jew peddler who used to come round often, and he always stopped at Corcoran's."

It was now my turn to whistle. The thing was becoming plain as day to me.

"Tell me all you can about these people," I said, "and then I'll tell you about the cellar."

"Willingly," he answered. "But if you could light on Corcoran's mate, he could give you a world of information about their private affairs, of which I know nothing save by guess."

"A mate! Had he a mate here?"

"Yes, a mate called Tom, a fair-complexioned man, a German, I think. But I don't think him and the missis hit it somehow; she always looked as black as thunder at him."

Well, we sat half an hour, I daresay, exchanging our stories in this way; and when my friend accompanied me outside to examine the ground more closely in search of the cellar, I do believe he was nearly as much interested in the matter as myself.

"Now here's where the store stood, you see, fronting the road of course. Part of the hill has been cut down to make a level foundation, and here in this spot was the counter where they kept the drink. If there was a cellar at all it might have been a hole under the counter to keep that cool, and has probably tumbled in long ago. But I'll be blowed if it isn't here yet!" he added, pushing a little clay away with his foot. "There are the slabs, only the hill has given way and pitched some dirt on it, or more likely, Corcoran himself covered it up."

It was quite true. In two or three moments my friend had shovelled the earth off, and laid bare about half a dozen slabs that had lain over the cellar behind the rude counter. We had some difficulty in finding an entrance, but the digger, more accustomed to such work, pushed out a slab and squeezed himself down into the cellar to examine it.

"If anyone comes about," he said, as he disappeared, "tell them you've a notion of camping here."

'Twasn't a bad idea, but no one came, and it was not many minutes ere the man extricated himself from the slabs, and appeared on the surface.

"Well!" I asked, impatiently.

"Well, there's nothing in the bit of a hole but the beginning of an old drive. It's very likely, you see, that *it* may lead to something, for I don't see what any man would put a drive in there for. But it's partly fallen in, and will take a little time to clear out. Now, master, I'll give you a bit of advice; just you go to the Camp and get a pair of moleskins on. I've got a little tent under my bunk, and will stick it up right over this hole. It will be a grand shelter, you see, and we can tell any curiosity folk that you and I are going mates, you see."

"I do see," replied I, "and I think too; and what I think is, that it's a pity you are not a detective yourself."

I took the digger's advice, then, and procured my disguise at the Camp, and it was drawing toward evening as I once more reached Smyth's Lead. Before I gained my friend's hut by a long way, I perceived that he had already slung the tent, in a temporary manner, over the cellar; and as I approached, he emerged from it with a look of importance that boded news.

“I have found the cellar, mate,” he whispered, leading the way into his own hut, “and something else beside; but as I could almost swear to a pair of eyes watching us at this minute, we’d better take the hut for it.”

“Watching!”

“Aye; but let me tell you about the cellar first. After you went I stuck up the tent on two forks and a pole I had handy, and then I went down below. I found I could easily clear out the drive without carrying up a bit of stuff, as it was only about three feet long, but opened into a regular bit of a cellar in the side of the hill, propped up with props and caps like a regular underground working. *That’s* the place you want.

“Not the least doubt of it. But about the watching?”

“Well, I saw the place was empty, and came up again. As I reached the tent, I saw a man standing in the road looking at the tent strangely. I knew him at once, but I never let on, only commenced tying the wellplate to the stick. It was that very chap I told you about. Tom they used to call him; Corcoran’s mate, the German.”

“Oh!”

“I gave him the time of day, and he sneaked up a bit, asking if there was any chance for a fellow in the Lead. I told him things were looking pretty blue, but being a hatter lately, I hadn’t much chance. I hoped to do better now I’d got a mate.

“Is that his place you’re putting up?” he inquired.

“Yes,” says I.

“There’s been an old place there before,” says he.

“Yes, a store,” says I; “but it’s long since it went. And so he went off as he came; but it things are as I guess, he is not far away.”

“You must get into the Force, mate,” I replied. “That’s the place for you.”

And I may mention, *par parenthese*, that he *did* get into the detective force not long after, in consequence of the part he took in this affair.

I need not weary your patience by reporting every one of our arrangements. It will be sufficient for me to say that, after feigning to go to bed in my mate’s hut—my own establishment not having been provided with a “bunk”—I stole into the cellar, with the assistance of a dark lantern, to do my share of the exploring, while my friend watched above, like a cat in the dark night, all ears, as he lay at full length on the ground behind his hut.

And so I was at last "in the cellar," armed with a pick and shovel, and fully determined to see what was there to fill the last thoughts of a dying woman.

It was an excavation in which a man could not stand upright, and barely seven feet square; and from the rotten straw and pieces of broken cases scattered about, I judged it had served as a hiding-place for grog during the notorious raids of the police about that time.

I examined the floor closely, for whatever was there was no doubt buried. It gave me a little clue, being of a dry, gravelly nature, and all rough-looking; but choosing the spot farthest from the entrance, where the ground seemed to have been more trampled upon, I commenced to dig. We had agreed to turn every bit of it up to a depth of four feet, if necessary; and I was only taking my first spell until relieved by my mate.

Fortune favored me, however. Scarcely had I excavated two feet deep in the spot I had decided upon, when, I being working with a will, my pick struck right into something that *crashed*, and out of which I had some difficulty in drawing it. Having done so, however, a single minute cleared away the soil from the object, and left exposed a brass-bound cedar box, about a foot and a half long and one wide, and upon a brass plate on the lid was engraved, in plain Roman letters, "Reuben Jacobs."

You might think the sight gratified me, but it didn't. I dashed my shovel on the ground with an angry exclamation, and knelt down to examine the deposit with a frown on my forehead.

Oh, yes, 'twas just a Jew pedlar's case of jewellry with a broken lock; and when I raised the lid, the light of my lamp flashed upon a brilliant array of watches and rings, and brooches and bracelets, none of them imitations either, but the genuine good colonial gold.

"And so," I muttered to myself, as I examined them carelessly, "it was of pelf, after all, the dead woman was thinking."

Yes, I was disappointed sadly, for I had expected to have discovered a body, the veritable body of Reuben Jacobs. I had made up my mind that the man was murdered, you see, and it seemed that I had simply dropped upon a plant of stolen jewellry. And what about the *carte*, then, and the similarity of names upon it and upon this box? Bah! it was a puzzle, and I was disheartened and disappointed.

But there was no use leaving this case for the hider to remove some day, and so before I arose from my knees I lifted it out and laid it on the floor near me. The lamp stood at the edge of the hole, and threw its rays directly into it; and as I turned my eyes back, after resting the box, they fell upon a sight that horrified me. It was a man's head—the head of Reuben Jacobs!

The fiend who was guilty of his blood had laid the murdered man's box directly upon the dead face. Surely such heartless brutality was never surpassed; and as I knelt and stared, and saw the discolored features flattened by the weight of the cedar case, I felt nearer swooning than ever I did in the whole course of my police experience.

At this moment the sound of scuffling overhead aroused me from my horror, and I started to my feet and rushed from the cellar and through the tent into the open air. I was in a rage which no words can express, and had the man Corcoran appeared before me at that moment, with only the suspicion of the crime hanging over him, and tried to strangle him; in short, I was temporarily bereft of my reason, and it is fortunate I had my cooler mate at hand.

Two bounds brought me to the spot where I had left him on watch, and from whence the struggling sounds now came.

"What is it?" I cried. "Where are you?"

"It's a man, and I guess who," he answered, with an effort, as he knelt upon his opponent with one knee; "but there is no spies coming round my place in the dead of night. Here, mate, a loan of your handcuffs if you please."

It was certainly not a very professional act to handcuff a man who was simply prowling about a tent in the dark; but I beg of you to recollect that such things have been done by the force, under order of course, as handcuffing men for selling a glass of drink, and making them walk three or four miles to the lock-up into the bargain afterwards.

So I made no difficulty in lending a hand to manacle the stranger, and then we led him into my friend's hut and struck a light.

"Now, mate," I said, turning to the prisoner, who was as white as a sheet, and shaking like a leaf, "I'm a detective officer, and on the lookout for the murderer of the pedlar named Reuben Jacobs, whom you and Ned Corcoran buried in the cellar there. If you had no personal hand in the murder, the best thing you can do is to turn Queen's evidence, and tell what you know of it."

"I didn't bury him," he answered, firing up; "and if Ned Corcoran said so, he's a—liar!"

"I've nothing to hide," he said; "but I promised his wife not to tell on him while she was alive."

"She's dead," I said, "so you're clear of that. Do you remember anything of that?" I added, handing him the portrait of Reuben Jacobs.

"I do well; it was the sight of this that set Corcoran's blood up. He was jealous of the Jew, you see, because he gave the missis some little brooch or other, and a black job was the end of it. Well, as she's gone, I'll tell all I know."

I needn't give you the man's rambling account; a sketch of the facts will be sufficient.

Corcoran had been madly jealous of the pedlar, who was free and jokey in his manner; and that the jewelry had nothing to do with the murder was evident from the fact that nothing of it was taken, save one watch, which we afterwards found on the murderer's person. One night, during one of the Jew's visits, Mrs. Corcoran left her husband and him playing cards, and retired to bed in a little room behind the shop, and Tom, the German, shortly after followed her example. She

was aroused toward morning by the sound of the strokes of a pick that seemed to come from the cellar; and being a nervous woman, instantly suspected something horrible.

Hastily throwing on a garment, she shook German Tom from his sleep, and they stole down the rude stairs to get a sight of the husband's deeds. Upon the floor lay the corpse of the pedler, a tallow candle flaring by its side, and Corcoran was working for life or death at a hole in the floor, to hide the terrible evidence of his crime from the light.

The sight was the death-blow to the poor creature. The horror she felt at the vicinity of the murder—which a fear of a similar fate made her try to conceal—gradually haunted her into her grave, but for her sake German Tom kept the secret well.

Ned Corcoran never suspected that his midnight deed had been witnessed, and he afterwards confessed that he had allured Jacobs into the cellar for the purpose of helping him to open a fresh case of porter, and that he had driven the pick right into his brain as he stooped over the case.

I had the satisfaction of arresting this man myself, and of hearing the sentence of death pronounced against him. He was in Ballarat at the time; but I don't think he ever intended visiting the scene of his crime again.

Flag of Our Union, August 1, 1868

This story was first published in Australia in *The Australian Journal* (April 20, 1867). The story was written by "W. W.," the pseudonym of Mary Helena Fortune who also wrote under the name "Waif Wander."