

# The Horseshoe

By Eden Phillpotts

Author of "Children of the Mist," "The Secret Woman," etc., etc.

## I.

**W**ITHOUT a doubt 'tis the Board Schools as have made our childer so much wiser than us. For my part, I be a'most frightened to catch my grandson's eye nowadays, when I be uttering my opinions in general. My age is up home seventy-five, an' he's thirteen; but he often makes a face at my larning; an', for that matter, I ban't too much pleased wi' his sometimes. He comes back hot-foot wi' the latest ideas of his pupil-teacher, an' some of 'em in all conscience be as fansical as anything I heard when I was a boy—though 'tis called science now; an' my knowledge is called superstition.

Thicky hoss-shoe be a red rag to my grandson. "Luck!" he says, in his shrill voice: "really, grandfaither, at your time o' life, you did ought to know that there's no such thing as luck. Nought happens by chance," he says. "'Tis all a matter of nature's laws, an' things fall out because they must."

What fool have told him there's no such thing as luck, I can't tell 'e. A child's prattle ban't of much account whether or no; but show me the growed-up man who says "luck" be no more than a word, and I'll show you a zany.

Once my son's youngster was for pulling down the hoss-shoe an' flinging him on the rubbish heap. Then I up an' spoke to him short an' strong. "You touch it," I said, "an', so old as I am, I'll give you the properest hiding as ever a young youth caughted for his sins. Luck or no luck," I said, "if it weren't for that hoss-shoe, *you* wouldn't be in the world for one; nor your faither neither. A imp like you, as ban't old enough to hop out o' the nest, yet to talk to me about principalities and powers and hidden things as if you was the gran'faither an' me the child! You bear yourself more seemly, Billy Maunder," I said to the lad,

"an' possess your soul in patience; an' maybe, when you'm a thought older and a long sight wiser, you'll hear tell 'bout that hoss-shoe. Then, if you've got any of your faither's high sense and trust in God an' his ways, you'll be the first to cherish the hoss-shoe an' keep it 'pon your door same as I do."

He smiled wi' all the wisdom of thirteen in his round face; but he never dared to speak disrespectful of the hoss-shoe no more; for his faither, as became a wise man, was of my mind. He knew the tale, and he knew what "luck" meant as well as most; for there's nought makes you understand the force of the thing like having none yourself, but seeing the fortune that falls to your neighbors.

John Maunder was my son, and, but for the blessing of his parents, he'd drawn a blank. He was dogged with ill-fortune from the weaning, as his mother used to say. Smallpox he had at eighteen, and a comely countenance was marred by it. Then he had no luck wi' his wife, for she died when the blessed boy Billy was born; and he had no luck with his work, which was that of datcher—or thatcher as you would say. Not because he wasn't very clever at it, but because there comed to be less an' less call for it. 'Tis all correlgated iron nowadays, an' a datcher have got to go half across the kingdom to find full work an' full pay.

When John's wife went home an' left him wi' one little new-born babby, my son comed back and lived with me at Belstone. His mother was dead, and I had none to care over-much about me; so it all worked very suent, and us two men an' the child went on together. An' here we be still; yet after more than twelve year of it I do sometimes think he be hankering in his slow way for another female.

I've knowed him to look at the hoss-shoe rather curious of late, an' once he said: "'Twas a masterpiece, sure enough, it brought to you. I wonder if my bad

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luck's over, an' if I shall ever come 'pon a hoss-shoe to bring me the wonnerful fortune as that one fetched."

Then, as us sat over our pipes of a winter night, wi' the boy sleeping snug in his cubby-hole under the roof of my cottage, John says this to me: "'Tis such a number of years now since I heard tell the story, that I shouldn't be sorry to refresh my mind wi' it, if you'm agreeable, faither."

So I up an' stuffed my pipe afresh and told him the self-same tale as I be going to tell you. Others may forget it; but for me 'tis fresh as hope to this day, and will be till I go down to the pit.

Fifty an' more years ago I lived to Sticklepath, an' one fine afternoon, having been to a revel in Okehampton, I must needs come back-along over the Moor. I was only jolly—no more; but well I remember being much bothered wi' two cocoanuts an' a packet o' fairing as I was carrying back to my sister—a maiden as never had over-much nature in her, and, for that matter, died on her twenty-fourth birthday.

Up over, where the sojers come nowadays an' bang their cannon and cut the place to pieces wi' their horses an' gun-carriages, I chanced to meet a man going in the Moor gate. Then one of my cocoanuts must needs roll away again; an' the chap stopped it with his foot, just afore it went into Moor Brook. I thanked him, and the simple soul axed what it might be that I was taking along so careful.

"'Tis a cocoanut as I won at the revel down to Okehampton," I said.

"Lord!" he said, "I've heard of 'em, but I've never seed one afore."

"Us 'll sit 'pon this here stone an' I'll scat un abroad, an' you shall taste un," I says.

"Ban't poisonous, I hope?" he axes me.

"Bless your life, my dear, half the heathen in foreign parts live on 'em," I told the man.

He was a sandy-headed, amiable sort of young fellow, an' lived to Belstone. His name was Ned Bloom, an' he had a good few relations in them parts. I knowed some of his family well enough, but had never met with him.

Well, we ate the nut to the shell, an' he much enjoyed it, and offered to see me home, for he said afterwards that he reckoned I was a bit more than market-merry, and he felt sure I should never get my other cocoanut and the fairing back safe if there wasn't somebody there to help me—specially over the river.

"No," I said, "I won't let 'e do no such thing, for I'm steady as time an' don't see nought double worth mentioning; but I'll come along with you, for Belstone's on my way; an' us'll have a drink at the 'Hearty Welcome' for luck."

It comed out after that he worked to Arscott's quarry and was a very respectable and well-thought-upon young chap.

On we went, talking 'bout them as we was commonly acquainted with, and then just by that hill that falls down to West Oke River under Harter Farm, what should I see but a spick an' span hoss-shoe lately cast and shining in the evening light like silver!

"A bit of luck, mate," I said; an' afore you could speak the word I'd bent down, caught up the trophy, and flinged it wi' my right hand over my left shoulder. 'Twas a gert cart-hoss-shoe, and I flinged it hard.

"Hell!" shouts out Ned Bloom. "What have you been an' done now, you silly fool!"

I looked round and there he was, dancing, wi' the shoe at his feet and both hands over his right eye.

'Twas a terrible come-along-o't, an' only God's mercy that I hadn't cut the chap's eye out of his head an' dropped it on the ground like a poached egg.

"I'm blinded!" he says—"blinded for life so like as not. My poor mother 'n' sister! 'Tis the 'house' for 'em if I'm done for."

I cussed myself blue for a know-nought gert lout; but I was proper terrified, I warn 'e, because, looking at the poor chap's eye, I seed that all the life was out of it, and it had shrunk back in the head of the man like a pricked bladder.

"Best to tie the member up an' take me so fast as you can to a doctor," says Bloom.

He was a darned sight calmer than I was, I'll allow. But the thing I'd done

very soon sobered me down. I knowed too well what 'tis for work-folk to lose their sight, and I felt if the worst overtook the poor fellow, I should have to try an' do his job as well as my own for evermore.

"There's no doctor to Belstone except between ten and twelve Mondays and Fridays," he said; "so you'd best to lead me back-along to Doctor Pierce in Okehampton so quick as it can be done."

With that I tied up his eye, as seemed to have fallen into his head worse than ever; and I took his arm and we marched back that awful long tramp to Okehampton.

He suffered a terrible lot of pain; and one thing brightened up his mind, and one thing made it rather dreary.

I beganed about how I'd work for him till he could get to it again, and he said: "That's all right so far as it goes. My Provident Society, the Order of Dartmoor Druids, will look after me for a bit; but 'tis the future I'm dreading, because when one eye be took out of the eyehole, it often chances that t'other gets rotten too, an' so a man's left wi' no light at all."

"Don't think of such a gashly thing," I said, trying to be cheerful. "We can't say yet if you've lost an eye. There may be enough to build up a new eye upon. There's nothing as doctors can't do nowadays, and 'tis well known that Pierce be one of the best." But, wi' my weak an' tender nature, my voice shook while I talked to the man.

'Twas a beastly wet evening, and we went palstring through the mud, and I never thought we'd get to Okehampton at all. For all my cheerfulness, I feared his poor eye was really gone, because I'd no idea a bust eye can mend and get round again, and fill out, and work so well as ever; but the doctor was to home by good chance, and he put some caucheries to the eye, and cheered us a thought, and said as he'd come and see Ned same evening. The eye was to be kept in the blackness of the plague of Egypt, and the best luck as could happen to Bloom, if all went right, was that the doctor might be able to let in light in a month or so. But he paid little heed to that along of the joy of

knowing that his sight would most likely be spared to him.

He didn't bally-rag me, and he axed me to say no more about it; and when I damned the hoss-shoe for all I was worth, and wished I'd lost my own eyes afore they dropped on the cussed thing, he almost laughed, and said I was a chuckle-headed fool to talk that way, because such an accident might have happened to any lively man who found a hoss-shoe and didn't stop to think if there was somebody walking just behind him.

Presently I got a spring cart and drove him home; then I took the cart back to Okehampton; and then I went home myself wi' my tail between my legs. My sister axed for her fairing, poor dear; but I answered a bit short, I'm afraid, and told her the devil knowed where that was—I didn't. For when the masterpiece of misfortune fell upon me, I'd dropped her parcel and t'other cocoa-nut on the Moor, and forgot all about them. She forgived me without a murmur; and my mother, who was old and toothless, went down on her knees in the parlor and thanked the Almighty to hear that the man wasn't going to have the law of me. An awful fear of the Law she had. Then she began about my taking the pledge, in her usual obstinate and determined fashion; and, as I always did at these oneasy times, I promised I'd do it with the light of the very next day.

## II.

Come Sunday I sneaked over, meek as Moses, to have a tell with Bloom and make my apologies to his people; and I took him two ounces of shag tobacco and the first gooseberries of the year picked off our own trees, for to make a little pie for the poor chap. He was sitting in darkness, and the Lord knows I'd have liked to do the same; but his women-folk had me out in the light and axed questions enough to sink a ship, till I felt the same as a criminal in the dock, and fancied how sentence of death could only be a question of time. The man's mother was gentle, as mothers will be. She'd seen worse trouble than this, and knowed I was young myself, and found out quick enough I was cut to the heart about it, and meant to do

the right thing if it cost the boots off my feet; for I'm a soft-hearted toad, and if I'd been harder I might have made the world bend to me a bit more than ever I have done. But his sister—Miss Tryphena her name was—dash my wig, she did rub it in! A little bungy woman, small and neat as a bantam hen, wi' beautiful black eyes that went through you and out behind, and a tongue—not sharp exactly, but awful well able to curl up the hardihood of a man; and wi' a way of seeing your excuses and answering 'em afore you'd made 'em. I never want to spend a worse ten minutes than I did with her while her mother went to see if Ned would care to have a talk with me; yet, all the same, I felt her loveliness and neatness more'n her hard words.

"A pretty thing," she began, "to play them May-games like that! and I don't care who hears me say so. You ought to know better, Mr. What-you-call-yourself."

"My name be Mr. James Maunder," I answered her, very polite.

"Poor chap, to lie at the mercy of the first fool—" she began. But that didn't go smooth, so she started again.

"Of course you was drunk, or you'd never have done such a rash an' wicked deed," she went on.

"Begging your pardon, I wasn't," I answered; "else how could I have helped the poor fellow back to the doctor's? Market-merry I may have been, as many a better man before me; but bosky-eyed I was not, an' God Almighty—"

"That'll do," she snapped out. "Us don't want none of your swearing here."

"We had just eaten a cocoanut, miss," I told her.

"Eaten a fiddlestick!" she replied.

Then, after a few more efforts to get her to hear sense, her mother luckily comed down-house and told me I might go up and see Ned. So up I went, an' glad to go, an' of course I found the man, despite his troubles, a darned sight more sensible than his sister. He was very glad of the 'baccy, an' thanked me for bringing it, an' said as the doctor was much pleased with his eye and hoped all would be well in a few weeks.

"Which I do too, so help me," I said to the man.

Then us had a tell, an' I seed there weren't a spark of malice in un. In fact, he talked just as civil as I might talk to you.

"I'm afraid your sister won't never pardon me, mate," I said. "She've given me a proper dressing down, I do assure 'e."

"Don't you take no heed of it," he advised. "Tryphena be glumpy and glowry sometimes, an' there's a touch of lemon in her without a doubt, but she's all right at heart."

"'Tis a lesson to me, I'm sure," I told the man. "Never a drop will I take again outside meal-times."

Then I left him after an hour or so, and crept downstairs.

"Hoss-shoes! I'd hoss-shoe him!" said the young woman to her mother very loud, as I sneaked out.

Three days later I went again, and it got to be a regular thing for me to do so. I told the chap the news and cheered him up best ways I could, and without a doubt he looked for my coming. He mended slowly, but the doctor was well satisfied with his progress, and wouldn't let the cure be hurried.

Then came a tragedy; for Arscott, the mean-spirited beast, turned off Ned Bloom from his quarry and said he couldn't wait no more for him. Old Joshua Bloom brought the news, and said 'twas all of a piece with Arscott's character, and foretold as Ned would never get another job. But Joshua was a man who never took a very hopeful view of life, and he had "workhouse" written on his own forehead, for that matter.

That night I had the bad luck to meet Tryphena in the lane as I comed away; and she talked to me again very forcible, and said I was a "gallyvanting robber" and a "itemy toad," and a few other things as didn't meet the case at all. Of course you can't say much to a female—especially a good-looking young one—but my manhood rose up in me, gentle as I was, and 'twas getting dark too, so I couldn't see her flashing eyes. Therefore I just spoke to the point and chanced it.

"You're a little cross-grained baggage," I said, "and 'twould sarve you very well right if I was to give you a good shaking. For two pins I would! What the dowl more can I do than I have done? 'Twas a cruel accident, and no more to blame in me than the needle be to blame when it slips and pricks your finger. And I won't have no more of your sauce, so I tell you. Next time you let your tongue run against me, I'll—I'll do something as will astonish you."

"Then 'twill be something sensible," she snapped out; and of course I let her have the last word and went on my way. 'Twas only a windy threat, for what could I do really? Besides, I thought the world of her in secret, and would gladly have killed the man who laid a finger on her.

Then Ned got better, and couldn't meet with no work; and him and me grew very friendly; and I felt as if I'd have given the coat off my back ten times over to find him a decent job with good money to it. But, beyond the handling of rough stone, he had no cleverness.

I'd left him the last day he was to be in the dark, and was walking back to Belstone by the fuzzes on the common, when I comed across his sister. We met in a cross-cut of the gorse, and never did she look neater, lovelier like, and more unkind of countenance. She 'peared doubtful how to act, so I spoke first.

"'Tis good news that Ned's going to see the blessed light to-morrow, miss."

"The blessed light ban't no use if you can't get no blessed work to do in it," she said.

"Be careful," I warned her.

"Careful! Perhaps you'd like to knock my head off, too, with a hoss-shoe—for luck?" she cried. "That for you!—I believe I hate the sight of you."

"Do you?" I said. "Then, by Heaven, you shall hate the taste of me too!" An' with that be shot if I didn't kiss her!

How I comed to do it I can't tell—such a backward chap with the maidens—but I did; and Tryphena turned into a raging fire; but she couldn't speak for astonishment. She stared, and I left her gasping and gurgling in the middle

of the fuzz bushes, and took my hook so fast as I could run.

Next time I saw Ned 'twas out of doors, and I felt mighty pleased to meet him in the air, specially because, owing to a most unlikely chance, when drinking down to South Zeal in a strange public, I met a man as wanted a granite hand. So I was that full of the job I'd heard tell about, that for the moment I forgot Tryphena and my owdacious deed. Young Bloom was very much excited at what I told him, and I promised to see the man again and try and fix it up, and show him Ned's papers, which were very good. Just afore I left him I remembered.

"I hope your sister haven't got anything more against me?" I asked.

"Not as I know about," he answered. "She haven't named your name for a week. Though she's glummer than usual, if anything."

With that I fell a-thinking upon the wonderful nature of the female mind, and I had an awful longing to see her again and say how the thing had happened in a manner quite accidental and unexpected—owing to some twist in my character.

Next time I went 'twas evening, and I took a bit of good news with me, for I'd got the job for Ned all right, and with it went a shilling a week more than he'd took to miser Arscott's quarry.

But it happened that the young man and his mother was out seeing a neighbor, and so I found Tryphena all alone.

I expected a flare-up, and was ready for 'most anything, down to going on my knees for forgiveness; but she rose from her sewing, looked me up and down as gentle as a calf, and said: "Good evening, Mr. Maunder. I'm afraid Ned's out."

"Very glad of it," I answered her. "Longer he bides out, the better I'll be pleased."

"I'll tell him you've called," she said.

"I'll tell him myself," I replied to her. "I wish I thought you'd got such good news for me, Miss Bloom, as what I have for him."

Her bright eyes wasn't so bright as usual, and her manner was that mild that you'd hardly have thought she was the same maiden.



"I've got no good news," she said, "an' never shall have. What be my life but to suffer an' suffer?"

"Nobody knows what 'tis to suffer till they'm married an' got childern," I told her—being a thing I'd heard my mother say. "The good news I want is to hear tell that you've forgiven me for my owdacious deed."

"You were mad," she said.

"There was method in it, however," I told her. "You mind what I said—that I'd surprise you."

"Yes—you did."

"An' you mind what you said: that if I done a sensible thing it would surprise you. So if you was surprised, 'twas a sensible thing I done."

"You ought to blush for it to your dying day, all the same," she said: "no man ever dared afore."

"An' no man shall ever dare again—but one; an' tis for you to name him, Tryphena Bloom. God's my judge, I've loved you ever since the first night you sauced me so sharp. An' the harder you was, the more I felt drawed. Now, Miss," I concluded, so dignified as I was able, "I shall be very much obliged if you will unfold your feelings and acquaint me if in course of time you could abide me or if not. If you can, then, please God, us'll begin keeping company from Sunday next onward till we'm tokened; if not, I must bear the shock of it best ways I can."

"Who be I?" she said, wi' her li'l lips trembling an' her eyes all of a mist. "Who be I, to fill any man's heart? So short-tempered an' cranky as I be? If you'd slapped me, 'twas all I deserved; an' I thought you was going to do it when you met me in they fuzz-bushes; but you kissed me—you kissed me; an' I loved you from that minute, if not afore; an' what a poor little fool like me can do to better your life, that I will do. You'm a man," she said, "an' if there was more as had your pluck to kiss afore they spoke—"

There she choked, an' I had my arms around her, cuddling of her, and swearing, and kissing, and pawing of her about like a bear, when in comed her mother an' Ned.

"She'm mine!" I roared out—to set

'em at their ease like. "She'm mine—gwaïne to marry me soon as ever I get a shilling or two on my wages; an' let nobody deny it, or I'll be the death of that creature!"

Mrs. Bloom got her darter away from me by main force, and told me I ought to be ashamed—such a mild young man as me—to go courting like a wild beast. But then the girl spoke for me and said 'twas all right, and she liked it that way; and that I was the husband for her; and that she loved me with all her heart and soul, and had done for weeks.

Then I turned to Ned and told him about his bit of luck; so he jolly soon had so good an opinion of me as his sister. And the mother, though her breast panted a bit with the excitement, an' she went fainty against the dresser, and broke a dish or two, nevertheless forgived me afore I marched out into the night an' went home like a conquering army.

And my Tryphena comed to the gate with me. Life not worth living? Who can take away the memory of the first time a loving woman comes to your arms? An' holding of your first little one, hot from under his mother's heart? What's Eternity got better than that?

I sat till church-clock telled three in the morning, thinking over that day's work; and ever since, when I sleep ill, and the cares of life bear hard, and I'm waking afore the winter dawns wi' old age gnawin', if the clock chimes three, I look back an' thank the Lord for what was, and the blessed memory of it.

Very first walk us took was up-along to the ford called Culliver's steps, and then over where I throwed the horseshoe, and near put out the light for my brother-in-law as was to be. And if us didn't find the iron there where it had falled! 'Twas my luck, you see—none else's; an' I gathered un up so careful as you please. An' my Try, she said, "Now let's look for the cocoanut, James."

But I said, "Oh, bless the cocoanut! Let it bide for the varmints to eat, so as they shall have their little bit o' luck out of it, too."

"You'm a soft old dear," she said;

an' with that we sat down behind a stone, as we always did do when she spoke gentle things like that to me up 'pon the Moor an' nobody moving.

A year after, me an' her was married 'pon Easter Sunday—as good a day as there be in the year for that job. And I took my cottage to Belstone, an' the hoss-shoe was nailed to the door on our wedding-day.

Ned's luck held too, for the job he got stuck to him till he died, ten year agone; and he was a very well-thought-upon man, and rose to be Vicar's church-warden down to South Zeal—a thing much above his hopes.

As for me, here I'm lagging; but my sons and daughters carry on the name, and my grandson, for all his cheek, be made of scholarship, and may lift them

as come after to a higher place among the neighbors.

My wife went on twenty year ago, an' as my son's wife died when Billy was born, we be widowers together. And it comforts me very much to know our women are together now, waiting hand-in-hand for us to come back to them.

A big family be like a flock of sheep that wanders over the hillsides of the earth. Some have the upland for their part, and some the meadows; some live long, and some short; some gather the fatness of life, some move by stony ways and bitter waters; but the Master never loses sight of one. He's ever ready and watching and willing. To the last little lamb, they shall all be gathered home to the fold, come their Shepherd calls out of the evening shadows.

## The Former Things

By Priscilla Leonard

"There shall be no more night and no more sea."  
—Yet to have known the tranquil twilight hour  
And seen the slow sweep of the silver stars  
Across the cold depths of the winter sky,  
Or waited in the hush before the dawn;  
To have been driven on the mighty wave  
And dwelt within the curtains of the storm,  
Or seen the tempest batter on the cliffs  
Till it is broken to a murmuring peace  
And all its surges softened into foam,—  
Shall not the sons of men remember these,  
Rejoicing they have known them, in the day  
When sundering oceans and the pathless dark  
Have passed away, and never can return?

"There shall be no more tears and no more pain."  
—Yet to have known the patient hour of trust,  
And seen the stars of faith and hope arise  
Out of the blackness of a midnight grief,  
Or grasped the robe of God within the dark;  
To have been swept far from self's safe-laid course  
Into the heart of all the human storm  
Of sorrow, and have battled through the surge  
Bringing some shipwrecked brother to the shore,  
Or learned the secret of accepted pain,  
The fellowship of suffering and woe—  
Shall not the souls of men remember these,  
Rejoicing in remembrance, in the day  
When sacrifice for others and for God  
Has passed away, and never can return?