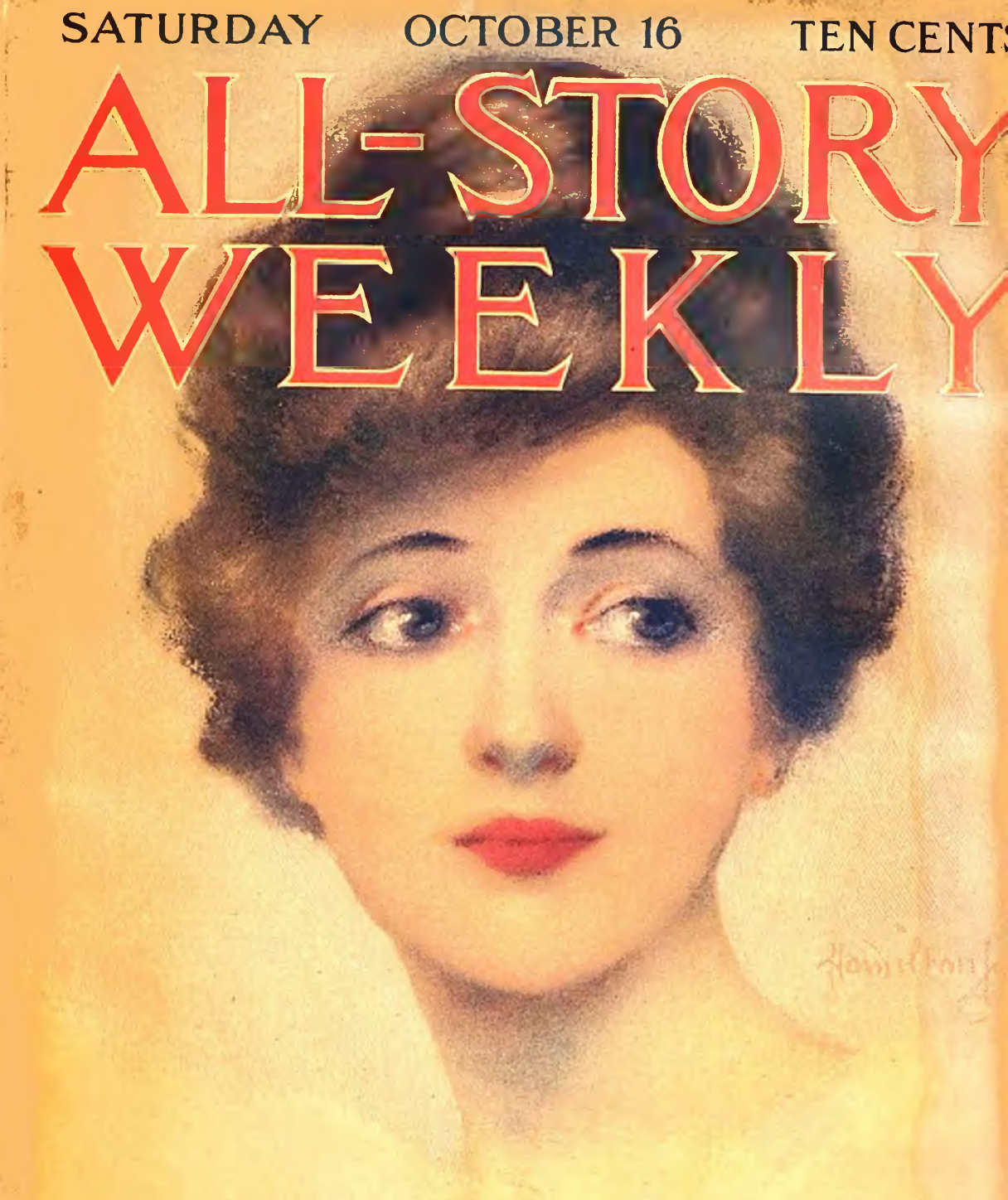
SATURDAY OCTOBER 16 TEN CENTS

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Hard Hit!

The Story of a Man in a Tight Corner

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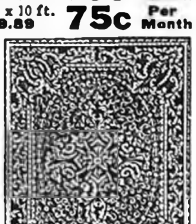

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME L — NUMBER 3

CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 16, 1915

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOLUME L — SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1915 — NUMBER 3

Hard Hit!

by Arthur W. Marchmont

Author of "By Right of Sword," "When I Was Czar," etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Freak Wager.

BOB MARLOWE—long before he became Sir Robert — had always gone his own way, regardless of consequences and other people's opinions. He was only nineteen when, to use his own words, he "disowned his uncle and disinherited himself."

The quarrel, not the first between them, was brief but final. He had been home about eighteen months from France, where most of his boyhood had been spent, when he refused point-blank to go to Oxford and then into the church on the ground that he "preferred to do something useful."

Sir Ernest, the wealthy head of an old Tory family, steeped in self-importance and saturated with veneration for the conventions, was scandalized, and told him so.

"I don't see why you should expect me to do just what you tell me," replied Bob. "It's all right for Claude, he's that sort; besides, he's your son, a model of your own molding, and is to succeed you. But I'm not built that way. I don't mean to waste my time at Oxford, and should only make an ass of myself in the church. A hundred and fifty a year as a curate doesn't appeal to me."

"And pray what *does* appeal to you?" asked Sir Ernest, thinking himself severely satirical.

"I've decided to learn a trade—the motoring business—and I've arranged to start at once as an apprentice in Boscawen's big works in Coventry."

Sir Ernest gasped in amazement and rage.

"What's that? Do you mean that you dare to disgrace the family by—by being a common working man?" he spluttered.

Bob's blue eyes smiled. "I don't see any disgrace in earning one's living by hard work."

"Are you mad? Do you know what this means to you? That if you dare to do anything of the sort I'll cast you off?"

"If it comes to that, it's *I* who am casting *you* off."

"You'll never have another shilling from me, sir!"

"There'll be all the more for Claude, then; and I shall have to start

as a mechanic, instead of apprentice. That's the only difference."

"You ungrateful young fool, you insolent scoundrel—"

"Steady, Uncle Ernest, steady," interposed Bob, his eyes lighting with quiet determination. "Fool I may be, but scoundrel I am not, and I will not allow any one to call me that, if you please."

"You'd better be off about your business, then. And mind, don't you ever look to me for a penny piece. You go your way for the future, and I'll go mine. You leave the Towers to-day, unless you're prepared to do what I tell you."

"I sha'n't come to heel, sir; it's not in my nature. I'm sorry—"

"That'll do. I've had more than I can stand already."

Bob went to the door, and then paused. "As I'm going away, there's something else I'd better tell you. I'm going to marry Olive Peters."

This was the crowning blow. Pretty Olive Peters was the daughter of the one man in Achester whom Sir Ernest hated with a hate that was unquenchable. An ex-official of a Welsh miners' union, a Radical among Radicals, a born leader of men and master of a perfervid Welsh vituperation, Peters had led a revolt against the influence of the Towers, and had been mainly instrumental in ousting Sir Ernest at the last election.

The news thus stung him as keenly as if Bob had laid a whip-lash across his face, and he stood a moment glaring at him, his eyes ablaze with unspeakable fury.

"I don't care which route you choose to go to the devil," he growled at length. "I wash my hands of you. Get out of my sight!"

Bob accepted his dismissal quite contentedly. He packed a few clothes, left the house, and went straight to Olive to tell her the news and ask her to wait for him.

He was only a boy with unquestioning faith in the idol of his calf-love, and having secured her promise, went to Coventry and started his work the next day in the engineering shed.

He was glad to have cast off the shackles of Achester Towers, and threw himself into his work with almost fierce energy and tireless concentration. He soon made his way, and in a couple of years he was so far master of his work that when the firm branched out into the manufacture of aeroplanes, he was made foreman of the new sheds, with a wage quite large enough to warrant his marrying.

There had been gaps in his recent correspondence with Olive, and he was on the eve of writing to tell her the good news when a letter came to say she had tired of waiting and had married a Dr. Fellowes, who had been at Achester as *locum tenens* for one of the other doctors.

He took the blow, as he did all such things, without flinching. He had been faultlessly faithful to her, and the disappointment hit him very hard. But he sent her a pretty wedding present and a letter of congratulations, offered in genuine sincerity. It said:

> No doubt you were right not to wait, and I ought not to have expected it. My only wish is for your happiness, and I trust with all my heart you will never have cause to regret your decision.

But in less than six months she did regret it, with tears of bitter mortification and chagrin; for the startling news came that Sir Ernest and his son had gone down on the Archaic as they were starting on a tour around the world; and Bob became Sir Robert Marlowe, owner of Achester Towers, and with an income of more than twenty thousand pounds a year.

Bob found it difficult to believe the news, and much more difficult to accustom himself to the changed conditions. There was an end of the work in the sheds, of course; but the last six months had inspired him with a love of aviation. He had already made

several ascents, and he was not contented until he became a really skilful and somewhat daring airman.

He did not forget Olive, and his method of revenge was characteristic. He would not see her; but when he learned that she and her husband were having a tough struggle for existence, he used his influence to obtain a good appointment for the doctor, so arranging matters that they should not know it was his doing.

His work at Coventry proved an invaluable training, for it made a man of him, strengthening his independence and resourcefulness. And his love-affair materially changed his attitude toward women. Naturally chivalrous, it was impossible for him to be other than courteous and gentle with even the lowliest and feeblest; but he persuaded himself that he had done with love-affairs for all time, and that women had ceased to interest him.

In the next three or four years he traveled widely. The hunting of big game was his avowed object, and he chose, as a rule, those regions which were least known, facing hardships which would have broken down any man whose life had been less clean and constitution less sturdy.

When in London he preferred a club life and the society of men, persistently refusing the invitations showered upon him as a great "catch." And this, coupled with his Coventry experiences and certain unconventional acts, secured for him a reputation as "an eccentric sort of chap."

This really meant little more than that, as always he chose his own path, heedless alike of consequences and of the opinions of other people.

Thus a freak wager which he made one day at his club, the "Twen-Cen"—that he would travel across Europe, starting without money and earning his living as he went—was a surprise only to those who did not know him.

The talk had turned upon one or two freak wagers of the kind—about one man who had trundled a barrow through England, a couple who had rolled a cask from one end of Europe to the other, and so on. Bob laughed at the difficulties, declaring that any one could earn enough by work to make such a journey; and when one of the fops sneeringly suggested he should try, he promptly accepted the challenge, and the conditions were arranged on the spot.

He was to journey from Calais to Rome, doing the part of the journey from Paris to Marseilles on foot; he was to have one sovereign only in his pocket on leaving Calais, was not to borrow nor beg a sou, nor sell anything, not give his own name to any one on the journey, but to depend entirely on what he could earn on the way; he was not to stay more than five days in any one place; he was to start that night, and was to complete the journey and be in Rome on May 22—two months from that day.

"It's a bit harum-scarum even for you, Bob," said his friend Dick Gendall, when the others had left.

"I shall enjoy every minute of it. I wouldn't miss the job for twice the amount of the bet," was the reply, with a light laugh.

"But how will you manage?"

"It'll be as easy as holing a three-inch put, man. While you were writing the conditions, I planned it all. You cross with me to-night to see that I start fair. Well, I shall take a train to Paris—third class, of course, and that'll leave me a few francs over for emergencies. I shall go straight to the flying-ground at Issy and get some sort of a job, and then do enough flying to put me in funds and get a testimonial to use at Marseilles. I can foot it there in a month at the outside—I'm as hard as nails, and can do twenty-five miles a day or more without turning a hair. At Marseilles I'll get another job as a chauffeur, or a flying man; and I'm out of my reckoning if I don't finish well ahead of my time."

"It'll be a tight squeeze, Bob, even

with your Coventry experiences to help you out."

"Not a bit of it. I'm half French, and, what's more, I know every inch of the road. If you'd like a little flutter on your own, I'll bet you a fiver I not only reach Rome by the 22d of May, but get back to town and have more than enough in my pocket to pay you the fiver into the bargain."

"No, thanks. I've too much faith in you," laughed his friend; and they parted, to meet again at Victoria.

On the journey they discussed several details of the trip, and Bob explained that he would leave proofs of his walk — by buying some small articles in various towns and villages, and leaving them to be sent for on his return—and that he intended to travel as a Frenchman, Jean Colonne, a motorist mechanic.

He was in high spirits and perfectly confident of success, slept nearly all the way to Paris, and hurried straight from the station to the Issy aerodome in search of a job. The first attempts failed, but he got a hearing at last from a well-known airman, M. Rouvelle.

"What's your name?"

"Jean Colonne."

"What can you do?"

"Use these," replied Bob, spreading out his hands and touching his head.

"Good," said Rouvelle, with a smile. "But have you had any training?"

"Take me through the sheds and I'll show you."

"Your hands don't look as if you'd done much work."

"The only fault with them is that they're clean. I can soon alter that. Five minutes will tell you whether I know my job."

Rouvelle smiled again. "True. Come along," and he led the way to the sheds. "I'm short of men; several are away. Ever been up?"

"Oh, yes—heaps of times!"

"Got your certificate?"

"Not with me; but I can qualify here."

"Any testimonials?"

"Never asked for one."

Rouvelle looked doubtful for the first time. "Why do you come to me?"

"Because the others wouldn't have me."

This made the airman smile again. "You're pretty blunt," he said.

"I think I can make them sorry if you give me the chance," replied Bob with the air of quiet, reassuring confidence his friends knew so well.

"You shall have the chance," said Rouvelle.

A quarter of an hour in the workshops sufficed to convince him that Bob not only knew his work, but was an expert. "Not the first time you've seen a monoplane," he said readily.

"I can do better for you outside than in the shops," said Bob; "and I want to earn more than a mechanic's wage. Let me take one up."

"Not quite so fast as that. Show us what you can do inside this morning, and if it's all right you can go up this afternoon."

"That's a deal," was Bob's prompt reply, and, whipping off his coat and borrowing a set of overalls, he set to work at once. The result of the morning's work left no doubt of his capacity, and in the afternoon he made his ascent, with results that hugely pleased the great aviator.

"Who are you in reality?" he asked when he came down.

"You know already. Jean Colonne."

Rouvelle shook his head. "I know all our flying men, and there's no one of that name."

"I must try and make it better known then," replied Bob, smiling.

"You'll soon do that."

"I can do a bit better than you've seen yet. All I want is a chance."

"You'll get it here. Our big meet is on Friday and Saturday, and you're just the man I want."

"Then we'd better talk business," said Bob. "You wouldn't wish me to

give exhibition flights for the wage of a mechanic, I'm sure!" and the discussion of terms brought a settlement which more than satisfied him. The fees would yield enough money for the rest of the trip.

For the two intervening days he was constantly in the air, familiarizing himself with the machines he was to use at the meeting; and when the day came his flights delighted the large crowds, who applauded him to the echo.

After his last flight on the second day—he had gone up to a great height and finished with some clever trick flying—he was pushing his way through the throng when a woman put herself in his way and thrust out her hand.

"You will shake hands with me, *m'sieu'!*" she said excitedly.

He could not repress a slight start of surprise as he glanced at her. Except that she had red hair, she was the image of Olive.

He smiled and shook hands, and, although she would have detained him, he hurried on in search of Rouvelle. He had enjoyed the experience, and was quite boy enough to relish the cheers of the crowd; but he had business matters to settle with Rouvelle and to get his money; and was thus in no mood to bother himself about any woman.

He meant to start the following day on his long walk to Marseilles, and a quiet evening mapping out his route to be followed by a long night's rest was his program meanwhile.

On his way back to the small hotel in Paris where he had stayed he was engrossed by his thoughts of the long and trying walk before him, when a loud, warning shout and a woman's scream startled him from his reverie. He looked round to find that a big car which had swerved from the road was close on him, with the girl he had seen at the aerodome standing up in the tonneau, waving her arms distractedly.

He made a desperate effort to save himself, but before he could leap aside the car struck him and he remembered no more.

CHAPTER II.

Jean Colonne.

IN the course of the many strenuous efforts of the Paris police to effect the capture of the exceptionally daring band of thieves known as the "Red-Car Gang" there was one episode—"the Vincennes trap incident"—of which the general public heard very little.

It occurred one Sunday evening, just a month after the great flying meeting at Issy where Bob Marlowe had scored such a success, and a short time before the gang was broken up. They got their name from the fact that in most of their coups they used a red motor-car of great power and size, and on this Sunday evening the police had information that the car would pass through Vincennes on the way from the city.

A large body of police was accordingly drafted into the suburb, and a clever trap was laid to capture the men. The point chosen was at the four cross-roads about three-quarters of a mile on the Paris side of the Vincennes station; and the preparations were elaborate, but hurried. Strong wire ropes were stretched across each of the roads about a hundred yards or so below the crossing, thus forming a barricade; and at a little distance beyond a heavy lorry was drawn across the road, behind which a number of police were concealed.

The inhabitants of the suburb found all these preparations complete when they came out of church, and they were promptly ordered into their homes and peremptorily told to stay indoors. A few police in plain clothes were told off to loiter about, lest the expected men should have their suspicions aroused by seeing the streets deserted.

The plan was so well laid that a capture appeared inevitable, and it was confidently expected that they would be caught in the meshes of the net before even a thought of the possibility of danger entered their heads. That there would be a fight was a matter of course; they were utterly reckless and desperate men, certain to resist capture to the death; but against the numbers opposed to them escape seemed to be a sheer impossibility.

Fortune does not always fight on the side of authority, however; and a little commonplace incident occurred at the critical moment which could not have been foreseen, although it completely upset the police calculations. A motorcyclist came rattling along the Paris road at such a clip that he was close to the wire rope before the police stopped him.

Had they not done so he would have been killed to a certainty; but, oblivious of this, he broke into a noisy, voluble hullabaloo in protest, refusing for a long time to listen to a word of explanation.

This reached the ears of the occupants of the red car, which was close behind, running almost silently and without lights, and thus unobserved in the gloom of the murky evening. In a moment they took the alarm. Thus half the value of the trap was ruined, although it was still a very formidable one.

But the chauffeur of the red car was no mere ordinary driver; his skill had often been proven to the confusion of former police plans. At a word from the man sitting by him he took in the situation almost by instinct.

The cyclist had been stopped on the straight road, which was a continuation of that from Paris, and the driver of the red car, seeing this, swung round instantly to the right into the Charenton road; a most hazardous and difficult turn because of the fierce speed at which he was traveling.

In less expert hands the car would inevitably have been upset.

A sharp glance ahead showed him the barricade. There was a clang and a curved bar of steel dropped into position in front of the car, and it dashed at the wire rope. The steel rope was cut as easily as if it had been a piece of string, and only the lorry remained to block the way.

Owing to the hurry of the preparations, this had not been placed with sufficient care, and a space had been left on the right of it where the footpath was lower than elsewhere. There was just a chance, one in a thousand perhaps, that the car might get through if the right wheels would take the footpath.

Without a second's hesitation the chauffeur took the risk and drove straight for the narrow way.

At the terrific speed the car was racing the wheels mounted the obstacle with a jerk which all but threw the occupants out of their seats, and it tilted to such an angle that for the second it was running on the left wheels only. It looked impossible that it should avoid turning over, but just as the police jumped out from behind the lorry the car righted and the dexterous hand at the wheel brought it back onto the road and dashed away into the murk at fifty miles an hour before the chagrined police could recover sufficiently from their surprise to discharge their weapons.

The volley when it did come was harmless, and the notorious red car and its occupants were soon beyond any fear of pursuit.

"Bravo, Jean—magnificent!" cried the man by the side of the chauffeur. "Keep going. I thought it was the finish of everything."

The same breakneck speed was maintained until they slowed down through Charenton, where they crossed the river and then turned to the right, quickening up again till they reached Villejuif, and again between there and Bourg, where they halted a little way short of the houses.

The four men in the tonneau jumped

out, whipped off the red sides and back of the car, changing its color to a sober green; removed the false number-plate, and with a quick "Good night!" hurried away, leaving the chauffeur and the man by his side—the leader of the gang, known as "Papa Gaudin"—to continue the journey alone.

They ran through Bourg at a steady pace, and a few minutes brought them to Chatillon, where they pulled up at a little villa in the outskirts. The car was quickly garaged, and the gear which had cut the rope was removed and packed away with the red plates in a cunningly contrived hiding-place.

As they entered the house Gaudin's daughter met them. She was a remarkable-looking girl with a mass of tawny red hair clustered about her face, throwing into strong relief the clear pallor of her complexion just as the soft, black, clinging dress emphasized the graceful lines of the sinuous figure.

"Is all well?" she asked. "You are late." Her voice was a little unsteady with the anxiety of suspense which knitted the rather heavy brows over her big, lustrous brown eyes. She put the question to her father, but her gaze was all for his companion.

"Of course it's all well. What do you mean? Jean here has done splendidly. But it was touch-and-go, eh, Jean?" and the rapid interchange of looks between them was unnoticed by the younger man.

The girl took Jean's hand and drew off his glove, pressed her lips to the fingers, and held up her face for a caress. "You're not hurt, Jean?"

He turned with a questioning frown. "Why should I be hurt, Estelle?" His tone was somewhat brusk as he kissed her and put her aside to take off his heavy motor-coat.

"We're hungry," he added in much the same tone. She was hurt by his manner and paused as if to reply, but changed her mind and led the way into the room where a meal was laid.

He sat down at once and ate in silence, taking no heed of the others' talk; and as soon as he had finished, he rose and took a cigar from a box on the mantelpiece. The girl jumped up and struck a match for him.

"You're not well to-night, Jean," she said with a smile of solicitude.

"Yes I am. Don't fuss," he answered, throwing himself into an easy chair and smoking slowly, his brows pent and his look abstracted.

Gaudin motioned to his daughter to leave him alone; but she would not.

"Why won't he speak to me?" she cried with a show of passion. "I've done nothing except eat out my heart in suspense as I waited for your coming. Jean—Jean! Why won't you speak to me?"

His frown deepened as he looked up, and an oath slipped from him.

"I'd rather you swore at me than said nothing," she exclaimed bitterly.

He shrugged his shoulders; but his face brightened a little directly afterward, and he smiled and drew her to him and kissed her.

With a gesture of anger she wrenched herself away. "There's no love in a kiss of that sort! For three days you've scarcely spoken to me, and given me nothing but sour looks and anger to live upon."

"Don't worry him, girl," put in her father sharply.

Jean turned to Gaudin with a gesture of protest and then back to her. "I'm sorry, Estelle; but I'm only a brute, and a moody brute at the best. I didn't mean anything; but you must take me as I am."

This was more than enough to pacify her, and she threw her arms about him and kissed him passionately. He let her have her way, but there was no answering caress in either word or look; and when she drew away he fell back into his former moody attitude, and sat smoking and staring into vacancy.

He was a young, powerfully built man with strong, irregular features;

he had closely cut whiskers and a short beard, and fair hair almost as short as his beard. His eyes were blue, but dull, and with little expression and intelligence; and his actions were slow and heavy, in keeping with his general appearance.

After a time he rose and left the room, paying no heed to the girl's quick question whether she could do anything for him.

As the door closed behind him she stamped her foot and burst into tears.

"What's the good of that?" asked her father gruffly. He had a hard face and keen, piercing eyes, and the manner of a man accustomed to force his will on others.

"Haven't I reason to be angry? Hasn't he changed toward me almost out of knowledge in the last few days? And why? Didn't I nurse him back to life? Didn't Dr. Cachot say that but for me he would have died? Who has a right to him if I haven't? Hasn't he promised to marry me? Didn't he put this ring, his own, on my finger and tell me again and again that he cared for me? Doesn't he know that I worship the very ground he walks on?" she cried passionately.

Gaudin gave a shrug of impatience. He had very little sympathy with any sort of emotion. "Well, I suppose he'll keep his word," he growled.

"A pretty way he has of showing it, hasn't he? A few words forced with an effort; a kiss or two given as a sort of toll, with neither warmth nor meaning in them, like a careless pat for a troublesome dog. And his looks—I declare to Heaven I'd rather he struck me than look at me as I've caught him looking a dozen times these last three days!"

"He may be coming to himself; beginning to remember. Cachot said he would."

This appeared to spur her anger to white heat, and she winced as if he had struck her. "If that's it there'll be a heavy reckoning, if it means that he won't have anything to do with me! I won't stand that, father. I swear I won't. If he tries to go back on his word, the police shall know who it is that drives the red car!"

Gaudin sprang to his feet with a heavy oath. "Stop that, my girl!" he cried fiercely; "you're mad!"

"Mad or sane, I won't let him be false to me. He's pledged, and he shall keep his pledge, or—"

Gaudin seized her roughly by the arm and shook her. "Stop that, I say!" he cried threateningly. "Stop this rot and listen to me. There's trouble, and cursed serious trouble, too. The police were on us to-night, and we were all but trapped at Vincennes.

"That means that some one gave us away; and I suspect Menier—he's jealous of Jean Colonne. But I'll deal with him. We don't know what he's told, but this place may be raided at any moment; so we must leave here and get back to the flat in the Rue de Bavisson. What's more, you've been too long away from the halls, fooling your time away here; so I've got you an engagement at the Folies Travaires."

"Why?"

"Because I tell you," was the blunt, stern reply. "Aren't I supposed to be a cripple living on what you earn? And how in a thousand thunders are you to earn anything if you're not dancing?"

"And Jean?"

"Leave things to me. What's come to you, girl? He can't go to the flat and find out what you do and your stage name and all the rest of it. Dull and half-witted as he is, he'd smell a rat."

"But I won't part from him; I swear that. I can't live without him!"

He frowned with an impatient toss of the head. "You can see him every day, for that matter. I'll arrange that. You can meet at our other rooms in the Rue Claude near the Lyons station. He can take you there

to-morrow morning. But mind, not a word to him about anything. And now the thing's settled."

Estelle knew her father too well to think of opposing him when he adopted that tone, and she picked up some work and pretended to be busy over it until Jean returned.

He crossed over to her and laid a hand on her shoulder. "Good night, Estelle. Go to bed. I want to speak to your father."

Gaudin looked up with a quick, suspicious glance, and when Estelle was for refusing he motioned her to go. "You've got your packing to do and had better do it to-night."

She obeyed, and he turned to Jean.

"Well, what is it, man?"

"That affair at Vincennes," he replied passing his hand slowly across his forehead. "They were police."

Gaudin burst into a roar of laughter excellently simulated. "You're a queer fellow, on my soul you are, Jean. Never met any one like you. Police! What next?"

"Why do you laugh?" asked the younger man heavily.

"Because you make me, and because our little plan took you in so completely. Look here"—and his manner changed to seriousness—"do you want to win the competition or do you not? You've only to say the word." And he tossed up his hands with a gesture of indifference.

"I'm—I'm fogged. I—I don't understand," was the slow reply.

"My dear friend! Listen to me a minute. A month ago you were knocked over by our car in the Bois, and we brought you home here and Estelle nursed you back to life. You know how she cares for you and how you've promised to marry her. You don't forget that, do you?"

"No, I know that; but—"

"Never mind the 'buts' for a minute. Well, you wouldn't tell us anything about yourself—"

"I don't *know* anything," interposed Jean.

"Well, we found out—at least Estelle did, for it's more her matter than mine, although I like you well enough, my boy—that your name is Jean Colonne, a mechanic and a flying man; and it was when she saw you flying that day at Issy that Estelle fell in love with you at sight. Well, if you want to marry her, you must have some means of keeping her, mustn't you?"

He was watching very closely to note the effect of his words on Jean, who sat trying to think. "Issy, Issy? I was never there in my life," he muttered.

"But sure you were, because we saw you. It 'll all come back to you with a bit of patience."

"But what's this got to do with the police at Vincennes to-night?"

Gaudin grunted. "There you go again. Wait a bit, can't you? I'm coming to it in a minute. Well, you want to earn enough to marry on, like a reasonable man. When you were well enough to go out you know that we went out for a spin in the car, and by accident discovered how clever you were at the wheel. You didn't forget that, I suppose."

"Estelle was with us," said Jean, nodding slowly and frowning as if with an effort of memory.

"And you remember that I hurt my hand and you said that you could drive us home? I saw in a second that you knew all about it; and what was more, I saw then how you could do what you wanted. I told you about the big competition for trick driving, and suggested you should qualify for it. That's all right, isn't it?"

Jean nodded again, and after a pause Gaudin continued. He spoke less fluently, choosing his words with great care, his crafty eyes watching the effect of every syllable.

"Haven't I given you every chance that a man could have? Haven't I got all my friends to help you? Haven't we had the car out at all times of the day and night, and gone to all lengths

of trouble to set up the sort of obstacles you'll have to face in the competition? Didn't I get you the promise of the appointment the moment you were qualified?

"Look at that business to-night at Vincennes; do you suppose it cost nothing in time and money to get all those men together and make all those preparations just to test your quickness of nerve and judgment?" He paused, and then laughed again heartily. "And you talk about the police! Well, there's one good thing—it shows it was done well enough to take you in."

He leaned back, and under cover of his laughter he watched the progress of the struggle which the other was making to understand.

"But they fired at us," said Jean after a while.

"*At* us be hanged! In the air!" And he emphasized the words with a wide sweep of his upraised hands. "But they bungled that a bit. They were told to fire before you passed the barricade. But your nerves! I don't believe it would have made an atom of difference. You'll carry all the money I can scrape together. I don't believe there's your equal in all France, Jean."

His companion rose and leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece and sighed. "And when do you say it is?"

Gaudin winked and nodded knowingly. "I've got a word about that, too. It 'll be just as soon as you've finished the rest of the tests, my friend. You don't know how impatient Estelle is."

But this mention of the girl failed to have any effect and drew no response, and the two smoked for a while in silence. Gaudin recalled what Estelle had said about the change, speculating uneasily as to the cause. The change was obvious. He was lethargic, much slower to understand, and subjects which had appealed to him in the previous days had ceased to interest.

Estelle was one of them.

The doctor was right; the man was beginning to remember, thought Gaudin; and then he would be no more use. He had been an invaluable help in the handling of the car; and just at the moment when it was sorely needed; but he might be just as great a danger, if his mind woke up and he knew what he had been doing.

There were always means of getting rid of an inconvenient or dangerous man, however; and Jean would have had a shock if his disordered, addled brain could have read the sinister thoughts behind the hard eyes which observed him so closely.

"I'll go through with it," Jean decided at length. "But you fooled me to-night," he added, shaking his head moodily.

"Of course we did. What would be the value of a test if you were told beforehand all that was to be done? I knew you'd too much grit to give it up. By the way, Estelle has to leave here to-morrow."

"All right."

"I want you to take her into the city to-morrow and you'll see her every day," said Gaudin, turning away to get another cigar. Then he added in a casual voice, "Her mad sister's coming back here to-morrow."

"Her what?"

Gaudin tossed up his hands despairingly. "Didn't you know I had a mad kid? I thought I'd told you. Poor girl, poor girl! It's a devil of a business. Terribly sad. She lives here, you know; but I had to put her away for a time. She got too bad. But she's quieter again. She thinks she's an English girl and pretends she don't know her own language. She had a fright when she was so high," and he touched the table and sighed.

"She was a delicate little thing and I took her to London to see a doctor. It happened there," he said, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. He was an excellent actor, and lied most plausibly.

"I'm sorry for you. But she won't want me," said Jean, hesitating and puzzled.

"But I do. I want your help for a day or two while I'm away. She has a woman to look after her; but there must always be a man in the house in case she has one of her violent turns and tries to run away. I suppose you feel you owe me something?"

"Yes," assented Jean; "but—"

"Then I want you to do two things. Just be here to see that she doesn't get away, and don't breathe a word to Estelle."

"Why?"

"Because she thinks poor Enid is—dead. And it would be better for us all if she were!" He sighed and shook his head dismally. "It would break her heart if she knew the truth. Will you stand my friend in this?" and he rose and held out his hand, scarcely able to resist a smile as the younger man gripped it.

"That's a weight off my mind," he said with another smile. "I'll tell you more about it in the morning. We'd better turn in now."

They parted then; and, as Gaudin undressed, he chuckled frequently to himself at the ease with which his preposterous story had been accepted.

"Even an idiot has his uses if you only know how to handle him," he muttered with a laugh as he blew out his light and got into bed.

CHAPTER III.

"My God, Who Am I?"

GAUDIN had a long conversation with Jean in the morning when the subject of his mad daughter, Enid, was continued, and a number of details added to the overnight account and a fresh pledge of secrecy exacted.

Estelle had seen them together, and, as Jean drove her into the city—in the small car, as Gaudin was careful to stipulate—she asked him what the talk had been about.

"I don't think I know," he answered, with considerable truth; for his wits appeared to be more muddled than before. "But I know one thing—I am not to tell you."

"Was it about me, Jean?"

"No. Not about you."

"Why weren't you to tell me?"

"I don't remember. Don't worry me," he said with a frown.

But she persisted in questioning him until they reached their destination, an apartment close to the Lyons station.

"This is where you're to come and see me every afternoon at three o'clock, Jean," she said. "You won't forget—*every* afternoon."

He looked round the well-furnished room with his usual slow deliberation, and then nodded. "Very well."

"Rue Claude, No. 25, second floor."

He went to the window and looked down into the street. "No. 25 Rue Claude," he repeated like a parrot, without turning round.

Estelle threw off her hat and arranged her glorious hair; and then, placing herself where the sunlight fell full upon her, called to him:

"Come here, Jean. I want to look at you and I want you to look at me."

He turned and looked at her in his heavy, moody way, quite unmoved by her beauty. "Well?"

She was both piqued and disappointed, and her brows knitted in distress. "Now, tell me the truth honestly, Jean. What is the matter?"

"I don't know," he answered stupidly.

"I mean with you, of course."

"I don't know," he repeated in the same toneless voice.

"Have I done anything to anger you?"

"No."

"You don't think I'm changed, do you?"

"No."

"Do you think me as pretty as you've often said?"

"Yes," he said with a gesture of perplexity. "But you—you don't

seem the same, somehow. I don't know how. I—I don't understand."

"Do you understand that we've been alone here all this time and you haven't even tried to kiss me?" she cried sharply.

"Why should I?"

The tears sprang to her eyes, and only with the greatest difficulty could she keep them back.

"Jean, Jean, how can you say that! Aren't we to be man and wife? Didn't you ask me and give me this ring?" and she held out her hand.

He stared at the ring with rapt intentness for some moments as if trying to understand; then shook his head slowly and looked up at her. "Did I give you that?" he asked in his dull heavy voice.

At the helpless words and the vacant look she broke down and, throwing her arms round his neck, burst into a passion of tears. Her grief did not appear to distress him in the least, and neither by word nor act did he attempt to check her almost hysterical sobs.

When the storm had passed and she was drying her tears, he stooped and kissed her. "I know we are to be married," he said.

The lack of tenderness in the kiss stung her, and she thrust him violently away from her.

"Do you think I want your kisses when you don't mean them?" she cried in a voice choking with sudden fury.

She looked queenly in her rage. Her supple, graceful figure was drawn to its full height, her head with its glorious aureole of flaming hair thrown aloft, and her big eyes ablaze with uncontrollable anger.

But her anger made no deeper impression than her tears. "I—I don't understand," he said, and repeated the words several times, tossing up his hands with a pathetic gesture of helplessness and turning back at length to the window.

She dropped on to a couch and covered her face in her hands, trembling under the strain of her emotion; and when she broke the long silence there was neither passion nor overt grief in her voice.

She began to plead to him and made him sit by her side while she once more reminded him of all that had happened since they had met, striving with all the eloquence of love to rouse him to a recollection of all they had said and done together.

But the effort was no more successful than others had been, and the grip of despair had begun to fasten on her heart as she watched him drive away, after she had exacted a definite promise that he would come to her again on the following day.

He went straight back to the villa at Chatillon, and as he entered the garage he noticed that the big car was gone. When he went to the house he found the door fastened against him and heard the bolts being withdrawn and the key turned in the lock.

A strange woman admitted him: a tall, repulsive hag, with unkempt, straggling gray locks, a hard, cruel face, and evil, leering eyes.

"I saw you coming. Why have you been so long? She's been kicking up a fine row and no mistake, I can tell you," was her greeting, as she refastened the door.

"Who?" he asked.

"The mad girl, of course. Who else? Do you suppose it was me?"

The words brought back something of what Gaudin had told him; but he only nodded and went into the sitting-room. He was lighting a cigar when a scream stopped him.

"There she goes again," said the woman, putting her head in. "You'd better come up to her. She'll hold her row now she knows there's a man in the house."

He followed up the stairs to the landing above, and she unbolted a door and hurried in just as another scream rang out.

"Stop that row," she said fiercely, rushing at a girl and seizing and shak-

ing her violently. "Stop it, I tell you, or it'll be the worse for you! Here's some one who'll deal with you, you she-devil!"

Released, the girl shrank into a corner, white to the lips; and stared first at the woman and then at Jean, searching hungrily for some sign of compassion. She was a beautiful girl, dark as night, her eyes dilated with the terror which set every limb and muscle quivering.

"Let me go, then!" she gasped, moistening her bloodless lips.

"Let you go?" repeated the woman with an angry laugh. "Yes; that's a likely thing, isn't it? A mad fool in the tantrums. You hold your row, or *he'll* make you. *He* knows how to deal with such as you. I told you what it would be when he came."

Again the girl searched Jean's face, only to close her eyes with a shudder of despair under his sullen, expressionless gaze.

The old hag laughed. "That's all right," she said gloatingly.

"But I'm *not* mad, sir! Let me go and I'll—I'll do anything you want. I can pay—"

"She's been going on like that half the time," interrupted the woman. "You tell her to shut up. She'll obey you, all right. She's afraid of you."

Jean took a step toward the girl, who cringed from him, shrinking closer into her corner and glancing at him with terror-filled eyes.

"You must be quiet or—" He broke off, not knowing what to say; but she interpreted the words as a threat and groaned.

He stared at her for a few moments and then went out of the room, leaving the woman, who threatened the girl with unspeakable things if she again attempted to raise an alarm.

Fear of the man kept her quiet for the rest of that day, but the next afternoon, at the time when Jean was about to start to see Estelle, there was a fresh trouble.

The woman, believing that her charge was frightened into submission, got drunk, and after taking up some food to her, came out without bolting the door. The girl, watching eagerly for a chance to escape, had noticed this, and as Jean came out of his room, he surprised her in the act of unfastening the door of the house.

He seized her wrist and pushed her back. In her disappointment and desperation she began to scream loudly for help. At this the woman came rushing, brandishing a heavy stick, with which, in her drunken fury, she attempted to strike the girl, pouring out a volume of fierce abuse the while.

Jean took the stick from her, and the girl, seeing it poised, cried out to him piteously not to hit her.

"Go up-stairs again," he said.

"No, no! For God's sake, let me go!" and she went on her knees, imploring him and seizing his arm as she cowered in fear of a blow.

"Go," he said again, pointing up the staircase.

"She'll kill me if I do!" she cried, in dire fear of the woman.

Without more ado, Jean picked her up in his strong arms and carried her, struggling violently, back to the room above, the woman following and threatening her at every step.

He laid her down on the bed.

"Thrash her! Thrash her! Strap her down, the hussy!" cried the old hag, beside herself with fury.

"You can't go, and must be quiet," said Jean, and turned to leave the room. Then for the first time he saw the woman's condition. She was lolling against the door, muttering threats.

"You're drunk! Go out!" he said, and pushed her out of the room.

"Don't let her come to me, for God's sake! She'll kill me! You don't know how she has treated me!"

He turned round at the words, looking hesitatingly at her. "You must be quiet."

"I'll be quiet," she wailed. "I'll do anything, if you'll only save me from that awful woman!"

He only partially understood, and stood looking at her in hesitating doubt what to do. "You're Gaudin's mad daughter," he said at length.

"I'm not mad, sir; I am not really! I am English. My name is Enid Truscott. I came to Paris only two days ago to see an old schoolfellow, Margaret Gendall; and I was brought here because they told me she was dying. I swear that is the truth!"

"Yes. He told me you thought that. But you're his daughter," he repeated. "You must be quiet." Without thinking of the effect on the girl, he picked up the stick the woman had dropped when he sent her out of the room.

The girl misread the action, and turned her face to the wall with a groan.

"Mind, you must be quiet," he said again and went away, locking and bolting the door securely behind him.

"I'll go to her now," leered the woman who had been sitting on the stairs.

But he shook his head. "No," he muttered, and drew out the key and took it away with her.

The fresh trouble had driven all thought of the meeting with Estelle out of his mind, and instead of going to meet her as he had promised he returned to the room below and sat smoking in his dull, moody fashion as he pondered vaguely what had just occurred, jumbled up with the problem which in the last two or three days had begun to force itself through the chaotic tangle of his blurred, stagnant brain.

He was perplexed by a growing sense of unfamiliarity with everything about him. Even the furniture of the room seemed strange; and he looked about him with semispeculative wondering.

It was the same with Estelle and her father. There were moments when he had positively been unable to recognize them, when their acts had seemed unreal, their words meaningless. Even his own name sounded more like the name of some other man.

"Jean Colonne, Jean Colonne." He repeated it over and over again; and looked down at his hands and clothes; rose and stared at his reflection in the glass, only to shake his head in puzzled bewilderment. Was he going mad? Were the changes he had noticed in himself the gradual slipping away of his senses? He gave it up with a heavy sigh and a toss of the hands and sat down again.

Tags and snatches of what both Gaudin and Estelle had told him about himself in the last few hours passed through his mind; the references to Issy and flying; how they had learned his name there; his promise to marry Estelle; and then his instinctive skill with the car. The last thought roused him.

How could he have learned it?

He rose and walked up and down the room with unusual rapidity of movement, excited and agitated at the thought. How could he have learned it, and where? Such things were not born in a man; and it must, therefore, have been a part of his former life. He turned to the mirror again to stare at himself with fierce eagerness, but all unknowingly.

"My God, who am I?" he cried aloud, throwing his arms aloft and shrinking away from the glass with a shudder of dread.

Another long period of dull semistupor followed this paroxysm, and he sank into his chair as if exhausted physically and sat huddled up, like a man without consciousness.

CHAPTER IV.

Jean Remembers.

JEAN COLONNE remained in this condition of semistupor for some hours. The house was as still as a tomb. The woman was sleeping off her drunkenness below, while the girl

in the room above, dazed with terror and plunged in despair by her failure to escape, had abandoned hope for the time and ceased her attempts to attract help from outside.

He was roused at length by the woman. Late in the evening she came with a meal and asked for the key of the room above, as it was time to take some food up-stairs.

He gave it to her and sat down to his own meal; but a few minutes later he was roused by a scream and some dim recollection of the woman's threats caused him to go up-stairs.

He caught the old hag in the act of beating her prisoner, and, as he interfered, his own hand struck the girl in the face. He did not see it and put the woman out of the room.

Turning back for a moment, he noticed that she cringed and shrank from him with even more fear than from the woman. Not knowing the cause—her belief that he had struck her intentionally—he did not speak the words of reassurance which rose to his lips, but left the room, locking the door and again taking possession of the key.

Gaudin didn't want his daughter to be ill-treated, he said to himself with an unusually connected thread of thought. She was not to be allowed to go, but mustn't be hurt.

With this thought fixed in his mind he stopped in the house all the following day, accompanying the woman every time she visited the room and waiting until she came out.

The next day Gaudin arrived early in the afternoon and thanked him profusely for what he had done, showing intense indignation at the woman's conduct and equally profound grief and distress on his daughter's account.

"I'll be here myself for the future, Jean, whenever you have to be away," he said. "And you must be off now to see Estelle. She is almost beside herself that you haven't been near her for all this time. I had to tell her I'd sent you away. Mind you keep that up—and not a word about poor Claire," he urged at the last moment.

"Claire? Claire? Who is Claire?" asked Jean.

"My poor darling's second name. I thought I had told you. I often use it. It was my dear wife's name," answered Gaudin, sighing, but cursing himself for his blunder.

Jean accepted the explanation without question. It was nothing to him whether Gaudin called his daughter Enid or Claire; and no thought of any inconsistency occurred to him. Indeed, he found it difficult enough to concentrate his jangled wits upon actual occurrences from moment to moment to have thought for much else. He went away at once, therefore, to drive into Paris for the meeting with Estelle.

He found her waiting for him in a positive frenzy of jealous rage—the combined result of his two days' neglect of her and a maddening discovery she had only just made.

She had been pacing the room of the apartment in the Rue Claude in a fume of angry perplexity as to the cause of his neglect when, in fingering the ring he had given her, she had touched a spring which threw back the signet, revealing the face of a young and very beautiful woman.

Her lightning conclusion was inevitable. Another woman had come between them!

The fire of jealousy flared up like the flash of an explosion, maddening her till she would have killed him; and it was in the first fierce moments of her rage that Jean arrived.

"So you have deigned to come at last, Jean," she said, her eyes flaming, the ring in her strained, quivering fingers.

"I couldn't come before."

"Two days 'couldn't' and the third 'didn't want to.' Is that it? Have a care, Jean!"

"I couldn't come," he repeated.

"Where have you been, then? You'll tell me that."

He remembered his lesson. "No, I can't."

"Father says he sent you to Amiens to be out of the way. But I don't believe it! You've stopped away on purpose. You *want* to be out of my way. That's what it really means. You're growing tired of me, and think you can treat me as you please."

"Ugh!" he grunted irritably with a heave of the shoulders as he turned, scowling, and sat down.

Her anger broke its bounds then, and she burst into a tirade, reproaching him bitterly for his coldness, neglect and breach of faith, working herself into a wild, hysterical passion. He listened without a word in reply, scarcely understanding and utterly heedless of her furious words.

That he should have kept away for so long a time and be able to meet her now without a word of explanation, without a single caress, or even a glance of love, was like oil on the flames of her wrath.

At the height of her frenzy she drew off the ring he had given her and threw it at him.

"If that woman is the cause, take the ring back to her! You've broken every promise you made when you gave it; you want to thrust me away; every word you uttered was a lie, every look false; every action nothing more than calculated pretense. I was useful to you, so you used me. I nursed you back to health, and, while I was necessary to you, you fooled me. My God, that any one should play with me in that way! You are the falsest liar that ever cheated a woman!"

He listened stolidly, fumbling about for the ring; not finding it, he rose and went toward the door.

"I dare say you think it," he muttered, nodding slowly. "Perhaps it's true; I don't understand," and he opened the door.

"Do you know where you're going?" she cried, hoarse with passion as she darted forward and held him, thrusting her white, strained face into his until her quivering lips all but touched him. "Do you know where you're going?" she repeated through her gritted teeth as he looked down at her, bewildered by her frenzy.

"Back to Chatillon."

At this fatuous, banal reply to a question she had intended as a threat she first laughed, an angry, bitter laugh; and then dragged him violently away from the door and stood between him and it, her clenched fists raised and shaking with fury.

"You think that clever; but listen. You *shall* listen! If you dare to leave me now you shall go, not to Chatillon—no, no, don't imagine that for an instant. You'll go to jail. Jail! Jail! Do you hear?" she shouted the words at him in a crescendo of rage. "The jail where thieves go, and villains and —*murderers!*"

She watched him, as if expecting him to attack her. But there was no suggestion of violence in his manner; perplexity only and questioning doubt. She interpreted this as merely another attempt to deceive her, in character with the part she believed he had been playing for some days.

"*You* may pretend not to care, but —the police won't when I tell them where Jean Colonne can be found—Jean Colonne, the chauffeur of the red car, one of the most reckless of the band, thief and murderer—the man who shot Inspector Dubois at Cremont!"

For an instant she was frightened by the effect of her daring accusation. He stood as rigid as a statue for some moments, every muscle in his powerful body tense and quivering, his face distorted and his eyes flashing like sparks of white flame. Then he moved a pace forward, towering over her with his arms upheld, as if to strike her down; but in a moment the change came, and he turned away and fell into a chair, burying his face in his hands.

Estelle, blanched and shaking, had backed to the door and watched him

for a space, her passion beaten out of her by the mastering fear for her life with which he had filled her.

"Jean! Jean!" she called at length, in little more than a whisper. Then again, "Jean!"

He made no answer, and presently she crept to him, and, hesitating, spoke his name once more, and then touched his shoulder; only to back quickly to the door again as he rose at the touch, his face haggard and his eyes holding hers with an expression which she read as a menace.

She was no coward; but she was desperately terrified now. She, too, had taken the change in him to indicate the dawning of madness; she had read that at such times love would turn to hate and a man's dearest friend be the first victim of mania.

She was in his power, alone and helpless. No one knew of their presence in the place; and those powerful hands of his would squeeze her life out of her in a single deadly grip. She gasped at the thought, as if they were already at her throat.

"I didn't mean it, Jean. On my soul, I didn't! I love you with all my heart and soul. I do! I swear I do! I don't care about this other woman. I wouldn't harm you, dearest. You know that. You *must* know it!" she cried, her voice thick and hoarse with terror.

He took no notice of the appeal, but continued to stare wildly at her; and sick with fear, she stretched out her hands behind her, feeling stealthily for the handle to open the door and fly to safety.

They stood thus staring into each other's eyes until, as if he had noticed her action, he took a step toward her and paused.

She gave herself up for lost. She tried to scream, but no sound came from her parched throat, and a palsy of helplessness seized her so that she could not stir from the spot nor move so much as a finger to save herself; and her very pulses seemed to stop.

At that moment a quick, loud knock sounded at the door.

Her blood began to flow, and with a cry of relief she turned and flung the door open. Jean did not move. For all the sign he gave he might not have heard the knock, and stood like a figure of stone, save that his eyes watched her closely.

It was a man who had disturbed them. A dark, thin, rather good-looking man with keen eyes which glanced questioningly from one to the other of the strange pair, as he took off his hat and bowed smilingly to Estelle.

"Pardon, *mademoiselle,* I wish to see M. Pincette," he said with a vile English accent.

Estelle knew this to be one of her father's many aliases. She had feared it might be the police, but would readily have welcomed even them in her desperate fear. She knew Gaudin was not in the house, but she saw how to use the question as a means of escape.

"Come in, *m'sieur.* He is expecting you. I will fetch him," and with that she hurried out and fled from the house.

The Englishman looked after her, surprised by her rapid departure and regretting it. He had been immensely impressed by her handsome looks and graceful figure, and would only too willingly have seen more of her.

"A very beautiful girl, *mossoo,*" he said, turning to Jean, "M. Pincette's daughter perhaps?"

The remark was received with chilling silence.

"You are a friend of M. Pincette's?" he continued, a little disconcerted by Jean's immovable stare. "I came about the affair of Miss Enid Truscott."

"I don't understand," replied Jean with a gloomy shake of the head; and without more ado he brushed the man out of his way and went out.

He got into the car and drove at hot speed straight back to Chatillon. His mind was in a maelstrom of conflicting

thoughts, stirred by Estelle's amazing accusations.

"Thief and murderer!"

The words rang like a peal of jangled bells in his head. "Thief and murderer! Thief and murderer!" over and over again with sickening iteration, maddening him so that he was scarcely conscious of anything save the one fierce resolve to see Gaudin and know the truth; to drag it out of him by violence if necessary. If she had not lied, then it should go hard with the man who had thus tricked and fooled him for his own ends.

He did not wait to garage the car, but entered the villa the instant he reached it. His face was full of his new purpose, and his eyes as set and stern as the rest of his features.

But Gaudin was not at the villa. As he entered he heard cries and, with a hasty glance into the empty sitting-room, he went up-stairs and found the old woman standing over the girl, with a cloak and hat in one hand and striking her with the other.

She stopped the instant she saw who it was.

"Where is Gaudin?" he asked roughly.

"He's gone away for a time; he'll be back directly to fetch her, and the obstinate little devil won't put these on. You must make her."

"Put them on at once," he said in the same rough, threatening tone. "Give them to her. Put them on," he repeated. "And you come with me," he said to the woman, driving her before him out of the room. The wild look in his eyes frightened her and she slunk away down-stairs, while Jean turned into his bedroom.

He went straight to the glass and peered at himself.

"Thief and murderer; not madman," he muttered, and then in a sudden frenzy of rage he tore it from the wall and dashed it to the ground. As he did so he stepped back and tripped against a chair, and in trying to save himself stumbled to the ground and cut his hand with one of the fragments of the mirror.

He sat on the bed staring curiously at the blood, smearing it now and then on the coverlet. He laughed at the stains; a weird, utterly mirthless laugh as he repeated the self-accusing words, "Thief and murderer"; clenching his fists and uttering a string of oaths, directed first against himself, and then, with greater emphasis, against Gaudin.

The mood passed after a time, and he relapsed into his customary brooding state until at length the disturbing sense of unfamiliarity with everything once again absorbed him.

Presently the blood again attracted his attention. It had been a deep cut and had bled freely; and he put his hand in his pocket and drew out his handkerchief. He was about to bind up the hurt when his fingers came in contact with something hard.

It was the ring he had given to Estelle. He remembered her throwing it at him and how he had looked for it and been unable to find it. It must have fallen into the gaping mouth of his jacket-pocket.

This connection of thought was so unusual, simple and obvious as it was, that he smiled at it like a pleased child.

But his face soon clouded again. For some reason he could not grasp, the ring began to have a powerful fascination for him and he stared long and earnestly at it, his forehead gathered in a frown of intense perplexity.

It was a man's seal ring, green malachite, engraved with a crest. Had he really given it to her? Where had he got it? Had it always been his? If so, it must be connected with his previous life, unless— *Was* he a thief? And was this something he had once stolen?

He shivered with the sudden chill of such a thought, and laid it down hurriedly.

But a moment later he recalled that Estelle had said something about another woman in connection with it,

and he looked down at it, striving with consummate energy to discover something which would restore the broken thread of his thoughts.

But to his dismay, instead of helping him, the scrutiny had the opposite result. The ring grew less and less familiar the longer he looked at it.

Presently his head began to throb violently with the racking strain of the strenuous effort. The failure angered him, and, seizing the ring, he was going to hurl it away from him, when he paused, his hand uplifted, and instead of hurling it away, he looked at it again.

It had opened, revealing the miniature portrait.

At the first sight of the face something seemed to give way in his head, and a rushing, agonizing pain drew a groan from him. He closed his eyes, the world reeled about him, and for a moment all was blank and dark.

This new sensation was one of profound, wondering amazement. He found himself staring at the ring his dead mother had given him. It had been his father's, and cunningly concealed under the seal it contained her miniature, painted at the time of their marriage.

"What in thunder can it mean?" he exclaimed aloud, as he looked round the strange room.

CHAPTER V.

Enid.

WHEN the pressure of the clot of blood was cleared as the result of the powerful emotional strain caused by the events of the previous few hours, and Bob Marlowe's brain began to perform its normal functions, the throbbing agony was at first so intense that he fell back on the bed, thankful enough just to lie still and let things take their course without making any effort to think.

After a while he fell into a doze from which he awoke in much less pain and greatly refreshed by the sleep.

"How the deuce did I come here?" he wondered. "I must have had a thundering whack and a devilish narrow squeak of it."

He remembered the accident and how he had had to leap for his life; and seeing the blood on his hand, concluded that very little time had elapsed.

"Nothing broken that I can tell." He felt himself carefully all over, and gave a sigh of satisfaction. Nothing worse than a cut on the hand was his thought. It might have been a lot worse; his usual luck had befriended him.

He recalled everything quite distinctly. The wager at the club; his start; the start with Dick Gendall; the arrival at Paris; how he had gone out to Issy and his experiences there. He plunged his hand into the little inner pocket concealed in the lining of his trousers and with another smiling nod of satisfaction took out the money he had earned there.

"By George, I hope I haven't lost much time!" he exclaimed. "I must get away as soon as I can. I suppose I'm fit enough to do it."

He got up and walked up and down the room for a few times and was delighted to find himself as fit as ever. He laughed heartily then, and counted the money. Eight hundred and fifty francs in notes.

Next he felt in his pockets for some loose gold and silver. It was not there; and as he could not have spent it, he concluded that it had either been lost when he was knocked over, or stolen. There were always scoundrels ready to rob even an injured man. It wasnt a bit serious luckily, as the notes would be more than enough for all he needed.

The house, whoever it belonged to, seemed to be strangely quiet; and presently he opened his door and peered out, listening. Not a sound. The landing was gloomy; but he could

make out enough to suggest that it was a private house; and again he wondered how he had been brought to it.

Probably where that girl with the red hair lived, he concluded. He recalled how she had pushed forward to shake his hand at Issy and that she had been in the car which had knocked him down.

"Hello, is any one there?" he called twice in a loud voice.

There was no answer. The thing was getting more perplexing every moment. The doors of all the rooms but one stood open, and he could see they were empty. How the dickens could he have been brought to an empty house and left to himself?

He went into the empty rooms to make sure, and then he paused in front of the closed door and knocked. No answer. He knocked again. This time he heard a movement in the room. Growing anxious to start on his long journey, he knocked again, and then tried the handle.

His fingers came in contact with the key and he uttered a grunt of astonishment as he noticed the bolts. A queer sort of house after all, was his conclusion; not a little thankful that he had not been treated in the same fashion.

A moment's hesitation decided him to see who was inside, and he shot the bolts back, unlocked the door, and looked in.

"I couldn't make any one hear, so I—" he began, but pulled up suddenly in even greater amazement than before.

The prettiest girl he had ever seen jumped up from the bed and rushed to the farthest corner of the room, her big, dark eyes fixed on him in a seeming frenzy of terror.

"I've put them on and I've not uttered a sound," she said, her voice hushed to a whisper and her lips trembling so that she could scarcely gasp out the words.

For an instant he could only stare at her in return, so intense was his bewilderment. An emotion of infinite pity followed. The thing told its own story. It was clear that the poor girl was out of her mind.

"All right. I see you have," he answered as he pushed the door open and went into the room. He spoke in French and tried to make his manner as reassuring as possible.

Far from being reassured, however, the girl cowered back into her corner as he approached. "I'll go wherever you wish. I will indeed, and won't give any trouble!" she gasped.

"But I don't want you to go anywhere," he replied. "Don't be frightened. It's I who want to get away, and pretty quickly, too. That's why I knocked at your door. I couldn't make any one hear."

Lunatic though she was, she appeared to understand him perfectly, although her terror showed no signs of abatement.

"Why do you think it worth while to say such a thing to me?"

"Only because it happens to be true," he answered with a smile.

"How can it be true?" she asked after a pause.

"I can only give you a woman's reason—because it is. I've just come from Issy, the flying ground there, and I'm starting on a tramp to Marseilles and don't want to lose any time about it."

The dark eyes fastened on his with an astonishing amount of sense in their expression.

"Issy? The flying ground?" she repeated in utter perplexity.

"Yes. Issy. The flying ground. We've had the big meet there, you know, and I've been up."

"But you are Jean Colonne!"

"Why not?" he asked with a smile and a shrug.

The distress in her face deepened again as the fear of some further trouble was started by the words. The man was a mystery, but to the full as dangerous as mysterious.

"Haven't you come to take me away?" she gasped.

"Good Lord, no! Why should I do that?"

"Because M. Gaudin has told you that I am his daughter."

"But you see I don't happen to know M. Gaudin. Is this his house?"

"Why are you saying all this? You know it is false. You know this is his house, and why he brought me here, and why he means now to take me away."

"I'm very sorry for you," he answered. This was evidently the form which the poor girl's delusion took. "Who are you?"

"You do know that, for I told you, and you wouldn't believe me. That was the day you struck me."

"I? I struck *you? You,* a girl?" cried Bob indignantly. "Oh, pardon!" he added. "I didn't mean to speak angrily. I am far too sorry for you."

"Do you pretend I did not tell you that I am Enid Truscott?"

"Most certainly you never told me. I never saw you before in all my life."

"Oh, how *can* you, how *dare* even you say such a thing?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Because you are the accomplice of M. Gaudin in this, just like that fearful old woman who brings me my food! Because it was you who stopped me from escaping when she was drunk and had left the door of my prison open, and you caught me at the front door and carried me back here; because you are one of Gaudin's men, the chauffeur of the red car; because—oh, what does it matter? I'll do whatever you wish. I can't resist you; but I'd rather you murdered me outright than kept me in this terrible suspense."

Bob listened in amazement.

"One of us is certainly mad," he thought, "and it is not I." He was at an utter loss how to deal with the astounding situation.

"I certainly don't want to murder you or harm you in the least," he said at length. "I don't know what you can mean by all that; but as you say you will do what I wish, come out of that corner."

With her eyes fixed intently on his face, she hesitated and made a step or two forward and then paused, her hands tightly clenched and pressed to her bosom, which rose and fell under her troubled breathing.

"That's something. You needn't come nearer if you don't wish, and I won't come any nearer to you. Sit on that chair there and try to calm yourself and get over your fright. I sha'n't do you the least harm, nor let any one else, while I'm here."

She did as he told her and he waited a moment or two before speaking again. "That's better still. Now, when you feel able, tell me again who you are and any way in which I *can* help you."

"I am English and my name is Enid Truscott." She was still in mortal fear of him; and although her voice quavered it was less troubled than before.

"But you said something just now about being the daughter of the man you call Gaudin."

"That's what he told you—that I was his mad daughter. You said that yourself to me. But indeed, indeed, I am not. It was a lie he told as an excuse for keeping me here."

"You're mixing things up a bit, you know. But it doesn't matter. Tell me how I'm to know you are English, and why you are in France."

"I've already told you."

"We'll assume that I've forgotten it, then. Tell me again."

"I came to Paris to stay with an old schoolfellow, Miss Gendall. She was not at the address; M. Gaudin was there and kept me there until he told me she was lying ill here and he brought me here in his car."

"Gendall?" repeated Bob. "Who is she?"

"The daughter of Mrs. Gendall of Upper Audley Street, London—No. 213."

He could scarcely restrain his astonishment. It was Dick's aunt. The thing was growing more mysterious at every turn. It couldn't be true. "Which Miss Gendall is it?"

It was Enid's turn to be astonished. "Margaret. She is my cousin. But what can you know about any people of the name?" Her surprise was so complete that for the time it conquered even her alarm.

He was on the point of blurting out that he knew a good deal, when the recollection of the terms of his wager stopped him.

"Tell me more about them and about yourself," he said somewhat bruskly. "And tell me in English; if you speak it, that is," he added. He wasn't breaking the terms of the bet to listen to somebody else talk English.

There was now much more mystification than alarm in the look she gave him as she rattled off a number of details about her aunt Mrs. Gendall and other friends. "Can you understand me, or do I speak too fast?" she asked as she finished.

It was all he could do to shut down the smile provoked by the question, but he masked it with a frown; and at the change in his look, a quick catch of the breath and a nervous start evidenced her fresh alarm.

"I managed to follow you," he replied. "Now tell me something about yourself. Your father and mother and where you live and so on." He asked this partly to give her time to recover from the fright and partly because he had begun to feel a keen interest in her.

"I have neither father nor mother. I live with my uncle, Stephen Cracroft, who is also my guardian. We live in a flat in Kensington, 83 Burnham Court"; and she added such details as she thought would help to convince him of the truth of her account of herself.

But he no longer needed anything of the sort. He believed her implicitly.

"Where do you wish me to take you?"

Her eyes opened wide in astonishment, and then in suspicion.

"You can go by yourself if you prefer it," he said, reading the change of expression instantly, and he threw the door open.

"I—I can't understand," she exclaimed, hesitating in her overwhelming confusion and surprise.

"An open door shouldn't be difficult to understand," he said with a smile.

"But—" She checked the words, fearing to offend and anger him.

"You think I'm setting a trap, I suppose. That's only foolish. If I meant mischief, it would be the easiest thing in the world for me to pick you up and take you where I pleased. You've only got to walk out."

She rose, as if still unable to believe her ears and took a step or two toward the door, expecting and dreading that he would seize and ill-treat her as he had done before. When she reached the door and he still made no effort to stop her, she paused and turned.

"Do you mean that I can go free? *You,* Jean Colonne, Gaudin's accomplice?"

"Yes. I, Jean Colonne. Gaudin or no Gaudin; and the sooner you go the better I shall be pleased, for I want to get off myself."

"I—I can't understand," she repeated. Then, throwing up her hands in bewilderment, she turned and went out of the room, like one in a dream, utterly unable to believe in her good fortune.

But the next instant a cry of alarm broke from her, and she was pushed back into the room by the old woman who rent the air with loud cries of anger and abuse.

"Who the devil are you?" cried Bob, thrusting the old hag away.

The woman stared at him in furious surprise. "She was going to escape!"

"Well, what of it? I told her she could go."

"You!"

"No one else. And you won't stop her, nor interfere with her in any way," he declared sternly.

The woman began a vociferous reply but checked it suddenly as a cunning leer spread over her wizened face. "Good. Good!" she said. "You've told her some tale that'll make her go quietly."

This renewed some of Enid's former terror and she sank down helplessly on the little bed.

"If you want to go, you'd better not lose any time about it," said Bob. "I'll see that this old harridan doesn't give you any trouble," and he took the woman's arm and forced her to the far end of the room out of Enid's path.

"Yes, go, there's a deary. No one 'll hurt you," murmured the hag.

But Enid had lost much of her former courage and was racked by a hundred doubts and fears of some treachery. Bob began to lose patience. He wanted to see the end of the affair and get away himself. His head was getting worse again, and he knew that he needed rest.

"Come, don't be afraid. I give you my word that no one shall stop you."

She made a great effort to rally her courage and rose. But the strain of her terrible experiences had tried her strength almost to the breaking point, and her head reeled and she staggered so that Bob had to hold her.

"You've evidently had more than you can stand. You'd better let me go with you."

But she drew away from him with a shudder, gazing at him in helpless hesitation.

"Go with him, deary," said the woman again with a leer of cunning.

"Hold your tongue," cried Bob fiercely, as Enid started and drew further away from him.

A long pause followed, and the silence was broken by the sound of the door of the house being opened and closed again noisily, and they heard a man's footsteps go into the room below and a loud call. "Jean! Jean!"

"It's M. Gaudin," said the woman; and they waited as heavy, impatient steps came quickly up the creaking stairs.

CHAPTER VI.

The Villa at Chatillon.

BOB was not a little curious to see what manner of man this M. Gaudin was, of whom both Enid Truscott and the old harridan had spoken; and a glance was enough to satisfy him.

"Oh, you are here, then, Jean," said Gaudin as he entered. "I thought you must be when I saw the car at the door. Didn't you hear me shout for you?"

"Are you M. Gaudin?" asked Bob.

"That's a pretty good one. I must tell that to Estelle," and he laughed and rubbed his hands as if in enjoyment of the joke.

"I'm glad you see something to laugh at in it. I don't."

"Never wear a joke too thin, Jean. It becomes silly." Then he turned to Enid. "Now, my dear, I see you're ready, so we'll go at once. There's no time to lose."

Enid had not taken her eyes off him from the instant of his entrance and was as piteously alarmed as ever. "Where to?" she asked, trembling.

"To a snug little place where you'll be quite comfortable and as safe as if you were at home in London."

"But she doesn't want to go with you," put in Bob quietly.

Gaudin turned on him fiercely, but instead of the expected burst of anger a burst of laughter came. "Not with her dear father?" he cried.

"She isn't your daughter. She's English, as you know perfectly well."

"Poor Jean, as dull-witted as ever. So she's managed to talk you over, eh?"

"He was going to let her go when I came up, Gaudin," said the old woman.

"And all the more credit to his heart; a sad blunder in judgment all the same. Heaven knows my only wish is that she *could* go alone," he said with a gesture of head and hands intended to indicate the depth of his grief.

"You'll get your wish," said Bob pithily.

"What does that mean? A half-witted girl can't be trusted to go about alone."

"She's better. She *is* going—and alone, too."

"He offered to take her away," interjected the woman again. "You'd better look out! He wouldn't let me stop her."

Bob was too good a judge of men not to see that Gaudin was desperately puzzled and, although he was trying to conceal it, equally angry. The sallow cheeks flushed till the red in them almost matched that of the ruddy, shaggy hair, and the beady eyes were as hard as steel and as full of vicious intent as those of a wild beast.

"What she says is true," said Bob firmly. He had had to deal with men of the sort before. "You've imprisoned this girl for some purpose; I don't know what and I don't ask. That's your affair. But it's my affair to see no harm is done to her and that she goes free. And go free she shall."

"You mean that?"

"Try to stop it and you'll see."

"Come here and listen to me"; and they went out onto the landing. "Do you know what's happened? The police have got wind of this place and they're going to raid it. They may be here at any minute, so there's no time for any fooling of this sort. You don't suppose I want to injure a poor, mad thing like that, and my own daughter?"

"I don't know your daughter, but—"

"You know one of them, for you're going to marry her," broke in Gaudin.

"I know that the girl in there is no child of yours; and you are not going to take her away."

"Have you lost the last remnants of your senses, Jean? Don't you understand what it'll mean to you as well as me if the police find us here?"

"You needn't stop," said Bob, with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

Gaudin was a powerful, domineering man, and nothing provoked him more than opposition. He eyed Bob up and down as if calculating the chances of a tussle; but he had had more than one proof of his companion's strength, and at such a crisis the minutes were too precious to be risked in a doubtful struggle.

He paused an instant and then tossed up his hands.

"All right; have it your own way, Jean, and look after yourself," he said and ran down-stairs and out of the house.

But this apparent retreat did not deceive Bob. The girl would not have been imprisoned without some strong reason, and Gaudin was not the man to give her up in any such fashion as this. He had rushed off to get help of some sort or a weapon. Something must be done, therefore, and at once.

He put his head into the room and beckoned to Enid.

"Come!" To his surprise she came at once.

"Stop in this room," he whispered, leading her into one; "and as soon as he comes in back here, slip away down the stairs and out of the house. I'll see that he doesn't follow you."

He turned away just in time to stop the old woman as she was rushing down to warn Gaudin.

"None of that," he said sternly, gripping her and forcing her back to the room. "Breathe a word of this and I'll pinch the life out of you," he threatened, frightening her intensely.

He had heard enough to know that he had a reputation for brutality, and he traded on it.

Gaudin came back with words of honey.

"Look here, Jean," he said as he came up the stairs; "I can't leave you here like this. We mustn't let this girl come between us. You shall have your way about her, but you mustn't get in the clutches of the police."

He reached the room as he uttered the last sentence and Bob saw the swift change in his look as he saw Enid was not there.

There was another significant thing. Gaudin's right hand was in his pocket.

"All right," agreed Bob readily. "Shake hands on it," and he held his out.

"Where is she?" asked Gaudin, drawing his hand from the pocket.

"He took her into another room," cried the woman viciously.

At that Gaudin let out an oath and whipped his hand from his pocket. But not quickly enough to prevent Bob gripping it and wresting away the revolver. He pushed the man into the middle of the room and stood in front of the door.

"I thought so. I know your sort," he said quietly. "That girl's going and you won't stop her. You can go now," he called loudly to Enid, without taking his eyes from Gaudin's face.

The man's conduct puzzled him then. For a moment he made ready to spring at Bob, but with as quick a change, he shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"I only meant to give you a scare, Jean. I'd rather let her go a dozen times than quarrel with you"; and he sat down on the bed.

"That's all right, then. But keep where you are, quarrel or no quarrel."

"I can't think what's come over you, man; but it doesn't matter. You'll get over it. I daresay that row with Estelle to-day has shaken you up. She's told me what a fool she made of herself, telling you things and threatening you with the police. If she tried anything of the sort I'd be the first to wring her neck although she is my daughter."

Interpreting this as nothing more than a preface to some treachery, Bob kept his eyes riveted on the man on the watch for the slightest movement, while listening intently for the sounds of Enid's footsteps.

The pause which followed Gaudin's words was broken by a loud cry from Enid on the landing. He jumped up with an oath and sprang at Bob.

But the latter was too quick for him. He avoided the rush, slipped through the door, slammed it behind him in Gaudin's face, and dashed at a couple of men who had seized Enid.

The butt-end of the revolver came down on the head of one of them and knocked him senseless. The other released his hold of Enid and turned, but a terrific uppercut from Bob's left hand landed on his jaw and stretched him by the side of his fellow, just as Gaudin, with a roar of rage, sprang on Bob's back and fought to get a grip on his throat.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

SOME HEARTS

BY GLENN WARD DRESBACH

SOME hearts are like the leaves winds blow
Down that still lane we crossed:
They never show their softest glow
Till they are touched with frost.

Big Pete

by W. H. Sperry

THE flap of the tent opened, and the head of "Hank" Wilson was thrust within.

Hank Wilson was a lean-faced, bronzed-skinned prospector, with graying hair and eyes that told of an unfailing sense of humor. Indeed a man cannot be without that sense and spend a lifetime on the desert, for if he cannot smilingly face death, thirst, heat, cold, loneliness, and other concomitant attractions of finding gold he will either give it up or else lose his mind and spend his declining years hanging around barrooms, doing odd jobs and talking vaguely of a dim and distant past.

Hank was one of the fit and had survived a thirty-year trail that led over the forest-clad Sierras, down the foaming California creek-beds, across the bleak and biting Chilcoot, up the headwaters of the mighty Yukon, into the blaring camps of Cripple Creek, Tonopah, Goldfield, Rawhide, and out on the burning glare of the Nevada deserts, and his hand was still firm, his muscles and sinews tireless, his smile cheery, and his keen old eyes still firmly fixed on the ever-distant end of the rainbow.

"Come on in, Hank," I invited, and he entered, found the "makings," and started to roll a cigarette. I passed over my cigarette-case.

"Have a tailor-made one?"

"No, thanks," he replied with emphasis; "I've got a lot of habits, but no vices. I've seen prospectors use tobacco in every way from snuff to mixing tea and tobacco together and smoking it in a pipe, which same's very soothing, but usually winds 'em up cutting out paper dolls in some place with bars over the windows, but I never see any of 'em smoke them ready-made things that smells like a fire in a drug-store.

"I've seen an almighty lot of prospectors, too. About every race, color, and religion that there is. Did I ever tell you about that coon prospector that I run across down in the Gold Ledge country?"

"No," I replied; "I never imagined that one of the descendants of Ham would take a chance on a thing like that."

Hank lit his cigarette and inhaled deeply; then his eyes lit up as he started his reminiscence:

Well, me and Bill Patten was putting in a round of holes in the bottom of our eighty-foot shaft, when we hears the dog bark up on top. Now, we was off on the edge of the desert where a dog don't get a chance to bark more than two or three times in a lifetime, because there ain't any water or anything else in there, and the country couldn't even support a coyote.

Visitors come about as often as 29th of Februarys, for we was pretty well off the route of wandering prospectors; and, though they was lots of good rock in the country, water costs us about twenty dollars a barrel by

the time we gets it out there, and there ain't many of the desert rats can stick it out long at that price.

Even when a man don't wash none whatever, he uses a lot of water for drinking and drilling.

So we comes out of the hole a humping, and one of us has a four-pound hammer in his hand and the other a twenty-inch drill. Only a tenderfoot packs a gun on the desert, for there ain't never anything to kill except a stray rattlesnake, and if you got moral objections to kicking them out of the way it's easy enough to go around 'em. *If* you feel like packing any excess baggage, it's better to pack an extra water-bag or two. They come in more handy like.

Well, when we gets up on top we see, coming across a little rise about a hundred yards away, what was sure the queerest-looking turnout that had ever come moping along the edge of a Nevada desert, and the queerest-looking sight I'd seen anywhere since the time I was up to Reno and see the whole divorce gang sitting out on the porch of the Riverside Hotel, waiting for the judge to do them asunder.

It was four smokes and a pushcart, with "Ice-Ccream, Two Bits," labeled on the side of it, only they wasn't any ice-cream on board, but about a ton of blankets and grub and a cask of water and frying-pans, shovels, and various other cooking and mining tools.

They was one coon pushing the shafts behind, another one dragging a rope in front, and another one pulling on the spokes of each wheel. As soon as they gets abreast of where we was they all lets loose of the cart and comes piling over.

They was plumb full of questions and stray remarks: "Good Lawd! Am dat a mine?" and "Golly, ain't it dahk down deah?" and "Go on down, Sam, and see what it looks lak," and "Man alive, Ah wouldn't go down theah for no thousand dollars!"

Only one of 'em would go within four feet of the hole, and he got down on his hands and knees and crawled up to it like a tourist looking over one of the Yosemite Valley precipitches.

"Where are you smokes going?" asks Bill.

They tells us that they had bought a claim, the Daisy Belle, for ten dollars from a white man in at town—"town" being the big camp over at the railroad twenty miles away—and that the Pullman Club, an organization of coon sports there, was grub-staking Big Pete, the coon who was pushing the shafts in the chariot-race, to come out and work the claim.

We knew the Daisy Belle and the *hombre* that owned it, and they was both plumb worthless. We tells the coons so, and further informs them that they was nutty to go paying anybody ten dollars for a claim when they was all sorts of ground around it that was just as useless for about everything except road-building purposes.

It didn't seem to shatter the coons' hopes none, however, and the big coon allows that he has been reading the Bible right frequent and that the hand of Providence has directed him to the Daisy Belle.

So we goes over with them and shows them where to stick their tent so as the wind won't blow it away, and how to burn sage-brush in a tent without getting smoked out, because burning sage makes a smell that will drive a dog out of a tanyard.

The next day three of the smokes goes back to the big camp, and Pete starts plugging down a hole in the midst of a desert of barren rock. Me and Bill goes over and expostulates with him mild like, and asks him why he don't sink his shaft where they was a lead of some kind. "De Book of Solomon done tole me to sink heah," allows Pete. "De Book of Solomon done say to sink de shaft wheah de pophry meets de dacite, and dat am right heah."

"Rats!" says Bill; "I used to read the Bible some myself, and there ain't

nothing in the whole book about porphyry or dacite. Furthermore, that ain't no point of contact you're on at all, but just a seam. You'll find seams like that in all rock. The rock on one side of the seam is just as much like the rock on the other as the skin on one side of your nose is like the skin on the other.

"Porphyry and dacite, me eye! That's nothing but common, ordinary sedimentary rock. I reckon old Solomon had enough to do keeping tally of his wives without straining his intelleck writing geology guides for brunette-colored prospectors."

"Well, they didn't call dem by dose names in dem days," admits Pete; "but de good Book do say: 'If de clouds be full of rain dey shall empty demselves upon de earf, and if de tree fall t'ward de souf or t'ward de norf deah shall it be.' Now, de onliest Joshua tree in dis whole country was right heah, and it fell t'ward de norf and heah it must be."

"Yes," says Bill. "And the same Book also says something about 'He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it,' and 'Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith,' so you better be careful."

"Man alive!" grinned the coon, "you are the fustest white man I evah seed who'd read de Bible!" And he showed a crop of teeth that would 'a' turned a dentist green with envy.

"Sure, I've read it!" Bill tells him. "But I ain't running around trying to find gold-mines on the strength of it. You don't want to believe all you read in it.

"Look where it tells how this Jasper Sampson went up and slew ten thousand Philippines with the jawbone of a burro, and then the whole American army goes down and it takes about three years and eighty million catterages to slew ten thousand of 'em.

"That there story is pointedly casting a slur on the American army, and the govefnment ought to revise that Book."

However, we couldn't say nothing to the coon that seemed to change his mind, so we shows him what we can about putting in his holes and mucking out, and a lot of other little mining knowledge that he was sure some ignorant about.

Well, time rolls along and Pete gets his hole deeper and deeper. Pretty near every night he comes over with a chunk of rock that he calls "hegasponite" or "odormorkite," or some other fool name, and he pounds it up in our mortar, but, naturally, he don't ever get nary a sign of color.

Usually when he comes over he stays and cooks our supper, and he was right good cook. After supper the three of us sits down and plays a little game of cards together. Of course, a white man ain't supposed to associate none whatever with a colored feller; but after you've been on the desert a few years you get to being on free-and-easy terms with everybody—coons, chinks, or anybody else—specially when you haven't had a chance to talk to any one except your partner for about six months, and as you know all of his life history and most of his innermost thoughts, and he has the same sentiments concerning you, talk in that direction is apt to be kind of limited.

We gets a lot of amusement out of Pete, too. He usually has some new idea on mining, such as having the point of the drill red hot so that the heat will crack the rock as it goes along and make it easy to drill. Also he is powerful scared of rattlesnakes, and packs a six-gun that is big enough to have setting on a pair of wheels in front of a fort.

One night when we was going across to his place with him the gun drops out of his pocket and hits him on the heel, and he thinks he has been hit by a rattler and runs for a quarter of a mile yelling at the top of his voice before he gets out of wind and stops to make an examination.

One day when Pete has his shaft down about fifty feet, Bill observes

that it is plumb mean for Pete to have to be disappointed every night about not finding anything, and he hauls out a sack of specimens that we has collected from every ore-bin and mine-dump between Seven Troughs and Las Vegas.

"Let's go over to-night," he proposes, "after the smoke has shot his holes and mix a bunch of this high-grade in with his dirt. It'll sure cheer him up some to get a few colors when he horns out his stuff to-morrow night"

So that evening about dusk we goes moping across the gulleys with a forty-pound sack of some of the prettiest high-grades in Nevada. We gets about half a mile from the holes when we hears the coon's shots going off, and pretty soon he comes stalking toward us through the murk.

We drops down flat and thinks probably he won't see us, but he walks right on top of us. Bill right away starts a consuming interest in a tuft of locoweed and starts showing it to me. Pete stops short and says:

"Hey, white men. What are you doin' way off heah at dis time o' night?"

"Hank here was telling me that he didn't know what locoweed looks like," Bill answers; "and I was showing him, so that if ever he has a horse he can look out that it don't get locoed."

The coon sniffs suspicious like, and as he walks off through the dark we hear him muttering something about "white men's debbilment."

We goes on up to the hole, but the evening was plumb spoiled for us, 'cause we reckoned that when he found the high-grade in his shaft the next day, he would put two and three together and get wise.

The hole was as dark as a pocket when Bill starts down the ladder with the sack of specimens tied around his neck.

"The ladder don't go all the way down, Bill," says I; but it ain't more than ten or eleven feet from where it leaves off to the bottom, and you can drop that easy enough."

So he goes down, and pretty soon I hears his feet clawing the rocks where the ladder ends, and then I hears a splash and a "Woof!"

A few second later there is a lot more splashing.

"Throw me down a rope!" Bill yells. "There's six feet of water in this hole." This speech of his is kind of broken up in sections like his head was going under water every other word.

I don't stop to make any surmises on how the water got there, but roots around and finds the rope Pete uses for pulling his dirt out with, and in about two minutes has Bill out.

"That smoke must have busted into a water-seam," he says as soon as he gets his breath. "It ain't more than fifteen minutes since he shot, and there is six feet of water in there already. And a good fifty dollars' worth of high-grade, too. I had to ditch that sack to keep my head out of water."

We beats it back to camp and next morning, seeing as we are getting a little shy of water, we takes all the cans and casks that we have and heads over for Pete's.

"He'll want us to help him bail the hole out," says Bill, "and we might as well fill up everything we've got while we're about it."

When we gets there though, the coon ain't worrying none whatever about the bailing-out part. He is sitting on the edge of his hole smoking, and when he sees us he sings out:

"'Mohnin', genelmun. Want some watah? I'se goin' to make a regulah price of five dollahs a bahl, but seein' as you two genelmun has hepped me a lot, I'll only chahge you two dollahs and a half."

"Why, you big chunk of alligator bait," says Bill; "here we come over to help you bail out your old hole so you can go back to mining, and you want to charge us for it."

"Dis ain't no more mine," Pete replies. "I'se a watah company."

"You won't sell enough to keep you in smoking tobacco," says Bill.

"Oh, theah'll be lots of white genelmun come out heah mining when they find out they can get watah," answers the coon.

Well, he has the best of the argument so far as we can see, and we burglarizes our clothes for two-fifty and takes the water. Sure enough, it ain't no time at all before the coon begins to do a land office business with his water.

We couldn't rightly kick, because we was getting water a blamed sight cheaper than we ever expected to, and besides, the increase in population had given our claims a little value.

We has a couple of pretty fair offers for some of our claims, and feels pretty well satisfied. Bill can't ever get over the loss of that sack of specimens, though, and one day when we goes over for water Bill says:

"Pete, I don't begrudge you the two and a half a barrel; but I'd like to take one dive in that hole. Fact is I want to so bad that I'll offer you twenty dollars for the chance."

"No, sah," says Pete. "Dis ain't no swimming tank. It's a resevah. If you-all wants to take a baff, you will have to get a can and take it in de regulah way."

THE WAY OF A MAID

A Sonnet in Dialogue

BY LYON MEARSON

CORYDON (*outside gate*)

WHY don't you come outside the gate, Ninette?

NINETTE (*inside gate*)

I'd just as soon stay here—I am afraid!

CORYDON

Afraid? Afraid of what, my pretty maid?
Is it of me?

NINETTE

I think it is—and yet
I am not sure, mayhap some subtle threat
That does your mischievous blue eyes pervade—

CORYDON

You do me wrong, Ninette, thus to persuade
Yourself—

NINETTE

I did not really mean—

CORYDON

Coquette!

NINETTE

I certainly am not! It's in your eye!

CORYDON

What is?

NINETTE

A plan to kiss me 'gainst my will!

CORYDON

Why, dear Ninette, you need have little fear—
With milk-pails in my hands—I could not try!
For if I did the milk would surely spill—

NINETTE

Oh, well, I'll hold the pails, you stupid dear!

The Blood Lender

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Bondboy," "The Crucible of Courage," "Cowards," etc.

CHAPTER I.

Misfortune's Market-Place.

MASON passed out of the brightness of Kearney Street and turned into Portsmouth Square, into which the tide of adversity had thrown many a broken man before his day — Portsmouth Square, in the heart of the old San Francisco, place of regrets and dreams. Near the Stevenson Monument, with its brave show of swelling sails on bronze galleon, he sat down in the shadows and turned again in the bitterness of his young heart the sad ashes of his withered dreams.

"To earn a little"—he could read the inscription on the shaft when the wind blew the branches of an acacia aside and the light fell on it—"To spend a little less." A good man's homely philosophy, placed there to chide the improvident and the broken, where the author of it himself had sat through many a lazy hour with his dreams.

It was near nine o'clock. The severe, iron-armed park benches, usually crowded at that hour of the night, were empty. Those distressed hulks of humanity accustomed to lodging there in clean weather had blown away before the wind and the mist to the obscure refuges which a few hard-earned or harder-begged coins could buy.

Around the place where Mason sat the shrubbery threw deep blots of shadow, but no more silent were these than the quick figures of the Chinese who passed occasionally, hands thrust into sleeves, shoulders huddled up about their necks in their collarless, uncomfortable way.

It were better, he reflected with a sigh, to be an obscure magician in the turmoil of the world, whose touch could convert the unbending obstacles of life into gold, than a notable logician under the spreading oaks of Berkeley Green. For what did it avail a man to set dignified letters after his name when his vitals clamored for the solace of food, when his bones ached for the warm comfort of a bed.

It had come to that pass with Henry Mason, doctor of philosophy, doctor of law, late of Berkeley's honored, classic halls. He was worn and weary; he was hungry, heart-heavy, and sore. The world had not come forward with its laurels; it had not hastened to heap its rewards at his feet. In his pocket he carried a crisp paper which gave him place among the savants of a nation; but in his purely human stomach there was a raging call for bread.

Only a few months before that melancholy night he had come forth from the university to charge the world with what he believed to be invincible armament—the sword of knowledge and the buckler of high resolve. Then he was ready to consider a dignified connection with some established legal firm; now he would have jumped over a six-barred hurdle to take a plain, bread-giving job.

A sudden fall of feet on the gravel near his retreat startled him out of his gloomy cogitations. He looked up into the face of an elderly man who had paused in front of him.

"Could you give me a match?" the stranger asked with pleasant informality.

"Haven't any," answered Mason shortly.

"It doesn't matter then," the other said.

Mason could see that his face was kind and scholarly, and that his beard moved as though he smiled.

"Smoke?" asked the stranger with an abruptness almost disconcerting, offering his cigar-case as he spoke.

"No; can't afford to," Mason returned rather ungraciously, for he was in no frame for taking on a wandering acquaintance. He wanted that hour only to be left alone to curse the world in general and San Francisco in particular.

"If you don't mind an old fellow's company," said the stranger, drawing the long cape of his heavy overcoat about his chest, "I'd like to sit here with you and chat a bit."

"If there's anything in the situation that appeals to you," replied Mason, "you're welcome to share it." He moved along the bench and the old man sat beside him.

The stranger was well dressed, evidently prosperous. He appeared to be well along in life, and he displayed certain oddities in his dress, and the cut of his pointed beard and long, heavy hair, which gleamed silvery in the flickering light.

"A musician or an author," thought Mason; "but he seems to have made good."

Certainly he was not in that place of derelicts through any tilt in fortune's seesaw which had flung him to the ground. The stranger's hat attracted Mason's particular attention. It was a tall, round-crowned felt, with broad brim and plentiful band.

"If he had a feather in it he'd be a dead ringer for Sir Francis Drake," thought Mason. And then he began wondering again about those shoes.

"You don't drink," said the stranger with the finality of a man stating a familiar fact.

"No," returned Mason. "I do well when I manage to eat."

"Which is rather remarkable for a young college man in this dissipated age," continued the stranger, but whether in reference to his own statement or Mason's reply the young man was at a loss to know. He continued before Mason had time to offer comment: "San Francisco is a poor place for a young fellow to make a start in the practise of law at present, I am afraid. Our two great universities throw so many on the market here, so to speak. A beginner could do better in one of the prosperous cities of the mid-West, in my opinion, sir; but it is a long jump from here to Kansas City or Omaha for a man without funds."

Mason glanced up at him with a mantling feeling of resentment. He wondered whether he wore both his trade and his misfortune so openly that even strangers could read them.

"Yes, I'm a newcomer into the profession of the law," he owned. "How did you come to know it?"

"I've been watching you for the past four days," the old man quietly replied.

"You've been taking great liberties then, sir!" said Mason hotly.

"Admitted, without prejudice; but with the best of intentions, I beg you to believe, sir," said the old man.

"Well, you haven't found me out a

housebreaker or a hold-up man, and I hope you haven't discovered anything in my present straightened mode of living that gives you ground for believing I'm either a pickpocket, a count, or an international spy," said Mason elaborately, with what sarcasm he could control.

"On the contrary," the old gentleman answered — and the blowing branches revealed a smile on his face as he spoke—"I have found you to be a sober young man of clean life and habits; a robust, healthy, promising young man, indeed."

"Thank you," said Mason, still on the edge of his ruffled dignity.

"The failure to realize on your expectations has depressed you certainly, but that should not be taken too gravely, for it is the common lot. There may be brighter times just ahead—who knows?"

"Well, not I," admitted Mason with a sigh. "But tell me—what object had you in spying over me for four days, or even four hours? Who are you? What's your game?"

"Your resentment is both just and natural," the old man said. He turned to face Mason quickly and spoke with a new eagerness. "See here, if I were to show you a way of mending your fortunes—an honorable way—and at the same time of doing a great, humane act, would you consider it?"

"I'm open to proposals, as the widow said," Mason returned, quickening in his turn.

"Naturally, a man of your broad view of life would be ready to embrace an opportunity of that kind," said the old man. "Well, the situation is this. I am a physician. I have under treatment at the present time—and have had for some months past—a most unusual, stubborn anemic case. Ordinary treatment has been a depressing failure, and I believe the only chance of recovery lies in a transfusion of blood from some robust, healthy person."

"I begin to see," said Mason.

"It is a very simple, riskless operation," continued the doctor, "if the proper person could be found. The patient is wealthy, and would pay handsomely — not that money alone, however, would be the principal inducement to the humanitarian who would offer himself for this purpose. There is a finer consideration in a thing of this kind, sir, beyond the computation of minds which think from the basis of dollars."

The doctor paused and looked pointedly at the young man at his side.

"And what is the sex of this creature which is fading out of the world for the lack of a banquet of human blood?" asked Mason, not able to view the situation seriously, feeling in his heart that there was some cheap quackery behind the old man's scheme.

"It is a woman, a young woman—talented, beautiful, wealthy," the doctor answered, "and she is fading like a flower uprooted in the sun!"

"Who is she?"

Mason spoke with studied show of being but faintly interested, although his heart was bouncing like a punching-bag.

The old man turned to him with sudden appeal in his manner and placed a trembling hand upon his arm.

"My daughter," said he, "my only child, the one living thing that I have left to bind me to this world. Help me to save her, Mr. Mason, for the pity of a lonely old man, for the pity of wasting youth and beauty—help me to save her!"

"Knows me by name, too," noted Mason to himself. He looked the old physician in the face.

"But why, out of the thousands in this city who would be glad to do it for pay, have you fixed upon me for this?" he inquired, doubtfully.

"Let me tell you," said the old man hastily. "For weeks my child has been slowly dying. I have searched for a worthy subject for this sacrifice —I speak of it so," he caught himself to explain, "for the yielding of blood

is generally considered in that light. But there is no risk, none whatever, as I have said."

"I understand that it is slight, at the gravest," Mason said.

"Just so," the doctor nodded, "you university men are initiates. The world in general, sir, is a fool. I have sought a man or a woman, as I have told you, who would fill my requirements, but in vain. I have visited the medical schools, the hospitals, schools for nurses—even the jails.

"I have advertised in the papers and received hundreds of applicants, but out of all who have offered I have not found one worthy of the sacred purpose.

"Rather than introduce a polluted, tainted — even questionable — stream into my child's veins, I would see her perish in her pitiful way. We have few friends, no relatives in this land to come forward and offer themselves, and those who act on the incentive of profit are undesirable in every way. So, you can see that my espionage over you has not been without its complimentary shade."

"Go ahead with the story," said Mason eagerly.

"One day, in pursuit of my quest, I sat watching the throng of bathers at the Sutro baths," the doctor resumed. "You will remember the day, perhaps, for it was there that I saw you first. Your bearing, your eyes, your color, your physique, proclaimed your untainted manhood at a glance. I followed you to your lodging and made limited inquiries, learning little. Then I employed a detective to note your habits, for which I trust you will forgive me. After the detective reported favorably of you, I set about to verify his findings for myself. I have watched you, as I have said, during the past four days. I was watching you to-night. I followed you here to speak to you, for the hour—almost the last, precious hour—is at hand. I want to buy a small measure of your blood—it may sound heartless, and grate unpleasantly on your senses, but that is the commercial side of it. The humanitarian service which you could render would be beyond price."

"You say it would be a simple, riskless operation. How much of my blood would you require, and what would you pay?"

"A few pounds; not above three at the most," answered the doctor eagerly; "a small quantity for a man like you. You could go about your business the next day, none the worse nor the weaker for your loss, and I would gladly pay you a thousand dollars—or more—even more!"

Mason pondered a little while.

"I'll tell you how this thing strikes me," said he. "If you're on the square —and I suppose you are—I'll do what I can for the young woman. But I couldn't take pay for a few pints of blood. I don't want any money for a service like that—it looks too mercenary, you know, this thing of selling blood, your own, or anybody else's."

"It's the lofty view of it that I expected you to entertain," said the doctor with ill-concealed emotion. "I knew you were a man!"

"Well, I'm not a capitalist, anyway —I never could drive a bargain in blood," Mason said. "If you'll guarantee that the operation will not incapacitate me for more than a day or two, I'll not ask anything of you at all; but if it should happen to put me out for a week, I'd have to bargain with you to lodge and feed me meantime."

"The spirit of this," cried the old man, seizing his hand, "moves me beyond expression! I will care for you as I would care for my own son, and Heaven will shower its benedictions upon you. My daughter will bless you if the happy day comes when she regains her health, and she will pray for your reward!"

"I expect that I'll always need praying for, too," reflected Mason, as if speaking to himself.

"There is no element of danger in the operation," the old man reassured

him. "I shall have a skillful surgeon to assist me, and there will not even be the slightest twinge of pain.

"Shall we go now?" he asked, rising quickly. "Time is precious, and it will require twenty-four hours for me to make a test of your blood, without which the operation cannot be undertaken. But if all proves favorable, we could make the transfusion at this hour to-morrow night. Meantime, you would lodge in my house."

"The sooner the better, as far as I'm concerned," Mason answered. "I'm ready."

"It's some distance from here," said the doctor, striking across the square to Kearney Street. "We'll drive."

CHAPTER II.

Into the Shadow of Death.

THE city lay under a thick obscuration of fog, and this, together with the many turns which the carriage made, confused all sense of direction or location in Mason's mind.

When the conveyance stopped, after a rapid and lengthy drive, Mason noted that the neighborhood appeared to be one devoted to the residences of the opulent. The doctor gave him no time for more than a cursory, peering glance into the fog, but swept him into the great house which stood gray and indistinct before them.

With the same feverish haste, his hand on Mason's shoulder in a manner of close guardianship, even suspicion and distrust, the young man thought, the doctor guided him along a dim hall, rich in hangings, statuary and paintings, to a small elevator at the farther end. This they entered, and ascended silently to the third floor.

"In the expectation of your coming, I made preparations," said the physician as they stepped from the elevator. "Everything is ready—just step in this room and wait a few minutes, please."

"So you counted on me to the limit—and for a certainty—did you?" said Mason, wonderingly.

"I knew that you had a human heart," said the doctor simply, cutting in the lights in the room which he had indicated.

Mason went in, and the doctor, with a muttered apology for his abruptness, hurried away. It was a small apartment, littered with the evidences of journeys in many lands — pottery, weapons, rugs. The physician was gone but a little while. When he returned he wore a sleeveless white jacket, such as Mason had seen on the internes of hospitals.

He bared and sterilized Mason's arm and drew away a small quantity of blood. Then the old physician turned his subject over to a Japanese servant, who conducted Mason to a bed-chamber. There the weary adventurer forgot his hunger at the sight of a bath and clean, white garments.

But the physician had neglected nothing which would contribute to his guest's comfort. When Mason came from his bath, clothed in white linen, he found a plenteous meal spread for him, and the Japanese servant standing by to serve his slightest wish.

Next day Mason saw nothing of the doctor. No word was sent him; he was not asked to leave his room, which was peculiarly quiet and sequestered in an angle of the house, with an outlook upon the adjoining roofs. Mason spent the day reading and speculating on the outcome of this uncommon experience.

At nightfall the doctor came to him—a flush of satisfaction on his face—and reported that the test had shown Mason's blood adapted for transfusion into the sufferer's arteries.

"The patient is prepared and waiting," said he. "*Come!*"

Mason followed him into an adjoining double apartment, which was divided by heavy curtains.

"Everything is ready—make haste and strip and put on these," directed the doctor, indicating certain white

garments flung over the back of a chair. Seeing that the subject hesitated, the doctor frowned impatiently. "She is under an anesthetic; she can't see you," he said.

"I wasn't thinking of that," said Mason dubiously, "but of these," stretching his hand toward the white garments; "is it as serious as all this?"

"This is merely a sanitary precaution to insure your safety as well as the patient's," the physician explained. "Those garments are absolutely sterile. The one danger of it all is the slight one of infection, and that's the reason for this care. Please hurry."

Mason was ready in a few minutes, and the doctor, who had waited, drew the curtain aside and led the way into the inner recess.

The patient, lying there insensible upon her white bed, absorbed Mason's first attention. She was young. About her bloodless face, white as the face of the dead, a rich mass of exuberant hair heaped the pillow.

It looked as if it would glint reddishly in the sun, and it was as full of the vigor and redundancy of youth as its owner was wanting them. She seemed a shadow of much stateliness and grace, but the hand which lay upon the coverlet was barely clothed in flesh. Her eyes were closed; she seemed scarcely to breathe.

The room was filled with the vapors of chloroform, and a nurse who stooped over the patient, watching her respiration, still held the cone by which it had been administered in her hand. At the bedside stood an adjustable operating-table, its enameled surface gleaming with that unfeeling appearance of absolute sterility which has unnerved many a man as he has approached its kind.

Busy over a pan of steaming instruments at a small table hard by was another man, younger than the father of the patient. He was clothed in a long, white operating apron. He looked up as Mason and the doctor entered.

"We will make the incision in your left arm," said the old doctor. "Please adjust yourself upon the table as quickly as you can."

Mason felt a question rising within him at sight of this serious preparation for what he had been led to believe a trivial thing. But, having come so far, he put down the indistinct notions of protesting and demurring which crowded the back of his mind, and took his place on the table.

A few inches from his side, and on a level with him, lay the bloodless victim of disease into whose veins the torrent of his strong, young body was to be diverted in a last desperate effort to give her life.

The old doctor bent over him as he stretched upon the hard little table, pressed his arms to his sides with something in his manner which lent the air of triviality and inconsequence to the act, and quickly passed a strap across Mason's chest. With deft fingers he drew it tight and buckled it.

Mason was bound by the sudden and unexpected movement. He flushed resentfully.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

The old man smiled reassuringly.

"You must remain absolutely quiet," he explained. "One small movement might displace the tube, once connection is established, and undo our work. I'll have to strap your limbs also, for even under ether slight movements are the rule rather than the exception. Doctor, will you secure those straps over the thighs and knees? Good!"

"You spoke of ether," said Mason. "Is it necessary for me to go under ether? You assured me that the operation was slight, painless, and without risk."

"So it is, so it is," the old man hastened to reaffirm, "but the mere sight of blood is unnerving to many men—especially their own blood."

"Can't you use a local anesthetic?" suggested Mason.

"It would be much more satisfac-

tory and safer also—to do so," the young doctor said.

"I would prefer that he be put under ether," insisted the old man with lofty severity.

"No," said the young one, holding to the nurse, who reached him his hypodermic needle from the tray at her hand, "the chances of collapse are not so great this way."

"It is to be expected under any condition," said the old man.

"But you assured me—" Mason began.

"Sh-h-h!" said the old man, lifting his hand in gentle yet commanding gesture of silence, "you're not afraid?"

Mason glanced across at the wasted form beside him.

"No," he answered calmly; "if it can do her any good you may take it all. Go ahead!"

The old doctor adjusted a broad strap across Mason's forehead and drew it tight. It bound him so firmly that he could not turn so much even as to see what they were about. As the old man buckled the strap he said:

"I yield the contention; we will use the needle only."

After the first sharp jab there was no pain. Mason watched with interest such deft movements of the operators as he could see. It was but a little while until his arm, bound closely to the unconscious girl's, was pouring from its severed artery a throbbing stream of life into her empty veins.

By grinding his eyes in their sockets Mason could see the old man bending over the patient across the bed. The young doctor pressed his thumb against the artery in Mason's temple.

So minutes passed. There was no feeling in Mason's arm, numbed by the anesthetic which had been introduced into its tissues. Mason became conscious after the lapse of what appeared to him a long time—that the pressure of the doctor's thumb against his temple was growing heavier.

It seemed to bring a lightness into his head; he tried to lift his hand to push the physician's away—remembering then, with a twinge of resentment toward the old man, that he was helplessly bound.

The lights in the room began to grow dim presently, with a slow-diminishing, fading volume, brightening again in a moment, then seeming to recede and advance, as if he were swinging. Sweat stood on his forehead—a heavy pressure seemed to be compressing his ribs, shutting off his wind.

The young doctor said something in a voice far-away and dim. The old man answered in sharp and impatient negative. Of that much Mason was aware as he felt himself slipping away from the shore of consciousness. In a flash he realized that they were drawing too much blood.

An onrush of cold terror swept him, righting his failing faculties for a moment sharply. He knew that it was time to protest.

"See here, you're — killing me!"

The voice did not sound like his own. It was submerged, small. Neither did it carry the vehement volume of protest that he desired to charge it with. It sounded a very mild, indifferent and nerveless statement of some secondary fact. He tried again to lift his hand to his forehead, his muscles swelling in their bonds.

"See here!" he repeated querulously. "I tell you you're killing me!"

He saw the old man's head rise from his listening, watching posture over the figure on the bed, but her he could not see, strain and roll his eyes as he might. The old man appeared vast and overwhelming in his misty vision, like some gigantic figure reared to crush him where he lay. Dimly he thought of the Colossus at Rhodes and of grim sphinxes in gray Egyptian sands.

Mason felt the weight upon his chest growing immeasurably.

It was crushing him; he struggled to fling it off with his strapped hands, as one in a dream gathers his limbs to fly some terror, and finds them stricken

impotent by some inexplicable force. The situation was terrifying, and magnified in its hideousness by the full knowledge that it was not a frantic vision of a dream-ridden night.

"Give me air, I tell you!" he muttered, panting with open mouth. "You're killing me, men! I tell you you're—killing me!"

"He can stand no more—we must close the artery," the young doctor said.

"No, no!" protested the old man greedily, rising higher, and with larger outline in Mason's glimmering vision. "Look at that spark of life in her poor cheeks! Look at it, man! We must go on—she must have more—more!"

"For God's sake, men, give me a breath!" panted Mason.

"I refuse to be answerable further in this case unless we stop the drain of blood at once," the young physician declared. "This is not justified; we can't take this man's life!"

"What is his life? What are the lives of ten thousand like him in the balance against her?" said the old man in passionate, wild selfishness. "We must save her! We must give her blood! Let him die if he must!"

Dimmer and dimmer Mason heard the words, and almost beyond the dull vibration of his thickening ears was the protest which the younger man uttered. They seemed to be quarreling—struggling. There was a sound as of hurrying feet.

Something gathered and sang, then burst in Mason's brain — something which trailed off in a diminishing scream like the whistle of a rocket. Blackness, blankness followed. He was as the dead!

CHAPTER III.

A Dream Kiss.

WHEN he became conscious in a familiar world again, Mason found himself upon a bed in a room greatly resembling that in which he had parted with his blood to the anemic sufferer. Curtains divided it, but they were drawn back, showing the sunlight on the floor beyond.

It appeared to be afternoon, there was something in the quality of the sun which told him that. An easy, satisfied listlessness embraced his limbs; he had no inclination even to turn his eyes to see if the implements of the operation had been removed.

Silently as a shadow a nurse bent over him as he lay staring. She brushed his forehead lightly with her hand, and hurried away. The old doctor returned with her in a moment, smiling as he came between the curtains.

Mason did not remember it all, at that moment, and he met the old man's eyes without resentment.

"Ah-h, you are quite yourself again!" said the old man, with evident pleasure in his face and voice. "We'll have you up and out of this in a day or two. How are you, heh?"

Mason opened his mouth to reply, but no sound followed the message of brain to vocal apparatus. He struggled to utter a word, a terrified sweat starting from every pore; struggled and gasped in vain. No sound rewarded his efforts; he was dumb!

"How is this, what is it?" asked the old man, leaning over him.

Mason pointed to the nurse's chart and pencil. The old man handed them to him.

"I can't speak—dumb," Mason scrawled, his weak hand wandering over the page, the pencil scarcely felt in his numb fingers.

"Strange, strange!" muttered the old man, the written word before his eyes, the dumb evidence of Mason's stricken, fear-strained face on the pillow at his side. "Perhaps it is only a spasmodic weakness," said he hopefully, turning to Mason, the chart on his knee, "which will yield to a strengthening stimulant. Nurse, a little wine."

She brought it with silent alacrity, and lifted Mason's head while he drank. It brought a little flush into his pale cheeks, but his stubborn tongue and paralyzed vocal cords remained as unresponsive to his efforts of speech as if they had been frozen.

"Remarkable!" said the old man, looking at the nurse queerly. "My daughter was speechless for days before the operation. But you will be glad to learn, I know"—turning to Mason as he spoke—"that she has recovered that faculty, and is improved, hopefully, vastly improved, in every way this morning."

Mason's eyes answered for him; he was glad to hear it, indeed, even though the girl's infirmity seemed to have been transferred to him like a Brahman's sickness.

The old man assured Mason that the loss of speech was but a temporary inconvenience, and not a thing to worry about.

"I'll have a specialist in to see you this morning," said he.

Instead of one specialist, there came three. They sounded Mason from heel to crown; rammed fingers down his throat; peered, pried, and experimented. But to no purpose. They went away again without being able to name the cause of the patient's inability to utter a sound.

The case was remarkable in pathology, they said, and that was all the comfort they gave Mason for the loss of a voice that had been quite satisfactory in its day.

Mason's strength returned to him but slowly as the days filed along. He felt, indeed, as if he had been drained of both spirit and blood, and that he never should walk in the sun again, never speak to men, never take up the unfinished part in his interrupted life. In unuttered words he cursed the night that had thrown him in with the old doctor whose world was his daughter, and whose selfishness had been the cause of his misfortune.

If the old man had consented to the closing of the artery that night when his assistant protested that it was time, Mason knew that he would not have been lying there, the hull of his old self, a broken thing without a gleam of promise for the future.

It was murder. They had killed him that night, and this artificial thing of the semblance of life which they had put back in his body in place of his living soul was mechanical, and could have no voice.

Such fantastic thoughts plagued him constantly. He came to believe himself a surgical monstrosity, the mechanical part of a man only. The divine spark had been extinguished in him; it had gone back to the force from which it came, together with that God-lent faculty of speech—man's gift of superiority above beasts.

A nurse attended him constantly; a barber came every morning to shave him. Attentions were lavished upon him, and nothing for his comfort was spared.

And the girl, what of the girl? Would she ever come to thank him for the service he had rendered in giving her life at the expense of his own happiness, health, and hope? No, he said, in the bitterness of his affliction; no, she would not come. That was not the way of the world.

Even the old man seemed to be avoiding him now, having drawn from him all that was useful, and to his greedy, selfish, heartless purpose. And he had done it under the cloak of misrepresentation, after binding him like a criminal in the electric chair.

One day, and that day not far distant, the old man would tire of this expense and thrust him out upon the street. And he did not know from whom to claim redress; the old man's name never had been mentioned in his presence; even the place of his residence, where Mason then lay, drained of all save the bitterness of his soul, was unknown to the victim who had fattened another upon his blood.

He could see it coming, the old man's behavior toward him proclaimed it. They would throw him into the street one day and that would be the end. He knew that would be the end. For beyond that he could not imagine; beyond that event he could not see.

Through all these cloudy days of apprehension for the future, and blame for the old physician for the past, Mason's mind persisted in the disquieting imagination that he was nothing more than a mechanical man. They had drained away his soul with his blood and his voice, he believed.

No matter what strength they might put into his frame at last, they could not make him again as he had been. For what, he asked himself, is a human frame without the divine lantern of the soul to light its dark windows and warm its cold heart?

The answer to this sick fancy came one day.

It was like a rebuke against the groundless whining of a child. That was a fair, warm morning, with a gentle wind moving the draperies as it strolled in through the open windows. Mason looked up out of his pensive train, to see her standing there before the crimson hangings which divided his apartment.

Against the strength of the curtains' dye she seemed a flake of snow on blood.

She was as stately and fair as he had felt her to be that night when he gazed upon her, pity wrenching his heart. She was still painfully thin, and pale as an aster in November winds. But her smile was sweet, and the tears which she wept beside him there, holding his hand, like a penitent at a shrine, paid him for all his suffering. He knew then that his soul had not been absent, but divided, and that part of it was with her, to remain in her keeping for evermore.

"I am the vampire who is living on your blood," said she, "and you must let me give it back to you again."

He stroked her bright hair, like a child playing with some strange fabric; he looked his gratitude for her offer into her eyes; he smiled.

He was grateful to the old doctor after that day that he troubled but little to come near him, having sent this fair lieutenant in his stead. All the learning of the college of physicians could not have brought the balm to his heart, the light and warmth to his soul, that this slim girl carried in her speaking eyes.

Day after day she came to sit beside him and cheer him with her presence, sending the nurse out for her airing. She read to him, she soothed him in his affliction, and opened to him the well of her boundless gratitude.

"I am satisfied with things as they are now," he wrote one day, after their friendship had grown through many visits. "Since you have my blood, it is fitting that you take also the heart that housed it once. All is yours."

She had flushed as she read it, and covered his eyes with her warm hand, as if to hide her confusion from him. But in her eyes there was no denial; on her lips no rebuke.

Slowly his strength came back to him, after a depressing level of weeks. At last he was able to travel, like a child, by holding to chairs and table, to the window and look out upon the world.

So much of it, indeed, as the view presented. That was little, and that little was chimneys and roofs. He was in the back part of the house, and not an object lay within the scope of his vision which would serve as a landmark of identification of that locality.

He woke one day out of a dream that she had kissed him, not satisfied that it was all a dream. He had felt the pressure of her lips upon his own in the twilight between sleep and wakefulness, but she was gone, if she had been there, when he roused from that blissful lassitude and opened his eyes.

He lay a long time in the still room —the nurse being absent at that hour —waiting for her to come and bring the verification of his half dream in her eyes.

The day trolled onward, but she did not come. He questioned the nurse with his eyes, eloquently, but she only shook her head, as if he were a child asking for something which he could not have. He began the next day with impatient hope, which drew out into a hungry fear before the evening fell.

She did not come.

He had only the solace of living over again that delightful moment when her hair brushed his forehead as she bent over him, and her warm lips pressed his. It could not have been a dream; it was her token of farewell. For after that day she came no more.

Mason gained in strength, in spite of his fretful mind, as the days passed blankly. To all his written questions concerning the young woman the nurse only shook her stubborn head. She would not even tell him the family's name. And then one morning the nurse was missing. In her place the surly Japanese who had waited on him the night of his arrival served Mason's breakfast, and looked in every hour or so during the day.

Mason felt that the time had come for him to demand his discharge from the old physician, and leave his ungrateful house.

He believed that he should see her no more. For him the story was written. He was "up" on his assignment, he had received his "thirty," and was coming to the end. He wrote a message to the old doctor and gave it to the Japanese servant.

No answer. As evening fell, and his restlessness and anxiety grew upon him, Mason came to the resolution of making an exploration of the premises, and seeing what he might start from cover in that mysterious house.

Since his confinement in that room he never had seen beyond its threshold, so peculiarly isolated, it seemed, and cut off from the rest of the house. He could stand readily without support now, and walk with a certain numbness of the extremities, but he had no clothing at hand save the long dressing-gown which he at that moment wore.

In this monkish garb he hesitated, not knowing, of course, what he might meet in the course of his explorations. But he considered that there was more owing to him in that house than he was obligated to it in the mere observance of conventionalities. He was at once creditor and benefactor, in the largest terms of humanity. He went resolutely to the door, which opened into the room from a small inner vestibule, and laid his hand upon the latch.

It was locked.

Mason never had felt the need of words before as he did then. He was filled with surging indignation, which almost smothered him for want of a vent. He wondered how far the old man meant to carry that thing, and what purpose might lay behind this evasion and sequestration.

Twilight was settling. He went to the window and searched the neighborhood again, this time with a newer and keener sense, for some object of peculiarity or distinction which would be visible from the street, and which might assist him in fixing the location in a future search.

It seemed very commonplace for a vicinity of such exclusiveness as that house proclaimed it to be—the commonplace of roofs and chimney-pots, little more distinguishing than the roofs and chimney-pots of the poor. There was nothing in that picture to help him.

Very well. To-morrow, when fortified by further strength, and fresh from his sleep, he determined that he would lay hands on the Japanese when he came in with breakfast, and compel him to open the door.

Without being conscious of having been moved, Mason woke next morn-

ing in a different room. The elegant surroundings were gone; the new room was small, with one window, and neither cheerful nor clean. There was no nurse, the barber did not appear, and the furtive eyes of the silent Japanese did not gleam at the door.

'Ring when you want anything; the landlady will wait on you. You are almost well now.

That was the message on a folded paper which lay on top of his clothes. They were arranged on a chair drawn up beside the bed, the same clothing; second-hand shoes and all, which he had worn on the night that he met up with that adventure which had terminated with such melancholy results for him. There was no other word.

Mason's bitterness added to his strength.

The end that he had foreseen had come; he was all but out in the street, sick, speechless, and alone. Weak as he was he got out of bed and dressed. His clothes hung loosely upon his bony figure; he laughed at the picture, a soundless, skeleton laugh, as he reeled before the glass.

Something crackled like paper in a pocket of his coat. He put in his hand and withdrew a packet of bank-notes. Astonished, he stood a moment, the money in his hand. Then he recalled the old man's offer to pay him for his blood. With a hot surge of contempt in his thin cheeks he flung the money down upon the rickety chair.

"Damn your money!" said the message from brain to vocal cords, and "Damn your money!" burst from his long-silent lips.

The sound of his voice quickened him with a great joy. "Damn your money!" he repeated, doubtful whether the sound would issue again.

It was true; he had spoken. The world was still good and fair before him; he was a man again. Yes, a man! He drew a long breath in the exuberance of that thought, and seemed to feel his strength lift within him. Too much of a man to accept such payment for a service for which he already had been paid.

He took up the packet of bank-notes, with the little paper band about it, just as it had come from the bank, turned and flung it down upon the table with all the strength of his arm.

"Damn your money! Do you think I'd charge *her* for a little blood?" said he, the flush of pride on his face.

He had not noted before that moment that the lower sash of the window was raised its full length, but he took this fact in connection now with one somewhat more startling and disconcerting. As the packet of scorned money struck the table it rebounded, and in a flash disappeared through the open window, and vanished from sight in the street.

Mason could scarcely have felt a greater pressure of consternation if his hand had parted from his arm and gone with the money through the window. The result had exceeded his intention. He hurried to the window and peered down, with the intention of hailing somebody and asking him to retrieve the treasure.

The awning was down in front of the store which occupied the lower floor of the house, as the awnings of the neighboring houses were down also, for the sun of the morning was strong on their fronts. This blinded the sidewalk from view, save for the slits between the awnings, across which the passengers on the walk flitted in hurrying stream.

"Hello, down there! Somebody look up here—quick!"

No immediate result. He sent forth his general hail again, and now an aproned man, of dark face which seemed all eyebrows, scowling and Italian of cast, backed to the curb beyond the awning and looked up. He demanded in surly voice:

"Wha's motter wit' chu?"

"I dropped something—look around

there, quick, and see if you can find it," said Mason excitedly.

"Wha' chu drop?"

"Money, money!" said Mason, straining dangerously out of the window. "A great big wad of money, and if you can find it and hold it for me till I come down, I'll pay you a reward worth your trouble—understand?"

"Aw, go on!" said the fellow insultingly.

Mason believed the man had picked up the money before answering his hail. He hurried into his clothing, including the despised shoes, now doubly loathed, after his pampered days, and went down.

He could not get any information out of the Italians who kept the store beneath his room. They turned their backs upon him, with scowls and threats, and orders to go away. Their neighbors, of the same vinous blood, that being a colony of Italians, bore themselves toward him with suspicion when he made inquiries among them. Evidently his story had gone abroad among them, and his balance was in question in that neighborhood.

He considered putting the matter of his loss before the police, but, after weighing the peculiar phases of the case, dropped that thought. He reflected that he could not even give the officials the amount which the package of bills contained, much less explain to them the manner in which it had come into his hands.

Mason had no inclination to return to the room over the Italian store.

Besides that feeling of repugnance that he held for the place, he was anxious concerning a few treasured possessions which he had left in his old room in his trunk. He met with but a cold reception when he called at his former lodging. His effects, he was told by the landlord, were being held by him as pawn for the rent which Mason was in arrears. When he came up with the money he could take them away.

And so it turned out that Mason found himself upon the street, with little strength to face the chill of those foggy nights, and less than two dollars, as he put it in his bitter way, "between his soul and hell."

That afternon he came to the conclusion that it would be better for him to leave San Francisco and seek some humble and inconspicuous situation on a ranch. The one thing that stood between him and the immediate enactment of this resolution was the lack of shoes. Those which he had were worn and unfit for the rigors of the road, and his small cash reserve seemed to mock the hope of new ones.

But even a philosopher and a doctor of law must not be fastidious when want drives and hunger rides, said Mason, or something which had the same substance, anyway. Second-hand shoes would do; second-hand shoes *must* do.

"I want a strong pair, about number nine," said he to the Mission Street dealer who had strings of the foot-gear which had belonged to other men hanging outside his door.

"Here's a pair I got off a sailor the other day," said the merchant, separating the shoes from the others which crowded them, dustily, on the string.

"Let's see them," requested Mason.

"They's nothin' fancy about 'em, friend," the merchant frankly confided, "but look at them there soles!"

"Yes," said Mason thoughtfully. "Well, I'll try them on."

They fitted well enough, and he clamped away in them, leaving his older ones in the shop. Some disquietude and undefined sense of creepiness attended Mason as he walked out in another man's shoes. But thus newly fortified, he felt his inclination to quit the city growing weak. He had come there to conquer; should he fly at the first shadow of defeat?

No, he said; and again, no! A supper and a cheap bed out of what remained, and in the morning he would rise refreshed and demand again of the

world and San Francisco a position which would at least return him bread.

And then there swept over him again a disturbing thought concerning the shoes.

What kind of weather had the poor devil who had parted with them fallen across? Or perhaps it had been a coroner's case, some broken vessel of human-kind disgorged from the tremendous gullet of the sea. He stamped his feet, scuffed them, and laughed at his own squeamishness. They would do, they must do, until he could earn a better pair.

But it was disturbing to think that maybe the blood let out by violence had run into those shoes, or the cold, stiff feet of one drowned and long-drifting had strained their leather as they swelled to mock the symmetry of life. But they must do; a man out of a job should thank Heaven, perhaps, that his feet were not on the ground.

CHAPTER IV.

A Dram of Cognac.

THERE was a little old Chinaman in Fish Alley who kept a tin kettle of stew simmering and muttering in thick-rising bubbles over a charcoal fire. On one side of this open-air victualer crabs and lobsters scrambled and rasped in their boxes, still glistening with the moisture of the sea upon their armored backs; on the other the wares of a pork merchant lay spread in tempting confusion, from the half-sides of pigs roasted with certain vital organs still in their cavities, to the delectable bits of entrails which those peculiar people set such great store upon.

Such customers as came to the stew-peddler—and they were neither inconsiderable nor far between—took their refreshment standing, guarding spoon and pannikin against the jostling throng. There was no privacy in the stew-man's business, for his mission in that place of slime and strong smells was to serve those whom necessity had stripped of delicacy.

The mixture in the gray and shrunken cook's kettle was of thick and glutinous nature, greenish of color, and composed of what outcast odds and ends of the animal and vegetable worlds no man but the keeper of the pot himself might know. For the peace of the future and the stomachic qualms of the present, none of the hungry, driven by the cross-currents of adversity, ever questioned its formula. No man has the right to be squeamish when he has but a cent to spend.

That was the price of the stew, one cent a serving. The old man dished it up in little tin pans, which he kept nested one within another on an end of his little stove.

Mason walked back and forth through the alley several times, considering the stew. Each turn was shorter than the one before, for the pangs of hunger were rife within him, and the last cent which he possessed was clasped ready in his hand. No matter what it was made of, his wild and tortured senses clamored, the stew was the one thing within the reach of that locally despised copper which would keep life in his body for another day.

Since the morning that he had inadvertently flung the money, left by the old doctor to repay him for his services, out of the open window, Mason had fared hard at the hands of the world. Time and again he cursed himself in those hungry days for the extravagant folly which led him to handle the money so carelessly.

He had not meant to throw it away; that was simply the expression of a contempt for the old man's act which words would not express. It had been his intention, from the first touch of the money, to pick it up in the end and put it in his pocket, to be broken only in the pressure of an evil day. His plan had been, that morning, to seek the world over until he found her, and

deliver the money into her hands unchanged.

It had been a romantic notion which a full stomach supported. Since then he had marched through the fires of starvation which he would have pawned his soul to appease.

In the days before he met the unknown physician, Mason frequently fancied himself hungry, when necessity confined him to stew when his desires sought steak. But he knew the difference now between hunger and desire. Since those times of comparative plenty he had walked the streets when the scents rising from cooking food through the grated sidewalk were as poignant torture to his starving stomach as the sight of inaccessible water to one dying of thirst. He had tramped days together, and long nights through, when the sight of the bread in bake-shop windows, and the displays in restaurants and groceries stirred in him the most violent and burglarious thoughts.

It is beyond the conception of one who has not undergone privation and suffering in the midst of plenty on display, to measure the pain of body and soul which the mere beholding of these things sets raging. It is a horrible enough thing to starve beyond the reach of food, but it is hell in refinement to perish with it lying at arm's length, with nothing more than clear plate-glass between.

And so Mason, unkempt and disheveled from sleeping upright on benches in the city parks; gaunt, bony, pale, and weak, turned again back to the old Chinaman who sold the stew, like a carrion bird hovering near a thing which it feared to approach. He held the copper ready in his palm, and with a turn of the wrist exposed it to the Chinaman's alert eye.

Words were not needed in that business, where the price was fixed and the purveyor had but one thing to offer. The next moment the old man was filling one of the little tin pans from his blubbering kettle. He took a spoon from a can of water and jabbed it, dripping and uncleansed from the last mouth that it had served, into the mixture and held out his hand for the coin.

As Mason gave it to him he was troubled by that uncomfortable sensation of being narrowly watched, which a sensitive person sometimes is aware of even though the back is turned toward the impertinent eyes. He shifted on his weary feet as the old man opened a greasy cigar-box and deposited the money before offering to surrender the dish of stew.

Near Mason's elbow a young man was standing, a look of lively sympathy in his face. He was a fresh and slender man, as clean as beach sand, but dressed with a certain swagger and stridency of color which lent the impression that he was connected with the liquor trade.

"I was just wondering, old man, if you were as hungry as that?" he said, gesturing eloquently with his well-kept white hands.

"No, I was helping the poor!" Mason replied, with bitter resentment.

The old Chinaman was standing patiently with the hot pan of stew in hand. Mason motioned to a grizzled, hairy old hobo who had just finished a pan and was that moment licking the spoon. The old beggar thanked him in alcoholic wheeze, and Mason turned away, sick and dizzy with the hunger that pride had denied this succor.

The young man who had addressed him stepped quickly to his side and laid a hand on Mason's arm with something of apology in his manner.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings that way," he said.

"I haven't any feelings left," Mason told him, shrinking from the touch of the stranger's hand with a scowl.

"But you're hungry," the other persisted, keeping step at Mason's side.

"What of it?" growled Mason. "There are others."

"I was just going to say that if you'll come with me I know a quiet

little place right around here where we can fix that part of it, all right," the young man offered.

"I never accepted a meal in charity in my life," said Mason, emotion thickening his utterance.

"Oh, that's all right, too," the stranger said lightly, with a wave of his eloquent hands.

"But I was going to say that I'm ready to forget that for a while," Mason finished, with a melancholy shadow of a smile.

"It's not charity, it's an invitation, man to man," said the stranger heartily.

"Which way do we go?" asked Mason, with an eagerness which was almost rude, recalling with satisfaction that it was nearly midday, and that the roasts would be ready in the restaurants without waiting.

"Right around here, and down a couple of blocks," the host returned, steadying Mason's tottering legs with an arm at his elbow.

It was a satisfactory meal.

The host shared it with Mason, sitting at a little table in the place which was part barroom and part restaurant, with trophies of the deep sea in its window. There was coffee at the end, and the young man would have a dash of cognac, which the old snoozer at the bar smuggled in regularly, he said.

Mason reflected afterward that he should have known better. But the heart of a hungry man who has been appeased, and the blood set forging on its course again, and the hope relighted in his soul, is ready to make concessions, even against the caution of experience. When Mason came to himself he was at sea.

If there had been any doubt of that in the internal symptoms, the external environment would have righted it instantly.

There was the rigging of a sailing vessel above his head, the planks of the deck, hard and cold, under his ribs, and the drumming of sails against the cordage and yards. He looked up at the moon, racing as if in desperate fright through the thin rack, and the smell of the sea was in his nostrils; he struggled to his feet and looked over the rail to see the gray waters, silvered here and there when the moon leaped a chink in the clouds.

One approached him as he hung there weakly on the rail, his head in a whirl, the hopelessness of death in his heart, but he had neither the interest nor the curiosity to look behind to see who he might be or what he was like. The man spoke, after standing silent a little while, not unkindly, it cheered Mason to note.

"You'd better turn in below now, son," said he, placing a hand on Mason's shoulder. "Tumble into any bunk you find empty, and in the morning you'll come up on even keel."

There was no need for Mason to ask where he was and what his predicament meant. The answer was in his throbbing head and aching limbs, in the rumbling sails above him, in the plunging vessel which took the mounting swells in eager leaps. The thing had happened to him which befell the careless every day in San Francisco. His host had been a crimp, and he had been shanghaied for a cruise to some far corner of the earth.

There was one comfort, even in that bleak discovery, and that was that it was not the time of year for whalers to put out for the north. Whatever of hardship lay before him, he knew that he was to be spared the agonies of that ice-locked world, of which sailors had told him, and the squalor and savagery in the lives of the men who sought its doubtful wealth.

"If I could have a drink of water," he said, sinking down again to the deck.

The man brought him a drink in a huge tin cup—an act of kindness over which Mason was many days in wonder when he came to know that ship and the men aboard of her. He was a shaggy man of gorilla build, and hairy too, as some beast out of the wilds.

His chest was broad and thick, and his voice was resonant in its great cavity like the deep tones of a 'cello.

"I'll ease you down," said he, lifting Mason by the arm, "for the light's little help to a strange foot."

And there, in the cramped, sour-smelling forecastle, already foul with the breath of sleeping men, and the emanations of their unwashed bodies, the fellow tumbled Mason into a bunk. Close by his ear there sounded the dash and gurgle of the sea as the vessel churned into the great swells—two easy ones, one big one, as Mason had always noticed they ran.

He lay counting them as the ship, attended by the strange sounds in rigging and hull which are so alarming to a landsman's ears, climbed and plunged, climbed and plunged. One, *two,* THREE; one, *two,* THREE; the third one as if she had plunged into the crater from which all the waters of the seven seas came forth.

He was too sick to question either the present or the future, or to be frightened by the trap in which he had been caught. Above the throbbing of his head and the sickness of his vitals, the one thought which persisted with anything like clarity was that his quest for the doctor's daughter was at an end for a long, long time to come.

Next morning they drove him on deck, unfit as he was, and sick to the foundation of his bones, in that unsympathetic fashion of the sea. They set him at strange tasks, to none of which he was equal, and the mate, who was none other than the broad man with long arms who had given him water and a helping arm the night past, cursed him for his ineptness and handled him roughly.

It was a season of interminable agony—that first watch which Mason stood at sea. Before the bell had sounded the shift of hands, Mason had fallen unconscious to the deck.

At sea every man is material, and when one falls sick the crude energies of those over him are bent to salvage as much out of him as may be. If he cannot be set up on his feet again as good as before, then perhaps he can be set up good for something, at least.

If he cannot turn one mill, he may be able to give profitable service in another. And so, at sea fewer sick men die than in the hospitals on land. Death at sea is an unprofitable business—taken all around.

It was a matter of days before Mason was fit to stand on his feet and bear the weight of his wasted body again. The mate put him at small jobs then—mostly useless and time-filling, it seemed to Mason. The rest of the crew, of whom there were nine, the sawed-off ends of human lumber from as many different lands, it seemed, were kind enough to him in a way.

That is to say, they did not turn him out of his bunk, nor snatch his portion of food from his pannikin, although one of them stole his waistcoat while he was sick, and appeared in it now with no pretense of concealment. This fellow was the most sociable of the lot—a young Portuguese with a list of assorted profanity from seven tongues.

It was from this one of his mates that Mason learned the destination of the vessel. Valparaiso, it was, and the cargo was bottled beer. But down in the captain's cabin, said the sailor, was the most valued portion of the cargo, and the old man had brought his wife along to look after it. This was nothing less than four chests of gold, said Paul, the sailor.

"I seen 'em when they brought 'em aboard," he confided, whispering behind his hand. "They fetched 'em out in a launch the night we sailed, and the mate and the old man h'isted 'em aboard, and two men come up after 'em from the launch and helped carry 'em below. A little while after that them crimps fetched you over, just as we was passin' out our line to the tug."

Mason was not impressed with the story. It made no difference to him how much gold the captain was guarding in his cabin, but for the sake of

keeping the sailor's friendship he thought it best to make a pretense of interest.

"But they don't ship gold these times on any such windjammer as this little brig, Paul," said he. "It must be something else."

"Not on your life—it's gold!" persisted Paul. "Bill, the cabin-boy, says they keep it locked in the captain's cabin, and it takes up so much room that he has to sleep in the mate's. The captain's wife she never takes her eyes off of it, only when she comes on deck to walk around at night. Then the old man he sets in front of the door. That's what Bill says. That woman she carries a gun on her all the time, too. I seen it, man, when she was up last night. I was in the port-watch in place of Dutchy. He had a bad pain."

"Well, it don't matter to you and me, Paul, how much money the old man's got aboard, I guess," Mason said. "We'll never get our hands on any more of it than the law allows."

"I don't know about that, either," said Paul with covert significance. "If I had three good men at my back—say, you owe the old man one, anyhow!"

"I owe him several, when it comes to that," Mason agreed with deep resentment.

"Sure you do, every man of us does! But they ain't all got the nerve—they ain't gentlemen like me and you, mate. If we could line Layfield up with us— Say, there's a *man!*"

"There are good spots in him, I believe myself," owned Mason, remembering the night when he woke up out of the drug and Layfield, the mate, had befriended him.

"He'd cut a man's throat—yes, or a woman's or a kid's—and never bat his eye!" said Paul.

"Maybe," said Mason.

"Sure he would," maintained Paul admiringly, "and so would I!"

"I don't suppose you'll ever have to do it, though," Mason said, humoring the young man, who seemed almost childish to him in his poor boasting and his glamorous dream of rifling the captain's chests of gold.

"I'll pass the word around, Tarheel," said he; for so they called Mason, owing to the manner in which his feet clung to deck when there was work aloft, "and you keep your eyes open. What? I know these waters down here off Baja California like I know this deck, and I could put it over on him, I tell you, Tarheel, if I had two more men like you at my back!"

Mason took little stock in the young man's talk at first, but as whisperings of the captain's treasure began to grow, and the laying together of heads in the forecastle became more frequent, he began to fear that some mischief might grow out of the thing—to the peril of them all.

Whether the captain carried anybody's money in his cabin—which was improbable, unless it might be some ill-won treasure which had to be smuggled away—or whether he carried nothing more there than his wife—he was not the man to be caught asleep.

Captain Peters was a seaman of the old type—huge, bearded, ruddy, with a strip of forehead two fingers deep, and pig's eyes gleaming out of the hair of his face. He had a mighty hand and an arm as hard as a capstan bar, and if he had any soul within him at all, it must have been compressed into the compass of a nut. The evidence of its possession was not apparent in his face or deeds.

As for Mason, he did not progress at the seaman's trade. The dizzy heights of the crosstrees were appalling to him; the lines of the rigging a tangle out of which he could make neither order nor sense. His feet clung to the deck as if weighted with lead when there was a task to be done among the dipping, swaying yards.

"Tarheel, you'll never make a sailor," said the mate on a day long after they had left the fogs of the California coast behind, and were forging onward through warm winds and ever-growing intensity of sun.

"I agree with you there," said Mason.

"You're the first man I ever took under my hand that I couldn't make anything out of," grumbled the mate, "and it's my opinion there's something wrong with you—a part gone out of you, or something like that. Well, you're to report to the cabin for the next watch—the old man's goin' to put you in Bill's place and Bill in yours. It can't be none the worse for me, anyhow, I guess. Maybe you know enough to carry beans to a hog!"

CHAPTER V.

The Woman in the Door.

BAD blood was growing between the captain and the mate.

Mason learned more on this head before he had been in the cabin a day than he would have come into possession of in a month on deck. Before the men of the forecastle there was a formal politeness between the two. The mate was "Mr. Layfield," and he, in his turn of preserving appearances and discipline before the crew, was all respect.

But in the cabin where, in that fair weather and calm sea, the two of them met at meals, there was a surliness on the captain's part and a defiant contempt in the bearing of the mate, which seemed to forecast a storm. If it did not break before the end of the voyage, thought Mason, it would be a marvel of self-control on the part of one of them.

Already there were growls at the captain's end of the table, which were choked down in his bearded throat when Mason entered suddenly in his work of bearing off and on. And there was concern in the face of the captain's wife also as she sat between the two of them as if on guard.

As for the treasure in the captain's state-room, Mason was no more enlightened than his mates in the forecastle, although he had promised Paul to be on the lookout, and verify for himself the presence of the chests when the door was opened.

It never was opened in his presence, but there was one mysterious thing which provided him no little food for speculation.

No matter for the fact that the captain's wife never was absent from the table, there always was an extra tea-service for him to wash. And there were certain dainties ordered from the cook, and borne down by Mason, which never appeared on the table. It seemed unlikely, judging from the hand that she bore at table, that the captain's wife consumed these things in addition in the privacy of her state-room.

Also, Mason had a standing order for two pails of hot water every morning. These he carried down and left, as instructed, before the door of the captain's state-room, which was occupied alone by the captain's wife. Mason could not believe—from the surface evidence which the woman presented—that the captain's wife used this water for her bath.

She was a dark, greasy woman. Her hair seemed as if oil could have been wrung out of it, and her eyes were small and quick, black, scant-browed. She was short and muscular, with a sure foot for any weather.

The captain called her Sadie.

She spoke at table only when addressed, or in serving the coffee and tea. For the mate's lumbering gallantries she had no more than a deprecating smile, but Mason was quick to see that she was the cause of the trouble between the captain and his first officer.

He gave her the credit also of being the innocent cause—for her conduct appeared to be beyond reproach.

For all of that the mate leered at her and drew suggestive eyes and said things with blunt, double-meaning, carrying himself as if he had the upper-hand of the captain in something. His conduct was disgusting in the extreme to Mason, who wondered at the captain's restraint when he was, by war-

rant of stature and bulk, the better man of the two.

They had been two weeks out when they fell in with foul weather, beating up out of the southwest in one long succession of hurricanes, which set back the progress of their peaceful days and drove them to seek sea-room far to the westward of their course. It was bad weather for the humor of everybody, although Mason had found his legs and was taking on strength like a man in training.

Often in those stormy days he was obliged to lend a hand on deck, which was not so distasteful to him as at first, for it gave him a break in his irksome, though light, duties below.

Yet through all of those days—and the days following—he was mystified by the presence of the extra tea-service among the dishes of the cabin-table. The hot water was dispensed with while the storm blew, but those chests of gold in the captain's state-room seemed to hold their appetite as before.

In all the time that he had been serving the captain's table he never had seen that door open once. When the captain's wife went in—and when she came out of it—he did not know. But the captain permitted no loitering there on his part beyond the necessary time for serving the food and clearing away.

It was at supper on the day that the storm blew out that the captain and the mate came at last to the rupture which had long threatened.

The sun had come out with an assuring gleam just before setting, and the wind was fair behind them again. The captain came down to his meal with a show of cheerfulness seldom seen, and the mate seemed to have improved his manners with the weather also.

The captain's wife sat between the two men, as usual, at the round table. When the mate came down, after they had begun their soup, he gave her a smile and a pleasant word, which she acknowledged with her smile. There was nothing cheerful in that smile of the captain's wife—nor in any smile which Mason ever had seen on her face. It had something of surliness in it, and more of threat than fellowship, he thought.

"So you don't remember Honolulu and 1892?" said the mate, lifting his eyes to her face suddenly as he left off arranging his napkin under his chin.

He spoke as if taking up a conversation lately interrupted, and there was less of hard insolence in his tones, Mason observed, than usual. She started a little—or at least her hands seemed to stiffen and her head moved with a quickness, as of shock. But she answered without tremor, but in the tone of slight vexation.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Layfield," she replied.

"Honolulu and 1892," said he, "when me and you—"

"Hold!" thundered Captain Peters, bringing his fist down on the table in a smashing blow.

He motioned Mason out, and as he went he saw the woman rise from the table. He hastened to the galley and took up the tray containing the next course of the meal. Before he was half-way down the companionway he heard the combat join; when he entered the cabin, his tray held high, the captain was on the floor and the mate's hands were buried in his beard.

There was a noise in that cabin then as if some monster had been drawn up from the deep and thrust there to gasp and die! The two men thrashed and heaved upon the floor—their heavy boots overturning chairs as they beat in wild struggle for advantage.

Now the captain tore the mate's strangling clasp from his throat, and cursed him as he hammered at his face, but the mate was a lithe and flexible man — he wound about the captain with arms and legs and rode him like despair.

Mason put his load down and ran to the tangle of hairy faces and clutching hands.

"Mr. Layfield, you're killing him!" he cried.

Behind him Mason heard a door open as he stood with his hand on the mate's shoulder, vainly trying to drag him from the captain's chest.

"Let go!" warned the mate, turning his savage face for one moment to Mason. "This is my fight! Leave me be!"

There was a swish of a dress past Mason like a wind over grass, and the captain's wife stood over the mate—a long knife uplifted to strike. Mason called a warning and clutched for her arm, staying it as the knife-point bit into the mate's shoulder and crunched upon the bone.

The mate sprang up with a curse and struck out in blind rage with one long arm. The blow sent the woman reeling back against the wall, and Mason, turning from the captain, who lay propped on his elbow, his face purple, his breath heaving in his chest like a drowning man's, and looked toward the forbidden door.

It was swinging open, and within it —her face drained by fear, her eyes great with the horror of what she had suffered and seen—stood the doctor's daughter, lifting her hands to him in silent appeal!

Mason's first impulse was to fly to her and drag her from her prison-place. But this thought was cooled by a quick flood of reasoning, for the succor of which he, in his later and balanced moments, thanked the source from which it came.

If they should learn that he had seen her, and discovered the secret which they, for reasons known only to their own guilty souls, were guarding so jealously, all chance for helping her would be lost. They would put him out of the way, perhaps, stopping at nothing to carry out in secrecy the thing so secretly began.

He signed to her quickly to go back and shut the door.

Quick as fire in wild powder she understood, and before the captain's wife had staggered again to her feet the door was closed. The relief that sprang into the dark woman's face when she turned and saw that their secret was safe, told Mason that his quick reckoning of the consequences of discovery had not been overdone.

The mate raised his arm again in threat of another blow, but Mason stayed him with a word.

"Yes, you're right, she's a woman," said the mate, coming back to himself by degrees. "But I'm the *man* here," said he, lowering upon her; "you see I'm the *man!*"

She stretched out her arm in quick gesture of defense and went back to the forbidden door, into which she let herself hurriedly and without a word. The captain was standing beside the table now, holding to it with one hand, breathing in great gulps like a fish.

"She was mine before she was yours," said the mate, threatening him with his fist, "and she'd be mine to-morrow—to-night—if I wanted her! You've had your medicine now! Go to your kennel like a dog!"

"Let's have no more of this, Mr. Layfield," said the captain with the poor shred of his official dignity to his aid. "Arrange the table," said he to Mason, "and bring on the meat."

Mason pushed a chair against the captain's weak knees, and he sat down. Then, when Mason placed the platter before him and lifted the cover, he took up his carving-knife and cut the meat with a hand steady enough, it seemed to Mason, for one who had just heaved himself back across the line of death!

The mate's shoulder was bleeding. Mason went to his stateroom with the injured man and gave the cut attention —it being situated out of both the sight and the reach of the self-sufficient mate.

It was not a serious matter, and within five minutes after Mason had applied an antiseptic and fastened a piece of gauze over the cut with adhesive plaster, the mate was sitting in his accustomed place in front of the captain at the table, eating with usual appetite.

Mason wondered what might be at the bottom of that rascality, and thanked the guardian of his unlucky days for the coincident in his distress and her own. Again he had been brought to her side by the stress of want.

In the inscrutable lines of their two lives this thing was laid down. Hopeless as his opportunities seemed at that hour, Mason did not doubt for one moment that he had been thrown there according to the prearranged plans of the Great Sense, and that he should stand between her and her peril at the hour of her sorest need.

That she was an unwilling voyager, like himself, he knew; but to what end she was destined he could not even frame a guess. There was something dark and crooked behind that deal, and the extreme caution and secrecy of the captain and all concerned in the matter was comforting evidence that the most serious part of the clouded transaction was yet to be carried out.

The first thing in any place for her assistance must be to communicate with her, learn what she knew of the scheme afoot, and give the assurance that he would be alert when the time for helping her should come.

It was slender hope that he could offer her, at the best, but he knew that it would be a beam in the night of her trouble. Her face told him, in that brief moment that their eyes met, that she was breaking her heart in the fear of her situation.

Mason was in humor now to lend ear to Paul's piratical ambitions and join him in them, even. Where there was something worse than piracy to be overcome, he had no scruple about the end to be employed.

If he could inflame the young man's mind with wild stories of the riches he had seen through the open door of the captain's stateroom, it was not unlikely that the sailor could bring over the rest of the crew.

As he worked that evening Mason grew warm with this scheme, and only when he paused to count the consequences of the crew finding no greater treasure concealed in the captain's quarters than a pale, terrified young woman, he dismissed all hope of good in an uprising of that sort. It rested on his own efforts to save her.

Unless he could make something out of this open breach between the captain and mate, and enlist the latter in his support, there was nothing to be looked for in the way of help aboard that ship.

There was no doubt that the old physician — whose name he did not even know — was wealthy. Beyond question he would redeem any obligation that Mason might enter into on behalf of his daughter. Perhaps the mate would listen with the ear of cupidity, sharpened by hate, and join him on the promise of future reward.

Yet that seemed doubtful. The mate was a shrewd, suspicious man, and promises were hard to cash. If he had the ready money—but he might as well have considered a battle-ship coming to his aid.

The first thing to do was to slip quietly about, lurk in shadows at all hours of the day and night, and listen and spy. He might slip a written word to her under the door when the captain's wife was off guard—or even speak to her and quiet her raging fears.

Paul had prompted him in this course of espionage over the supposed treasure.

"Slip around like a cat or a waiter and you'll see 'em with them chests open some night countin' the money," said Paul. "But you'll have to knock them heels off of your shoes—they make too damn much noise!"

So, in the galley, by the light of the cook's dim lamp, Mason prepared that night to act at last on this week-old advice. He never could handle those shoes without a feeling of repugnance, which had grown on him and intensified since the first night that he put them on, sitting on the bench in Portsmouth Square. He had come to be-

lieve now that they had belonged to some Chinaman who had died of leprosy.

He took the hatchet and held the heel of one shoe on the edge of the coal-box.

A blow detached its first layer, which had worn thin under the usage that Mason had given it on pavement and decks. He was lifting the hatchet for another stroke when he noted that the heel had been hollowed out and the space filled with something white. It looked like a queer trick for a cobbler to play on a customer.

Mason touched the white substance gingerly with the end of his finger. Cotton.

A strange trick for a cobbler, indeed, and of far more trouble, it seemed to him, than profit. He plucked the filling out. There was a weight to it and a feel of solidity which made his heart jump.

The cook was sitting outside, his back against the rail, smoking. If there was a secret in that shoe-heel, Mason felt that it was not one to share. He bent over as if busy at his job, struck the box a blow or two, and swore to give it color. Then he unwrapped the packet.

Five diamonds, cut to the rarest scintillating facet, lay twinkling in the palm of his hand. A mist came over his sight as he made a rough computation of their value and slipped them into the pocket of his coat.

With shaking hands he unlaced the other shoe and fairly tore it from his foot. A man like the owner of that shoe did not put all his eggs in one basket; you could gamble on that, Mason said. But it took more work to get the other heel off, and it came away in a piece.

Mason pried the first lift off with a butcher knife.

The cotton-filled cavity in that heel contained one large, partly cut diamond and two red stones which Mason judged were rubies. From their manner of distribution, he believed that the stones must be equal in value to the five diamonds in his pocket.

Here was wealth at hand to corrupt a State Legislature, much less the mate of a doubtful ship in a suspicious trade. The day of his down-hill traveling was past. Here was a return on all his investment of suffering; in his pocket lay a force of greater value for his present need than a holdful of guncotton.

But future procedure called for craft and cunning.

His treasure must not be discovered, or it would be his no more. Yet, the situation called for action. With that wind behind them, they would slip down below the line in a little while. If there was anything to be done, it must be put through while they were within touch with the Mexican coast, which, according to the chart that he had seen spread on the captain's table, they had been following when the storm carried them out of their track.

Mason picked up the heels of his shoes, walked to the rail, and tossed them into the sea. The mate, whose watch it was, stood a little way along, moodily smoking a cigar.

"What's that you're tossin' overboard, Tarheel?" he inquired with friendly interest.

"An olive bottle," returned Mason readily.

"I'd like to know who in the hell eats olives aboard of this old tub!" said the mate.

"The passenger in the captain's stateroom," Mason said, drawing near, lowering his voice.

"Oh, that one!" said the mate, throwing away the short end of his cigar.

He turned, facing Mason, and seemed to be studying him intently in the gloom.

"Who in the hell are you, Tarheel?" he asked suddenly.

"A floater out of the park," Mason answered with a little laugh.

"Well, I guess it don't matter; you done me a good turn to-day, anyhow. If you hadn't caught that woman's arm

she'd 'a' split my heart to the point. She's done that kind of a thing before —she knows how."

"I'm sorry I wasn't a second quicker," Mason lamented.

"Never mind," said the mate cheerfully. "Have you ever seen her?"

"Her? You mean—"

"The little China girl below."

"No; I didn't know she was a Chinese," Mason said.

"Yes; there's no need of a secret between me and you that I can see, Tarheel, but you keep it under your vest. She is. She's goin' down to Valparaiso to be the bride of Lee Fong, the richest Chinaman in Chile."

"Is it possible?"

"Imported specially, and sold to him by the Frisco dealers at a big price. They sent her aboard doped. I never saw her, but I know that's the straight of it."

Just as well, considered Mason, for him to hold that belief for a while. He felt greatly encouraged by the mate's expression of obligation to him for checking the blow of the captain's wife before it reached its mark. Out of that little plant of gratitude he hoped to cultivate a tree heavy enough to swing his weight upon, and more.

Mason put his hand in his pocket. The diamonds felt slippery in his fingers; indicative, he thought, of the uncertain hold which men have upon the treasures of this earth. Well, let them slip from him as they might, they had a good work ahead of them before they should go, or a try at it, at the worst.

The mate, being in the frame for it, told him a good deal more about that ship and its master, none of which was very savory for chaste ears. He told, also, something of himself, and how he had served a term in prison for smuggling opium, and how he had worked at the nefarious business of crimp.

"I'm goin' back to that line again, too, after this voyage," said he with a sigh over the recollections of his pleasant past, for so the man considered it. "I'll be back in Frisco about the time the whalers are fitting out, and some of the steamers carry big crews. They are always hard to fill, and a man that knows his business can make a hundred dollars a day."

"I wonder," said Mason reminiscently, remembering the deathly sickness of his first night aboard that ship, "if you know what it was that fellow doped me with?"

"Sure I do," said the mate cheerfully. "I've got the ingredients of it in my chest right now. I'm never without it, for them bitters is a handy thing to have with you when you see a good openin' to work your hand."

CHAPTER VI.

Unwelcome Company.

THREE days later they were back in Mexican waters, or if not exactly within the limit, plainly in sight of the coast. Mason believed that his hour was at hand to begin the corruption of the mate. He smiled over the word. It would be a pretty hard matter to addle that old egg.

In spite of all his slinking and dodging, Mason never had been able to find the door of the prisoner's stateroom unguarded, if not within, then without. Either the captain's wife always was on duty inside when Mason's tasks kept him below, or, if she chanced to be on deck for her daily exercise, the captain himself sat with his bottle and pipe at the table, his eye jealously on the door.

Mason had caught the murmur of voices within the stateroom once or twice, but even that little bit of conversation seemed purposely subdued and guarded. He believed that they must have cast over her the spell of fear of the others aboard the ship, and probably had elevated themselves to the false position of her protectors against perils which might descend upon her if her presence aboard became known.

Mason had neglected no opportunity to advance himself further in the good graces of the mate. He had told him his name, and as much of his past as he thought necessary. The mate was pleased with the fact that Mason was a lawyer, and that he expected to return to San Francisco.

"Say, we could go into a kind of partnership — a man in my line needs a lawyer every little while," said he. "It'd be like havin' one in the family."

Discipline on that ship was a matter mainly for the captain's eye. The mate was in nowise particular when the old man was below. He could gab with the men of his watch on easy terms just so long as they didn't get too familiar and drop the handle from his name. And when that happened somebody measured his length upon the deck.

Mason always was the letter of respect.

Besides that, he contrived with the cook to save apart choice things for the mate's palate when stress of weather or duty on deck held him from the table at which the captain sat. And now the time was at hand for realizing on this experiment in reaching the heart of a bestial man by the avenue of his mouth.

There was a cloudy moon that night, and they were running on a long tack, with the decks aslant under the full-pulling sails. Mason joined the mate where he paced back and forth, his eye on things aloft. After passing the civilities of the evening Mason said:

"I'm afraid there's some mistake about that girl in the captain's stateroom, Mr. Layfield."

"What's that?" asked the mate, coming around short in his tracks.

"She's not a Chinese, sir."

"Hell's bells! Do you mean you've seen her?"

"Yes, and more; I've talked to her." Mason did not feel that the occasion required the details of the time and place of the conversation.

"Who is she—how'd she get in the China girl's place?" demanded the incredulous mate.

"She's the daughter of a rich doctor in Frisco, and she doesn't know, any more than I do, how she got in the China girl's place, sir. But I'll tell you, Mr. Layfield, somebody's going to dance a lively tune for this thing. Her father's a big man up there, and he'll be turning heaven and earth till he finds her. And when he does—well, there's Federal prosecution ahead for everybody that had a hand in this business."

The mate whistled; a little, soft sound of astonishment.

"So you've seen her," said he. "What's she like?"

"She's not so much to see right now; kind of tall and big-eyed, and as thin as the side of your hand," Mason returned, despising himself inwardly for the libel. "But her father would pay a big piece of money to the man or men who'd get her safely out of this trap before she falls into old Lee Fong's dirty, long-nailed hands."

The mate measured a little beat upon the deck, which he paced in silence, his head bent. Then he came close to Mason, stopped, shot a quick look around into the shadows.

"What do you suppose he'd put up?" he asked.

"I had only a minute's talk with her, and I didn't come to that," said Mason, carrying out his falsehood with good face; "but I'd think he'd go twenty-five thousand, at the least."

"Yes, but there'd be no security for a man, no guarantee that he'd pay up unless she could be held somewhere till the money was put down," reflected the cautious mate. "That'd be risky, too; damned risky!"

"She's wearing a brooch with a big diamond in it—she says it's worth two thousand dollars. She'll try to slip it out to me some way, and she says I'm authorized to offer it to the man—and you're the only man that can put it over — who'll fix it so she and I can

be lowered in a provisioned boat some night. We've got to have quick action on the proposition, too, while we're close to land."

"I'd like to see that stone," said the mate, as if communing with himself; "I know diamonds in the dark."

"Do you?" said Mason, looking about him cautiously.

"Try me," said the mate.

Mason placed one of the five stones which he had found in the first shoe-heel in the mate's outreached hand. Layfield felt it over.

"It's the goods, all right," he said; "but I'd have to see it by daylight."

"In the morning," said Mason, pocketing the treasure again.

"All right!" agreed the mate, turning away as if to put an end to the talk.

Mason slept little during that portion of the night which was allotted to him for repose, and when his watch was called on deck he spent the hours in plans which his hope illumined. At the first opportunity next day he placed the gem again in the mate's hand.

Layfield looked it over, and gave it back with inscrutable countenance.

"All right!" said he shortly. "What's your plan?"

"Fix me up a bottle of that knock-out bitters," said Mason, "and I'll dope the old man's coffee at supper this evening. Give me enough of the stuff to put both of them out of business for eight or ten hours. Provision a boat, and supply it with a rig for sailing.

"Have everybody forward but the man at the wheel when it falls dark, and the stone's yours. More than that—it's to be considered only a payment on account. If we ever come to shore I'll see that the difference between the stone and twenty-five thousand dollars is sent to you wherever you may designate."

The mate thought it over a spell. Then:

"See if she's got any more diamonds with her," he said.

"If I can get a word with her," Mason promised doubtfully.

It was mid-afternoon before he could get a word with the mate alone again.

"She's got another one just like it," said he. "I misunderstood her at first. She meant that I was to offer both."

"It's a go then," said the mate. "I would n't do this on a decent ship under a decent man, Mason, you understand?" said he, turning quickly to put the question.

"Certainly not," said Mason heartily. "But as things are here there's nothing in this that they can hold you for, even if it ever should come out. And that's impossible. You'll be the only man with the key."

"We're about in the latitude of Manzanillo now, or ought to be," the mate said; "but you can't tell much by the old man's chart. He's stronger on dead reckonin' than he is on instruments, and that's why he hugs the coast this way. I saw the point of Cape Corrientes this morning, and so I know where we are. You ought to be able to make it to Manzanillo in two days if you're not picked up before. Can you handle a boat?"

"I've handled a sail-boat on Lake Michigan in all kinds of weather, and I think I can get along here," Mason replied.

"Yes," the mate agreed, "it's pretty much the same—only it's different. I'll put you in a compass."

"And plenty of water," said Mason.

"Yes. What did you say her name was?"

"I don't recall having told you," replied Mason, feeling a shiver of fear over the sudden and unexpected question, which he was altogether unprepared to answer.

"Don't you know yourself?" asked the mate suspiciously.

"I don't see that her name cuts any figure, since you're to get a payment on the spot," said Mason with a show of stiffness. "But there's no reason

between you and me for concealing it that I know of. You've heard of Painless Porter, haven't you?"

"The old quack tooth-carpenter with the side-wheel whiskers that advertises by the page in the coast papers?" said the mate with lively interest.

"That's the man," nodded Mason.

"He's got a house as big as the British Museum up on Van Ness Avenue," said the mate. "I've been past it many a time. So he's the man, heh?"

"He's the man," repeated Mason, feeling that he hadn't yet lied her into a disgraceful relationship. Not that it mattered at all so far as the mate was concerned. The mate seemed to accept the name as if it were a bond. He warmed up at once to a newer interest in the matter, as if he now considered his promised reward secure.

Mason made a mental note of it that she should answer to that name, too, in case the mate's suspicion should get the better of him when it came time for them to embark. He went about his duties with a fever of unrest and apprehension over him, fearful that something would intervene at last to defeat his plans for rescue.

It would be quitting one peril for another, he realized, to put out alone in those strange waters and on the vastness of the open sea in a little boat with her. But the peril of the free ocean was welcome in comparison with the sinister dangers of that ship. Death in the deep would be a clean and wholesome end if it must come to that, but a fate waited her at that journey's end which was worse than any death.

His concern now was whether the mate would stand by his bargain. The test of it would be in the efficacy of the drug which he had given Mason—a clear liquid in a two-dram vial.

All doubt on this head was set at rest within twenty minutes after Mason served the captain and his wife their coffee that evening. He left them over it, ascending the companion-stairs with a weakness in his legs, not from fear of the consequences of the thing that he had done, but due to uncertainty of the outcome for which he hoped.

When he returned to the cabin to clear away he found the captain with his bushy head on the table, unconscious as the dead. The captain's wife lay on the floor between table and door of the locked stateroom, for which she evidently had headed when she felt the strength of the drug overpowering her. The key, which she had held ready in her hand, lay there at her fingers' end.

Mason lifted it and knocked on the door.

"Are you there?" he asked in a voice which trembled, although he struggled to make it sound assuring.

No answer. He knocked again, and put his mouth close to the keyhole.

"It is Mason, of San Francisco, the man who gave his blood," said he.

He heard a light step approach the door. Then she spoke.

"It can't be—he had no voice," she said.

"It came back to me," he said. "If you are ready I'll open the door."

"What has happened—what do you want?" she asked, her voice shaken with doubt and fear.

"To set you free," he told her eagerly.

"Then open the door, in God's name!" she appealed.

It was dusk there in the cabin, for they were winter days, and night was coming on. Her face was white against the deeper gloom of the stateroom which had been her prison through those fearful days. When her eyes had assured her that a friend stood before her she stretched out her hands to give him welcome, and a trembling, joyous cry, which broke in sobs, rose to her lips.

If Mason had been less a man, and farther away from the strain of the

situation of uncertainty and danger in which they stood, he might have exceeded his rights. As it was he only held her hands.

"We must hurry," he said.

She stood in the door, dressed in a rich, great-figured Oriental robe, with sleeves half a yard in width.

"What have you done?" she asked as she saw the victims of the mate's compound, recoiling from the prostrate body of the captain's wife. "Are they dead?" she whispered.

"You know where they were taking you?" he asked.

"No; she told me nothing — she would tell me nothing at all."

"Then when you know," said he, placing his hand on her arm, "you will say that a merciful death was a generous fate for them. No, they are not dead—only drugged. They were selling you into slavery to a Chinese merchant in Valparaiso, and I—"

She interrupted him with a sharp exclamation of horror.

"And I, against that dreadful fate, can offer you liberty with all its perils in an open boat at sea. Are you ready to go with me?"

"Yes, yes—anywhere!" she said, clinging to him, weak in the realization of what she was about to escape.

"Get your clothing and gather up all the heavy wraps you can find, then," he directed.

"They took my clothing from me when they brought me here," she said.

"Look for it in that stateroom over there—there's no one in it—while I take care of these people," he said.

He carried the captain's wife into the stateroom which she had shared with the prisoner, and dragged the heavy hulk of the captain after her, locking them in. Her search for her clothing turned out happily. Everything that she had worn when they brought her aboard was found in the locker in the stateroom which the captain had been occupying, even to her watch.

Mason left her to make the change out of the Oriental kimono and went on deck to notify the mate that all was well. There was a contrary wind again, and clouds. Night had come down thickly, and all was to their advantage, as the mate said.

"We'll take the other tack in a few minutes, and that's our chance to lower the boat," said he. "Hurry her up here and stow her away. I'll have leeway for you—hurry!"

True to his word, the mate had the deck clear of men, at least within seeing distance through the obscurity of the night. He said no word as Mason and the young woman climbed into the ready boat, but stood with his eye aloft. Presently he shouted an order to the man at the wheel, and the vessel came up to the wind and hung a little spell with sails shaking. Then, in the lull, before she filled away on the other tack, they lowered the ready boat into the sea.

Mason fell to the oars when they were clear of her, fearful in the first minutes of their adventure that they had but exchanged the doubtful security of the vessel for certain and speedy death in their little craft. It leaped and plunged in the rough sea, shipping some water, but how much it was too dark to see.

There was a lantern aboard which he dared not light yet, for he did not trust the mate entirely, even though he had carried out his bargain to the letter. After a struggle he got the boat in hand and stepped the little mast. He got the sail up with a good deal of fumbling, and struck a match to see the compass and shape his course.

The ship had disappeared almost immediately in the night, and Mason felt that there was no chance of their overhauling him now, even though the captain had come to himself and put about to rake the sea in search.

The young woman was huddled astern, wrapped against the dashing spray in a tarpaulin. He had not

spoken to her since the launching of the boat; but now, sitting near her, tiller in hand, he asked her if she thought she could light the lantern.

She was of the opinion that she could do it.

"Keep it covered," he directed, "and put the compass by it. I don't know this road."

She spent a good many matches before she made it, but at last she closed the lantern with a triumphant click. As she stooped over it, arranging a corner of her tarpaulin to damper its gleam, she clutched Mason's arm, pointed to the prow, and whispered:

"Look, look!"

Mason followed her eyes. A man's foot protruded from under a canvas which covered their supplies.

"Come out of that!" Mason commanded.

The canvas heaved and a man sat up, his head and shoulders shielded from their sight by the sail.

"Who are you; what 're you doing aboard here?" called Mason angrily.

The man threw his leg over the thwart and crawled back to them.

"It's me. I was tired of that dam' old ship!" he said.

Mason flashed the lantern in his face, although identification was complete without it. It was Paul, the Portuguese sailor, who had it in him to cut the throat of a woman or a kid.

CHAPTER VII.

Measured Rations.

MORNING brought them calm waters and a sunlit sea. Land was at hand also, with a brown mountain close in the foreground, its base standing in the sea.

Paul said it was not the Mexican mainland. He knew that sea, he said, like he knew the palm of his hand, and unless he was mightily mistaken they were a long way from Manzanillo port and the green lands of Mexico.

"That's about as close as you can depend on old Peter's reckoning," said he with contempt. "That's an island, I tell you, and it's old Socorro, if I ain't lost my eyes. I was on there three years ago with some guys that come to wash gold on the beach. I know it by that old holler mountain."

"What's on the island?" Mason inquired anxiously.

"Snakes and spiders and bugs," said Paul in disgust. "They ain't no gold in that place; they ain't even water. We had a distillin' machine, and made water out of the sea; but that kind of water'd kill a gull!"

"It's a barren-looking place," said the woman.

"Wait till you git there, lady," said Paul portentously, as if to tell her that her imagination was not equal to its cursedness.

There was a harbor, he said, about as big as a man's hand on the eastern shore, and as they would have to round the obstacle before they could lay their course for the west coast of Mexico, Mason decided to put in and rest.

It was late in the day before they beached the boat in a quiet little harbor, which ran back in the walls of lava like the print of a tooth. It was a deep and quiet pocket in that rock-set shore, the only place, Paul said, where a boat could land.

"Yes, I know the face of this old island like I know my brother's," said Paul. "We're four hundred miles from Manzanillo, lady, by the cable. And this is a one hell of a place!"

The island was of considerable extent, its farthest coasts stretching beyond the compass of the eye. There was no green thing growing upon it, at least in that part where they had landed; but colonies of birds had their nesting-places in its crags, and on the beach of the little inlet where their boat lay, the tides and storms had cast up riven planks, the broken branches and trunks of far-drifting trees, and the various flotsam of the sea.

There was no lack of fuel therefore, and not any of food of a kind.

If there was fresh water, thought Mason as he cast about him in the barrenness of the place, he would consider seriously a stop there of several days. For it was certain that Captain Peters would put back and make a thorough search for them. There was no doubt that the most valuable portion of his cargo had slipped out of his hands, and he was not the man to give up without an effort.

Peters knew that there was a long stretch of sea between them and safety, or, if he had reckoned wrong previously, his investigations soon would correct his error. And what chance had a small boat to escape a fast-sailing vessel in such a race?

Not one in fifty, thought Mason, although he kept his fears to himself. Indeed, he had been allowed little opportunity to converse with the young woman at all. In the feeling of relief and safety, even in her new situation of danger, she had slept the night through, huddled at his side as he sat at the tiller.

When morning came and she woke refreshed, Paul evinced a jealous desire to hear every word they uttered. Mason did not feel like sharing any of their confidences with the unwelcome stowaway, and so the matter of her identity had remained unrevealed.

Mason knew that Socorro was one in a group of large islands. If they could remain there a week, and lie hidden, their chance of safety would grow immensely meantime. For Captain Peters would have no way of knowing where they had landed. If he set out to search the islands he would have a long task ahead of him, and one which Mason readily understood he never would attempt.

But it was a question of water. The mate had given them a five-gallon cask. With the utmost economy and stinting it could not last them longer than it would take to sail, with favorable winds, to the mainland.

And so, if Paul's story of the aridity of the island—which all evidences seemed to support—was true, they could not tarry there longer than that day. With nightfall Mason meant to put to sea again.

He hoped that, conditions being friendly to the venture, he might sail during the darkness beyond the range of Captain Peter's search.

And there was the presence of the sailor, Paul, to add to his troubles. He had no confidence in the fellow, although he struggled to make himself useful, and seemed sincere in his desire to quit the vessel. Still Mason was doubtful of the mate's entire sincerity. He questioned whether he had not taken the sailor into the scheme with him, and placed him aboard the boat for some dark purpose of his own.

Paul was busy within five minutes of their landing gathering wood, which he heaped on the beach and would have kindled if Mason had not stopped him.

"We'll have to get along without coffee," he said in reply to the sailor's protest that he stood in great necessity of that cheering cup. "There isn't water enough to waste on making coffee, and if there was we'd have to get along without it. I don't want any—well, I don't want any fire."

They made a breakfast on tinned stuff, Paul sulking and swearing throughout the meal. Afterward he left them and went clambering among the rocks looking for eggs and young birds.

He had carried with him a long fragment of plank, and this they now saw him pushing back into caverns and nooks in the rocks, arising great clouds of chattering, shrieking birds of many and strange kinds.

While he was away Mason improved his time.

"It's a strange circumstance," said he, "that after all our adventures together I don't even know your name."

"And there's nothing strange about *that,* either," she smiled. "It's the

most commonplace name in the world, but I thought you knew it, somehow. Well, it's Smith—Hortense Smith, the Hortense in compensation for the Smith, somehow, I suppose."

"It's a good enough name—it will wear," said he, finding it in his heart to smile, even in the face of their grave situation.

For there was the sun around him, and the great, swelling sense in his heart that he had done a man's part again in bringing her off from a greater peril than that of her wasting sickness, from which she had risen on his blood.

"Yes, it's established by usage, like a common law," she said.

"Smith and Mason," he reflected. "Well, if we never come to the good green land again we can set up a craftsman's guild here on Socorro. Tell me how it happened while we're alone. I don't trust that sailor lad."

"Do you suppose—?" she questioned, her eyes telling him what she had left unsaid.

"There may be treachery in him," he nodded, "for I don't see how he could have hidden away without the mate's knowledge. But how did they manage to lure you aboard that craft?"

"They didn't," she said. "It seems a silly sort of thing to own, but I must tell you how simply and easily I fell into the trap. I was active in missionary work among the Chinese girls in the Presbyterian Mission — I've been interested in those strange, sad people for ever so long. I taught a class of young men for two years in our church, and somebody who knew of my sympathies in that way set a trap for me.

"The mission people had lately brought into the shelter of the home a little Chinese girl who had been sold as a slave, but not delivered. I made friends with her, and she looked to me with a simple, pathetic faith that touched my heart. On the evening that this thing happened to me I was called by telephone by one of the mission women, who said my little girl had been taken sick suddenly, and was calling for me. It wasn't late—a little before nine—but father was away from home, and I hesitated about going over there alone. You know where the mission is, and how dark it is around there at night?"

"I know," said he.

"But I took our Jap boy and went over on the street-car. When we approached the mission I thought it strange that there wasn't a light showing in the building anywhere. But I didn't hesitate. I ran up the steps, and then two men sprang out of the darkness beside the door and seized me. I tried to scream, but they muffled my head in something, and what became of Soto, why he didn't help me, I don't know."

"He was in it, the scoundrel; I knew he was equal to treachery like that!" said Mason. "He had the meanest eye I ever saw."

"I've thought so, since," said she.

"Pardon my interruption," said he, seeing that she hesitated now to proceed.

"The terror of those moments will brood over me forever!" she shuddered, her face as white as it was that night when he first saw her, lying in the midst of her tumbled hair.

He took her hand with soothing clasp and caressed it as she went on:

"They carried me silently along somewhere, my head wrapped in a stifling cloth, and into some dark place, where they jerked away the muffler and let me breathe. I screamed, and somebody spoke roughly to me in Chinese. Others caught my arm and stripped up my sleeve, and I felt the horrible pain of a needle in my flesh. It seemed that I lost consciousness almost immediately, or else I fainted. When I woke I was in that stateroom from which you brought me, and that dark woman was with me."

"Did she ever tell you about Lee Fong?" he asked.

"Lee Fong?" said she, starting at the name. "Lee Fong? What about him? Why, he used to be—"

She stopped, her face growing white again, her breath apparently dead in her breast.

"Yes, he used to be one of your Sunday-school pupils, didn't he?" he asked.

"Yes," she admitted faintly; "he asked me once to marry him."

"The base hypocrites get hold of a good many white women that way," he said. "Well, finding that he couldn't marry you, he hired somebody to steal you. It seems he's a rich man, in business at Valparaiso. Captain Peters was to deliver you to him there. And that's all I know."

"How much did you have to pay the mate?" she asked him, laying her hand on his shoulder, looking searchingly into his eyes.

Simply and briefly he told her the story of the treasure in his heels.

"And I'm going to ask you to share the load of carrying the rest of the stones with me," said he. "The man to whom they formerly belonged—and I can only guess at the fate that found him, poor chap—was wise enough to separate them, so that if he lost one shoe, or one limb, he would not be poor. I don't trust that fellow, Paul. He's along with us for no good; and you may as well know that first as last. You carry part of the stones. In case he robs me we'll not yet be impoverished."

Paul came back a little while after with a hatful of eggs.

"There's some fine eatin' birds on this here island, mate," he declared, "but the young ones run up on the rocks where I can't git 'em. We'll need them things in the tins worse than we do now before we git to Manzanillo, too."

"Maybe we shall, Paul," Mason allowed, humoring the fellow along.

"Well, if you'd go up there with your gun you could knock 'em over as easy as nothin'!"

"Gun—what gun?" said Mason, turning on him quickly.

In the same breath he regretted his foolish betrayal of his defenceless condition. Paul's eyes gleamed in the triumph of his easy victory.

"Ain't you got a gun?" he asked sneeringly. "No, you ain't," he answered himself, "and you're a hell of a feller to try to take care of a lady! Well, I have—I got a gun—look!"

The sailor slung the weapon out of his pocket as he spoke, and leveled it at Mason.

"I thought you didn't have no gun," sneered Paul, "you ain't got sense enough for that."

"Well, I can take care of you without a gun," said Mason, fetching the sailor a savage, quick blow in the face.

Paul staggered back to his haunches, but recovered himself like a cat, still gripping the pistol in his hand.

"I'll fix you for that!" he threatened, throwing the weapon down on Mason again.

With a cry Hortense sprang in front of the sailor, and laid hold of his arm.

"Don't Paul! Put it away and let's all be friends—that's a lad," she begged.

Paul dragged the back of his other hand across his bloody nose, and grinned at her familiarly.

"I like you—you're my kind," he said. "If it wasn't for the reward I'll git for deliverin' you to old Lee Fong, dam' if I wouldn't sail off with you myself!"

"You low, sneaking, traitorous dog!" snarled Mason, as savage now as the Portuguese himself.

"Talk, go on and talk, blow yourself out!" said Paul, with a returning composure, thrusting the revolver in his pocket again. "When my time comes to do it I'll fix you, mate, and I'll do it right!"

He went across the little strip of sand to the boat, and pulled it up a little farther on the sand, for the lazy Pacific tide was lifting the stern and threatening to warp it off to sea.

"What do you suppose he means?" she asked, pale, but steady.

"And I could have had a gun, if I'd had my senses about me — there was one in the captain's stateroom!" lamented Mason in the abasement of self-reproach.

"What did he mean by—"

"He meant that I only half succeeded in getting you out of Lee Fong's hands," said he bitterly. "I believe that mate was only working me for all he supposed I had, or that we, between us, had. He let us get away, but he put that sailor in the boat to prevent our passage beyond this place. Layfield knew, all the time, that this wasn't the Mexican shore."

"But how will he profit by it further? Won't he fear the captain when he comes out of the drug; won't he—"

"The captain will never come out of the drug," he told her, with conviction, seeing the whole scheme now, "the mate will attend to that—has attended to it before this."

Paul had fastened a big rock to the painter of the boat, and now he came strutting up to them again.

"I'll deal you a pint of water apiece every day," said Paul, with piratical severity, "and rations enough to keep you alive. If nobody don't show up at the end of five days, two of us will sail for Manzanillo." He looked meaningly at Mason as he spoke. "And I'll give you that long to guess who them two'll be," he said.

With that he went down to the boat again, drew out their portion of water in a tin cup and stood it on the sand above reach of the tide. Then he placed a small amount of food beside it, pushed the boat off, rowed out several rods into the inlet, the water being as smooth as a lake, dropped his improvised anchor over and lay down to sleep.

They stood in silence and watched him. It was then near sunset; the shadow of the old volcano, long silent and inactive, had submerged that side of the island. In the bitterness of his heart for his miscarried plans, Mason began berating himself for a bungler. She stopped his torrent of self-abuse by laying her hand across his lips.

"Hush!" she chided: "there'll be a way—we'll find a way."

He looked at her, a whimsical smile on his lips, but a light which was not of mirth in his eyes.

"Love, it is written, always finds a way," said he.

"Can you doubt it?" she asked.

"I only doubted it when you left me, speechless and alone," he said sadly.

"Don't reproach me for that!" she appealed. "I was not to blame; it was because—because I—"

Although there was no reason for such maiden modesty there, it asserted itself, and checked her confession.

"Because you loved me that they sent me away," he finished for her, folding her hand in his.

She loked up, tears in her eyes, and nodded her head like a child.

"But my distress was not uncompensated," he told her. "My misfortune in losing you gave me back my tongue, and the train of distress which followed ended in restoring you to me. I shall keep you now. There is not a mariner that sails can take you from me, let Layfield come when he will!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"They're Coming!"

FOR three days Paul kept a signal-fire burning on the beach, smothering it with wet seaweed during daylight, and sending up a thick column of yellow smoke. He was exact in his apportionment of water to them, and he had thrown Hortense's wraps and a piece of canvas ashore. Out of the latter Mason had fashioned her a tent to fend her against the sudden and frequent chilly winds.

There was no rain.

In the course of their explorations in search of water they found the

piece of driftwood which Paul had carried away with him on the day they landed to stir up the nesting birds. He had wedged it between rocks on a promontory, and attached his handkerchief to it in way of a flag. It was a signal which could have been seen through glasses at sea for miles.

Mason climbed to it and tore it down, and together they pushed their search among the great blocks of lava for a spring. Mason was unshaken in the belief that there must be fresh water on a body of land the size of that, out of which the extinct volcano rose to a height of apparently four thousand feet. There must be drainage in a lump of earth and stone of that bulk, and the guttered surface of the land proved that rain sometimes fell there abundantly.

On the fourth day they found what they sought. It was only a tiny trickle of a spring, but the water was fresh and sweet. It must have been almost a mile inland from the point where the boat was moored, in a niche of a gray cliff at the mountain's foot. A little pool stood in a depression of stone below the tiny stream, but the overflow was sucked up by the thirsty sand. Three feet away from the spring there was no trace of it.

It provided water enough for their daily needs, and the moss on the rocks around it proved it to be permanent. It was the one thing needed to make life on the place possible, and their discovery eased their anxiety and brightened their prospects immediately.

Prior to that time Mason's one thought had been to regain possession of the boat. He had considered swimming out while Paul lay asleep and attempting to get the upper hand of him before he could use his revolver, and he would have gone even to that desperate length but for one thing.

On the second day on the island Mason and Hortense had climbed to the ledges bordering the inlet, which shelved in places and jutted over the water. Looking down from there into the green depths, they had seen a shark, black and great as a sunken log, moving lazily in a wide circle, like a patrol, around the boat.

Paul saw them, and rose grinning from his pretended sleep. He pointed over the side and called to them derisively:

"He won' hurt me; he's my frien'. I know what he wants, and I'm goin' to give it to him before I leave."

Now that they had water, there was no haste in quitting that refuge. Inhospitable as that shore was, and precarious as the existence which it offered to human beings, it was better than trying the sea while Layfield prowled upon it.

They could well enough endure weeks of that life, if necessary, until the mate had abandoned the search, if he did not come meantime in answer to Paul's signals.

Mason believed it was best for her to remain near the spring, in concealment, and not appear again on the beach. In case of the landing of the mate, both of them could find shelter among the rocks, where they could be found only by a long search, or a mere matter of stumbling luck.

She agreed with him in that arrangement, and at sunset he went down to the beach after their day's allotment of food, which Paul had been putting ashore with regularity. He also meant to carry his companion's wraps to her, and the scrap of canvas which served as her shelter.

Paul had drawn the boat up on the sand, and was sitting moodily in the bow. He sprang out when he saw Mason, and hurried to meet him. There were no provisions laid out for them and no water. From Paul's manner, it was evident that something had happened.

"Where's that woman?" demanded Paul.

"She's quite safe," returned Mason. "Don't worry about her."

"I want her—her and me, we've got to sail right now," said Paul.

"Well, maybe you'd better go and find her, then," Mason suggested.

Paul glared at him savagely and put his hand to his pistol, ever ready, thrust clumsily under his trousers' band, inside his belt.

"Go and tell her to come here!" the sailor ordered.

"What's your hurry — aren't you going to wait for your friends?" Mason inquired.

"Hurry enough," said Paul, blaspheming in many tongues.

"Well, you've got the boat—go whenever you're ready; she's not going with you—you don't need to wait for her," Mason said.

"You go and tell her the water's all gone," said the sailor—"tell her I knocked the bung out of the cask with my foot while I was asleep. If she ever wants to git away from here alive, she ain't got no time to monkey around; you go and tell her that!"

"So you've lost all the water?" said Mason, fixing him severely with his gaze, doubting the truth of it in any particular.

"And that's the God's truth — I didn't save a drop!" said the sailor solemnly.

"You'll never be able to make it to the mainland alive without water," said Mason shortly.

"I'll run the chance of bein' picked up in a couple of days," said Paul. "You're not goin'. You don't need to lose no sleep over me and her."

"I don't believe you spilled the water," Mason told him; "and I'll not believe it till I see the empty cask."

"Come on down here," said the sailor, jerking his head in the direction of the boat.

He had been sitting on the cask when Mason discovered him, and he had but to reach into the bow and lift it to the sand.

"Heft it; shake it! They ain't a drop in it, I tell you," he said.

"But some of it must be in the boat —it couldn't leak out of that," said Mason.

"The sail soaked most of it up," said the sailor, "and the little in the boat's thick with salt. No man couldn't drink it."

"You'll be a dead man inside of three days," said Mason, looking at him with solemn face, "and you'll die the worst death that can come to a man anywhere. You're thirsty already; your tongue's thickening between your teeth. Before morning you'll be in hell!"

"How much better off will you be, dam' you?" asked Paul vindictively.

"I know where there's water — all the cool, clear, sweet water that a man can drink—enough for a ship's crew," said Mason, dwelling luxuriously on the words.

"You're a liar!" said the sailor hotly.

"All right," said Mason, turning away. "When you get ready to talk business, yell for me."

"Hold on here!" ordered Paul, as Mason started away. "If you know where there's water, by God you'll lead me to it, or you'll die right here, this minute!"

"One place is as good as another, I suppose," said Mason, with a cool indifference that exasperated the sailor almost beyond bounds; "but if you kill me, that'll never put one drop of sweet, cold water on your dry tongue, my lad. Maybe you can find it if you'll go and hunt."

"You're one smart guy, ain't you?" mocked the sailor. "Well, you don't git me away from the boat by no such a game as that. Now I'll give you two hours—just two hours by the watch—to take that cask and fill it, if you know where any water's at, and git back here with it and that woman. If you're bluffin' on the water, all right; but if you ain't, git back here by then, dam' you, I'll shoot you on sight!"

"All right," agreed Mason, taking up the empty cask. "I want to get the tin cup from our camp up there, and that canvas to sling the keg in."

"Go ahead," granted the sailor, his

dark humor growing blacker in his mean, young face.

Mason threw his companion's cloak into the canvas, together with the large tin cup and such food as they had left out of Paul's slender allotments. She would be comfortable with that wrap, for, while the heat of the day was intense and burning, the nights were fretted by those whimsical winds which seemed to spring out of the cold, dark places of the sea.

Mason felt that Paul would trail him and try to locate the spring for himself. He set out in a misleading direction, therefore, stopping every little while to listen. There was no sound of footsteps after him, and presently, mounting an eminence, he could see the sailor busy on the beach, heaping wood on a great bonfire.

Mason had great difficulty in finding his way back to the spring and Hortense, for darkness overtook him among the tangle of wildly sown stones. The two hours set off for him by Paul for his return had long elapsed before he finally stumbled upon the spot where she sat waiting for him, with the comfortable tinkle of the dripping stream in her ears.

Not that Mason had any intention of going back within two hours. He had quite another plan, which he now lay before his comrade in adversity, and which she approved.

All the next day they remained in the seclusion of their place, save for the time Mason spent in foraging for eggs among the cliffs. From his vantage-point he could see the sailor, not sleeping in the sun in the bottom of the moored boat now, but pacing the sands with anxious carriage, his smoky beacon lifting in unanswered signal to the skies.

They knew that Paul would not set sail alone as long as the hope of reward for restoring Hortense to her captors lived in his thirst-plagued breast, nor as long as the dearer hope of obtaining water lasted. He, on his part, perhaps believed that they would be forced very soon to make an exchange of water with him for food. And so they believed he would hang on till the pangs of thirst had prepared him for their ordeal.

Toward noon of the following day Mason concluded that the time had come for opening negotiations with the sailor, according to their agreed plan. They had filled the cask, to have it ready in case that opportunity should favor them; and now Mason took the quart tin full of water and picked his way slowly over the rocky barriers toward the beach.

The sailor had rigged himself a shelter from the sun out of sail and oars. He was sitting in it, his anxious eyes roving the sea, when Mason came in sight. In a flash he was on his feet and running to meet the cup-bearer. While he was yet thirty yards off, Mason lifted the vessel and emptied its contents upon the sand, leaving no more than a scant swallow in the bottom of the tin.

Hoarse curses reeled from the sailor's swollen tongue as he saw the waste before his famished eyes. When he came up Mason handed him the cup, and the sailor swallowed the mouthful in one greedy gulp, nicking the tin with his teeth like a starving dog.

He seemed to have forgotten his threat to slay on sight—to have forgotten even his weapon, which still stuck in its accustomed place. He demanded more; he fell on his knees and scooped up the wet sand where the water had been spent, and sucked it with his parched lips. Presently he seemed to control his frenzy and rose, blasphemous, demanding of Mason his reason for throwing the water away.

"Listen to me, you lying, traitorous dog!" said Mason, shaking him, undaunted by the uplifted, threatening arm. "You didn't believe I had water, but you believe it now; you didn't believe we could live in this rocky, damned place without you, but you see that we can. Sail away! Go, put to sea! We're done with you, you dog!"

"I'll kill you!" said the sailor, wrenching his pistol out.

"Put up your gun, Paul, and listen to me," counseled Mason in unshaken voice. "You want water; well, I'll give you water, I'll take you to a place where you can stretch on the sand and soak your tongue in it—cold and clear. Ill take you—"

"For God's sake, Mason — for God's sake!" pleaded the suffering man, his pistol trembling in his unsteady hand.

"On my terms I'll lead you there, Paul; not on yours. Kill me if you'd rather see my blood than water. But if you do, you'll never see the light of another day. You can't find the spring—you'll die in a thousand times the agony you're suffering now."

"Oh, for God's sake, Mason!" the fellow moaned. Then a flash of his old stubbornness came to him. He cursed, declaring he'd never make terms; that he would have the girl—that he would sail away with her alone, and feed Mason to the sharks.

"Have it your way, then," said Mason determinedly. "You've stuck by the boat, afraid I'd get the upper hand of you if you put down your gun a minute and turned your back. Well, there's the difference of a gun between you and me, Paul; you need one when you stand up to a man. You can't bluff me; if you want to kill me, go on!"

"What terms, Mason? For the love of Heaven, what do you want?" he begged.

"I want that gun, first of all, and all the ammunition you've got with you."

The sailon demurred no longer. He seemed even eager now to have it over, and feel the cold water on his parched tongue. He handed the pistol over to Mason, and emptied his pockets of cartridges. Not satisfied with this, Mason searched him, but found no other weapon save a knife. This he took away, also.

"I guess that's about all," said he, "except that you're to keep away from the boat and the beach, and stay off the cliffs where you might be seen from sea. You're to make no fire, no signal of any kind. I'm not making any threats, but you do as I say."

Paul agreed to the conditions, and Mason led him away to the spring.

Hortense came down from the rocks to which she had clambered in her anxiety over the outcome of the plan which they had laid to force the sailor's surrender.

"They're coming—they're standing in this way!" she panted, running to him, her eyes great again in that fright which he had seen in them the day of the fight in the cabin.

Paul was stretched on the ground, his face in the little pool of the spring. She had not seen him, and started back now with a sharp exclamation. Mason drew her away around a corner of the ledge, out of the sailor's hearing.

"It will be better if he doesn't know," said he. "So they've seen his signals at last!"

"It might be some other ship," said she, catching hopefully at the thought, which in her fright had escaped her.

"Not likely," he told her. "These islands lie inside the roadway of vessels in the South American trade, and outside — far outside — the coasting trend. I must go back and defend the boat—they sha'n't have that."

"I'm afraid of that sailor, even though you have disarmed him—I can't stay here with him!" she said.

"It's to be considered where you're to stay," he said, in troubled thought.

They went back to the spring again. Paul was not there. Mason ran about looking for him, called him, commanded him to come back. But the sailor had drunk his fill and gone.

"He must have heard you, and he's gone off to join them," Mason said. "Never mind"—as she began lamenting her hasty alarm—"we know where to expect him, anyhow. I'd rather have a fellow like him in front of me than behind me on a day like this."

"I'll go with you to the boat," she said resolutely.

"There's nothing else for it," he agreed. "You can hide among the rocks there, and at least be as safe as here. You'll have the comfort of knowing how things end, anyhow."

"Mr. Mason," said she earnestly, her hand laid restrainingly on his arm, "let me go down to the beach alone and return on board with them. Wait"—as he expostulated impatiently—"let me tell you; I have no right to allow you to risk your life for me. I had no right to expect it of you, ever. Oh, Mr. Mason, Mr. Mason, I have confessed too much to you—and related too little!"

She was so deeply earnest, so steady and purposeful, that he stood looking at her in amazement.

"I don't know what you can mean, Miss Smith," said he, "only I know you're never going to set foot aboard of that ship again!"

"I mean that if you save me, you'll save me for another man!" said she. "Oh, how cowardly I was to confess to you that I—when I—"

"Nothing matters at all this moment that has gone between us in the past," said he gravely. "They will be putting out a boat to look for us here. I must go."

"When I tell you," said she firmly, "if I hadn't been carried off by the agents of Lee Fong I'd have been married before this. The day was set—four days from the time they trapped me — my trousseau was ready, the church was being prepared. You will have heard of Douglas Thornton?"

"The shipbuilder's son," he nodded.

"Yes," she sighed. "Father arranged it with the shipbuilder years ago. It's a sort of family pact, which both of us grew up to consider holy. It would have been well enough if you never had come—if I never had taken your strong, clean blood to warm my heart.

"That drowned my old self; I woke with a new desire.

"They found it out in some manner"—she sighed wearily—"and you were sent away. Thornton is rich—and money will find out things in Chinatown. He will sail in search of me, and perhaps—if they take me on board — he will overhaul them and make them give me up. You can't hope to fight all of them down there on the beach. Let me go alone!"

"Oh, this nonsense!" he chided impatiently. Then: "What is all this about the other man—as if I recognized any other claim prior to my own. Cut it out! Forget the other man. You belong to me—now—to me!"

"Oh, you don't understand!" she protested faintly. "I'd have to marry him—it's been preparing so long between us, everybody looks for it, and father would be killed by the disgrace of it if I should break faith with Mr. Thornton now. Ours isn't just the same as an ordinary engagement, you know, Mr. Mason—not as if— Oh, this thing reaches down to the roots of the family, don't you see?"

"It's a matter of promises and preparations," he argued stubbornly. "If you set more store by them than on a man's good, honest, homely love—well, I guess the other man can have you!"

He pushed her behind him, almost rudely, growled something deep in his throat, of which she could make no words, and set off toward the beach. She seemed to understand that he meant for her to follow.

CHAPTER IX.

The Bond of Blood.

WHEN they came to the beach the ship was standing-by in the roadstead under short sail, and a boat was already on its way to shore. There was no mistaking the vessel—Mason had learned enough about her rigging in his unwilling apprenticeship to be certain of her.

"We'll go up there," said Mason, in-

dicating the ledge at the head of the inlet, the rocky platform of which jutted here and there over the water.

The refuge was but a few rods from the boat, but high above it, and it could be approached only from that direction. There they would be safe from a rear surprise, backed by a sheer ledge of sixty feet or more.

They climbed up with caution, holding themselves concealed behind the great boulders. Mason studied the situation a little while.

"Stay there," he directed, pointing to a shelving rock in the face of the cliff, protected in such manner by flanking great blocks of stone that none could reach her save by first passing him.

The boat, manned by three men, the mate at the tiller, came skimming into the little harbor. The mate beached it near their own and came ashore, leaving his men gazing curiously about them on the strange and desolate scene.

Layfield first inspected the boat in which the fugitives had arrived, turning out the small remaining stock of provisions, and evidently marking the absence of the water-cask, as Mason could see by his perplexed mien.

Mason and Hortense crouched behind the rocks, completely hidden from sight of the men on the beach. Now they saw Layfield go back to his boat and give his men some kind of orders. They could hear his voice, but his words were lost. This done, he turned and followed the tracks which they had made between boat and the camp which they occupied before the discovery of water.

Presently, in the course of his explorations, he passed out of their sight among the rocks.

At this point Mason felt that it would be well to see that his captured weapon was loaded and ready. He took it from his pocket and inspected it for the first time, trying the hammer tentatively with his thumb. The hammer yielded at his slightest pressure, and swung back in its slot without the least resistance of any spring. Amazed and concerned, Mason looked closer into the peculiar weapon, only to discover that the thing was not of as much value in his hand as a stone.

The spring was gone out of it; it was worse than no pistol at all.

He was standing on his knees beside the opening, which was in a manner a door, into the little nook where they lay hidden, his companion but a few feet away. She was as quick to mark the defect of the pistol as he was to discover it.

"Oh, it's broken!" she said in consternation.

"Well," said he, flinging it down, "it's just as well for you to know it first as last, I suppose. It's no good to us. I'll have to— I understand now why Paul talked so much and shot so little!"

"Look," she whispered, so close beside him now that her breath was on his cheek, and lifting the hair at his temple, "there's Paul!"

The sailor had crept from his concealment near the beach and joined his shipmates at the boat. They pressed round him with loud words, shaking hands with him, clapping him on the back, hauling him from one to the other in the excess of their joy at his recovery.

Only for a few moments this revelry lasted, until Paul had managed to shake clear of them and draw them round him in a conspiring ring.

Layfield was still out of sight; Mason knew that he must be slowly picking his way over their scant trail toward the spring. Paul was now waxing vehement in his argument, waving his arms, pounding with clenched fists, pointing now and again toward the ship. The men who had come with Layfield drew closer about him as he talked, and now, when Paul stepped off a little way from them and offered his hand dramatically, as if calling for recruits to some bloody scheme, they laid their heads together for a little while. Then one stepped forward and shook

Paul's hand; the others followed, and the whole gang made a precipitate dash for the boat in which they had come.

In a flash they had put off and were rowing for the ship.

"What do they mean— What are they going after, do you suppose?" she asked.

"Let's wait a little while and see," he suggested, a bright hope beginning to show its light.

The boat was quickly alongside, and the men went up the dangling rope ladder like monkeys. The boat was hoisted aboard, and certain of the hands lay-to aloft, while—they could see all movements plainly, so close the vessel lay ashore—others brought up a barrel of the bottled beer and cast the straw-packing into the sea.

Mason looked at her, an age of care cleared out of his face, and nodded. Then he picked up the broken pistol and placed it on a rock, out of footway.

"I'll not have so much need of it now," he said.

"It looks like—they *are*—making sail—putting out to sea! Do you suppose they intend to leave the mate?"

"That's the game," said he with satisfaction. "Paul wants to be a pirate, and it looks like he's in for a dash of it now. You know they've got a cargo of bottled beer."

The ship stood away to sea—the beer bottles flashing valiantly in the hands of the thirsty crew.

"They'll be at the bottom before morning," said Mason, feeling a complacent satisfaction in the prospect.

"What do you suppose has become of the captain?" she asked.

"No telling," he answered. But he could have made a shrewd guess.

"Do you suppose the mate—"

"He's seen them—he's coming back, running like a mad bull," said he.

In a moment the mate burst into their sight, wild in his rage. He pranced about on the sand, bellowed after the ship, futile as he must have known his voice to be, and ridiculous as was the attempt to hail the craft.

Already the ship was well to sea, far beyond the hope of the mate ever to overhaul it, although that seemed to be in his mind, for he ran to the boat in which Mason and his companion had arrived, slashed the painter, and lay hands on it to push it into the water.

Mason stood and hailed him.

"Never mind the boat, Mr. Layfield; we'll need that after a little," said he.

Layfield wheeled about at the sound of Mason's voice, then lifted his hand in friendly salute.

"Come on down, Mason, I want to have a talk," he requested.

"It's cooler up here, and you can watch your crew better," Mason replied.

No matter for his misgivings, Layfield was a bold man. He did not hesitate a moment, but began the sharp ascent among the rocks. He was coming empty-handed; if he had a weapon of any kind it was effectively concealed —for he was in shirt and trousers only.

Mason hoped that the man might have come ashore unarmed, or at least that he had left his weapons in the boat, relying, as he must have done, on Paul to have the upper hand of the situation there. Presently Layfield appeared, rising cautiously from behind a rock two rods from the narrow passage which Mason was keeping.

"Put up your gun, Mason; we'd just as well be friends in this deal," he said.

"I've put it up," Mason told him.

Layfield came on and stood beyond the reach of a knife in front of Mason. He was not able to see beyond the barrier which Mason guarded, although he stooped and peered.

"I was lookin' to see if you had your gun handy," said the mate. "Well, so you bought off that dam' black Portaguese feller, did you?"

"No, I had no need to do that," returned Mason.

"Where's the girl?" asked Layfield, edging nearer like a crab as he spoke.

"No matter where," said Mason

gruffly, his eyes following every movement of the crafty mate.

"She's in there behind you, Mason, and I want to see her. I want to have a talk with her," said the mate.

"I'm doing the talking for both of us," Mason returned.

"We might as well continue friends in this deal, Mason. I carried out my agreement with you to the letter, didn't I? I helped you off, but I didn't guarantee I wouldn't follow you. Now we're both stuck, and we might as well be friends."

"On conditions," said Mason.

"Well, I'll make the conditions," said Layfield, leaping forward.

Quicker than words he had seized Mason's arms in his great hands, and now he was forcing him backward into the little clear space where Hortense crouched.

"I'll show you who's the man here," boasted the mate as he saw her shrinking fearfully there. He spoke with the same exulting insolence that he had put into his words when he stood master over Captain Peters, and as he made the threat he threw his eyes around in appraisement of every advantage the situation offered.

It was then that he saw the shelving ledge overhanging the green waters of the inlet. His face twitched as in the spasmodic contractions of pain as he gathered himself, yet doubtful of his opponent's strength. They stood thus for a moment, Mason gripping the mate's hairy wrists.

Suddenly Layfield swung him, lifting his feet clear of the rock, and forced him with rigid arms within a yard of the edge. Mason was clearly conscious of but one thing in that second—the determination to take the mate over with him if he must go. He clung to Layfield's arms and swayed against him with the multiplied strength of desperation.

A little while they stood again, chests heaving, eyes blazing in animal fury, muscles set for the final struggle. Mason knew that he was no more than a bundle of straw in that wild man's grasp, yet he did not despair. In such moments of hot, savage passion anger consumes fright like a tow-string in a blaze.

Again Layfield threw his strength to shift Mason over the edge. The woman, a little way behind them, set up a piercing scream of warning and fright, as potential in its quavering note as the cry of a mother-bird which sees her young imperiled.

The sound charged Mason with a sudden surge of strength. Chest to chest he strained with Layfield, striving for a foothold away from that lip of death! The mate was unable to move him, and the realization of this brought confidence to Mason's heart. And there was, besides, the man's desire in him to quit himself well before her eyes. He was inflamed to that exalted fury where the weak are as giants.

Layfield shifted a foot, and in the readjustment of his balance Mason felt the hand which clamped his right arm relax. With a wrench he tore himself free from the mate's grasp.

Mason stooped quickly, hooked his right arm around the mate's ankles like a sickle struck into grain, and bent his might into that last struggle. How long it lasted, or how near he was dragged to the precipice edge, he did not know; he only felt the mate's hand snatch at his arm again and cling to it as if he would pluck the muscle away. Then he stood, panting and staggering, alone on the lip of the rock.

A few feet away, on the safety of the firm ground, Hortense stood, bending forward, screaming in hysterical triumph. In a moment she was clinging to him, her bosom shivering with sobs.

There was a commotion in the water below them; waves mounted in the placid inlet and lifted the stern of the boat, threatening its security. Mason spoke to her comfortingly and stroked her hair.

It had all come so suddenly—the assault, the terrible, repulsive end; the

action of the encounter had been so brief, like the mounting of a wave which sweeps a vessel's decks, or a bounding stone, tearing its rough path down a mountain side! They were stunned; neither of them had at that time more than a numb conception of the horrible thing that Layfield had attempted, in the confidence of his strength and the treachery of his heart, only to plunge into it himself.

"I must go down and look after the boat," said he, for the waves were dashing stronger, warping it around in a manner to launch it and leave them stranded, indeed.

The mate's hat was floating under the ledge when Mason reached the beach, as if it contained a man who walked submerged. He drew the boat well upon the sand, tied the severed line to Paul's anchor-stone again, watched the water settle back to its accustomed quiet, and then returned to her.

"I'm ready to take you back to the other man," said he.

"There is no other man—now," said she in small voice; the awe of the thing that she had witnessed still over her like an obscuring mist.

She reached out her hand slowly, timidly, a yearning, questioning something in her eyes like the soul of some wild thing—some wild woman, maybe, that had lived in her dead mothers for a million years—and touched his fingers. A smile lit her face like the leaping of a blaze in a dark chamber when his hand closed over hers—in the first assurance of protection that man ever gave his mate.

Mason came back from the spring with the water-cask slung in the canvas, making ready to sail. He had been an hour away, or more, for he had refilled the cask with fresh water. She ran to meet him, flushed and excited.

"There's a steamer out there!" she cried, indicating the smoke. "It seems to be coming this way; maybe if we'd put out we could get in its track before it passes."

"We'll try it, anyhow," he said, hurrying things aboard.

An hour later they stood on the deck of Douglas Thornton's fair, white yacht, Mason in his heelless shoes and torn, soiled garments, his face blackened by the sturdy beard which had grown during his seafaring days. He looked an outcast, rather than a castaway, except for the confidence that held him like a soldier and the gleam in his eye which reflected the joy of his soul.

"We overhauled that brig, with its drunken, rascally crew," said Dr. Smith, "and we boarded and searched her. The Portuguese sailor who seemed to be nearest in command told us the story of your escape and the mate's treachery. As we couldn't find you aboard, we concluded that his story must be true."

This explanation he poured into his daughter's ears after he had embraced her and wept over her and rejoiced in her as one risen from the grave.

Captain Thornton stood by in his white suit and braided cap, waiting patiently, it seemed, for his reward. Hortense had not fallen into his arms on coming aboard, nor had he offered them to her, indeed. It seemed to Mason that there were traditions, rather than hearts, waiting to be broken between them.

Dr. Smith turned to Mason.

"We are under a double obligation to you for my daughter's life and safety, sir," said he. "The remarkable coincidences in your lives have made you of singular service to her. It lifts a cloud from my heart and conscience, too, to know that you have regained your health and strength in every particular."

"Perhaps 'coincidence' is as good a name as any for it," said Mason, resenting with a strong rising tide of feeling the cool, even supercilious survey which Captain Thornton was making of his rags and tatters.

"You will be compensated—adequately, handsomely compensated—

for this heroic service, sir," the doctor said. "Captain Thornton will join me in the assurance that you shall be rewarded, I am certain, for rising up so manfully and opportunely in this second crisis in my daughter's life."

Captain Thornton nodded, lifted his chin high, and turned his head away, looking off to sea, as if to breathe above the exhalations of such common clay. Hortense marked the arrogance of his pose. A wash of crimson passion swept her face.

"Why didn't you rise to meet some crisis in your complacent superiority, Captain Thornton?" she asked in scorn.

"Miss Smith—my child!" rebuked her father.

It was coming, Mason knew. And better early than late.

"Why didn't you give your blood to me when I was dying for it?" she pressed, passing over her father's anxious, shocked words.

"Did you rise up out of the sea to catechise me, Hortense?" asked the captain, with an urbane but uncomfortable attempt at humor.

"That's no answer!" said she sharply.

"It will have to suffice—at present," returned the captain, with a speaking look toward Mason.

"But there is reason in her question," said Dr. Smith unexpectedly, and in speculative, thoughtful voice; "you must admit that. I have asked myself the same unanswered question a thousand times—why didn't you come forward and offer your blood?"

"This is neither the occasion nor the place to answer that," the captain said.

"Perhaps you are right," the doctor yielded. He turned to Mason. "I can offer you the service of a razor and fresh linen, sir," he said.

"No; there is no better time nor place," she insisted. "Mr. Mason has stood between me and death, not once or twice, but every hour of many days. Mr. Mason has—"

"Has been alone with you on an uninhabited—" the captain began.

"Stop!" commanded Mason, lifting his hand.

"You are my guests," the captain bowed.

"This—this will never do!" said Dr. Smith lamentably.

"Don't allow that to embarrass you," said Mason. "You can lower us away in our boat again; we felt quite safe in that."

"Or put back and land us," she added.

Captain Thornton was a sport. He had won and lost before on the big contests of life. Now he stood a little while, his chin up, his eyes searching the distant sea. He turned toward them then and touched his cap.

"I will land you," said he, his voice hard and cold. There he stopped, hand to his cap, as if waiting their pleasure.

"Very well," said Mason.

"At Manzanillo, the nearest port," the captain finished, and strode away to the bridge.

"My child, you seem to forget yourself—your obligations, your ties," protested Dr. Smith, in consternation at the sight of his long-built hopes in wreck. "I will speak to Captain Thornton, I will—"

"Say nothing at all to him," interrupted Hortense. "Mr. Mason—"

"Will be compensated amply," broke in the old man coldly.

"See here, Dr. Smith, I want you to drop that thought of 'compensation' in your interpretation of it, sir!" said Mason angrily.

"Sir, I—"

"Yes, you tried to compensate me once; you tried to force your damned dirty money on me—just as if I would put a price on any service that I could render her!"

"Sir, you forget yourself—the difference in your station."

"Difference!" said Mason impatiently. "You neglected no slight which would bring that home to me if I had been little enough or base

enough to admit the thought of inequality. All through the transaction of the past you treated me as if I were a soulless animal, concealing your identity from me, even the location of your house, and in the end sending me away to squalor with your high-sung compensation, as if I were—"

"An inferior — exactly. So you are," said Dr. Smith, drawing himself up in haughty pride.

Hortense stood by, her face pale, her eyes downcast, leaving the battle to Mason, as she had left that other fight to him that day. She seemed to have neither fear nor doubt about the end.

"You were a perfect animal, Mr. Mason, physically, I beg you to understand, sir, and I engaged you as such. You received fifteen hundred dollars from me for the three pounds of blood which we transfused into my daughter's veins, and I leave it to the verdict of the world, sir, whether or not you were well paid."

"I never knew before how much money there was in that packet," said Mason, looking earnestly into Hortense's face. "I never benefited by a dollar of it. I never touched a cent of it. In the blind rage and indignation of the moment of its discovery, I flung it away in scorn."

She looked up quickly, her face glowing, her eyes bright with quick-sprung tears.

"You mean to tell me, young man—" Dr. Smith began.

"That I threw it from me like a thing from a leper's hand," said Mason. "It flew through an open window into the street, where some one found it and made off with it before I could get down. I didn't mean to throw it away wantonly," he appealed to her. "I intended to search the world over for you and give it into your hand unbroken."

"You fool!" scoffed Dr. Smith.

But Mason was satisfied. The compensation so much talked of was in her commending eyes and the glad, sweet smile which caressed him like a loving hand.

"Maybe if you could lose a few more pints of that hot, impetuous blood, young man," said Dr. Smith, a suspicion of a smile moving his beard, "it would right you to sanity, and trim you to meet the tempests of life. Well, I'm sorry you lost it, but I still feel that I owe you something for this later service. You will be—"

"Compensated," said Hortense, giving Mason her hand.

"I don't want any of your money," said Mason, with a smile.

"Well, we can't give you back your hot, bounding, irresponsible young blood—can we, daughter?" the doctor said.

"Yes," she answered, reaching out her other hand to Mason in glad, complete surrender; "I will give it back to him, with the heart that contains it and the soul that it warms." She looked into his eyes, repeating his written word of that day which seemed to both of them now so far removed:

"Take it—all is yours!"

(The end.)

AN OBSERVATION

BY HAROLD SUSMAN

THE male coquette is quite the most
Absurd of human breeds;
For greatly he delights to boast
Concerning his miss-deeds!

The House of the Purple Stairs

by Jeannette I. Helm

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

JOHN GORDON, young New York lawyer, finds Bertha Wetherall just after midnight bending over the body of her aunt, Mrs. Wetherall, at the foot of a flight of stairs of sinister history in a town up the Hudson near New York. The girl says her aunt had started down-stairs and had suddenly shrieked and pitched to the bottom. In the woman's heart is found a long hatpin; yet they two were alone in the house, Mr. Wetherall having started for the train just before midnight. An inquest is begun by Dr. McDonald, the local coroner.

CHAPTER IX.

"Do You Recognize this Hatpin?"

"AT what time did your uncle leave you, Miss Wetherall?" was the first question of the coroner.

"At ten minutes of twelve."

"Do you know what business took your uncle away at such an hour?"

"No; but he showed me a telegram that came that afternoon, and said it was important he should go at once."

"Do you know what was in the telegram?"

"No; I did not read it.

"Were you in or outside the house when he said good-by?"

"Outside."

Her answers were clear and calmly given, and the doctor nodded an unwilling approval.

"Why did you go outside?"

"I went a little way down the walk with my uncle; it was so hot inside."

"How far—out of sight of the house?"

"Oh no; only about a hundred feet."

"So nobody could have entered the house while you were absent?"

"Oh, no."

Her tone was positive, and Gordon groaned inwardly as he saw this loophole vanish.

"Why didn't you go down to the end of the walk with your uncle?"

"I was tired, for one thing; then my shoes were wet and I wanted to get them off."

"How did they get wet; there had been no rain for a week?"

"My uncle accidentally knocked over a watering can, and it went over my feet."

"Were you and your uncle alone all evening?"

"Yes."

"What did you do?"

"We played cards until half past eleven."

"Do you usually sit up so late?"

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for October 9.

"No; my uncle asked me to play cards with him so he should not fall asleep and lose his train."

"At what time did your aunt retire?"

"At ten, I think. She said she had a headache."

"Did either you or your uncle go up-stairs after she had retired?"

The girl met his searching eyes steadily.

"Yes; I did."

One of the jurors shuffled his feet and another coughed nervously. The doctor leaned forward.

"At what time was that?"

"About twenty minutes of twelve."

"What did you go up for?"

"I had forgotten an important letter I wanted my uncle to mail at the station."

"How long were you up there?"

"I don't know. Maybe ten minutes."

"What were you doing all that time?"

"I was looking for the letter. I couldn't find it, and when my uncle called up that he was going, I ran down without it."

"And then you went out with your uncle," said the coroner. "When he left you, did you go directly back to the house?"

"Yes."

"What did you do then?"

"I locked the door and examined the windows."

"Were any of them open?"

"They were all closed but the two long, French windows on the piazza."

"In the front of the house?"

"Yes."

"So that no one could have slipped in while you were outside with your uncle without your seeing them?"

"No; unless when my back was turned, and I think I should have heard them."

"When you had locked the door, and the windows what did you do?"

"I think I picked up a book and glanced over it a minute."

"No longer?"

"No; it was only an idle habit. I don't remember even what book it was."

"What did you do then?"

"I switched off the lights and started to go up-stairs."

"Why didn't you go up?"

She paused an instant, and Gordon met her eyes again. She answered his almost appealing look by one of resolution, and there was no faltering in her voice as she replied in almost the same words she had used to Gordon.

"I had just reached the foot of the stairs when I saw my aunt's figure creeping softly down. When she was half-way down she suddenly threw up her arms with a gasp and fell back against the balustrade. Then she slid down in a heap at the foot of the stairs."

The doctor's voice broke the absolute silence which followed these words.

"Did you go to her at once?"

"No; for a moment I was too overcome with horror to move. I was alone there—in the dark. I think I turned faint for a moment and caught at the table for support. Then I felt for the button and switched on the lights; then rushed screaming to the door, unlocked and flung it open."

"Why did you do that?"

"I don't know. I was horribly frightened, and I lost my head completely."

"How long was it then before you went to your aunt?"

"Only a minute or two."

"Was she dead?" The doctor's voice was full of dry meaning; but Bertha went on quietly:

"I feared so, but I felt her pulse to make sure. Even then I could not believe she was dead. Mr. Gordon lifted her to the couch, and we tried in every way to revive her."

"Did you see any signs of any wound or instrument which could have made one?"

"None at all."

"Could you see your aunt distinctly as she came down-stairs?"

"Yes."

"How could you when there was no light?" The coroner smiled as if he had scored a point.

"The moonlight came in on the stairs through the window," answered Bertha quietly; "and there was a hall-lamp on the landing above which shone partly down."

The doctor's tone was grim as he asked: "Do you think your aunt saw you?"

"I don't know." The girl's voice dropped. "I was in the moonlight, too, but I had on a dark dress."

Gordon gave a sigh of relief. Evidently she was not going to say anything about the ghost.

"Did your aunt make any gesture with her hand that might indicate a purpose of self-destruction?"

Again, in the silence that followed, every one hung on her answer. It came slowly, distinctly:

"No."

"And she carried nothing in her hand?"

"No."

The doctor pulled his great beard and sat back in his chair, staring at her with something between wonder and admiration in his shrewd eyes.

"Miss Wetherall," he said slowly, "are you aware that on making the examination a sharp hatpin was found thrust into your aunt's heart, which must have caused her death instantly?"

"Yes." The answer was faint but clear.

"She might have staggered a few steps before she died, but she could not possibly have descended even a third of those steps as you say she did. Knowing this, are you positive of what you have stated?"

"I am."

There was no mistaking the sincerity and conviction of her words. The jurymen looked at each other questioningly, and even the doctor was silent a moment. Then, with an air of decision he picked up an object from the table before him and held it out toward her.

"This, Miss Wetherall, is the pin which I found in Mrs. Wetherall's heart. Have you ever seen it before?"

With an effort the girl bent forward to look at it, then gave a sudden start.

"Yes; it is mine." There was no hesitation in the answer, though her face was pale.

"When did you have it last?"

"I missed it two days ago, and thought I had lost it."

"Where did you last have it?"

"I cannot remember."

Very wisely the coroner let the testimony rest there, but when she would have left the room he stopped her with the curt request to stay until the inquest was finished. He then rose and gave an account of his examination of the body, with the impressive air of one conscious of the effect he is about to produce.

"On first viewing the body I had my suspicions that death was not to be attributed to shock alone, although Mrs. Wetherall suffered from some heart-trouble, which might under certain conditions have caused her death. The general condition of the body, however, and the distortion of the face indicated to me a more violent death than that from heart-failure. I could discover no bruise on the head which might have caused death, but in making a further examination I found that my supposition was correct.

"This short, steel hatpin, which the clerk will now pass over to the gentlemen of the jury for inspection, I found deeply embedded in the body. It had been plunged between the ribs up to its head, and had passed directly into the heart. It had caused internal hemorrhage, and almost instant death. There was very little superficial flow of blood, due to the fact that the head of the pin was flat, and pressed so closely against the body that it prevented any such flow of blood as

would otherwise naturally have occurred.

"The fact that neither Mr. Wetherall nor Mr. Gordon noticed the presence of the pin was due to its flat black onyx head, and its being entirely concealed by the heavy lace falling from the upper part of the dressing-gown. Mr. Gordon has already told you of that.

"In my professional opinion Mrs. Wetherall's death was instantaneously caused by this weapon. It will be your aim to determine by further evidence to whom the placing of it there should be attributed."

As he finished and sat down, Gordon set his teeth. He suspected that the doctor had purposely kept back this statement to the jury in order to make more effective the confronting of Bertha with the hatpin and to make her story seem more incredible. It was evident that the doctor had already formed his opinion, and that the same idea was being impressed on the jury.

The coroner's statement had been received by them with a growing excitement, and the hatpin was passed from hand to hand with intense interest. Doubtless none of these countrymen had ever officiated in such a puzzling case, and that they would follow sheeplike the lead that was being given he felt sure.

It looked dubious for Bertha; but he consoled himself, prematurely as it appeared, with the lack of motive for such a deed.

The constable came next, and testified that he had made a careful examination of the windows and doors throughout the house, and found that none of them had been tampered with. They were nearly all provided with heavy wooden shutters and immense iron bolts; and old Jerry, called to the stand, testified also at great length that they were bolted as usual when he came in to open them at half past six.

Martha Jenkins was called next, and took her place with a boldly confident air that increased Gordon's prejudice against her.

"How long have you been in Mr. Wetherall's employ?" asked the coroner.

"Two years."

"Why did you leave?"

"It was dreadful lonely here, sir, and the cook and the other girl got talking about all sorts of things until it went on my nerves, too."

"What sort of things?"

She hesitated.

"Speak out," said the doctor sharply. "Tell me everything you remember."

"Well, they said there were queer noises and something like lights going up and down the stairs, and they couldn't stand it."

"Did you ever hear any of these noises or see any lights yourself?"

"No, sir—that is, not to speak of."

"Well, I want you to speak of it," said the doctor impatiently. "Tell us everything you saw, no matter how slight."

"Well, I was comin' in late one night and I heard a noise in the hall, and when I came in I saw a light seem to run quickly up the stairs; but when I went close there was nothing there. They do say there's a ghost in the house, and old Jerry's always talking about it; but I don't take any stock in those things myself," she added with a superior air.

"Then why did you leave?"

"The rest was for going, and I didn't want to be here alone."

"Why did you return?"

"I realized how foolish I was to give up a good place, and Mr. Wetherall promised me more money if I'd come back."

"Very well. Now, Martha, during the time you lived here you saw the family under all conditions. What were the relations between Mrs. Wetherall and Miss Bertha?"

The stroke which Gordon dreaded, and which he had anticipated despite the doctor's clumsy finessing, had

fallen at last. He glanced quickly at Bertha; but she was staring out the window, hardly seeming to have heard the question. Mr. Wetherall had turned in his chair, and was regarding the witness with an apprehensive look, as if he feared what she might say.

Martha Jenkins hesitated.

"Answer me as fully as if no one were present," said the doctor sharply. "This is a court of law, remember, and you are sworn to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

"Well, sir, I don't think they got on very well together. Leastways they didn't seem to agree much."

"Did they ever have any quarrels?"

"Well, no; not when any one was around."

"Perhaps you overheard something by accident?" suggested the doctor.

Martha hesitated again and cast a quick glance at her young mistress. The cold one she met in return made her stumble quickly into speech.

"It was quite accidental, sir. I am not the one to spy on people. I was dusting in the hall, and I heard them speaking in the library."

"What did they say?"

"Mrs. Wetherall was trying to quiet her, and the young lady was speaking rapid like and very much excited. She was saying as how she couldn't stand it any longer, and Mrs. Wetherall said to remember what they had done for her; and Miss Bertha she said: 'You are killing me by inches, but be careful; your turn may come next.'"

"What did Mrs. Wetherall say then?"

"She began to cry, and I heard Miss Bertha run up-stairs to her own room."

"Did they have any other quarrel that you overheard?"

"No, sir; but they was always saying little things to each other."

"What kind of things?"

"Bits of back talk like women do, sir."

"Did Mr. Wetherall take part in these discussions?"

"No, sir; he was always quiet and gentle like."

The doctor picked up the pin from the table again and held it toward her.

"Do you recognize this?"

The maid's bold, hard face grew pale.

"Lord—yes, sir!"

"Whose is it?"

"Miss Bertha's."

"Are you sure?"

"I've seen it often on her dresser and in her hat, sir."

"Very good, Martha; you may go. Mr. Wetherall, will you take the stand?"

Mr. Wetherall rose with much reluctance, his florid face pale.

"Have you ever noticed any disagreement between your niece and your wife? Remember it is very important to be frank."

"Yes; I have noticed and regretted it very much."

"Were you aware of any such attitude as Martha Jenkins has described?"

"Not expressed in that way."

He spoke with a reluctance which seemed to Gordon's ears insincere.

"What was the cause of this antagonism?"

"I should rather not say."

"There is no question of 'rather,' Mr. Wetherall. It is your duty to tell us everything."

"She believed that her aunt had been responsible for wrecking her father's life. Mrs. Wetherall had been engaged to him before she did me the honor of marrying me."

"Is your niece nervous?"

"Exceedingly so."

"Has she ever been subject to any hysterical fits or hallucinations?"

Mr. Wetherall's eyes were cast on the ground.

"Yes; I regret to say—very often—of late."

"That is a lie!"

They all turned to see Bertha standing, her eyes blazing and her outstretched arm pointing to her uncle.

"Miss Wetherall!" "Bertha!" exclaimed the doctor and Mr. Wetherall simultaneously.

"Yes, I know!" she cried passionately. "But in making me out to be mad be careful that you don't drive me so!"

She turned around, and, seeing Gordon, who had involuntarily risen to his feet, she stretched her hands out toward him appealingly.

"Please take me out of here before I—"

Gordon sprang forward and caught her as she drooped. The others crowded around, but he waved them off and carried her outside to the deserted hall. At a nod from the doctor the constable followed them out, but stood at a little distance.

Gordon felt there was no one there she could trust but him, and he was satisfied with his own wisdom when she opened her eyes and, looking round her with a shudder as if fearful to see some of the faces, let her eyes return to his gratefully.

"What did I say?" she murmured faintly. "Something foolish, I know; but I couldn't bear it any longer."

"Don't think of it," he urged. "It has been a terrible strain for you. Lie here and rest."

Her hand closed on his with a grateful pressure.

"Oh, you are so good! No one has been so good to me since my father died."

"I wish I could help you more," answered Gordon honestly. "Isn't there something I can do?"

"Yes. Will you go back into that dreadful room and hear what they decide? I must go up-stairs soon; I can't endure any more. Slip a note under my door, telling me what is the result."

Gordon promised, and made his way back to the scene of the inquest. The doctor, who had been summing up the evidence, ended with these words:

"This is a very perplexing case, gentlemen; and the evidence will need careful sifting, since it bewilders rather than makes clear. Mrs. Wetherall is found dead with a wound in the heart, which in my professional opinion should have caused instant death; and yet her niece, who was alone in the house with her at the time, asserts under oath that she saw her come half-way down the stairs before she fell.

"It might be conceivable that she fell on the point and drove it into her heart if the position of the wound did not preclude that supposition. It has evidently been driven in by some one with considerable strength and animosity. There is no mark on the body to indicate that the fall injured her or that there was any other cause of death. All the evidence has been given, and the law must take its course. Gentlemen of the jury, I leave the decision with you."

The jury was out fifty minutes, and rendered a verdict of:

"Death from a stab in the heart, inflicted by a person or persons unknown."

CHAPTER X.

A Knight of the Road.

GORDON slipped out the moment the verdict was pronounced and hurried to the place where he had left Bertha, but she was gone. He scribbled a few lines on a piece of paper, asking if he could see her later in the cupola; slipped it under her door, and then went out.

It was oppressively hot, but he walked on briskly until he was well away from the vicinity of the house. He wanted to be alone, to think over quietly the events of the past three hours, and to settle, if possible, some of the perplexing doubts which were filling his mind.

None of this could be done within sight of that gloomy house whose walls held such a baffling secret. He did not know in what direction he was going,

but struck out at random through the woodland that lay around the house. Not until he had walked a half mile or more did he stop, and, throwing himself down in the grass of a woody knoll that commanded a view of the distant river, lighted a cigarette and began to go over the evidence.

One thing was apparent at first sight to his practised mind: The coroner's suspicions were definitely directed toward Bertha. As Gordon went over the various testimonies — the evidence of the hatpin, the bad feeling shown to have existed between the girl and her aunt, and last, but not least, her own improbable statements, to which she clung so obstinately—he could not wonder himself at the conclusion to which the doctor had come.

Even his own mind was staggered by this array of damning facts; and if his feelings had only been those of a lawyer toward a client, he, too, might have drawn the same deduction. But other and stronger forces were making themselves felt more irresistibly every minute, and he had a blind faith in her innocence which amounted almost to a conviction.

She was guiltless, and it was his duty to see that others recognized that fact also.

He knew very well what the next step of the prosecution would be. The coroner would turn the case over to the county district attorney, and he would lay the evidence before the grand jury.

Whatever methods were to be used to prevent that must be used at once, but just what they would be Gordon had not the slightest idea at present.

The case was unusually puzzling, and the evidence, as the doctor had said, only obscured it the more. Nothing could be got from Mr. Wetherall, Bertha was too much upset by the strain she had gone through to be of much assistance, and he must work alone and in the dark.

Gordon's square jaw set with a grim determination as he faced the knotty problem before him. Harvey, his old football captain at college, would have understood the meaning of that same jaw and backed it to win.

For a long time he sat there, smoking, thinking, and watching with unseeing eyes the waves of heat that rose from the brassy surface of the river below.

"Say, mister, 've you got a light?"

A hoarse voice in his ear made Gordon turn quickly. The decrepit figure standing beside him was one of the derelicts of humanity that wash up and down the river's length, and it was only a hint of some refinement, not yet entirely lost, in his tones as he thanked Gordon for the box he tossed him that made the latter look at him more closely.

His face was unshaven and dirty, but the lines of it were not unpleasing, and there was a humorous twist to the lips that redeemed its rascality. His ragged clothes hung on a pitifully gaunt frame, and he coughed hollowly even as he drew in the smoke of his pipe with a nod of satisfaction.

"Only thing that makes this old stewpan of ours worth while," he observed, "unless it's a bit of coke and white stuff to cheat the devil that runs things for a while."

His bravado was so pitiful that Gordon felt less of contempt than compassion.

"But he has his innings later," he rejoined.

"You bet he does; he's a first-rate Jew, and gets his pound of flesh every time," the man answered with a sudden somberness that lent his face a kind of fallen dignity. "He'll have the whole of me soon—say, have you the price of a drink on you?" he added, as suddenly resuming his beggar's whine. "Let a poor devil drink to the health of a rich saint."

Gordon laughed in spite of himself.

"I'm not a saint, even if you are a devil, and I've no desire to send you to him before you have to go."

"All right," answered the man

without any resentment, "but you've missed a chance to make two people happy."

"Who are they?"

"Myself, for one—"

"And the other?"

The man winked. "A good friend of mine who will be glad to send me along the road. He'll give me all the drinks I want. Holy snakes, won't he be glad to see me turning up again after he thought I was safely planted! But I'm good for a dozen quarts more, I am."

He chuckled, and then his cough caught and racked him until Gordon thought he would surely choke to death. He stood watching the man with mingled pity and disgust.

"Look here, I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at last. "I'll send you to the hospital and pay for you to be made comfortable there."

The man backed away from him.

"Hands off!" he wheezed, "I'd rather croak peaceful on the road than be in one of those fancy germ-houses with an inquisitive sawbones cutting you up before you are dead to see how you work. Nix on the sawbones for me. Lemme alone, mister, and I won't trouble any one soon."

"All right," laughed Gordon. "Does your friend live near?"

"It's a mile further, I guess," answered the man as he turned and began to limp away.

"Hold on," said Gordon with a sudden impulse of pity, for the man looked half-starved and staggered as he went. "I suppose if I don't give you something for drink somebody else will, anyway. Here, get a little forgetfulness, if you can't do anything else."

He pulled some loose change from his pocket and handed it to the man. The tramp did not offer to take it, but stood looking at Gordon with eyes suddenly become somber shadows.

"Forgetfulness! Does that come in a bottle after all? I see things—yes, and hear them, too, when I'm asleep—always a voice, a silky voice, leading me on from bad to worse. It's the devil himself, but some day I'll get even with him and tell the truth—Ah—" he broke off with a shuddering cry, and hid his face in his hands. Then, as suddenly, while Gordon stood silent, he looked up with a crafty grin and clutched the money the other still mechanically held out.

"Thanky, sir; thanky," he whined. "I'll get a bite and a drink and bless you for it."

He turned again and made his way along the road with more strength than he had shown before. Gordon looked after him with an odd mixture of relief and regret. The man's evident degradation was repellent, but his pluck and a certain rascally humor interested the lawyer in spite of it. At all events he had made Gordon forget for a few minutes the weight of his own problems, and he was thankful.

This regret was somewhat violently increased when he discovered that he had inadvertently given the vagabond a cherished pocket-piece. And it was too late now to get it again. He dismissed the matter with a shrug.

As he walked back considering anew his immediate course of action, he decided on one thing: to send for a clever private detective he knew and let him make whatever investigations were possible. Two heads were better than one in a case like this, and he felt instinctively that he could count on no help from Mr. Wetherall.

In fact, he had a strong suspicion that that gentleman would welcome his departure, and he was not surprised, therefore, when he met Mr. Wetherall as he returned from the village to have him suggest that if Gordon still wished to catch the evening express, he would drive him down at once.

"Thank you very much," replied the young man, "but I'm afraid that I shall have to impose again upon your hospitality. My clerk told me when I phoned him this afternoon that new matters have turned up, and it will be

necessary for me to see that witness again before I return. I found that he had gone to the city to-day, but was expected home to-morrow night. So, if it is not too much of a bother for me to stay here to-night, I'll hunt up quarters in the village to-morrow. I tried to get a room in the hotel, but it was full of farmers just come in for the county fair. They told me they might have a room to-morrow."

"Certainly not," answered Mr. Wetherall. "I won't hear of your staying anywhere else but with us while you are here. And it will not only be convenient, but a great pleasure, I assure you. Now, let us have some dinner."

His tones were perfect in their hospitable warmth, but it was not reflected in his cold, opaque eyes, and Gordon smiled to himself as he followed him into the house.

CHAPTER XI.

The White Face.

MR. WETHERALL excused himself and went out directly after dinner, and Gordon was able to make his way unobserved to the cupola, where a few minutes later Bertha joined him. Evidently she had gained control of herself, and her manner, as she greeted him, was full of a quiet courage which impressed as well as cheered him.

"So they think my aunt was murdered," she said at once, "and the doctor believes I did it. That I could see. What will he do now?"

"I'm afraid the matter has passed out of his hands. The district attorney is taking the case up now."

"And what will he do?"

There was a faint quiver in her voice, but she met his eyes steadily. Gordon did not hesitate; the truth was the most merciful thing now.

"He will put the matter in the hands of the grand jury, and I am afraid you will be held in custody."

Bertha gave a involuntary shudder.

"Does that mean I must go to prison?" she asked tremulously, her self-control slipping for an instant.

"Perhaps not," he reassured her, although his own mind was filled with doubts. "They might not find a true bill; but they would require your presence here meanwhile. In any case, Miss Wetherall, the matter is a serious one, and we must consider carefully what to do."

"I know it," she answered, with a brave resumption of her former control that won Gordon's admiration. "And if you know how much that 'we' consoles me— Mr. Gordon, can —will *you* take the case?"

"I think I have done so already without being asked," smiled Gordon. "In fact, I have taken the liberty of acting in your behalf and sending for a detective. Criminal cases are a little out of my line, and we need all the technical help we can get. When he comes to-morrow it will be as one of my clerks, and no one need know what he really is. He is a clever chap and should help us."

"You are always so good to me," she said slowly. "I am continually thanking you, or trying to. How can I ever repay you?"

John Gordon, LL.B., had a sudden, almost uncontrollable desire to exact payment at once: to take his client in his arms and kiss the fear away from her beautiful, troubled face. He repressed it valiantly, but something of it still lingered in his face as he answered, and Bertha's eyes dropped before his.

"Don't try now. Some day I may ask you for thanks. And now let us talk things over. Can you remember any other fact, however insignificant, which you did not tell the doctor at the inquest? Any; I mean, which his questions did not suggest at the time?"

She frowned thoughtfully. Suddenly her face lit up. "Yes, I can. I remember, now, how I lost my hatpin."

Gordon leaned forward eagerly.

"That's a very important point. What became of it?"

"I remember now that a few days ago I had been in my aunt's room taking off my hat while talking to her, and absent-mindedly stuck one of the pins in her cushion. That must have been the one."

"I'm afraid that won't help much—not our case, at least. Isn't there something else?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing that I can remember now."

"Miss Wetherall," he said suddenly, "when we talked up here before you referred to something that your aunt had done to your father. Will you tell me now what it was?"

The same look of brooding horror which he had noticed before swept over the girls face.

"I don't know whether I *can* tell you—but I'll try. My father died when I was only thirteen, but the circumstances of his death were very terrible and made a strong impression on me."

She twisted her hands nervously, and it was several minutes before she could go on.

"It was shortly after my mother's death, and my father, who had always suffered from heart trouble, was especially miserable at this time. My aunt and uncle were living with us in this house, and it was during their stay that my father, influenced by a premonition of some sort, put me legally under their care. I will be twenty-one on my next birthday — a month from now, I am glad to say.

"One night we were awakened by a hoarse scream, and running out, found my father lying dead at the foot of the stairs with a look of frozen horror on his face. The doctor said it was heart failure, but I think it was caused by fright."

"By fright? What caused it?"

"I think," she answered, looking at him steadily, "that my aunt did."

"Your aunt?"

"Yes; whether purposely or not I don't know. I believe that my father, who was given to walking in his sleep, came down the stairs that night, and wakening suddenly when he was halfway down, saw her standing at the foot. The shock of waking and seeing her with such a ghostlike resemblance to his dead wife (did I tell you that my father and uncle had married two sisters, their first cousins?) was too much for his weakened heart, and the result was fatal."

"But this is terrible!" cried Gordon. "Why do you think your aunt did it purposely? How could she, and what do you found your suspicions on?"

"Only this. I was passing my aunt's room one evening after she had gone to bed, and hearing her moaning, went in to see what was the matter. She was asleep, but talking excitedly. As I came in she sat up in bed, and staring at me wildly, cried, 'No, no; not that! Why did he come downstairs just then? Oh, that dreadful look on his face! Benjamin, it was all my fault!' Then she fell back again on the bed, and when I roused her, said she had been having a terrible nightmare."

"What made you connect that with your father? She might only have been thinking of him as he looked after his death."

Bertha shook her head obstinately.

"I believe she was responsible in some way, and I think it was a guilty conscience that caused her own death."

"In spite of the hatpin?"

"Yes, in spite of that. I look very much like my father, Mr. Gordon."

Gordon did not answer immediately. He wished she would not cling to this ghost story. And yet, if he still needed any proof of her own innocence, he would have found it in the simple way in which she had told this unconvincing story, for if she had been guilty she would have invented a more plausible one.

This obsession of hers worried him, however, and he wondered whether her uncle might not be right after all in his hint of some mental trouble.

"We must deal with facts, not theories," he soothed; "and there is one thing more I want to ask you. Why did you try to leave the next morning?"

She met his look frankly.

"I was so terrified I felt I must leave this place at all costs. But please believe, Mr. Gordon, that if I had known of the suspicion against me, I would never have thought of it."

"I do believe that," said Gordon hastily, ashamed of his appearance of doubt; "I only wondered if you had any one to go to."

"I have no friends," she answered simply. "Not one living person I can trust, except an old nurse of mine, to whom I intended to go. Does that surprise you?"

"It does, indeed," he answered, regarding her with pity. "Surely you must have some relatives, or even a friend you made during your school-days?"

"Not one. I was very sick after my father's death, and my uncle took me out of school and gave me private teachers. Then we traveled abroad for a while, and for some reason I never seemed to make any friends; perhaps because my uncle and aunt never encouraged it, nor cared to have me be with young people. My father had no other brothers nor any sisters, and those relatives he had disapproved of cousins marrying and would have nothing to do with us. I have been very lonely, Mr. Gordon. Sometimes it seems to me that my life matters very little to any one; but I mustn't trouble you with all this when you are good enough to do so much for me."

She gave him a forlorn little smile.

"I am very glad you told me," he replied quickly, "and it only shows me how much you need a friend. It makes me more glad that I can be one—if you will let me."

"Indeed I will!" she answered, giving him her hand impulsively. "It is the only thing that comforts me and gives me courage to fight on—the fact that you believe in me and are trying to help me. I know you won't let me thank you now; but some time, perhaps, the mouse may be able to help the lion!"

"She certainly may!" laughed Gordon. "You don't know what a terrible usurer I am."

"I'm not afraid," she smiled back. "Indeed, I don't feel afraid of anything now."

In fact, Gordon thought as he looked at her she already seemed a different person, and he trusted heartily that the look of hope he saw in her lovely face would be rewarded. But even as he looked it clouded over with a shadow of a new idea.

"It's selfish of me to ask you to stay here. I ought not to let you, much as I need you. This is a dangerous house, Mr. Gordon."

"I'm not afraid," he answered with an attempt at lightness; "and I absolutely refuse to be frightened away by any of your ghosts, real or imaginary."

"You need not be afraid of the ghosts," she returned, with a new gravity that impressed him in spite of himself.

"Is there any one in the house I should fear?" he asked quickly.

"I can't tell you anything more definite than that I have a strong feeling you are not safe here. And I can't tell you from whom or from what the danger comes. But so many dreadful things have happened here already. And those I care for—" She stopped with a quick flush as if suddenly conscious of how much she had betrayed. "I—I don't want to lose my only friend."

"Oh, I'll take care of myself, never fear," promised Gordon. "I'm a lucky chap, as a rule—but the house is certainly uncanny," he added, glancing around the cupola, where the gathering

dusk was making shadows in its cobwebby corners.

"It is a dreadful place," she shuddered. "I never feel safe for one minute. There seems to be something menacing me all the time — ready to spring on me any minute— *Look! What is that?*"

In spite of the heat, a chill ran over Gordon; but he restrained the impulse to spring to his feet. Bertha was peering down through the balustrade into the darkness of the hall below.

As he followed the direction of her eyes, he distinctly saw a white face staring up at them.

CHAPTER XII.

Danger!

BERTHA caught his arm. "Did you see it?" she gasped.

"I thought I saw a face below. It's gone now. I'll go down and see."

"No, no—don't!" she cried, still clinging to his arm. "I am so afraid! Oh, why didn't we go down before it got dark?"

She seemed beside herself with terror, and Gordon patted her hand soothingly as he might have a child's.

"The face was a human one," he reassured. "It was probably one of the servants wondering what we were doing up here. I couldn't see very clearly, but it seemed familiar to me. Do you know who it looked like?"

"Yes, yes," she shuddered; "but I don't want to say. How are we to get out of here?"

"Easily enough. I'll go down first, and you can follow close to me."

They went slowly down the narrow, winding staircase, Gordon lighting matches at each step. There was no one in the dimly lit hall below which led to the servants' quarters in the right wing; the corresponding quarters in the other wing being given over to trunks and discarded furniture. But Gordon was not sorry when they gained the lower hall.

"You see, it was probably one of the servants," he said reassuringly. "It was a woman's face, I am sure, but I can't tell whose; she must have heard us talking, though we were speaking very low, and was probably as much startled as we were."

She shook her head.

"I would rather it had been something other than human; it would be safer—in this house."

"Come, you are overtired. You must go to bed and get a good night's sleep; you will look at things differently to-morrow. And don't worry about me; I shall take very good care of myself, never fear."

But though he spoke unconcernedly, his face grew grave as the door of her room closed behind her, and he turned and walked thoughtfully to his own.

He would have been even more serious if he had seen the white face and eager eyes still peering at him from the hall above.

It was early yet, and he was not sleepy. He lit all the candles he could find, filled his pipe, and settled down with a book, determined to put everything else out of his mind for a while so that he could take a fresher view of the whole affair. But the warmth and the oppressive silence, broken only by the occasional sighing of the wind in the branches of the hemlocks outside his window, made his mind wander time and again.

He had made an unfortunate selection, too, in his book, which was a creepy, old-fashioned tale called "Uncle Silas," the heroine of which, oddly enough, was persecuted throughout many nerve-racking chapters by a wicked uncle. Presently he flung it down and got to his feet.

"I'll be seeing things soon myself if I stay any longer in this jumpy place," he mused. "I've got to get some fresh air."

He left his room and went downstairs quietly. Only a few lights were burning in the great hall below, although it was but ten o'clock.

As he walked over to the door Mr. Wetherall came out from the library, where Mrs. Wetherall's body was lying. His face was white and careworn; and in spite of his prejudice against him, Gordon felt a sudden sympathy. After all, he might not be more than he seemed at this moment—a stricken old man suddenly bereaved of a lifelong companion.

"I am going out for a breath of air," he observed. "It's stifling inside. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"No, no, thank you," said the other wearily. "Unless you will be good enough to see that the house is closed when you come in?"

He went up-stairs without waiting for an answer, and Gordon let himself out into the warm fragrance of the night with the relief he always felt at leaving this gloomy pile.

It was still very hot, but a little breeze came from the river, and the occasional winking of far-off lightning seemed to promise some relief later. He walked up and down the terrace for nearly an hour, thinking over the events of the past day.

Certainly into no other twenty-four hours of his existence had so many startling occurrences been crammed, and he could hardly realize that it was barely that long since he had blundered into this web of mystery.

And what a mystery it was! Think as hard as he might, he could see no way out of it, or possible explanation. But the girl up-stairs trusted him, and he *must* find a way out.

He wished Rollins was here, so they could begin their investigation. And with this thought the idea came to him; why couldn't he begin the investigation at once on his own account? The lights were all out up-stairs, and he had the house to himself.

Gordon was nothing of an amateur detective. His work dealt chiefly with law and order; and how on earth could one apply the rules of common sense to this fantastic affair? But every investigation he had known of, either in fiction or fact, invariably began on the spot of the murder.

He would go and look over the staircase, would try to repicture the scene, and perhaps some solution of the mystery would occur to him.

He turned and went toward the house. As he passed a clump of trees, something bright sticking up from the grass caught his eye. He thought, too, that there was a darker shadow there than the tree would account for.

His nerves were so attuned to suspicion that he stopped, and then advanced cautiously. As he came near he saw that the shiny object was the neck of a whisky flask, and beside it, with one hand still clutching it, was stretched a dark figure.

Gordon hesitated another moment, and then striking a match, held it down. One glimpse of the unshaven face and gaunt features of the recumbent figure showed him that it was his friend of the road. He seemed to have found his peace at last, and his face was so ghastly that Gordon fancied for a moment that it might be an eternal one; but as the light flared in his face, he stirred uneasily and coughed.

Gordon put his hand on the man's shoulder and shook him, but he only muttered something unintelligible without opening his eyes. He was evidently dead drunk; and since the night was warm, and the tramp in his present state was incapable of any harm, Gordon let him alone and made his way back to the house.

Once inside he tried, in accordance with his theory, to fancy himself Bertha entering the house after leaving her uncle and starting toward the foot of the stairs, to be met by the sight of her aunt descending them. Just where the stairs began to curve must have been the spot where, according to Bertha's statement, her aunt fell.

He counted the stairs from the bottom. The fourteenth, or perhaps the fifteenth, might have been where she stumbled; but they were all exactly alike.

Gordon's nerves were fairly strong, but the events of the past day had tried them severely; and standing there on the spot where so much had already happened, almost within an hour of the very time, a sudden sense of foreboding came over him, and a clammy sweat broke out on his forehead. He felt an irresistible impulse to get away, and it was almost in a panic that he hastened outside.

After several turns up and down the piazza, his common sense and courage returned. He went in again, and, annoyed at himself for his almost womanish weakness, he forced himself to mount the steps, looking about him carefully.

A little square of paper, which had become wedged in an obscure corner of the metal railing, caught his eye, and he stooped for it quickly. At the same instant something crashed by him—something which would have brained him if he had not stooped so suddenly, but which struck him on the shoulder instead, and shivered to pieces on the stone steps.

The blow was a glancing one, but it took Gordon unawares. He reeled, caught at the balustrade, missed it, and plunged headlong down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Tramp Again.

THE fall was a heavy one, and for a moment Gordon lost consciousness. Then he faintly heard a woman's cry, and the sound of steps running swiftly down the stairway.

He opened his eyes to see Bertha bending over him with an expression of fear and concern, which even in his confusion affected him strangely.

"Oh, you are hurt!" she cried.

He smiled faintly and rose to his feet with difficulty.

"No, I am only shaken up a bit. Something fell down from above and struck me, and I must have tumbled down the stairs."

"Oh, I knew something would happen!" she almost wailed. "Why did you come to this dreadful spot?"

Gordon did not answer. He was feeling his left shoulder gingerly.

"Nothing broken, but it was a narrow shave. I wonder what it was that fell on me."

He went over and picking up the white fragments that were scattered on the stairs, examined them curiously.

"Why, it's a piece of molding, or a cornice of some sort. It must have got loose and fallen from above. I wonder—" He did not finish his speech, but stood looking up thoughtfully.

"I *knew* something would happen," repeated Bertha hysterically. "Why did you come to just this place at just this time? Is there to be a horror every night in this house? Oh, if you had been killed what *should* I have done?"

Her distress was so intense, and she looked so lovely in her white dressing-gown with her dark hair loosely caught up, that Gordon forgot his self-imposed prudence, everything but his desire to comfort her, and put his uninjured arm impulsively around her.

"But I am not killed, and I'm doubly anxious to live just now—for your sake as well as my own."

For a moment the girl's body relaxed against his confidingly; then she drew herself away, while a warm, crimson blush flooded her face.

"I didn't mean to be so weak," she whispered. "But so much has happened here that I couldn't bear this—to you. But your arm—?" as Gordon winced involuntarily, "Can't I do something for it?"

"Oh, a little arnica will fix that up. What bothers me most is how that piece of cornice happened to fall at the exact minute it did."

She followed the direction of his eyes, and so unstrung were their nerves that both started violently as a figure appeared just then in the curve of the stairs. It was Mr. Wetherall,

and he stared down at them with startled, blinking eyes, like one waking from sleep.

"What is it? Is any one hurt?" he asked. "I thought I heard something fall a few minutes ago, but I had just taken a sedative to try to get some sleep and it was some time before I could rouse myself."

"It was my fault, I'm afraid," said Gordon apologetically. "I was going up to bed when something—a piece of the molding above there just below the balustrade — fell on me and nearly finished me. I am sorry to have aroused the whole house."

"Good Heavens," cried Mr. Wetherall, his jaw dropping, "you might have been killed, and just on *that* spot, too!" And then he added in Bertha's own words: "Is there to be no end to the horrors in this house?"

But the frightened faces of the two maids were now peering over from above, and Bertha, realizing her costume for the first time, went quickly back to her room after a whispered direction to Gordon where he would find some liniment.

Mr. Wetherall, whose shaken condition roused even Gordon's sympathy, insisted upon mixing them both a drink; and Gordon was not sorry, for he was beginning to feel very weak and dizzy.

"By the way," he observed, "I stumbled across a drunken man out there in the grass, but he is too far gone to do any harm. A queer sort of fellow with a dreadful cough. He won't trouble any one long, I fancy."

Mr. Wetherall put down his glass.

"What did he look like? Did you see his face?"

"It was lean and gaunt, with a large red scar on one cheek," answered Gordon carelessly. "His hair was white, though he didn't look old."

He did not mention that he had met the man before; some instinct made him keep this to himself, and he was glad of it later.

Mr. Wetherall got up quickly.

"I'll just go out and take a look. These fellows come around often to rob, and it isn't safe. He may be pretending to be drunk."

Gordon rose to go with him, but Mr. Wetherall waved him back.

"No, you have had enough for one evening," he said with marked solicitude. "If I need your help I'll call."

He disappeared before the younger man could protest his entire ability and willingness to help him. Gordon shrugged his shoulders philosophically and emptied his glass. If Mr. Wetherall wanted to hunt possible burglars alone, he could, and in any case he judged the man was harmless enough.

In less than ten minutes Mr. Wetherall was back. He panted slightly as if he had been running, but otherwise he seemed as composed as ever. Only his hand shook painfully.

"You were right. He is too drunk to do any harm. I will attend to him in the morning—and, as it's nearly that now, suppose we retire?"

He locked the door and shuffled upstairs, where Gordon gladly followed him. He had had enough for one day, and he speedily dropped off into a sleep which a dozen ghosts could not have broken.

He was awakened early next morning by the dull ache in his shoulder, and further sleep being out of the question, he got up and dressed himself slowly, and with difficulty, for his arm was stiff and swollen.

There had been a change in the night, and the air was cool and fresh. It keyed up his nerves, and made him forget the throbbing pain in his shoulder which came with every movement.

"I wonder what's in store for me to-day," he thought, as he fumbled over his tie. "If it's anything as lively as yesterday my guardian angel will have to keep busy."

As he went down the stairs he glanced curiously at the balustrade from beneath which the heavy piece of molding had fallen. It had certainly

been a close call for him last night. If it had not been for his stooping for the paper—and, by the way, what had become of the paper? He remembered clutching it just as the blow fell, but what had he done with it?

He had had enough of investigating the stairs for a while, however, and he went on down without further search.

It was early, and he was evidently the first down, for the big door was still locked. He strolled into the great drawing-room, and unfastening one of the long windows, stepped out on to the terrace. He had just taken out his cigarette-case when he heard voices coming from the lawn beyond the big clump of oaks.

"Didn't think you'd ever see me alive again, did you? Thought I had my three feet of sod over me all right, hey? Well, I had to come back to see an old pal once more before I croaked."

He could not see the speaker, for this side of the piazza was screened with vines; but he recognized the voice as that of his friend of the highway.

"What do you want?" answered the voice of Mr. Wetherall.

"Lots of things. Food, and another drink to begin with; and then we'll chew things over."

"You've had enough to drink already," retorted Mr. Wetherall sternly, "and you'll get nothing from me by blustering."

Apparently his tone cowed the other, for he answered in a more conciliatory voice:

"Who's blustering. Can't a man josh a bit without a call-down?"

"Come this way," answered Mr. Wetherall shortly, "and be quiet, or not a bite you'll get."

"Keep a civil tongue, too, then, if you want things your way," sneered the man with returning spirit.

Mr. Wetherall made no answer. Gordon could hear them moving toward the corner of the house nearest the kitchen, and when he peered around through the vines they were out of sight.

"This sounds interesting," he thought. "So Wetherall is the friend he alluded to—and judging from the way he has received him, I imagine there 'll be no fatted calf for that prodigal. I must have a talk with him myself."

He slipped noiselessly back into the house and made his way to the kitchen as soon as he thought it safe; but there was no one there except the cook, who, judging from her sleepy expression and the way she was attacking the stove, had just come down.

He asked her for a glass of water as an excuse for coming in, and retired. But though he scouted carefully through the grounds, he could not see any signs of the man or Wetherall. In fact, the latter only arrived for breakfast when Gordon had nearly finished.

"I had to walk down the road to telephone," he said as he took his place, "which made me both late and hot. It certainly is a bother not to have a telephone in the house, and I must get one in as soon as possible. I trust you slept well, and that your arm is better?"

"Thank you. It's a bit lame, but it will be all right in a day or two."

"That's good. You had a narrow escape. I should never have forgiven myself if you had been seriously injured, although I had no idea of the condition of the molding. The house is very old, and some of these plaster ornaments are quite heavy. I shall look over them carefully to-day, and have them attended to as soon as possible. I think you should have the doctor look at your arm. I shall send for him."

Gordon protested that it needed no attention beyond what he had given it, and he added, carelessly, that he expected a confidential clerk of his to come that morning with important letters for him to sign, and hoped his presence would not inconvenience Mr. Wetherall.

"This afternoon I'll try the hotel again," he observed. "You have been

awfully kind to let me bother you so long."

Rather to his surprise, Mr. Wetherall would not hear of his leaving. In fact, he seemed so concerned at the idea that Gordon consented to stay until his business was settled.

"You have had unfortunate experiences in this house," said Mr. Wetherall pleasantly as he rose, "and I don't blame you for wanting to leave, but I hope to make you have a better opinion of us. Of course, my niece and I must be away at the funeral this morning, but please consider the house and everything in it at your disposal during your stay."

He smiled blandly as he spoke. He seemed to have recovered his usual suave dignity, and only the tired lines about his eyes and mouth showed the strain he had been under.

"You are very kind," said Gordon formally. He did not fancy that smile.

"By the way," he added, "did you find the tramp?"

Mr. Wetherall's eyes met his with a childlike frankness.

"Yes," he said in his sweetest tones, "I sent him off about his business. Poor man! There are many of his kind around here."

"'Drink and the devil have got the rest,'" quoted Gordon carelessly.

"Too true," Mr. Wetherall agreed. "And now, if you will excuse me, I must attend to some urgent matters."

"Now, what the devil does he mean by wanting me to stay," thought Gordon to himself. "There is some game in it, and it's a deep one, I'll wager —I wish I could find that tramp. But I'm ready to play his own game, even if it is with loaded dice."

CHAPTER XIV.

Rollins on the Scene.

HE hoped for a word with Bertha, but she was not to be seen; and he went down the drive to meet Rollins and to avoid the funeral preparations. Presently he caught sight of the detective coming up the road in one of the ramshackle village hacks. He hailed him, and Rollins, jumping out, dismissed the ancient vehicle and joined the lawyer.

Rollins was a genial, rather florid man of about forty. In spite of the fact that he had lived all his life in the Fourteenth Ward, he looked more like a farmer than what he was, one of the cleverest private detectives in the city; and one expected to hear him talk of crops and ensilage rather than of graft and gunmen.

Only his firm jaw and his keen, little, gray eyes would have told the more observant that he was not to be trifled with; and he had a steel-spring quickness of action that was surprising in a man of his sluggish build.

"You're prompt, as usual, Rollins," greeted Gordon, "and I'm mighty glad to see you. I was afraid you might be off somewhere."

"I got the first train up," replied Rollins briefly. "And now will you put me wise to the job, so I'll know what I'm up against?"

Gordon gave him a concise explanation, which the other listened to in silence, nodding occasionally.

"Well," he remarked when Gordon had finished, "this promises to be, in the words of the circus poster, 'exciting, entertaining, and educational.' One thing is very plain about the whole matter: Somebody's lying, and not going short on the Ananias market, either. The question is, which one?"

"I know which one is telling the truth," interrupted Gordon quickly.

The detective regarded him with a half-quizzical smile.

"All right," he said tolerantly. "Have it your way, and let the question be: Who *isn't* telling lies? And as it's evident you've made up your mind, suppose you tell me what *you* think about it."

Gordon felt himself reddening slightly under the other's keen eyes.

"I have every reason to believe that Miss Wetherall is telling the truth," he replied rather stiffly.

"H-m! Let's have the reasons then."

"Hang it all, man," burst out Gordon, "that's what I brought you up here to find out! Miss Wetherall is my client, and I feel sure from what I know of her that she never killed her aunt; but it's more of a belief than a conviction, and we've got to make the rest fit in."

"All right," said the detective; "that's all I want to know, whose side I'm on; but you must have something to found that belief on. She tells one story, and the facts point to another."

"I know it seems contradictory on the face of it, but my idea is this: Both her uncle and the doctor said she was highly nervous and subject to occasional attacks of hysterics. She might have seen her aunt's body lying on the floor, and, with the idea of the ghost and her father's death in mind, believed she really saw what she described to us."

"Her father's death! What ghost?" exclaimed Rollins quickly.

Gordon told him Jerry's story, adding Bertha's theory of her aunt's death. Rollins listened with a seriousness which somewhat relieved Gordon's fear of being laughed at, and made him repeat every detail as well as Bertha's explanation of her father's death.

"There may be something in it," he remarked thoughtfully when Gordon had finished. "I have known ghost scares to count for something before this. Tell me something more about Wetherall. What's he like?"

"Can't quite make him out, but he runs deep. I'd put him down as a gentle-minded, simple soul if I didn't feel to the contrary. I don't like him, and that's the truth of it; but I haven't the ghost of a reason for it. He's got a perfect alibi, and no reason on earth to do such a thing. And yet I believe he knows more than the rest of us. You'll think I'm as bad as an old woman, Rollins, with all these fancies of mine; but twenty-four hours in that spooky house with murders and ghosts have made me ready to believe anything, and the facts are so devilish hard to make agree."

"You bet they are. It is about as tough a case as I've run across. But they aren't all facts, fortunately, or we should never make them agree; and our job is to sort out the real ones. Somebody's responsible, and we've got to put it home to him—or them.

"Now, even admitting your theory of Miss Wetherall's fancies and the testimony of the doctor concerning that hatpin, the only facts we have are that Mrs. Wetherall came to her death by some one's hand, and we've got to find that some one. Eliminating the young lady leaves only her uncle—and the unknown. What sort of a man is the doctor?" he asked abruptly.

"A bull-necked Scotchman with a red beard and a good opinion of himself. I don't know how much of a doctor he is, but he's a pretty clever coroner; at least, in arranging facts to suit his theories."

"Yes, I know the sort," answered Rollins. "Once they get an opinion in their heads, nothing less than a Black Hand bomb will make room for another. Was he the only one who examined the body?"

"Several of the jurors went in and looked, but I don't think it did them any good. I'm afraid, though, the cause of death was unmistakable. The jury seemed to find it so."

"Yes, most coroners' juries are like sheep; they follow their leader. As far as I can see from what you've told me, they took one man's word for it. However, he ought not to have made any mistake in a matter like that; but I would like to have a look at the body myself."

"It's too late," said Gordon vexedly.

"Too late? Why?"

Gordon nodded toward the road which they could see from their seat under the trees, and down which a

hearse and some carriages were proceeding slowly. The detective whistled thoughtfully until the last carriage disappeared around the bend of the drive.

"Let's go and take a look at things," he said, getting up briskly. "Gee, that's some pile, isn't it?" as they came in sight of the house.

"Yes, and I'll admit that I feel more comfortable outside than in. It has played its part in some queer old mysteries before this, I'll wager."

"Well, we'll have a look at it, anyway. Suppose you show me just what you did when you went in, where you found the body, and all that."

Gordon explained in detail, and the detective listened, chewing on his unlit cigar.

"Say," he asked abruptly, "do you suppose I could get a copy of the coroner's minutes?"

"I'll get it for you, though if there are any points you need immediately I can tell you all you want to know. I have gone over everything pretty thoroughly."

"All right; but I'd like the whole thing later. By the way, was the body warm, or was it rigid?"

"Both," answered Gordon.

"H-m, that's strange. Usually *rigor mortis* doesn't set in until the body is cold. Now I'll have a look at the stairs — never saw any like them before. Wonder if that brass would stub anybody's toes? No, it's as smooth as can be. It was about here she fell?"

"Look out!" said Gordon, interrupting the other's detached sentences. "You'd better not stand under there. I nearly got brained on that spot last night by a piece of falling molding."

"What's that?" exclaimed Rollins. "I'll have to take a look there, too."

He ran lightly up the stairs.

"Come up here, Mr. Gordon!" he called in a different tone after a few minutes of poking and tapping; and Gordon obeyed.

"I think," Rollins remarked quietly, "if I were you I be pretty careful where I went and just where I stood in this house."

Gordon stared hard at his serious face. Rollins never joked with that expression on.

"What do you mean?"

"That in my opinion it was not chance that made the fall of that piece of molding coincide with the exact moment you were beneath it."

"You think—"

"Look at the place where the molding broke off. It never broke of itself; the rest is as firm as a rock; it's been pried loose from behind. See, here is a little bruise made by the instrument that was forced in. And somebody was behind that instrument!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

REVELATION

BY JOSEPH P. HANRAHAN

AS onward merrily they sped,
The blushing maiden hung her head
To hear the pretty things he said,
Sub-rosa.

But when that sorry car broke down
About a dozen miles from town
He said some things that made her frown
Sub automobile.

Wild Oats

by Lorena Hill Betts

SUNLIGHT intensified to the *n*th degree. Sunlight which makes shadow substance. Sunlight until five o'clock has still the glare of noonday.

Such is the power of a North China sun in summer.

Humidity there is none. Electricity there is in excess. The nerves of foreigners are consequently drawn fine, almost to breaking. The only relief is to be found in action; so sport flourishes.

In the Port of Men-Te-Huang tennis was the game. The mud-flats lent themselves to tennis as simply as they did to rain. Nature needs and gets but little help from man in China.

An enclosure to keep the natives out (and even then its top bristled yellow and its cracks shone blue), a mat shed where tea was dispensed, a tent wherein the club set up its bar, some nets stretched at intervals across certain quadrilaterals marked with lime; this, with overhead a sky all sun from whose brazen face one bloodshot eye leered toward the west, was the setting for the daily game.

Some twoscore souls here kept their bodies fit, and pride in their skill waxed exceeding strong.

Mrs. Legrand was easily the champion tennis-player of the port. She always played alone, declaring no partner could be found who would not hinder her work. She met contestants singly or doubly, as they preferred, but covered her own courts with a single invincible racket.

But one day she met defeat when least expected. The young daughter of a friend of hers who lived in the States came through the port on her way to visit a sister who lived in Peking. Myrrh Colton challenged her "Aunt Flores," as she called her, to a game.

Mrs. Legrand compared the girl's nymphlike build with her own robust physique, and smiled indulgently. The girl insisted that she was better than she looked. Mrs. Legrand finally consented to take her on, together with a young man whom she also wanted to try out. He was in the customs service, and had but recently come up from a southern port to Men-Te-Huang.

The young man was accordingly brought up and introduced at the next assemblage at the courts. His name was Penrhyn Flood, and his shy, embarrassed manner with Mrs. Legrand was immediately reversed in the complete understanding of the grin he gave the girl. He was a faunlike youth with pointed ears, a pleasure-loving mouth, and eyelashes that lay like a long, limp fringe of flax upon his high-colored cheeks. His laugh was a gentle bray.

Myrrh Colton gave him one look out of her dovelike eyes, and as if that was sufficient, exclaimed: "Oh, say, let's play ball and be done with it!"

Penrhyn's form improved in action. He ran like a hare when occasion

arose, and succeeded not only in taking his own balls with *éclat,* but showed a troublesome disposition to take those of Myrrh's also. It seemed they would never get down to team-work, and Mrs. Legrand, as usual, was having it all her own way.

Presently Penrhyn whispered mischievously to his partner: "Let's make her run. She does it all standing still. Place the balls."

The plan at first seemed futile. No matter where the balls were placed, Mrs. Legrand's racket was always there. But an added color showed in her cheeks. It was like the flame of a maple leaf in autumn drenched with rain.

The boy and the girl saw it, and it gave them courage. Back and forth they flew, sun-maddened. Its fire was in their veins, its moisture on their brows, its energy in their hearts. Shod with speed, the nymphlike maid and the faunlike youth circled upon one another as though contriving the intricate movements of a mazy dance while they volleyed and returned, cut, smashed, and dislocated every ball that came over the net.

No fabulous inhabitants of the sun could have seemed more in their element than the two who that day vanquished Mrs. Legrand. Yet no sooner was it done than they fell upon each other in dispute and declared that each much better could have won the game alone.

Mrs. Legrand was forgotten in the mêlée which ensued. She stood breathless amid the fickle crowd which had just rendered her accustomed plaudits to her adversaries. They little knew the tragedy it was to her.

They were laughing now at the youngsters' pranks. Penrhyn had thrown the girl's tennis shoes, which she had just removed, on top of the mat shed, and put the pumps which she expected to wear home into his pockets. She flew at him in her stocking feet, and tried to get her property in vain.

"Let's see you do a toe dance, Pavlowa!" he teased.

Mrs. Legrand looked at her own rather substantial tennis shoes which she intended to walk home in, and thought: "It is fortunate that foot adventures happen only to the *Cinderellas.*"

That night, when dressing for a dance to be held in the Assembly Hall, Mrs. Legrand asked Myrrh what she thought of Penrhyn Flood.

"I think he is just too rude for words," she declared. "He not only let me walk home in my stocking feet, but he put vile smoking tobacco in the band of my hat and stuck a hatpin in my wrist until it bled!"

Mrs. Legrand did not seem shocked. She only asked: "What had you done to him?"

"I tried to singe off his ridiculous eyelashes, and told him he looked like he had just stepped out of a heathen mythology book."

Mrs. Legrand smiled in perfect understanding. "How cruel are the ways of youth," she said reflectively. "And how blind," she thought.

Later Mrs. Legrand saw them at the dance, sitting beside each other on the edge of the stage; and as Myrrh was talking volubly, it seemed they had settled their differences.

Mrs. Legrand was struck with the picture they made together. Myrrh was dressed in white-and-rose tulle, and looked like an anemone. Her cheeks were delicately flushed, and the pearly transparency of her skin seemed on the point of revealing all the exquisite construction of virginal youth. Her arms were still thin, and her body had just sketched what it promised to be. The frame and the coloring were all that had been decided upon, but what the rest suggested to the wise was sufficient.

Penrhyn made no contrast to the girl he was beside. He simply carried her out in a deeper tone. They both typified youth at its most alluring stage.

The music started. A bevy of clamoring partners crowded Penrhyn out. He sought Mrs. Legrand and asked for a dance. Her card was empty, and he looked surprised, but sprawled his name in the middle of it. When he came to claim his dance she asked to sit it out.

"Delighted," he said. "I'm only a rotten dancer at best, and I haven't learned any of the new trots. Miss Colton says I'm a back number."

"Really? But tell me what you think of her."

"Will you think me rude if I answer you truthfully?" Here he seized her fan and used it violently. Mrs. Legrand had not been dancing and was not warm, and though her hair was blown into her eyes she made no protest.

"You surely could not be less polite than you were to her this afternoon. But I understand that," she added hastily, as she saw him excitedly prepare to explain. "But you must admit that she is pretty."

Thrown on another track, Penrhyn replied irritably: "With that squash face and those skinny arms? Never! I like to see a woman with some figure," and he regarded Mrs. Legrand, as he thought, pointedly, while he replaced the gauzy scarf which had slipped from her bare shoulders with all the reverence of a devotee veiling a sacred shrine.

"But what did she talk to you about? It seemed some theme in which she was tremendously interested."

"She was. It was the history of six weeks of her sweet young life expanded into six volumes. It seems she went on a camping trip into the Rockies last summer, and she will never get over it until she goes on another. Camp, camp, camp, the boys are marching, or words to that effect, *ad infinitum*."

"Too bad. But hadn't you some thrilling experience of your own with which to head her off?"

"Plenty of them, but she wouldn't let me have a chance," he replied peevishly.

"Well, tell me about them. Let me see, you came up here from Ichang. Tell me all about yourself and the gorges."

Before going to bed that night Mrs. Legrand sat at her dressing-table and regarded her left eyelid with dismay. Its gardenia texture showed unmistakable signs of blight. A faint, withered look had flexed the crispness of its contour and given an uncertain expression to its former perfect drawing. A little more and a line would be drawn which would border on the grotesque.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed, "is that the way age comes? Will it strike me through the eyes?"

Mrs. Legrand was not a vain woman, but like most of her sex at forty, she took frequent stock of her charms to see how they were standing the advance of the common enemy and to guard against any surprise.

Up to now she had stood her ground with flying colors. Not one white hair had found its way amid her midnight locks. Not one ounce too much of glowing flesh had stayed the quickness of her movements. Not until this day had youth played her off the tennis-courts and age left his first faint mark upon her face.

"I am doomed, doomed," she moaned. "Six months at the outside is all the youth I have left. What shall I do with it?"

The hour and the mood gave way to retrospection. She had been married to a man for twenty years who had tired of her after twenty days. Much older than herself, a sensualist of the most selfish type, his passion had flamed at the sight of Flores Martinique's rare beauty; and as he could not obtain her any other way, he married her and forgot her.

Her lonely life might have been the field for many an intrigue if she had

willed it. She was far too beautiful to bloom unseen, and her long sojourn in China beneath the racking rays of its demoralizing sun could easily have wrought her ruin.

But never until this day did she exclaim:

"Others have done it before me; I, too, will have my fling!"

She and her husband expected to leave the East for good at the end of the year. He had prospered sufficiently to justify his retirement from active work, and she was pleased at the prospect of returning to her native home and to old friends.

Myrrh was leaving the next day for Peking. That, too, was a source of gratification, because Mrs. Legrand knew she could no longer see the flawless girl with rose-leaf eyelids without envy.

Every condition was therefore favorable, and, as she thought, justifiable for what she intended to do.

It was necessary only to decide upon the victim.

He must be young. So young that an average struck between their ages would hover around thirty years, the age she wished to be. And as she thought, the idea flashed across her mind that fate that day had provided him in the youth who had defeated her at tennis, and who had just shown her his own vulnerability in a much older game.

It was too easy, too simple. Given a woman of her years and charm, and the youth of twenty is her fool and plaything. She could readily love the boy because he had that which she lacked, and because youth is always lovable.

She regarded him as what she should have had herself at twenty instead of what fate had sent her. If conscience told her that she was acting as her husband had done in taking what she wanted without regard as to suitability, she silenced it with the thought that it was not a lifelong enslavement she was visiting upon the boy. He would be free to choose again when she was gone, and he would not be hurt by their brief encounter.

What destroys a woman's soul only stamps character upon the male, she argued—

Uneasiness arose only when she had realized the blaze her little flame had kindled. The ardent nature of Penrhyn threatened to mount the heights of conflagration.

He urged her to run away with him. He would not take the answer that a scandal would ruin both their lives. She saw it was useless to urge the fact that her superior age would leave him a young man when she was decrepit. She could not hurt his feelings by hinting that his mental development would always be twenty years behind that of hers, and therefore perfect congeniality could not ensue.

She dared not tell him that she could not physically stand the strain of playing down to his years. The defeat at tennis showed that something had gone in her elasticity. More was yet to go which would make the difference in their years more and more perceptible.

She might play the part of an active young woman a few months more; indeed, she had never looked so young, so radiant, so beautiful. But she knew it was Indian summer with her, and the glow which resembles youth had sprung up under the ardor of a youthful lover only to fade soon and leave her what she was—a woman of middle age.

She was finally obliged to temporize. He would not let her go until she had promised to take the necessary steps to free herself when she arrived in America, and to return immediately this was accomplished and marry him. She consented, and he was forced to see her go.

Before the ship sailed he sold his pony, added a month's salary to the amount received, and bought a brace-

let for her as a parting gift. It was made of jade and pearl, set in an enamel design of kingfishers' wings, and was exceedingly barbaric and handsome.

From Honolulu Mrs. Legrand wrote the unanswerable and unforgivable. His was not the temperament to be "let down easily," she thought. She had not the courage to give him the blow in his face, so she took the easier way and wrote.

Three years later Mrs. Legrand sat in her New York apartment while a sane and moderate sun threw its dying beams athwart her window, and listened to Myrrh's announcement of her engagement to Penrhyn Flood.

"Tell me all about it, dear," she said. "Where did you see him again, and how did you overcome your aversion to him?"

"It's a long story, Aunt Flores," said the new Myrrh, a highly illuminated and glorified edition of the first. "I met him again in Peking, a year after I had seen him in Men-Te-Huang, but I assure you I didn't know him."

"Why was that?"

"He had changed completely. He seemed to have become a man, and before, you know, he was only a foolish, frolicsome boy.

"I was so struck by it that I forgot to be entertaining and questioned him entirely about himself. At times I thought he seemed to be embarrassed, and now that I am engaged to him I know the reason why, because he has made a clean breast of all that happened to him that year."

Mrs. Legrand rose and lowered a shade while her visitor was talking and then carefully seated herself with her back to the light.

"You were saying that he told you —everything?"

"Oh, everything that a man *can* tell a girl, of course. There was nothing horrid in it, nor sordid. The woman was a lady, years older than himself—old enough to be my mother, he said, so of course I could not be jealous."

"Did he tell you the woman's name?"

"No, he couldn't do that, he said, but he assured me that I owed her as much as he did, and I believe it when I consider what she has done for him."

"Can you tell me specifically in what way he has improved?"

"He was so much more considerate, for one thing. He acted as though he felt a real reverence for women. He was gentle and deferential. He looked like a pagan statue that had at last found a soul."

"What about his eyelashes, were they as long as ever?"

"Yes, but now they seem actually to curl with experience. You know, he said one must sow his wild oats some time in life, and it is much better they should be sown early than late."

"I quite agree with him," said Flores gravely.

"Of course," continued Myrrh, "if he had done anything ignoble; if the woman had been young and he had victimized her, or anything of that sort, it would have been different. But he was conscious of the fact that while he had everything to gain and nothing to lose, he also suspected that she, too, was putting in a belated crop of wild oats!"

"Why, Myrrh, you astonish me! I think that bridegroom of yours must be an exceedingly astute young person. And as you are going out to marry him in the spring, I have a wedding present for you—this bracelet which I have worn ever since I left China. Take it with my love, dear, along with all the happiness that awaits you on the other side of the world."

She took off the barbaric bracelet of pearl and jade and kingfishers' wings, and clasped it on Myrrh's wrist, thereby definitely closing the episode, shutting the door on the past. Penrhyn, she knew, would not misunderstand.

The Beloved Traitor

by Frank L. Packard

Author of "The Miracle Man," "The Impostor," "Greater Love Hath No Man," "Madman's Island," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

ALL France rings with the new fame of young Jean Laparde, the greatest sculptor in the world. Laparde was discovered by Henry Bliss, an American resident of Paris, in the fishing village of Bernay-sur-Mer, whither Bliss had come with his daughter Myrna for rest. Laparde secretly loves Myrna, who is strongly attracted to him. However, he is engaged to the peasant, Marie-Louise Bernier. The Blisses are about to return to Paris ahead of Jean in order to prepare a studio against his arrival. Through an overheard remark it is borne in upon the peasant:

"There is no place in his new life for Marie-Louise!"

CHAPTER X.

A Daughter of France.

HOW still the house was! Only once during the night had Marie-Louise heard a sound as she had sat, dressed, by the window in the little attic-room. And that sound had been the whir of an automobile rushing by on the road—it had been Jean returning from Marseilles, whither he had been taken to be lionized. That was while it was very dark, very long ago—now it was daylight again, and the sun was streaming into the room.

The chaste, sweet face was tired and weary and aged a little; but on the lips — sensitive, delicate, making even more beautiful their contour—was a brave, resolute little smile as her eyes rested on the small, white bed, neatly made, unslept in. It was over now, the fight that had been so hard and so cruel to fight; and she needed only the courage to go on to the end.

Over and over again, all through the night, she had thought it out. She loved Jean. She loved Jean so much! She had trembled once when she had tried to think how much, and the thought had come so quickly before she could arrest it that she loved Jean as much as she loved God—and then she had prayed the *bon Dieu* not to be angry with her for the sin, for she had not meant to think such thoughts as that.

It was true what the Americans had said when they had passed by on the road yesterday evening:

There was no place in his new life for her.

A hundred little things all through the week had shown her that, only

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for October 2.

until yesterday evening, when M. Bliss had spoken, she had not understood what they mean—Nanette that first day when Jean had come to lunch with *mademoiselle* and *monsieur;* the curious, sidelong glances that the villagers gave her now; a strange, embarrassed reserve in Father Anton when the good *curé* had spoken to her lately; that wide, vast gulf that lay between the world *mademoiselle* lived in, the world that Jean was going to, and her own world.

They had all seen it—except herself. And she had not understood because she had not allowed herself to think what it might mean, what she knew now it meant—that she must lose Jean.

To let Jean go out of her life because France had claimed him — that was what her soul had whispered to her all through the night. A daughter of France, her Uncle Gaston had called her proudly. It was Jean who had told her what her uncle had said—that he had taught her to fear God and be never afraid. But she was afraid now; she had been afraid all through the night; for it seemed as if there were no more happiness, as if a great pain that would never go away again had come to her.

France had claimed Jean. He was to be a famous man. Did they not all talk of his glorious future? It was different with Jean—years ago, even, she had known that. She herself had told him he was different from the fishermen of Bernay-sur-Mer.

Jean was born to the life that he was going to. Was he not even now taking his place among these great strangers as if he had been accustomed to do so always?

And she, if she should try to do it, they would laugh at her, and she would bring ridicule upon Jean, and she could not do what Jean could do. She was a peasant girl to whom *mademoiselle* spoke about going without shoes and stockings.

And Jean must surely have seen these things, too. But Jean, though he had heedlessly hurt her so when he had given away again the little beacon, would never speak to her of this, because this was a much greater thing which was to change all their lives.

It was she who must speak to Jean. It was she who must tell him that she understood that the great future which lay before him must not be harmed; that she must not hold him back; that she must not stand in his way; that she would only hurt him in that dazzling, bewildering world that would disdain a fishergirl; that it was France, not she, who came first.

The night had brought her that. It was only the courage she needed now to act upon it.

She stood up, looking through the window — and the great, dark eyes filled with a blinding mist.

"Jean! Jean!" she said brokenly, aloud.

A little while she stood there, and then walked slowly across the room to the bed. And as once she had knelt there before, she dropped again upon her knees beside it. And now the smile came bravely again. They were wrong. It was not true. There *was* a place in his life for her — something that she could do now. There was one way in which her love could still help Jean in the wonderful life that had come to him.

The dark head bent to the coverlet.

"*Mon Père,*" she whispered, "make me that—Jean's beacon now."

And after a time she rose and bathed her face and fastened the black coils of hair that had become unloosed, and as she heard Nanette stirring below, went quietly down-stairs.

She must see Jean. They were going away to-day, these liberal tenants to whom she was both landlady and servant — *mademoiselle* and *monsieur,* and Nanette, the maid, and Jules, the chauffeur; and Jean was to follow them in a few days. She had heard *mademoiselle* and M. Bliss discussing it at their supper last evening. She must see Jean now before the others

went, so—so that everybody would understand.

She stole out of the house, gained the road, and started to run along it toward the village. Jean would be up long ago—all his life he had risen hours before this—and she would be back by the time *mademoiselle* and *monsieur* were up and needed her. She stopped suddenly, and in quick dismay glanced down at her bare feet. She had forgotten to put on her shoes and stockings. Suppose *mademoiselle* should see her returning like that!

And then Marie-Louise shook her head slowly and went on again. It was not right to disobey, but it could not matter very much now, for *mademoiselle* was going away in the afternoon. And besides, she could run much faster without them, and — the tears came with a rush to her eyes — they seemed all at once to mean so much, those shoes and stockings. It—it was the shoes and stockings, and all they meant, that was taking her out of Jean's life. She understood it all so well now.

She brushed the tears a little angrily from her eyes. She must not do that. To go to Jean and cry! Far better not to go at all! Afterward when they were gone, these Americans, and when Jean was gone, and she was alone, and only the *bon Dieu* to see, then perhaps the tears would be too strong for her. But now she must talk very bravely to Jean, and not make it harder for him; for, no matter what happened or what was to come, Jean, too, loved her.

She understood Jean better now, too. The night had made so many things much clearer! Had he not confessed that he was not always happy as a fisherman in Bernay-sur-Mer? And must it not have been just this—this greatness within him — that had made him discontented?

And now that it had come true—a far greater thing than he could have dreamed of, changing his whole life—must it not for the time have made him forget everything else? It had not killed his love for her; it had not done that—but this thing must be first before either of their loves. Afterward, perhaps, it might kill his love—afterward, yes; afterward it might do that.

She tried to smile a little. It was what she was going now to bring about—afterward it *must* kill his love. It was the only way. And that would come surely, very surely — his giving away the beacon, so lightly forgetting what he told her it had meant, taught her that. If he went now, if she bade him go now, it was not for a little time —it was for always.

She was running very fast, breathlessly—as if she were trying to outrun her thoughts. It was coming again, the same bitter fight that she had fought out through the darkness, through all those long hours alone; but she must not let it come, that sadness, that yearning that tried to make her falter and hold back.

The way was very plain. If she loved Jean, if she really loved him, she must not let that love do anything but what would help him in his new, great life—she must cling to that. It would not be love if she did anything else; it would only mean that she loved herself more than she loved Jean.

"To be never afraid"—Uncle Gaston had taught her that, and the words were on her lips now.

"To be never afraid."

She was walking again now, for she had reached the village. Some one called to her from a cottage door, and she called back cheerfully as she passed on to the Taverne du Bas Rhône, where Papa Fregeau was standing in the doorway.

"*Tiens, petite!*" the fat little proprietor cried heartily. "But it is good to see our little Marie-Louise! You do not come often these days. They make you work too hard, those Americans, perhaps? But to-day they are going—eh? Wait; I will call Lucille."

"Good morning, Jacques!" she answered. "Yes; it is to-day that they are going, so do not call Mother Fre-

geau, for there is a great deal to do at the house, and I must hurry back."

"Ah!" observed Papa Fregeau. "You have come then with a message?"

"Yes," she said hurriedly; "for Jean. Do you know where he is?"

"But, *là là!*" chuckled Papa Fregeau. "But, yes; he is up-stairs in his room. But wait—I must tell you. I have just helped him carry it up. It is a very grand American affair, and he is like a child with it. It arrived from Marseilles last night after he had gone."

"What did?" inquired Marie-Louise patiently.

"What did?" ejaculated Papa Fregeau. "But did I not tell you? The American trunk—*pardieu!*—that he is to go away with, and—"

The fat little man grew suddenly confused.

"*Tiens!*" he stammered. "He is up-stairs in his room, Marie-Louise. I am an old fool—eh?—an old fool!" and he waddled away.

Why should it have hurt a little more because Jacques Fregeau had said Jean was going away? And why should Jacques Fregeau have been able to read it in her eyes? She was not so brave, perhaps, as she had thought. And her heart was pounding now very quickly, and so hard that it brought pain as she went up the stairs.

"*Mon Père*"—her lips were whispering the same prayer over again—"make me that—Jean's beacon now."

And then she was knocking at the door.

For an instant she hesitated as his voice called to her to enter; then she opened the door and stepped inside. It was Jean, this great fine figure of a man, who turned so quickly toward her; but it was already the Jean of the world where they wore shoes and stockings, and his clothes were like the clothes of M. Bliss. They made him very handsome, very grand; only somehow they made it seem that her errand was useless now; that she had come too late; that Jean was already gone.

Her eyes met his, smiled—and from his face strayed about the room. It was very fine, that American trunk; but not very large. It was like one that *mademoiselle* had that she called a steamer-trunk and carried on the automobile—and the trunk was empty, and the tray was on the floor beside it.

"Marie-Louise!" he cried, and then a little awkwardly he caught her hands. "But—but what has brought you here, Marie-Louise?"

"To see you, Jean," she told him simply.

For a moment he stared at her uneasily. Was this then to be the scene that he had dreaded, that he had been putting off? And then he laughed a little unnaturally.

"Ah, did you think then, Marie-Louise, that I had forgotten you? You must not think that! Only, *mon Dieu*, what with Bidelot, and the other critics, and Marseilles, and the work all day at the new design, what could I do? But Bidelot and the rest have returned to Paris, and *mademoiselle* and *monsieur* go to-day; and this afternoon I was going to find you and tell you about the great plans they have all made for me."

"Yes; I know, Jean," she answered. "And that is what I have come for—to have a little talk about you and me."

"About my going away, you mean?" he said, infusing a lightness into his voice. "But you must not feel sad about that, Marie-Louise. You would not have me lose a chance like that! And it is only for a little while until I have learned what, they say, Paris will teach me. I shall do great things in Paris, Marie-Louise—and then I shall come back."

She shook her head slowly.

"Jean," she said very quietly, "it is about your coming back that I want to speak to you. I thought it all out last night. It is not for a little while. When you go it is for always. You can never come back."

"Never come back! Ah, is it that then that is troubling you?" he said eagerly. "You mean that you would not mind my going for a little while, only you think it is for more than that?"

"You do not understand, Jean."

It seemed as if she must cry out in wild abandon, as if the tears must come and fill her eyes, as if she were not brave at all. Would not the *bon Dieu* help her now? She drew her hands away from him and turned from him for an instant.

"You can never come back, Jean; you can never come back to the old life. You will go on and on, farther and farther away from it, making a great name for yourself; and your friends will be all like the *grand monde* who have been here; and I know that I cannot go into that life, too—I understand that all so well. And — and so, Jean, I have come to tell you that you are free."

"Free!" he cried, and gazed at her in stupefaction.

The color came and went from his face. He had not thought of this from her! And yet it was what he had said in his soul—if only there were nothing between Marie-Louise and himself! It was as if a weight had been lifted from him—only instead of the weight was a miserable pricking of the conscience.

"Free! What are you saying?"

And now the dark eyes were bright and deep and unfaltering — and suddenly she drew her form erect, and her head was thrown proudly back.

"Free, Jean, because you must not think any more of me; because you are to be a great man in your country and it is your duty to go, for France has called you, and France is first; because"—her voice, quivering yet triumphant, was ringing through the room—"because I give you to France, Jean! You do not belong to me now —you belong to France!"

For a moment he did not speak. There seemed a thousand emotions, soul-born, surging upon him. Her words thrilled him; it was over; there was relief; it was done. She had gone where he had not dared to go in his thoughts — to the end. He would never come back, she said. He was free. But he could not have her think that he could let her go like that!

"No, no, Marie-Louise!" he burst out. "Do you think that even if I belonged to France, even if all my life were changed, that I could ever forget you, that I could forget Bernay-sur-Mer, and all the people and my life here?"

"Yes," she said; "you will forget."

"Never!" he asserted fiercely.

"Jean" — her voice was low again —"it is the *bon Dieu* last night who has made me understand. I do not know what is in the new world that you are going to, only that you will be one of the greatest and perhaps one of the richest men in France. And I understand you better, Jean, I think, than you understand yourself. This fame and power will mean more to you than anything else, and it will grow and grow and grow, Jean.

"And oh, Jean! I am afraid you will forget that it is not you at all who does these great things, but that it is the *bon Dieu* who lets you do them; and that you will grow proud, Jean, and lose all the best out of your life because you will even forget that once those clothes hanging there" — she pointed toward the rough fisherman's suit—"were yours."

It was strange to hear Marie-Louise talking so! He did not entirely understand. Something was bewildering him. She was telling him that he must think no more of her—that it was finished. And there was no scene. And she did not reproach him. And there were no tears. And it did not seem as if it were quite real.

He had pictured quite another kind of scene, where there would be passion and angry words. And there was nothing of that — only Marie-Louise, like a grown-up Marie-Louise, like a

mother almost, speaking so gravely and anxiously to him of things one would not expect Marie-Louise to know anything about!

She turned from him impulsively, and from the peg took down the cap and the rough suit, and from the floor gathered up the heavy boots with the coarse socks tucked into their tops — and as he watched her in amazement she thrust them suddenly into his arms.

"Promise me, Jean," she said in the same low way, "that you will keep these with you always, and that sometimes in your great world you will look at them and remember — that they, too, belong to France."

And then suddenly her voice broke, and she had run from the room.

She was gone. Jean's eyes from the doorway shifted to the clothes that cluttered up his arms—and for a long time he did not move. Then one hand lifted slowly, and in a dazed sort of way brushed the hair back from his eyes. It was a strange thing, that, to take these things with him to remember — what was it she had said? — to remember that they, too, belonged to France.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he whispered—and, with a queer lift of his shoulders, turned mechanically to the trunk beside him. "*Mon Dieu!*" he whispered again — and now there was a twisted little smile of pain upon his lips as understanding came, and almost reverently he laid the things in the bottom of the trunk.

CHAPTER XI.

The Pendulum.

HOW many miles had they come? Jean did not know. It had been far—but far along a road of golden dreams, where time and distance mattered only because they were so quickly passed.

It was Myrna Bliss who had suggested it because — had she not said? —she wanted to have a little talk with him alone before she left for Paris that afternoon—and they would walk out along the road before her father started, and the automobile would pick her up on the way.

And so they had come, and so she had talked and he had listened—feasting his eyes upon the superb, alluring figure that swung, so splendidly supreme, along beside him. She had told him of Paris—Paris, the City Beautiful! — of the great city that was the glory of France, of its magnificent boulevards, its statues, its arches, its wonderful architecture, its wealth of art garnered from the ages, its happy mirth, its gaiety, its richness, and its life—the life that would now be his.

And he had listened, rapt, absorbed, fascinated, as if to some entrancing melody, now martial, now in softer strain, that stirred his pulse as it carried him beyond himself and unfettered his imagination until it swept, free as a bird in air, into the land of dreams —a melody that knew a fierce, ecstatic echo in his soul — the melody of her voice.

But now there had come a jarring note into that melody; and there came upon him a sudden, swift emotion that mingled dismay with a passionate longing and a panic sense of impotency. The quick throb of the motor was sounding from down the road behind them. M. Bliss was coming now. In a moment she would be gone.

She had heard it, too, for abruptly she ceased speaking, and, halting, turned to face him.

"Isn't it too bad, Jean!" she cried disappointedly. "And I had hardly begun to tell you about it! But then, never mind; the rest of it all you will see for yourself in a few more days when you get to Paris."

In a moment she would be gone! What was it that held him back—that had always held him back before? He was strong enough—strong to crush her to him, to cover that gloriously beautiful face with his kisses, to bathe his face in the fragrance of her hair,

to feel her heart, the throb, the pulse, the life of her body against his own! What was it that, strong as he was, was stronger than he?

"It — it is good-by," he said in a low, tense way.

She felt the passion that was possessing him—he read it in the startled glance of the gray eyes before they were veiled; in the ivory of the perfect throat grown colorful with the mounting red; in the parted lips before the teasing, merry smile was forced there as she stepped back a little away from him.

She knew! She knew, as he knew, that his soul was aflame—and it was she, not he, who dammed back the tide of his passion with that "something" that was so powerful an ally of hers, so readily, so always at her instant command. She knew, as he knew, that his soul was aflame—and yet she had not repulsed him.

What did it mean? That she *cared!* But why did she laugh so lightly now? Why was she so perfectly self-possessed? What did it mean? That she was playing with him!

"How absurd, Jean!" she laughed gaily. "Of course it isn't good-by; that is"—she glanced at him demurely — "that is, unless you've changed your mind about coming to Paris."

Then, impulsively eager:

"But you haven't done that; have you? And you want to come more than ever now after what I have told you, don't you? And, Jean"—she came suddenly close to him again, and her face, its demureness gone, was puckered up in very earnest little wrinkles—"there isn't anything, you won't let anything keep you from coming—will you?"

Keep him from Paris — from her! Why had she asked that? He laughed out boisterously, harshly. It was very near now, that accursed automobile! M. Bliss was calling out to them. Keep him from—Paris! He could only laugh out again wildly as he looked at her.

"Jean!

It was a quick, hurried exclamation, not all composure now, and her eyes were hidden, and her face was turned away.

"Jean! Good gracious! Don't you hear father calling to you! Look, here he is!"

Jean swept his hand across his eyes. It was the madness upon him. Yes, here was M. Bliss beside him, and she and her father were both talking at once. It was Paris! Always Paris, that they talked of! In a week, in ten days, he would be there. And then they had both shaken hands with him, the gray eyes had smiled into his for an instant, and she had sprung from him into the automobile. It was a daze. They had gone. He was standing in the road watching them. She was fluttering a scarf at him as she leaned far over the back of the car—her voice, full-throated, was throbbing in his ears:

"*Au revoir,* Jean! *Au revoir*—till Paris!"

The car disappeared over the brow of a little hill, came into sight again as it topped the opposite rise, became a blur and then a tiny dot scarcely discernible far on along the road. And still he stood there.

It was gone at last. He turned then and started back along the road toward Bernay-sur-Mer; now walking slowly, now suddenly changing his pace to a quick, impulsive stride. His eyes were on the road before him, but he saw nothing. Her voice was ringing in his ears again; again he was living in that golden land of dreams—with her.

Paris! The city beautiful! Paris —where he should know fame and power, where his genius should kindle a flame of enthusiasm that would spread throughout all France! Paris —where men should do him honor! Paris — where riches were! Paris — where she was!

His brain reeled with it. It was not wild imagining. A power, a mighty

power, the power that made him master of his art lived and breathed in every fiber of his being. He needed no tongue of others now to tell him that this power was his; the knowledge of it was in his soul until he knew—knew as he knew, that he had being and existence; that the work of Jean Laparde would stand magnificent and supreme before the eyes of the world. He saw himself the center, the leader of a glittering entourage.

Fame! Men of the highest ranks should envy him—the gamins of Paris should know his name. He threw back his head on his great shoulders. Conceit, all this? No; it was stupendous—but it was not conceit. He knew—his soul knew it. He was more sure of himself now than even those great critics of France had been sure. They had seen nothing—he had not begun.

A year, two years in Paris, the tools to work with, the models of flesh and blood at his command—and ah, Heaven! What would he not do! They should see—they should see then! And they should stand and wonder as they had not wondered before—at Jean Laparde!

He laughed suddenly aloud. Father Anton had preached a sermon once in the little church—he remembered it now—to the effect that fame was an empty thing. An empty thing! He laughed again. It was the simplicity of the good *curé*, who believed such things because, *pardieu*, the *curé* was a gentle soul and knew no better.

What should Father Anton—who never went anywhere, into whose life came nothing but the little daily affairs of the fisherfolk in Bernay-sur-Mer, who could never have had any experience in the things outside the life of the village that turned everlastingly like a wheel in its grooves—know of fame? It was not the fault of Father Anton that he talked so, for he got those things out of his books, and, having no reason out of his own knowledge of life to know any better, believed them!

Jean shrugged his shoulders. One felt sorry for Father Anton! Perhaps once in two years the *curé* journeyed as far as Marseilles—and the few miles was a great event! What could one expect Father Anton to discover for himself out of life?

Fame—an empty thing! Poor Father Anton, who because he believed it, so earnestly preached it to Papa Fregeau and Pierre Lachance, who never went even so far as Marseilles, and who therefore in turn were very content to believe it, too! An empty thing? It was *everything!*

Jean drew in his breath sharply; his hand was feverishly tossing back the hair from his forehead. It was everything! It was wealth, it was power, it was might, it was greatness. It was real; it brought things to the very senses one possessed—things that one could see and hear and touch and taste and smell. They were real—real, those things!

It brought money that bought all things; it brought position, honor, and command, a name among the great names of France; it thrilled the soul and fired the blood; it was limitless, boundless, without horizon! It brought all things beyond the dreams that one could dream—the plaudits of his fellow men, the wild-flung shouts of acclamation from hoarse-throated multitudes; it brought riches; it brought affluence; and it brought—love.

Love! Aye, it would bring love! It would bring him that more than it would bring him any other thing. He knew now what had held him back from crushing that maddeningly alluring form in his arms, from giving free rein to the passion that was his, from giving him the mastery of her. It was that same thing that Marie-Louise sensed between herself and what she called the *grand monde*.

He, too, had not yet bridged the gulf. He had not yet been able to look into those gray eyes of the beautiful American and forget, deep in his soul, that she was different, that he had been

Jean Laparde the poor-fisherman and not always Jean Laparde the great sculptor.

Was she playing with him? What did it matter? The day would come when she would not *play!* She would be his — and this fame, that was so empty a thing, would give her to him. If for no other thing than that, he would go to Paris.

She would be his—as all the world would be his! His! That is what fame would bring him! Would she play with him then in his greatness?

Paris! Paris! It lay before him, a glittering, entrancing vista; it held out its arms to him and beckoned him; it heaped honor and glory and riches upon him; it gave him—her!

His hands were clenched at his sides. The skin over the knuckles, tight-drawn, showed white; his stride was rapid, fierce; he was breathing quickly; his face was flushed; his eyes were burning. Paris, his art that would bring him fame, the fame that would bring him her—nor Heaven would hold him back!

And then suddenly in the middle of the road he stopped, and his hand tore at his collar as if it choked him. Subconsciously he had seen stretching out before him the sparkling blue of the quiet sea, the headland, the little strip of beach where he and Gaston used to keep the boats, a blur of white where the house on the bluff showed through the trees—he had come that far on his way back. Subconsciously, in a meaningless way, he had seen this; but now it was blotted from him in a flash, and in its place came a scene that, though imaginary, was vivid, real, actual, where before reality itself had meant nothing. It was black, intensely so, and the howling of the wind was in his ears. The rain was lashing at his face, and all along the beach echoed the terrific boom and roar of the surf. And now there came the crash of thunder, and quick upon its heels the heavens opening in darting, zigzag tongue-flames, lurid, magnificent, awesome, as the lightning-flashes leaped across the sky.

And he was standing on that little strip of beach, and far out across the waters, shrouded in a white smother of spume and spray, the figure of Marie-Louise stood outlined on the edge of the Perigeau Reef. And now he was crossing that stretch between them, and living again the physical agony that had been his; and now he was in the water, clinging to the gunwale of the boat, and in all the wild abandon of the storm her lips and his were pressed together in that long kiss that seemed to span all life and all eternity.

As if spellbound, a whiteness creeping into his face, Jean stood tense and motionless there in the road. Why had this come now? He had never let it come in the week that was past. Why should it have come now, like flood-gates opened against his will, to overwhelm him?

Ah, was it that? That little figure, that was just discernible, far off on that beach—that little figure, bare-footed, that was sitting now on the stern of his boat where it was drawn up on the sand, and whose face was cupped in her hands, and who seemed to be staring so intently out toward the reef! That was Marie-Louise there—Marie-Louise! Was it the sight of her that had brought this thing upon him?

And now the scene was changed again. And it was against the window-panes that the rain lashed, and against the sashes that the wind tore, and the lamp threw its light on the gray, grim face of old Gaston Bernier, on the bed.

Jean shivered a little. What was coming now? What was that? Gaston's hand was upon his. He could hear Gaston's voice:

"Jean, do you love Marie-Louise?"

And then Gaston was repeating the question, and repeating it again:

"Jean, do you love Marie-Louise?"

And the old rugged strength seemed back again in Gaston Bernier as he rose up in bed, and his voice, in a

strange, stern note, rang through the room:

"Swear it, Jean—to a dying man—swear that you will—"

"*Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" Jean cried out aloud—and, like a blind man feeling before him, turned from the road, stumbled through the fields, and flung himself face down upon the grass.

There was torment and dismay upon him. His mind was in riot; his soul bare and naked now before him. Paris? No! He must go, instead, to Marie-Louise and tell her that he would stay in Bernay-sur-Mer; that they would live their lives together, because they loved each other.

Yes; he loved Marie-Louise, not with the mad passion he had for this American who bewitched him, but as he had loved her all the years since they were children. He had told Gaston that, and it was true. It was the act of a *misérable* to go away!

No; he would not go now. It was true, all that he had told Marie-Louise—that she should stand on the beach and hold out her arms to him in welcome when he pulled ashore from the fishing, and that they would be always happy together.

And yet—and yet had not Marie-Louise herself said that he belonged to France, and said herself that he must go for the great career that lay before him, for the great work he was to do?

He cried out aloud sharply as if in hurt — and, hands outstretched before him, lay still for a little time.

It seemed to come insidiously, calling to him, luring him, wrestling, fighting, battling with the soul of him—Paris! Here there was love, but there, too, was love. One was calm; the other like the wild tumult of the storm that in its might, primal, elemental, swept him blindly forward. Paris—she would be there; she who held him in a spell, who made him forget Marie-Louise! And there was fame and glory there, honor and wealth—all, all, everything that the world could give. And it was his, all his—he had only to reach out and take it. There all France would be at his feet!

It made his brain swim with the mad intoxication of it. It was as a man dying with thirst who sees afar the water that is life to him. Here he could never be contented now; he could never be happy; and in a year, two years, Marie-Louise, therefore, would be unhappy, too.

But — but he could not go. That night that he had held Gaston Bernier's hand. And there was Marie-Louise that he loved. Marie-Louise, with the pure, fearless face, the great eyes that were full of a world of things — of calm, of trust, of tenderness and love—the lips, the wonderful lips that were so divinely carved, the lips like which there were no others. And he must choose now forever between Marie-Louise and—Paris. If he went, he would never come back. He was honest with himself now. He knew that. Marie-Louise knew that. He must choose now. Choose! Had he not already decided that he would — that he would—*what?*

It began all over again, and after that again for a hundred times, until the brain of the man was sick and weary, and the torment of it had brought the moisture to his forehead and into his eyes a fevered, hunted look—and still he lay there, and the hours went by. And after a time the sun sank down, and the golden afterglow, soft and rich and warm, was as a gentle, parting benediction upon the earth—and Jean's head was buried in his outflung arms. And twilight came—and after that the evening—then darkness, and the myriad twinkling stars of a night, calm and serene.

And there came a soul-wrung cry from Jean as he lifted a worn and haggard face to the moonlight.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Mother's Boy

by Roy Somerville

PERCY COTTRELL entered the Terminal station and hurried to track five for the six-two express to Woodside. The gate was closed, and he pulled out a gold watch incased in a chamois bag. The time was six-eight!

Most men would have uttered warm words riming with "slam it" under their breath, but Percy was unlike most men. A widowed mother in comfortable circumstances had seen to that.

There should be some law prohibiting a woman from molding a boy's character after his voice changes.

Unpunctuality, in Percy's mind, was listed with sin. Consequently, he stood conscience-stricken in front of the gate and glared accusingly at the gateman as though that worthy was to blame—a way of the very virtuous; but the gateman smiled back in malicious amusement—a way of every gateman.

When the first shock abated the gateman was eliminated as a scapegoat and the true one substituted—the trial balance—for Percy held the position of bookkeeper in a wholesale grocery firm. He had worked up to the present eminence from office-boy — a job his mother had obtained for him through the influence of Mr. Barton, superintendent of the Woodside Methodist Episcopal Sunday-school.

Now, at the age of thirty, his mother regarded him as a self-made man, and Percy seldom disagreed with mother. If it were merely a matter of physical construction they might have been pardoned in their pride, for Percy was not at all displeasing to the eye.

He was big-boned and rangy, but the muscles were a bit flabby, and his complexion too pink for a man. The blue eyes and blond hair harmonized so well with the complexion, however, that there was no suggestion of effeminacy.

While he waited for the next train —the six-forty-five—his mind reverted to that trial balance. This was the third in six months to go wrong.

The others had disclosed the cause as poor memory—an entry or two he had forgotten to make in the ledger—and this last one was apparently due to a similar cause. Percy was worried. Loss of memory might mean a serious affliction. Sometimes people were found wandering around the streets with no knowledge of their own identity.

When the six-forty-five was announced he passed through the gateway abstractedly and hastened into a car. In the semitwilight he sank into an end seat without even taking the trouble to note who had preempted the more desirable side near the window.

The "All aboard" sounded; and

the train pulled out of the station into the light; then all heads began to turn and twist in the manner of good commuters with an interest in neighbors and neighborhood affairs. Sometimes one saw Jones seated with Smith's wife, or other equally choice morsels to feed to the open-mouthed and open-eared family in the home nest.

Percy was a good commuter.

His eager glance raked the car from end to end; but this was not his regular train where he knew every one, and he discovered nothing that might furnish even a five minutes' whisper on the porches, so he looked at the passenger in the seat beside him.

At the same instant she turned her gaze away from the fast blurring scenery, and he stared into the softest brown eyes he had ever seen. They were set wide in a clear-skinned, oval face, and matched the color of her hair to a shade. And they appeared alight with recognition.

It was not a face one could forget easily, but how, where, and when he had met this beautiful girl before was lost in the vacuity of a treacherous memory — he only knew he had met her.

As he groped into the blank cerebral cells for a possible clue, he became dimly aware that the protracted stare and delayed greeting were bad form. He must trust to luck to place her in the ensuing conversation.

"Why, how do you do?" he said effusively. "You don't seem to remember me."

When you are weak it is always good policy to throw an opponent into the defensive. The brown eyes clouded for a brief instant and then twinkled. Suddenly the cloud returned and the lids drooped.

"Remember!" the mouth pouted reproachfully. "I have been trying to forget."

Percy shrank back in his seat. The face was certainly familiar, but not quite so intimate as all that. He racked his mind for one incident in his well-ordered life which might have given a girl cause to speak that way, but the effort required less than a minute.

One of the penalties a real nice man pays is that his superior virtues create an arctic circle between himself and the tropics of femininity. A woman only thaws out when there is some devil in a man that needs exorcising.

"Of course, Miss — Miss—" He floundered miserably, for it was the thing he least intended to say. The original plan had been to inveigle her into a conversation trap where she would be compelled to mention her own name.

"Miss?" she smiled a trifle bitterly. "Once it was Agnes, and—and then—Aggie."

He shuddered at the hurt expression on her face. For a certainty his memory was failing. The name Agnes was one of his pet detestations, and one doesn't forget what one detests. And as for Aggie!

He tried to recall the girls he thoroughly disliked to find one who corresponded with Aggie, but the tablets were clean. Indeed, there was no recollection of taking liberties with any girl's Christian name. Agnes was leaning toward him.

"I met Edith last week and she wanted to write to you about something. Give me your card and I'll mail it to her."

He did so mechanically, and she glanced at it before dropping it into her purse. "You remember Edith, don't you?" she asked archly.

Percy knew three Ediths, and he wondered what any of them had to communicate. Then he had an inspiration. Here was a good way to find out her name.

"Oh, certainly. I never forget friends. I was just telling mother yesterday that I had seen neither you nor Edith in some time. She is going to put your names in for the next amateur theatricals. Let me have one of your cards to give her."

Cleverness is not always rewarded. Agnes hesitated a moment, and then said sweetly: "Isn't that mean? I haven't one with me. The engraver has disappointed me twice now."

"Oh, never mind," he hastened, fearing she might suspect the ruse. "You're at the same old address, aren't you?"

"The same old address! You don't remember that, do you?"

The quick glance accompanying the question expressed either surprise or mischief, he couldn't determine which. Did he or didn't he know the address?

Then came the embarrassing thought that in order to answer he must first recall who she was. The rattle of the train seemed to subside, and a hush pervade the car, as if the other passengers, too, were awaiting the reply. He squirmed uncomfortably, and then smiled in a superior way.

"Oh, don't I? You'll see when you get the invitation."

The bluff was a poor one. One must be a good, natural liar to get away with a wriggle like that. Agnes regarded him demurely.

"What is it?" she challenged.

Percy flushed to the roots of his blond hair, and the eyes of every one in the car were apparently concentrating on the back of his neck.

"Woodside!" called the brakeman, and Percy jumped up like one who is paged in a hotel. He almost grabbed her hand out of her lap for the farewell shake.

"This is my station," he hurried. "You know one must get off at one's own station." It sounded so inane that he felt he could tarry no longer. "We must see more of each other after this. Good-by." He started for the door.

"I hope we will." She had to raise her voice a trifle, for he was part way up the aisle. "You won't forget me, Percy, will you?"

"Never!" The answer was almost a shout as he made for the door.

It was the worst ten minutes he had ever experienced outside of a dentist's chair. The routine of a colorless life had destroyed whatever resourcefulness he may have inherited, and he reviewed the stupid way he had handled the situation with dismay. If there had only been time to think!

The word "think" suggested the cause of the situation — his failing memory, and he worried as he walked. It must be in a bad way when it could not recall an Agnes he had once dared to call Aggie.

On his way home he stopped in to consult Dr. Wetherby, the family physician, who gave him an innocuous prescription and admonished him against smoking so much—the way of family physicians when a patient develops hypochondriacal tendencies.

His mother was more comforting.

Percy had been trained to withhold no secrets from her; so she listened perplexedly to a detailed account of the adventure, and with a bit of alarm to his glowing description of Aggie. Every beautiful girl is a designing creature to the mother of an only son.

But she came to his relief, as mothers always do, by suggesting that he might have met her in Asbury Park, where he went every summer for a two weeks' vacation; and one cannot always remember those chance acquaintances—with a sniff. One grows familiar with them, as a matter of course, they have such forward ways, you know; and there are some people who are best forgotten—another sniff.

Anyway, absent-mindedness was a family trait of the Cottrells — her side was noted for wonderful memories and all the other good traits—and to prove it she related an episode in the life of the late lamented Cottrell, senior.

She had come upon him suddenly while he was seated with a hussy in a restaurant, and it was several minutes before he could remember the hussy's name or who she was, despite the fact that she was the buyer for his best

customer. Percy would, doubtless, meet the girl again, and her identity would come like a flash.

The prophecy about meeting Agnes again came true, but her identity failed to flash; indeed, it did not even glimmer. He waited for the six-forty-five next evening in the hope that she might be a regular commuter, and the hope was realized.

She proved a delightful companion, and had evidently forgotten about the unanswered question, and he could readily perceive how he had once reached the familiarity of Aggie. It was the way she had of making a fellow feel entirely at ease; and then she was the first girl he had ever met who displayed a vivid interest in untangling a snarled trial balance.

Naturally, he waited for her the next night to tell her how cleverly he had traced the error; and then the next night there was something else he wanted to discuss with her, and the next, and the next—but you don't need any more "nexts" to guess that Percy was in love.

What you cannot imagine, though, is that with all this propinquity, and all this deep, whole-souled love to jog his memory, Percy was still unable to recall their previous friendship.

What was worse, he never could summon up the courage to confess the weakness—her displeasure meant too much to him now—nor was he adroit enough, conversationally, to worm the information out of her.

Away back in his memory her face and mannerisms flitted elusively, tantalizingly; but just when he thought he had them cornered in some little brain-cell, they danced out and the chase was on again. Perhaps mystery is the rich loam of love.

He proposed to her in a taxicab while they were driving from the theater to the Terminal station, and from this circumstance you will surmise, rightly enough, that their companionship was not limited to commutation trains. Percy was no "tight-wad" wooer, and he had many other likable qualities, but Agnes refused him.

She did it with the gentle firmness of a surgeon performing a necessary operation, and the keen scalpel of her critical analysis cut him to the quick.

"I'm sorry," she said softly, "for I know you are sincere, and I care for you more than any man I have ever met, but marriage is a serious thing for a girl. A few years ago I did not think so—would have let my romantic feelings sweep away all objections—but I have worked side by side with men since that time, and I have lost many illusions. It is not good looks or manners that count so much now, it is the dependable man—the kind a woman can lean on in times of stress—who appeals as a husband. I thought once that a business life spelled independence for a woman; now I know her real independence is a dependable husband.

"Oh, I know what you are going to say," she added hastily as he attempted to interrupt. "You would be good to me, and all that: I don't doubt it. You would be so good—so monotonously good—that I would come to hate you for it.

"Your perfect ways would render a woman miserable; for a wife's happiness, Percy, is measured by her husband's faults. Your mother has left nothing for a wife to be happy with. And then, you have been taught to lean on your mother for all things, and a leaner is never dependable when trouble comes—and trouble comes sooner or later in married life. If I thought you were dependable—"

"But I am," he broke in eagerly as the cab chugged up to the station. "I can't give you any specific instance; but I know—"

"It is only my opinion, dear," she interrupted wearily; "and I have worked as a stenographer too long for a man's protestations to change it. I'm sorry."

Some men have the happy faculty of doing the right thing at the right

time—an inheritance of breeding, perhaps—and Percy was one of them.

Instead of sulking, whining, reproaching, or affecting indifference on the homeward trip, he tried to conceal the hurt by a casual manner, and every woman understands that inward brand of suffering. When the train arrived at Woodside he got up to leave in the usual way, for despite their intimacy, she had never permitted him to accompany her farther.

"Good night," she almost whispered as she pressed his hand. "I hope you forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive," he answered slowly, and she noted a new tone—a deeper tone—in his voice "You've had the courage to tell me your real reason; and perhaps you're right. You see, I'm beginning to see myself differently already. I'll try to forget—if such a thing is possible." And he strode down the aisle and out of the car.

Agnes watched him from the window as he pushed his way through the bundled crowd on the platform; and when the train rattled on she still stared at the trim station until the lights became a blur; but the blur was not from distance.

There was no reason why they should avoid each other after that; but then the ways of lovers are not the ways of reason.

Percy changed back to the six-two express, and, by the same token, so did Agnes. They met in the station, but got into different cars. Then Agnes switched back to the six-forty-five and discovered Percy waiting at the gate —again the different cars. Eventually Percy adopted the six-two and Agnes the six-forty-five.

The final arrangement did not bring the relief Percy hoped for.

Her absence hurt as much as her presence did; but, then, one is supposed to suffer better in the solitude of crowds. The idea generated with a lot of poets and prosodists, those high-souled, high-browed, word-scalers who sing their pæans from the rose-tinted cloud-banks of the Garden of Ego—a paradise peopled only by themselves.

The common garden variety of folks find no joy in introspection — they don't wear blinders.

So Percy brooded. No monk in a solitary cell wore the sackcloth or spattered the ashes with greater humility as the days and weeks slipped by.

The jolt which had lifted him out of the smugness of perfection made him see stars—the stars of a new world—and a comet. The comet was he. He no longer worried about a failing memory; his mind was too busy moiling over the pitiless things Agnes had said.

It is true that sometimes he wondered if she would be wiped out of his mind again, and years hence find him in the same predicament about where he had met her. He wondered, too, if he loved her much in that prior acquaintance; if so, amnesia was merciful.

The difference between a fixed star and a comet is that something is always liable to happen to a comet. Percy had made the trip between Woodside and New York daily for upward of twelve years without even stumbling on the steps or having a cross word with the trainmen; but in his new rôle of comet something happened.

One night he entered the Terminal station and hurried to track five for the six-two express. The gates were closed, and he pulled out a gold watch; but it was no longer incased in a chamois bag.

The time was six-eight.

The gateman smiled maliciously, but Percy smiled back and turned nonchalantly to the benches, where he unfolded a newspaper and waited for the six-forty-five. A little later he noticed Agnes in the crowd gathering around the gate, but he went back to his newspaper. She did not see him,

and when she got on the train he went into the car directly behind her.

That helped matters not at all.

The sight of that trim figure, the graceful carriage, and the very throb of her presence brought a painful thrill to the old wound in his heart. Agnes would always remain a vivid personality in his memory now. Why, even the passengers, their paper-covered bundles, the very atmosphere of the train, were reminiscent of her. And how—

Then it happened—happened with a roaring crash louder than he had ever heard in his life before; so loud that it literally stunned the senses, and so powerful that the very breath of it seemed to pick him up like a feather and hurl him through the air until he smashed into the upheaved end of the car.

He lay still for some minutes—long enough for the outraged senses to reassert themselves.

The roar in his ears thinned out into separate vibrations. Near by a man's voice was cursing at another man's voice which gibbered through the inky blackness in an excess of cowardice. Here, there, everywhere, came the screams of women—screams shrilling horror, terror, or pain, or all three.

He heard the heavy groans of mortal injury, and the sharper moans of conscious pain; but permeating all was that dull sound of grinding, crunching timbers. He lay there languidly.

Suddenly a thin spiral of flame flashed up a few feet away and went out. It flashed up again and chained his interest in its feeble efforts to live. A strong, pungent odor crept into his nostrils and strangled him for a moment, and the coughing made him conscious of a pain over his eye.

Torpidly he lifted stiff fingers to feel a gaping cut over his eye and the slippery smear of blood. The lassitude left him on the instant—he was hurt—a wreck—Agnes in the car ahead—the débris was afire—lives in danger!

The moonlight struggling in through a broken window pointed a way to safety and he wriggled out. A mass of wreckage littered the tracks in a shape that reminded him of a huge boa-constrictor.

The three last cars of the passenger-train tailed out uninjured, but the three forward ones were in a jagged heap against the end of a string of freight-cars. Men were running hither and thither in the aimless frenzy of terror. Others were sitting with bedraggled women in the ditch, staring blankly at the hideous pile on the track.

Percy stared with them for just a minute; then the seethe of a great impulse—it was too big to analyze—seemed to fill every tiny cell of his mind and body with conscious power.

"Here—you!" He grabbed a couple of the whining, teeth-chattering men roughly by the shoulders and shoved them toward the wreck. "Get to work—there!" pointing to the windows.

The effect was magical; they had been waiting only for the thought. So he went up and down the line, dragging the shock-crazed ones to work and leaving them alert and fighting their way into the débris like madmen.

One he despatched to telephone for help; another to alarm the neighborhood—to bring buckets with them, too, for he had discovered three feet of water in an adjacent ditch.

The women were spurred into action and forgot their own fright in caring for the injured. Percy seemed to be everywhere at once — helping here, commanding there; a big, blond, rushing figure, covered with grime and reek, and a stream of blood caking down the side of his face.

Once he found Agnes, shrieking hysterically and wringing her hands in helpless fear beside the track, but did not recognize her. He seized her by the shoulder with no light hand and shook her impatiently.

"Stop your damned bawling!" he

snarled. "Go over there and help with the injured. This is no time for nerves."

She looked squarely into his eyes, and still he did not know her; but what she saw there made her hasten to do his bidding.

Assistance began to flow in from countless sources. Residents in the neighborhood had responded in force, and he organized them into a bucket-brigade which was successfully coping with the incipient fire.

A number of physicians had arrived and more were coming.

The wrecking-train was rounding the curve. Then Percy thought of Agnes. This may read unpleasantly to lovers of romance, but it is so, nevertheless. An hour previous Percy would have scouted the idea himself.

He found her bathing the head of a groaning victim, her white lawn gown hanging limp to her slender form and splotched with black.

A loosened coil of thick, dark hair tousled down the side of her face until she brushed it back with a slim, grimy hand.

And then he saw her face—a face streaked with grime, but glorified by the work of mercy.

He took the hand away from her face and led her away to where the shadow of a huge elm made a black patch in the moonlight. In silence they watched the flare of torches as the wrecking-crew took up the work, and the little lights of the lanterns as they darted through the darker places like so many fireflies.

Then he spoke to her.

"You had better rest a while. It has been a terrible experience; your nerves must be all unstrung."

She shivered as though to confirm the diagnosis, and the little hand he held clutched spasmodically.

"What's the matter, Aggie? Are you hurt?" He was very solicitous now.

"Aggie!" She snatched the hand away and burst into tears. "Don't call me by that hateful name—please—it's cruel—at this time."

"But—" Percy fairly gaped in his amazement.

"Oh, I know it is hateful of me; I don't deserve any pity from you—my real name is Ethel Bradley—I live in Idlewild."

"But—"

He could think of no other word for the life of him. He had often heard of Ethel Bradley through mutual friends, for Idlewild was only two stations below Woodside. He was positive he had never been introduced to her.

"I just told you my name was Aggie—when—when you flirted with me—that day on the six-forty-five."

"Flirted!" he gasped. "Why, I knew you somewhere before that—your face was familiar to me."

"I know. I used to take the six-two sometimes; I'd see you on the train."

Percy looked away to think it over. The wrenching his nerves had received this night had left him a bit dazed. She misunderstood the motive—a way women have—and came closer to him, her hands clenched tensely against her breast.

"I know you ought to hate me—for shaming you that way—on the train." She was sobbing miserably. "Please—please, don't be angry with me."

"With you?" he repeated in genuine astonishment.

"Nor for what I said to you in the taxicab," she pleaded hopefully, catching an encouraging intonation in his voice. "You remember—I said—you were not dependable. My God! You—not dependable! You!"

She covered her face with her hands and the sobs became hysterical. Through sheer weakness her head drooped until it leaned against his breast.

As was said before, Percy had inherited the happy faculty of doing the right thing at the right time.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

HAT is more terrible than to be unjustly accused? What is more frightful than to be arrested, tried, and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment inside the gray walls of a penitentiary, away from friends, family, and sweetheart, when you carry in your heart the knowledge that you are innocent—absolutely innocent of any wrong-doing?

What in the whole wide gamut of human experience is more tragic than that?

Walter Mansfield must have asked himself much the same question when he heard the guard shut his cell door behind him for the first time and turn the key in the lock. What his alleged offense was, and what the combination of circumstances that condemned him, will be disclosed in

THE ALIBI

BY GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

which will begin in the October 23 ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

The strongest argument that can be advanced against capital punishment is that peradventure some innocent man may be sent to the gallows or the electric chair instead of the rogue who committed the murder. In fact, there is little doubt that, in the history of jurisprudence, such a gross miscarriage of justice has sometimes occurred. But it cannot be urged on this ground alone that capital punishment should be abolished. Society must be protected. Unfortunately, the innocent are on rare occasions enmeshed in the net of circumstantial evidence.

Such was the plight of *Walter Mansfield!* He was caught in the diabolical web of another's weaving. George Allan England has surpassed himself in this poignantly dramatic novel, which will be run in six instalments. If you have read "Darkness and Dawn," "The Golden Blight," and that remarkable human document, "The Fatal Gift," which made such a sensational hit with ALL-STORY readers very recently, you are going to ask your newsdealer immediately to save you a copy of next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY containing the first part of "THE ALIBI."

Do you remember *Mr. Lloyd Demarest*, the handsome, fascinating, aristocratic thief whom you met in "Sir Wilfred's Sapphire"? Well, here he is again in

A LOST LETTER

BY FRED JACKSON

which will be published complete next week in this magazine.

This time *Mr. Demarest* was commissioned to recover a very important letter for *James Redway*. *Redway* called at *Demarest's* rooms one evening, and after convincing the master thief that he was to be trusted, begged him to steal back a letter written to another woman.

The vital letter was not in the possession of the woman to whom it had been written, but of *Mrs. Lawrence Humphreys,*

a clever little minx from the South, who had married a dissolute but wealthy New Yorker. *Redway* was reticent about the details of the affair, but claimed that the lady was holding the letter over his head in an effort to induce him to do something he didn't want to.

Demarest accepted the commission, being promised five thousand dollars for the return of the letter. His first act was to call up *Mrs. Humphreys's* apartment. He ascertained that *Mr. Humphreys* was out of the city and that the lady was at home. Then he took a taxi and went to the apartment, demanding to see *Mrs. Humphreys* on a matter of urgent business on behalf of her husband.

Mrs. Humphreys was terribly agitated, and when a telegram signed by *Lawrence Humphreys* arrived, which backed up *Demarest's* statement, she incontinently fainted.

Although *Demarest* could not be sure whether the lady's emotions were real or if she were a consummate actress, he wasted no time over her, but dashed for the bedroom in which he knew the letter was kept in a jewel-case, and then—

Well, a great many things happened in very brief time, and some of the complications were of a wholly unexpected nature. However, you will know all about it next week.

* * *

"THE STUFF IN HIM," by Harold Titus, is written to prove that when a boy is ashamed of his mother it places upon him a stain as ineradicable, though not so distinct, as the spots of a leopard. Others may not know the why of the stain, but they sense its presence and shun the branded one instinctively. That was why *Walker Langberth*, says Titus, had never made a close friend. He was ashamed of his mother because she did not come up to his father's and his own conception of a lady.

Within a fortnight after *Walker* went to school he was calling their lone maid "nurse," much to her Irish irritation, and within a year had a splendid start at developing into a little super-snob. At the age of ten he judged people solely by what they had, and when he finished the grammar school he was a walking social register.

What finally brought about the softening of *Walker's* heart toward his mother makes one of the most appealing stories Titus has ever written.

* * *

"FAINT HOPE AND CHARITY," by Tom S. Elrod, is about the kind of a fellow who hesitates between two neckties. '*Graham* was his name. Such a man, says Mr. Elrod, is likely to become at the age of fifty or sixty the exact counterpart of the cartoonists' popular conception of Mr. Common People.

The persons with whom *Graham* associated most did not really know him. They barely suspected that he kept his real feelings hidden so deeply that it was only at rare intervals that they were given even a glimpse of his true personality. Because his parents had named him *Francis Hope Graham*, his friends dubbed him "*Faint Hope*" *Graham*.

In this story of *Graham's* one supreme love affair, Tom S. Elrod has surpassed himself.

* * *

"DEAD MAN'S SHOES," by Octavus Roy Cohen and Manning J. Rubin, tells what happens after Old Man Pneumonia suddenly claims *Joe Thompson*, who for fifteen years had occupied the post of sales manager and optimist for the McClary Hardware Company.

The sudden death of his right-hand man threw *Sam McClary* on the verge of nervous prostration. It was worse than a cut in rating could possibly have been. *Thompson* had come into *McClary's* employ when the annual sales totaled twenty-five thousand dollars; when he died they totaled something more or less than one million five hundred thousand dollars annually. Somehow, *Sam McClary* found it hard to consider another man for the vacant desk. He felt vaguely that he would desecrate the memory of the dead man by such an attempt.

How a merely fortuitous circumstance shows *Sam McClary* who is capable of filling the dead man's shoes you will learn when you read this charming tale of modern business life.

* * *

MORE TARZAN COMING

To the Editor:

This is just a short epistle from one of your readers that may or may not be acceptable. What I want to say is that if Edgar Rice Burroughs does not hurry up with a *Tarzan* story all of his admirers ought to quit reading the All-Story Weekly for spite.

He is one great character. I think all of the Burroughs readers will agree with my sentiments. I would like to see *Tarzan* and the *Mucker* become acquainted.

I do not intend to knock, but do not use Fred Jackson's stuff any too much.

I like next to Burroughs, Zane Grey, Cyrus Townsend Brady and Oppenheim. There are other good authors; in fact I

cannot find any that are not good, although some I do not like.

I would like to see a sequel to "The Quitter," "The In-Bad Man," and "The Curious Quest of Mr. Ernest Bliss."

I will close now with the best wishes for a long life to the magazine.

W. H. PILLING.

Warwick, New York.

NOTE.—"The Son of Tarzan," a sequel to all the *Tarzan* tales, will begin in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY in early December.

HENDRYX A FAVORITE

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed please find one dollar for which send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months. As my subscription is overdue, please begin with the September 4 issue. I was going to procure future numbers at a news-stand, but find they are engaged ahead.

I have just finished "The Executioner," which is fine. Oney Fred Sweet, Fred Jackson, and James B. Hendryx are my favorite authors. Hendryx especially. "The Promise" is the best story I have read since I have been a subscriber. I would like to see more of that nature, and I am sure other readers would not kick.

Wishing you success, I remain, still a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

P. V. ELMER.

Box 15,
Nucla, Colorado.

PRAISE FROM PANAMA

TO THE EDITOR:

Let me congratulate you on being the editor of such an illustrious magazine. I think it the greatest in the world. And do not believe I am the only one to give it such praise. There is no other magazine I could enjoy half as much as I do my ALL-STORY.

Its readers in the States have the advantage of me in one respect—they receive it every Thursday, whereas we readers on the Zone must wait almost two weeks for the next issue.

I thought it would please you and your doubtful readers of the Heart to Heart Talks to know that even the great Panama Canal had a reader that believes in all of the Heart to Heart Talk letters, and to prove it, dear editor, will you print this for a well wisher?

Your Mr. E. R. Burroughs is immortal! Also Arthur Applin, Fred Jackson, T. W. Hanshew, E. J. Rath, and Robert A. Bowen deserve gold medals. Andrew Soutar is winning steadily.

Give my respects to the poets. They are fine. I quite agree with Laurence H. Davidson, of Mobile, Alabama, whose letter was printed in the August 7 issue. He certainly knows good authors—for he was and is a Burroughs booster, don't you remember? I have no kick coming. There is nothing, yes, nothing, at all wrong with the ALL-STORY or its editor. And if I see another letter with a kick against the editor I'm going to start something. So Mr. and Mrs. Grouchers, look out!

MISS ABBIE MCKEOWN.

Gatun, Canal Zone, Panama.

"THE PROMISE" WINS A SUBSCRIBER

TO THE EDITOR:

I do not subscribe to the ALL-STORY, but have been getting it at a bookstore in Coburg for two years. I think it the best magazine I ever read. A friend of mine was here visiting this summer and began reading some of the stories in the back numbers, such as "The Quitter," "The Mucker," *et cetera*. He took the five instalments of "The Promise" home with him in his club bag. So I am sending you four dollars for which please send him for one year the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Please start the subscription with the 1st of September.

MRS. MABEL ROSS.

Grafton, Ontario, Canada.

JOHN BUCHAN AND "ALL-STORY DAY"

TO THE EDITOR:

I have just finished reading the September 11 issue of the ALL-STORY, and have read every story in it, and it now being nearly 1.00 A.M., I am ready to retire, but not glad, for I only wish I had a few more stories to finish, especially of the kind John Buchan has written in "Andrew Garvald, Tidewater Trader."

I have read your Heart to Heart Talks every issue for a couple of years, and note what some of the readers say, and for this reason I am writing to mention Mr. Buchan, for I believe he has written one of the cleanest stories I have ever read. He has a tact of putting his English and Scotch in such a way that you say at the close of each chapter, "This boy is some writer." And I only hope he will give us some more of his stories.

I, like the rest, like that fellow Means's stories, and I laughed until my sides ached at his last one. He is good!

I strike very few places where I cannot buy the ALL-STORY on Thursday, as I always look forward to that day, and have

named it "ALL-STORY Day," but on rare occasions I find a newsdealer who does not sell it, and I like to kid him about how far behind the times he is for not selling the best magazine for clean, up-to-date stories in the country.

GEORGE A. MIRANDA.

Dayton, Ohio.

VIVA CAPTAIN VELVET!

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been an ardent reader of the ALL-STORY for some time, and do not regret ever having started it. It's a perfect shame that Mr. Editor lets all those knockers and kickers into our cozy corner, for they spoil it all. If you aren't satisfied with the stories, why read them, Mr Grouch?

There are some stories, of course, that I do not care for, but I merely skip 'em and read something else, for there's plenty that I *do* like. Now, those who do not like such interesting stories as "The Promise," "A Man's Hearth," and all of E. K. Means's negro yarns—well, they don't know a good story when they meet it.

The Heart to Heart Talks complete a dandy, fine magazine, for the letters from so many different States are quite interesting. We are like a large family, aren't we? And an interesting one, too. Some of us are actors (a benighted heathen, as Jack W. Cobbin terms it), doctors, and some are just kickers.

I am anxiously awaiting the coming of "Captain Velvet." Oh, Mr. Editor, did you really mean it when you said this will be the last of the stories of him? Why, how are we going to get along without the lovable, queer old captain? Well, I'm glad there's one more anyway.

Wishing you much success,

MILDRED OWEN.

514 Symmes Street,
Norman, Oklahoma.

CANNOT BEAR BURROUGHS

TO THE EDITOR:

If you would keep such letters as the one written by Mr. C. Martin Eddy, Jr., out of print the Heart to Heart Talks would be enjoyed more by the public. What have you got the Heart to Heart Talks for if not for the readers to express their opinions of the stories, thereby keeping the editors posted as to what the readers like; without some one like Mr. Eddy, with mistaken notions of giving sympathy where they themselves need it more than the man they give it to?

I realize that to write such stories as "The Empire in the Air," "Judith of Babylon," "Abu, the Dawnmaker," and "The Mad King," it takes a fine, highly cultivated imagination, but all those stories do not appeal to the imagination of one person. "The Mad King" is the only story of the above-mentioned that appeals to my imagination. I would just as soon read "Anderson's Fairy Tales" for children as to read some of Burroughs's stories. Give us more like "The Riddle of the Night," by Mr. Hanshew, and that will more than make up (to me) for the stories I don't like.

PHIL GOODMAN.

89 Bogard Street,
Charleston, South Carolina.

LETTERETTES

Enclosed find money order for $2.00 for which send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for six months. My subscription expires on August 28.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY for a year and like it very much. Give us some more stories from the north. Don't cut out your Heart-to-Heart Talks.

SAM SORENSEN.

Petaluma, California.

Please find enclosed ten cents in stamps for which send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for Saturday, June 26, 1915. I am reading the story "The Promise" and want the last part of it. I think it is about the best story I have ever read.

HERBERT M. YULE.

459 Market Street,
Kenosha, Wisconsin.

I have been unable to obtain a copy of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of August 21, 1915, in this section of the woods, and like all the rest can't get along without it. Please be kind enough to send me a copy of same by return mail. As soon as I can corral some money, which is very elusive at present, I shall become a yearly subscriber for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. It surely is a top-notcher.

CHARLES A. LINDNER.

Redland, Dade County, Florida.

Enclosed find a twelve-cent stamp for which please send me the ALL-STORY for August 14. I also wish to say that it is one of the best magazines issued.

T. LLEWELLYN.

P. O. Box No. 1,
Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Love in Fetters

by Richard Marsh

Author of "Adventures of Judith Lee, Lip-Reader," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

GUESTS of Mme. Madeleine de Constal at her beautiful, sinister Château d'Ernan include Mr. and Mrs. George P. Stacey, Count de Girodet, M. Léon Perret, Sir and Lady Augustus Chorlston and their daughter, Thomas Spragg, Colonel Gardner, Messrs. Osborne and Krauss, Miss Alice Hudson, and Ronald Denton. Mme. de Constal has been acquitted of murdering her husband; the Staceys are Chicagoans, looking for the missing heir to the huge fortune amassed by Stacey's late partner, Andrew J. Sloane; Count de Girodet and M. Perret are accomplices of Mme. de Constal; the Chorlstons, like the Staceys, have lost heavily at cards to the swindlers; Alice Hudson is a lovely English orphan under the "protection" of Mme. de Constal; Ronald Denton, alias Robert Dennett, is wanted in England for murder. Miss Hudson and Denton are quasi-prisoners at the *château*. They love each other; Mme. de Constal, for reasons of her own, wants them to marry at once.

In another particular also Mme. de Constal finds need of haste; she must raise five thousand pounds within a week for the criminal, Jules Monteil, who needs the money to hide from the police, and who will inform against the gang unless he gets it.

Just before Spragg is going to tell Stacey the whereabouts of Sloane's heir, Spragg disappears amid a midnight racket which arouses the whole household. The next day Mme. de Constal explains that a messenger called for him and he went away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Suspicions.

BY the time Mme. de Constal strolled away nearly all her guests were assembled on the terrace. Mr. Stacey said the moment she had gone:

"I don't want to insinuate a word, but of all the strange stories that of hers about Spragg is a little beyond me. It's funny that I should have heard what I did hear, considering that he told me only last night that he might be here for a week, and perhaps more. That yarn of hers about a messenger coming in the middle of the night makes it funnier still."

"I hope," sighed Lady Chorlston, "that I've not been deceived in Mme. de Constal. I don't know if you noticed with what extraordinary persistence I seemed to lose last night—a persistence which requires explanation."

Her daughter glanced at Ronald. Mr. Krauss spoke next.

"I just came up in time to hear what she said about all this fine place being hers as far as the eye can reach. I happen to know that every foot of it

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for September 25.

is mortgaged up to the hilt, and that at this very moment the mortgagees are threatening to foreclose."

"Are you one of them, Mr. Krauss?"

The question came from a gray-haired man, who seemed to have a knack of keeping himself in the background.

Mr. Krauss looked at the gray-haired man, rolling his cigar round between his lips.

"Suppose I am, Colonel Gardner; would you like to take my share off my hands at the price I paid for it?"

"No, Mr. Krauss — no; you spoke with such an air of certainty that I merely wondered."

"Wondered what I knew of Mme. de Constal? We all know something about her, don't we? I fancy you know as much about her as any one, only you're one of those retiring men, colonel, who leave others to do the talking."

Just then Mme. de Constal, coming out of the house, waved her handkerchief to them as if it were a signal, and called:

"Mr. Dennett! May I speak to you—one moment, please?"

Ronald hesitated, conscious of an almost singular reluctance to go to her.

"Mme. de Constal is calling to you," said Miss Chorlston; "don't you hear her?"

"What is it?" asked Ronald.

"I can't speak to you at that distance," replied his hostess. "I don't want to bawl. Will you come for just one minute, please?"

Ronald went, still reluctant. The others watched him, Mr. Stacey indulging in comment as soon as his back was turned.

"I wonder what that young gentleman's position is at the Château d'Ernan? Is he the lady's spy, or—what is he? I'll swear his name wasn't Dennett the last time I saw him. He left Monte Carlo in a great hurry without saying good-by to any of his friends, or even sending them a card, and no one seemed to know where he'd gone to. It's a surprise to find him here as Robert Dennett."

Ronald, having reached the lady, showed a disposition to hear what she had to say there.

"I can't possibly speak to you here, my dear boy. I don't want all the world to listen. You must come into the house."

When he hesitated she added:

"I have something to say to you about Alice—something which I think you had better hear."

Ronald might have his doubts about the lady, but as he was anxious for tidings of Miss Hudson, he followed her into the house. As he did so, the gray-haired man, detaching himself from the group of fellow-guests, began to move toward the *château*. Mr. Stacey, in accordance with what seemed to be his habit, commented on him also.

"That man's a puzzle to me. He gave me to understand that Spragg was just a casual acquaintance, but I've seen things which make me wonder if they haven't been friends from boyhood.

"Some one introduced him to me as Colonel Gardner, but a big bug at Monte Carlo told me that if he got his colonelcy anywhere it was from the secret service department of the English police. I don't know, but the more I travel, the more I wonder who anybody is. It isn't often that they describe themselves, but Monte Carlo seems to be full of curiosities."

"It's not so full of curiosities as the Château d'Ernan."

This was Mr. Krauss. They all looked at him.

When Denton entered the hall he turned instinctively toward the oak-paneled room on the left in which he had had several *tête-à-tête* interviews with his hostess. She laid her hand on his coat-sleeve.

"Not that way this time. I want to introduce you to my own particular den. It is a compliment I pay you, because it is only old friends, and those in whom I have the greatest confi-

dence, who are ever allowed to enter there."

He was disposed to tell her that he desired neither to be regarded as an old friend nor to receive her confidence, but he refrained. She opened a door at the end of the hall, of whose existence he had been ignorant, and held it for him to enter, smiling as she did so.

"Be quick, please. This is the way to my own private quarters. I don't want any one to come into the hall and find it out."

He had a feeling that if he once passed the door he might find himself in a very uncomfortable position, but such an idea, in broad daylight, with all those strangers about, seemed absurd. Accepting her invitation, he went through the door.

The moment he was through she closed it behind him. He had a notion that as she did so some one entered the hall from the grounds. The same notion seemed to occur to her. She exclaimed, as if unconsciously uttering her thoughts aloud:

"I wonder if he saw?"

Although he doubted if the question had been addressed to him, he answered it.

"What does it matter if he did? Does that door mask something which you would rather he did not see?"

As she glanced at him she smiled, this time, as it seemed to him, with difficulty. It was a second or two before she answered. She was either listening to what was taking place on the other side of that door or thinking how to express herself.

"Mr. Dennett, what curious things you say. It really is too droll; I cannot think how you get such curious notions in your head. As if there was ever anything which I should wish to hide!

"Now I'll take you to my own particular den. I think that, as you English say, you'll find it comfy."

She took him through what seemed to be an endless series of passages, doors opening out of them on both sides at frequent intervals.

"That den of yours seems to be a long way off. This is an amazingly large house of yours—all this part of it is quite strange to me," Ronald commented.

"Don't you know that this is one of the largest houses in France, and one of the most famous—if only because of the extraordinary things which have happened here? They began to build it at the end of the fifteenth century. The Château d'Ernan, if it were to tell all the strange things it had seen, what a story it would be—the crimes which have been committed within its walls!"

All at once a sound struck Denton's ears. He paused.

"What was that?" he asked. "It seemed to come from the other side of that door."

"My dear Mr. Denton, what is what?"

"I thought I heard some one—crying, or doing something, as if in pain. What's on the other side of that door?"

"That door leads to the servants' quarters. Here's my den. Let me make you welcome to its mysteries."

She held open a door, on the other side of which was a very fine, spacious apartment. He entered; she closed the door. They were in the room with the painted ceiling. He looked about him with curious eyes.

"This is a magnificent apartment; it might be a room in a palace," he cried.

"You might regard it as a room in a palace, since I believe at least one king of France has been its occupant. The suite to which it belongs is the crowning glory of the *château*, which is perhaps one reason why I use it as my own.

"Now, Mr. Dennett, I have something which I wish to say to you. It begins with a question. Are you, or are you not, going to marry Alice?"

In the immense room there were

several tables, of different sorts, shapes, and sizes. The young man stood by one fashioned out of massive black oak. Scrollwork ran round the edges. It was covered with an amazing sort of litter. He leaned against the edge, considering his hostess a minute or two before he answered.

"Where is Miss Hudson?"

"If your answer is what it ought to be, almost before you know it she will be in your arms."

"I don't know if you realize, Mme. de Constal, what a dangerous game this is you are playing."

She raised her eyebrows in, as it were, a note of exclamation.

"My good young man! What do you mean?"

"Every creature in your house suspects you; not one of your guests has a good word to say for you. I have only to place them in possession of certain facts with which you know I am acquainted and your position will become very unpleasant indeed."

"Is the young man stark mad?" she cried. "You leave my position alone. It is your position which is likely to become unpleasant if you are not very careful,"

"What has become of Mr. Spragg?" he demanded.

His hostess started, staring at him as if bewildered.

"What do you mean? What is it you are asking me?" she faltered.

"Your story about the message he received in the middle of the night, and his leaving because of it, was a lie, and one which failed to carry the least conviction. I know better."

"You know better? What do you mean? What do you know?"

"Mme. de Constal, I am going to give myself up for the murder of Edward Osborne."

"You are going to give yourself up —to whom?"

"I am going to tell those people down-stairs who I am, and what I am, and I'm going to ask them to place me in communication with the police."

She laughed oddly.

"You are, are you? We shall see. You use brave words, my lad. What else do you propose to do?"

"You hold Miss Hudson as your prisoner; why, only you know, though I begin to have my suspicions."

"You—"

She moved toward him almost as if she would have struck him, and then checked herself.

"You begin to have your suspicions? What do you mean by you begin to have your suspicions? What are they?"

"As they are only suspicions, and may be baseless, I do not propose to tell you what they are. But having informed the persons whom you are entertaining as your guests about myself, I intend to inform them of your treatment of Miss Hudson, and her position as your prisoner. I think very soon after that she will cease to be your prisoner, and I shall be in the hands of the police."

"Aren't you, as you English say, counting your chickens a little before they are hatched?"

Mme. de Constal was regarding him with something in her eyes which made him conscious that he and she were about to measure swords, and which made him wish that they were in that oak-paneled parlor instead of this particular den of hers.

"You have been frank with me," she went on. "I will be equally frank with you—perhaps even more frank. There's a parson on the premises; all the proper formalities have been attended to, all the necessary declarations made. You have both of you been resident in this house the statutory time.

"You are going to marry Alice Hudson in half an hour, or perhaps less. After you have married her you will be at perfect liberty to hand yourself over to the police if you choose, and if you wish to make Miss Hudson the widow of a man who has been hanged for murder—in which case her

punishment will probably be greater than yours. You will certainly be killing her as well as yourself.

"But all that is for your after consideration. You are going to begin by making her your wife. Be so good as to answer the question which I put to you at the beginning. Are you going to do this of your own free will?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Reverend Gentleman.

HIS answer was to move rapidly toward the door by which they had entered. For an instant her attitude suggested an intention to interpose herself — an intention, however, which was reconsidered. Resting her hand on the back of a chair, she watched him with smiling eyes. He found, on trying the handle, that the door refused to yield. He tried it three or four times.

"It seems to be locked," he said. "Yet I don't know how that can be, because I did not see you lock it."

"Perhaps it locked itself; perhaps it is worked by a spring, which, when you push the door to, locks it. There are such doors, although you may not have heard of them."

"Does that mean that I am a prisoner?"

"My good young man, you have been a prisoner ever since the night on which occurred the train-wreck that killed Inspector Jenner and gave you a chance to escape before he could get you to England. You will continue to be a prisoner until you have done what I wish you to do.

"You have not answered my question. You have not said whether you will marry your lady love of your own free will, which means, I take it, that you won't. That makes no difference. You will marry her before you leave this room, whether you will or won't."

She touched a bell. A door opened and two persons entered. One was Achille; the other was a person he had never seen before—a big, burly man, whose face was ornamented with strips of sticking-plaster. Mme. de Constal went through the ceremony of introduction with a little air of formal grace as if it were seriously meant.

"Mr. Dennett, permit me to have the pleasure of introducing you to M. Léon Perret. M. Perret — Mr. Dennett. I fancy, Mr. Dennett, you may have heard M. Perret's name."

His answer was not couched in the courteous form which marked the lady's words. He moved a little forward, his fists clenched at his sides.

"You blackguard! So you still bear some of the marks she gave you. If I ever have the opportunity I'll give you marks which you'll carry to your coward's grave!"

M. Perret returned Mr. Dennett as good as he sent.

"I am obliged to you, Mr. Dennett. Aren't you the individual who killed his friend and then ran away to save his skin? It becomes such a one to strut like a bantam cock and speak of cowardice."

Ronald's reply was to rush across the room and strike M. Perret. That gentleman, however, catching him by the wrist, gave it a sudden turn, and sent him blundering across the room till his progress was stayed by the table against which he had previously been leaning.

"If it were worth my while," said M. Perret, "I'd strip the clothes off you and beat you till you're black and blue."

"M. Dennett," chorused Achille, "is a very brave gentleman with his tongue."

The villainous *valet de chambre* spoke with that peculiar suavity which almost hinted that his organs of speech had been oiled.

"You coward!" cried Ronald. "Do you suppose that because you're bigger and stronger than I am that makes you brave? You are like the curs who play with marked cards—you take care that all the odds are in your favor. You

give me anything like an equal chance and I'll show you if I'm good with my tongue only."

Even as he spoke his glance fell on a polished mahogany case on the table by which he was standing—and he wondered. The lady played the part of peacemaker—or pretended to.

"Come, children; no quarreling, if you please. My dear Léon, M. Dennett is a very gallant gentleman; if he is a little hasty it is a fault of youth. We have more serious matters to occupy our attention; amuse ourselves when they are done. Where is the Rev. Mr. Hayes?"

M. Perret nodded toward the door through which he had come.

"Outside. Are you ready for him?"

"In one moment."

Mme. de Constal took a folded paper from a drawer.

"Mr. Dennett, this is an authorization from the proper authorities permitting a marriage to take place between Mr. Robert Dennett and Alice Hudson and allowing such marriage to be solemnized by an ordained clergyman of the Church of England at the Château d'Ernan. I have acquainted Alice with the contents of this document, and she has expressed her perfect willingness to marry you under the circumstances and on the conditions set forth in this document."

"I don't believe it!" Ronald flashed.

The lady showed no signs of being irritated by his flat contradiction.

"She will be able to tell you presently with her own lips that what I say of her is true. What I want to know is, if she is willing to marry you, will you be willing to marry her?"

"Let me see that paper."

"With pleasure, if you will give me your word of honor to return it to me at once when you have read it—uninjured."

He hesitated.

"If you find it difficult to give such a promise, I shall have pleasure in reading it aloud to you, Mr. Dennett."

"I don't care what is on that paper, or what it pretends to be, or where it pretends to come from; I am sure it's a fraud. No form of marriage such as you speak of can be anything but a mockery.

"As I have said, I am beginning to have suspicions of what it is you are after, and it's quite clear that you mean to stick at nothing to get it. What infernal means of persuasion you have used to Miss Hudson I cannot say; if she has said anything such as you say she has, I am sure you have used some. Whatever you have done to her, I am certain that she doesn't realize what a trick it is you are scheming to play on her, with my connivance."

Achille cut Ronald short, interposing with his accustomed suavity.

"What is the use of listening to this gentleman? He will talk and talk and talk—we must do."

"We will do, my dear Achille. Ask the Rev. Mr. Hayes to come in."

The gentleman must have been very close at hand, because Achille had only to open the door and he walked through it—a short, thin gentleman, bald-headed, spectacled, clad in nondescript attire which might or might not have been clerical. Since nowadays so many clergyman dress as laymen, it is not always easy to distinguish. He stood looking about him when he was well in the room with the air of a person who expects to see something remarkable without quite knowing what.

"*Monsieur*—I do not know this gentleman's name"—the reference was to Achille—"gave me to understand that all was ready."

"And all is nearly ready, dear Mr. Hayes. Mr. Dennett, this is the Rev. Mr. Hayes, late English chaplain at Pont-sur-Oise. This, Mr. Hayes, is the gentleman you are shortly to join in holy matrimony to the lady of his heart. Will you please explain to him that that union will be perfectly valid."

The Rev. Mr. Hayes seemed surprised. He had what might have been a prayer-book in one hand; with the

other he settled his spectacles on his nose. He looked at Mr. Dennett very hard with short-sighted eyes.

"I do not understand. Not valid? Any marriage which I should celebrate? This gentleman cannot think that I should associate myself with anything that was improper. You cannot think that, sir?"

The question was addressed to Ronald, who answered it after a fashion of his own.

"Are you a properly ordained English clergyman? If so, do you understand what you are wanted for, what sort of house this is, and why they have brought you here?"

"I certainly believe that I understand most distinctly; and as for my being ordained, I have been an English priest for seven and twenty years. I have held three livings in England—in Sussex, Warwickshire, and Hertfordshire—and this is the first time I have ever been asked a question which throws doubt upon my qualifications.

"Is the lady ready? If so, I have my vestments without. I will immediately put them on, and if all is ready, since I have other engagements, it would be convenient for me at once to begin."

Mme. de Constal touched the bell which she had rung before. A door opened in an opposite corner of the room, from which a woman attired as a maid appeared.

"Antoinette, will you please ask Mlle. Hudson to enter?"

Antoinette vanished. There was an interval, during which the Rev. Mr. Hayes continued to look about him with the same vague air as of a person who was looking for he knew not what. He made a suggestion in a whisper as if it were a matter of the extremest privacy:

"I will go and robe myself, with your permission."

He returned by the door through which he had previously come. As soon as he was gone Mme. de Constal said:

"I trust, Mr. Dennett, that the Rev. Mr. Hayes has satisfied any doubts you may have had."

Ronald uttered a sound which might have been meant for a laugh of contempt. The tone in which he spoke went well with it.

"Satisfied? You must take me for a simpleton. Do you know the only thing that would satisfy me? That you should allow me to call your guests up here and request them to inquire into the good faith of that person and that paper of yours; and if they are satisfied probably I shall be. As things are, my only feeling is that that fellow is one of yourselves, and that you are all conspiring together in what seems to be a clumsy attempt at deception."

"That is your opinion, is it, Mr. Dennett?"

Mme. de Constal seemed to be amused.

"What a shrewd young man you are! Here is our dear Alice. She may be able to inspire you with a confidence which we cannot do."

Antoinette had opened the door in the corner and remained standing, with the handle in her hand, while Miss Hudson entered. She was dressed in a gown of soft silk, of so light a blue as to be almost white. A long train spread out behind her. As she moved, little blue satin shoes peered out from under the hem.

"You see," said Mme. de Constal, as if she introduced her, "our dear Alice is dressed for the wedding. Does she not make a lovely bride?"

Ronald's heart seemed to be bounding in his bosom as he admitted that she did. The exquisite gown she wore became her fair hair and skin, making, as it seemed to him, her delicate beauty still more ethereal.

Her cheeks were white. Her lovely eyes seemed to be distended, as if with fear either of what was past or of what was still to come. Her lips were pressed tightly together. She held herself with a curious rigidity, moving as one who walked in a dream.

The instant she was in the room her eyes found Denton. She seemed to start, to draw back, to gasp for breath. A spot of scarlet appeared on either cheek.

"Does not the bridegroom," asked Mme. de Constal, "advance to meet his bride? My dear Alice, let me lead you to him."

When, advancing, Mme. de Constal would have taken her by the hand and led her forward, the girl stood still.

"No, please—please don't."

Her lips were trembling.

"Robert," she murmured, as if unconscious that she used his Christian name, "they told me—that you wished —to marry me."

Denton was silent. The working of his features showed how difficult it was for him to find words which would explain the situation without hurting her feelings. When he did speak, it was with that stiffness which seemed a characteristic of his in moments of deepest emotion.

"I hope they've not been ill-treating you."

The words seemed to be unexpected; her eyes seemed to open still wider.

"They have not — they have not— been very kind."

Her reply, and all that it implied, seemed to rouse in him a sudden flame of passion. For the first time he moved toward her.

"Tell me what they've been doing to you."

Mme. de Constal intervened with an air of graceful amusement.

"My dear Alice, don't be silly; don't let your imagination run away with you. I'm sure the intention of every one in the Château d'Ernan has been to be kind to you, to show you every possible kindness. All we want is to have you happily married."

She turned to Achille:

"See if Mr. Hayes is ready."

Achille opened the door. Mr. Hayes entered, looking, in surplice, stole and hood, more clerical than he had done before. Antoinette, who had remained in the room, pushed forward a sort of reading-desk, behind which he took his stand, placing on it an open prayer-book. Mme. de Constal turned to Ronald.

"Come, Mr. Dennett, give Alice your hand."

"That I will do willingly without any prompting from you. Kindly get out of my way, Mme. de Constal, and don't you venture to touch me, or Miss Hudson, either."

Brushing unceremoniously past his hostess, planting himself directly in front of the girl, Denton took her right hand in both of his.

"Do you understand this mockery they propose to go through—this mockery of a pretended marriage? Have they explained it to you? Does it meet with your approval?"

Mme. de Constal answered before words could come to the girl. Ronald's touch seemed to have had upon her an extraordinary effect. Her cheeks flamed; tears had come into her eyes; she trembled.

"He is such an incredulous person, your husband that is to be, dear Alice! It is not proposed to go through any mockery of marriage. As if in my presence I would allow any one to mock at sacred things!"

In spite of her apparent wish to be serious, her voice all at once assumed a sort of satirical intonation.

"You are about, my dear Alice, to be joined in the bonds of holy wedlock, as it is so beautifully phrased by the church. The marriage which will presently be celebrated will be as valid as if it were celebrated in St. Paul's Cathedral—where, by the way, if you like, afterward you can be married again.

"Come, young people! We are losing time. Is everything ready, Mr. Hayes?"

"Everything," replied that personage. "I but wait the convenience of this young lady and gentleman."

His tone was a little austere, as if he felt that he was being slighted.

"Come, then, Mr. Hayes—begin. These two children are quite ready."

Ronald Denton expressed himself in an entirely different sense.

"You are a very persevering person, Mme. de Constal. You seem to think that we are puppets to be twisted round your finger. I have not the slightest intention of taking part in what, call it as you please, is nothing but a sacrilegious mockery, and I am quite sure that if Miss Hudson understands the position, neither has she."

CHAPTER XXV.

Ronald at Bay.

MME. DE CONSTAL gave no direct reply; she merely glanced at M. Perret and at Achille. As if her glance were a signal, Perret, moving forward, gripped Denton by both arms, so quickly that he had Ronald fast before his intention was suspected. Just as rapidly Achille moved toward him from behind.

Before the valet could reach him the young man made a violent effort to disengage himself. For once, in a way, fortune was on his side. Perret, slipping on the polished floor, loosed his grasp for an instant—Denton was away. Achille, making a snatch at Ronald, not seeing quite clearly in his haste what he was doing, collided with his friend.

Mme. de Constal, springing forward, tried to arrest Ronald in his flight across the room. Without hesitation, Denton, straightening his arm, struck at her with all his force; as it chanced, the blow lighted on the point of her chin. She went down on to the floor with a cry, and where she fell she lay.

Denton, gaining the other side of the table, against which he had leaned, and snatching up the flat mahogany case which he had noticed, tried to open the lid. It was locked. Regardless, in his consciousness of the value of moments, of everything but his desire to get at the contents, he raised the case above his head and brought it down with all his force against the edge of the table—not once, but twice, and again, till the woodwork was broken all to pieces. Two shining things fell out—as he had expected, a pair of revolvers.

Perret and Achille had delayed for an instant to learn what had befallen Mme. de Constal. Denton's movements had been so swift that that instant was enough. Picking up the revolvers, he held one in either hand before, realizing what he was doing, they were on him. By then it was too late; he was not so defenseless as they had supposed he would be. He pointed the weapons at their heads.

"You know as well as I do," he cried, "that they are loaded. If you move another step I'll fire!"

As if taken aback, the two men paused. Achille cried:

"Why did you leave that case where he could get at it?"

"How do you suppose," retorted M. Perret, "that I ever imagined he would be able to get at it?"

Mme. de Constal was raising herself from the floor.

"Rush at him," she urged. "He can't hit you both."

The consideration, however, that he might hit one seemed to restrain them. They remained where they were.

"Put those things down!" roared Perret. "We want to do you no harm."

"You move and I'll do *you* harm," rejoined the gentleman.

The woman whom they called Antoinette, perceiving that the position was desperate, had performed a flank movement and was coming toward him from behind. Before he guessed her purpose she had him by one arm. Another instant and he would have been at their mercy.

But, quick as lightning, swinging himself loose and wheeling, he fired at the woman while she was still within reach of him. She gave a wild scream

and, staggering back against the wall, uttered shriek after shriek as if possessed.

For once the veneer of suavity fell from Achille. He rushed at Denton with a bellow like a bull. Again the young man fired. At that distance he could hardly miss. The valet would have dropped to the floor had he not in falling come in contact with M. Perret, who was close behind, and who, almost willy-nilly, had to hold him up.

"I am done!" gasped Achille. "He's plugged me in the shoulder! The cursed English pig!"

The momentary silence which followed was broken by the shrill tones of the Rev. Mr. Hayes.

"For Heaven's sake, gentlemen — for all our sakes—be careful what you do! Matters are bad enough without making them worse. I won't stay and see murder done before my eyes."

Mme. de Constal addressed Antoinette, who still continued to shriek; the smile had gone from her eyes, and her tones were shrill.

"Antoinette, you fool, stop that noise! They will hear. We shall have the whole place about our ears. Nothing very serious has happened to you or you wouldn't make that noise. Where did he hit you?"

Thus adjured, the woman, ceasing to shriek, seemed to consider.

"I don't know where he hit me. I know he's broken my arm, and I believe my leg. I think the bullet went right through me."

Then with a sudden burst of fury she added:

"Hasn't any one got a gun that we can use on him? Madeline, where do you keep your vitriol? Use that!"

Mme. de Constal moved toward a table which stood before the fireplace. Denton had caught the words, pregnant with such hideous significance.

"Be careful, Mme. de Constal, what you are doing," he warned. "I do not wish to fire at a woman unless I can help it."

Heedless of his words, she dashed at the table, dragged open a drawer, and snatched from it a bottle. The instant he saw it in her hand he fired with so true an aim that the bottle was smashed to bits. Mme. de Constal started a series of yells which more than rivaled Antoinette's. The dreadful contents of the bottle had fallen on her bare hand and was burning the flesh to the bone.

Without standing on the order of his going, the Rev. Mr. Hayes ran toward the door, gathering up his surplice as he went as a woman gathers up her skirts. Perret, still supporting Achille, rained a volley of curses at Ronald as if in the hope that they would sear him as the vitriol had done Mme. de Constal. The young man confronted him unmoved, speaking when at last the other gave him a chance.

"If I riddled you with bullets, M. Perret, I should do no more than you deserve; but as I don't want to play the part of executioner I shall recommend you to take yourself off, and with you the man you are holding and those two women. The day of reckoning has come, and you are going to be called to account."

Scarcely had the young man's words been uttered than the door through which the reverend gentleman had retired was thrown open, and a man whom Denton had never seen before came dashing in in a state of almost frenzied agitation.

"Quick, all of you! They're coming!" he cried.

Perret turned as if he needed no one to explain who "they" were.

"You are sure of it?"

The man almost danced with the excitement engendered by the doubt which the other's question conveyed.

"Sure of it? Am I sure of it? For what kind of an idiot do you take me? However, it's your affair — not mine. The rest are already gone; I go also; you can stay if you choose."

The man had gone with the same

unceremonious swiftness with which he had come. His exit was followed by silence. Mme. de Constal ceased to scream, Antoinette to whine, Achille to groan.

"Can you walk?" asked M. Perret of the valet. "Madeline, I follow you; you know what we agreed. Do you suffer much?"

"Do I suffer? What do you suppose? Look!"

She stretched out her hand, which, just now so white and shapely, was black and horrible.

"Poor Madeline!" cried Perret; one would not have supposed that his voice was capable of so much sympathy. "However, I fear that no good end will be gained by staying."

"Do you think that I don't know it if the moment has come? Antoinette, are you ready?"

"As ready as I ever shall be."

The woman spoke sullenly.

"But I will not go without Achille."

"Achille shall go!" exclaimed Perret. "I will carry him."

Lifting Achille in his arms, M. Perret bore him toward the door as if his weight were a thing of no account. The man who had so suddenly come and gone had left the door wide open. Perret paused with his burden for a moment on the threshold, turning to Mme. de Constal.

"Come," he said; then, bearing his burden with him, he disappeared from sight. Antoinette went staggering after him.

Mme. de Constal, left alone, eyed the two young people. If words could have scorched, they would have been withered—she seemed to breathe forth the concentrated essence of rage as if the whole of the evil forces in her nature raged together.

"You think you have conquered. We shall see!"

She turned to Denton.

"As for you, the hangman's hands will tie you; his foot will kick the bolt; you will swing into eternity at the end of a rope—and may the pit receive you! They'll cut you down and burn your body with quicklime, and your name will be a byword to all decent folk — as the man who murdered his friend and then ran away to save his life. I will be revenged on you—you won't conquer in the end."

She turned to Alice with the swiftness with which a snake turns.

"As for you, the worst I can wish you is that you may become his wife; he'll make you suffer more than I ever could have done. He'll bring you to such utter shame that you'll hide your pretty face lest men should recognize you as the wife of the man who ended his life upon the gallows."

Words came from her lips with which one is unwilling to sully the page. She sprang at the girl as if she would have struck her with her dreadful hand. Alice shrank back, frightened, toward the corner of the room. Mme. de Constal made as if to follow her; Denton, rushing forward, interposed.

"I once before warned you to be careful, Mme. de Constal. If you attempt to touch Miss Hudson I'll shoot you like the wild beast you are!"

When Mme. de Constal saw the pointed revolver and the expression on the face of the man who held it she apparently concluded that hers was a position in which discretion was the better part of valor. Without uttering another word she turned and left the room through the door which still stood open. When she was through she closed it. Denton stood listening for a moment; then he tried the handle.

"As I supposed," he said, "it's fast."

He went to the door to which Alice had come with Antoinette. That also was fast. He struck it with the butt of the pistol.

"What's on the other side of this?" he asked.

The girl shuddered.

"The room in which they kept me prisoner. I don't want to go back to that; don't make me, please."

"But if you and I are prisoners together in here what are we to do?"

"It will not be the first time that you and I have been prisoners together in the same room."

"That's true—but then the circumstances were different; that was only for half an hour. Now who knows how long we may be shut in here or how long it will be before they are able to find us?"

Going to one of the embrasured windows, he drew aside the curtains; then went to the second and did the same; then to the third.

"Do you know, I don't believe these are windows at all," he said. "The painted glass in them seems to be set against some solid background."

"Antoinette told me," said the girl, "that this is known as the room which has no windows."

"Then how are we to attract the attention of those who are outside? In this great rabbit warren of a house this room may be overlooked for days. I had a sort of notion that we were descending as we came to it; the room may be underground."

"I believe it is; I believe that all this part of the house is underground."

"Then if that is the case it looks very much as if we must be trapped. Where is that bell which Mme. de Constal rang, or seemed to ring?"

In the frame of the table before the fireplace was set the ivory push-piece of an electric bell. He pressed it again and again, waiting for results, keeping his finger on it for several seconds at a time.

"Nothing happens," he reported. "Either the connection has been cut off or it rings where there is no one to hear who will hear. There is another bell beside the fireplace; let's try that."

He tried it with similar results.

"It doesn't look as if ringing were going to do us much good. All the same, we'll try again presently. It may be that ultimately a sound will reach the ear of some one who, wondering where it comes from and what it means, will start to find out. Here is a telephone; we will try that."

He lifted the receiver off an instrument which stood on the table into which was set the pushpiece of the electric bell. He put it to his ear.

"Hello! Hello! No one answers. I wonder where it rings to; it's possibly a private telephone. It is connected with an operator with whom Mme. de Constal can get in connection when she pleases and the operator chooses. Possibly at this moment the operator isn't there—or doesn't choose.

"Hello! Hello! It's no good. We'll try both that and the bell again a little later on. At present it looks as if we shall have to possess our souls in patience."

"I am so sorry; I hope you are not angry with me."

The girl spoke like a child who has done wrong and fears reproach.

"Angry with you?" he repeated. "Why should I be angry?"

"You are so brave — if it had not been for you I don't know what would have become of me."

As if conscious that her reply was not an answer to his question, she seemed to shrink away. His looks, even more than his words, conveyed the amazement which he felt.

"Please do not say I am brave. Brave! I! If you only knew! And as for what might have happened to you, it seems to me that something sufficiently serious may happen still unless we can find a way of escape from our prison."

He moved round the room, striking the walls as he went with the butt of one of the weapons which he still retained in his grasp.

"For all one can tell from the sound these walls might have been hewed out of the living rock," he commented. "I don't know how many doors there are; there are five which we can see, and they seem to be as solid as the walls. I wonder if there is anything in the place which could be used as a crowbar to force them open."

He looked about him as if in search of such an implement. She said, speaking with a timidity which seemed to be so great that she trembled:

"If you wouldn't mind, before—before you find what you're looking for, there is something which I should like to say to you."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Stranger Than Fiction.

SHE had her hand raised to her throat as if fingering something which was concealed in the bosom of her dress, something of whose safety she was anxious to be assured, and which she was eager yet afraid to produce. He observed her, the sight of her affecting him more than all that had gone before. It was as if some magnetic current were established between the two, which drew him toward her, and which it needed all his strength to resist. So violent was the emotion which the contemplation of her produced that, as was usual, his manner seemed to harden, and his words to come with difficulty.

"What is it you wish to say to me? Is it nothing which will wait?"

His tone could hardly have been colder. It seemed to chill her, to add to her already obvious tremors.

"I—I should rather like—to speak about it—to you now, if you don't very much mind. It's—it's something rather particular. At least, it—it seems particular to me."

Her finger-tips were still plucking at the top of her bodice.

"What is it? If it is really something pressing and important, tell me what it is."

"It's—it's something which I found just before they took me up-stairs to the room in which they kept me locked all night."

"That was it, was it? Mme. de Constal told me that you had a headache and would rather not come down to dinner."

"She never gave me the chance; she never said a word about it. She told me she wished to speak to me up-stairs, and she took me to a room which I had never seen before. She showed me into it, saying that she would return presently; then she shut the door and I saw no more of her nor of any one until what I suppose was the middle of the night."

"Didn't they give you anything to eat?"

"No, nothing. And I was so hungry! You know I had really had no lunch. It was so dark; there were no windows in the room; it was underground, like this. When you go through that door"—she pointed to the one through which she had entered—"you pass along a little passage, and there at the end is the room.

"There were no lights, or at least I could not find them, and there I was sitting in the darkness hour after hour, wondering what was going to happen to me next, when there began the most terrible uproar. I believe it came from in here. Shots were fired; people shouted; and oh, I don't know what happened; I am afraid to think. I thought that at any moment they might come in to me there.

"And after it was all over Mme. de Constal did come in. She carried a tray on which were some meat and bread, and some wine in a tumbler. Just before she entered half a dozen electric lights flamed up. I suppose she must have turned them on from outside, because I could see nothing by which they could be turned on in the room. While I ate, she—she went on at me."

"What had she to say to you then? The dear woman!"

"She talked to me about all sorts of things; I can't tell you everything. And I dare say some of the things she said weren't true. But—but she told me you were in great danger."

"That's true enough. Every one's in danger who sets foot in her establishment."

"She made out that you were in danger of—of your life, and I don't know what else besides. She made out that the only way to save you was by—by my becoming your wife."

"As I have already remarked—the dear woman!"

"She—she worked on me in such a way that I promised that I would marry you this morning."

Something which she seemed to see in his face might have caused her to make a sudden digression.

"But that's not what I wish to say to you," she said. "What I wish to speak to you about is this."

She thrust her fingers into the neck of her bodice, which she had all this time been fingering, and with difficulty pulled something out of it. It was apparently a newspaper, or at any rate a part of one. She explained as she held it out to him with a hand which was clearly shaking:

"I suppose some of those people who came yesterday must have brought it with them, and put it down somewhere where it was unnoticed until I saw it. I had just picked it up when Mme. de Constal took me to that room. I had just time to hide it inside my dress before she came to me."

Her tone grew more serious, while her manner suggested that she was becoming more mistress of herself.

"When Mme. de Constal had gone out of the room in the night or this morning, whichever it was, she left the lights on—not for very long, but for a time. Directly she was gone I thought of the paper. I wanted something to—to divert my mind from what she had been saying—I suppose that's what made me think of it. I took it out and began to read it. Almost the first thing I saw was this."

She held out the paper, the tip of her finger marking a place on the page. He looked at it askance, made as if to move to take it, and seemed to change his mind. His air was almost sheepish.

"Tell me what it is—what it says," he begged.

"Won't you come and see for yourself?"

Appeal was in her eyes, her voice, her bearing. He seemed to be afraid. It was his turn to stammer.

"I'd—I'd much rather you told me what it is, if you don't mind."

"But I want to show you what it is. Why do you stand that long way off? Put down those—those horrid things and come here and let me show you."

He laid the "horrid things" down willingly enough, but an actual effort seemed to be needed to enable him to accept her invitation to decrease the distance between them. Perhaps it was because she saw the difficulty with which he seemed to move that, when he had taken half a dozen steps, she moved quickly across the space which still divided them and went close up to him. She held the paper almost under his nose, her finger-tip still serving as a pointer.

"See—this head-line is what I saw. It was my own name which caught my eye; I stared and stared at it, and couldn't make out what it was. Although it was my own name, of course I never dreamed for a moment that it referred to me. But when I began to read I couldn't make it out at all.

"Won't you take the paper and read it for yourself? You're not even looking at it. Don't you take an interest in what I say?"

She spoke with what seemed to be an air of offense. His glance certainly was not fixed upon the printed page; it seemed to be riveted on her face, certainly not with an expression which suggested lack of interest. It was curious, now that they were close together, how her timidity seemed to have flown, and his to have assumed grotesque dimensions.

"I—I don't know what's the matter with me," he said. "I suppose I'm a bit knocked over by all that shooting business, but I'd much rather that you read to me what's in the paper if it wouldn't be giving you too much trouble."

On her countenance there instantly came an expression of alarm.

"Aren't you feeling very well?" she cried. "What a selfish wretch I am to be bothering you with my affairs when —when— Of course, you can't be feeling well! But I don't see what there is I can do for you. I'm so helpless!"

"Thank you, I'm feeling perfectly well, only just at the moment I don't feel quite up to reading; and, anyhow, I'd much rather you told me what the paper says, if—if it wouldn't be giving too much trouble."

"It's not a question of trouble; it's a question—"

She stopped and considered him.

"You *are* a little pale."

He tried to smile, and succeeded after a fashion.

"I assure you I'm all right, however I may look. Please will you tell me what's in the paper? Of course, if you won't—"

"Well, I will; of course I will!"

As if spurred by something which was not quite obvious, she went on with a sudden volubility, a color coming into her cheeks as she spoke.

"It seems that I am the Alice Hudson referred to. That's the most amazing part of it, but I am. I must be. The whole story is most extraordinary. But it—it does shed a light on things which, to put it mildly— Well, you know they've been very mysterious. Now I do begin to understand —after this."

She held out the paper as if to emphasize her words.

"I'll begin at the beginning. If you won't read it for yourself, you'll have to let me tell the story my own way."

"I shall be only too delighted."

"It will take a long time. I can't tell a story like a newspaper can," she demurred.

"The longer the better; we are not pressed for time."

Without further ado, Alice began:

"It seems that a person named Andrew J. Sloane died not long ago in Chicago; the paper does not say exactly when, so I can't tell you. He left heaps and heaps of money. The paper talks of two million dollars as though it were only part of what he left. It seems that he was never married, and hadn't a relation in the world. He left all his money to one person, and that person was a man—John Hudson.

"When I saw that I jumped, because John Hudson was my father's name. I sat in that room, wondering what it meant and what I was coming to. I was so—well, upset—you know the sort of feeling one gets when one has had a shock and expects that a still greater one is coming?—that I didn't dare to read on. But at last I did dare, and—oh, it was wonderful!

"Won't you please read what the paper says for yourself? You see how I'm wasting time."

"I don't agree that you're wasting time. It gives me a chance of looking at you while you are talking, and — I don't call that a waste of time," he smiled.

It was the nearest approach to a compliment which he had ever paid her. Her cheeks were dyed a vivid scarlet; she looked at him with startled eyes; then—he drew back, not she. He drew back as if fearful that too close neighborhood might not only lead him into saying things which he did not mean to say, but into doing them— which would be much worse. She did not seem to resent his moving farther from her, perhaps because with some subtle feminine instinct she divined the reason. She went quickly on:

"I soon saw as I read that the John Hudson to whom the money had been left was my father. The paper tells you all about it—how, many years ago, he was captain of a ship named the Alice; my mother has often told me about it; it was christened after her. That was in the days before they were married, when she was still a girl.

"One day a young man was dragged out of the hold. The ship was bound for Boston. He had tried

to get money to pay his passage to America and had failed. Then he tried to work his passage, but nobody would let him. Finally, in desperation, he had stowed himself away. The Alice was a sailing-ship; I remember hearing my mother say that it was the last sailing-ship on which my father ever voyaged.

"They were several days out at sea, and for most of them that stowaway had been without food. He had not had the means to lay in anything like a proper store, and was half starved. He must have been nearly mad when they found him, with hunger and despair, and all sorts of things. He ran to the side of the ship, and before they guessed what he was going to do, had leaped into the sea."

The maiden paused. Her auditor was convinced that that paper could not have told the story more eloquently than she was doing.

"On no ship is a stowaway wanted, and on most ships they are treated very harshly when they are found. I believe there are ships which, if a stowaway is found on them and then jumps overboard, would just sail off and never bother about such a trifle as stopping to pick him up.

"My father was not like that. When that stowaway jumped overboard he stopped the ship and had a boat launched, which saved him and brought him back to the vessel. When a ship reaches port stowaways are handed over to the police. My father did not hand that stowaway over to the police; he not only let him go—he gave him five pounds to start the world with. There must have been something very fascinating about that stowaway to induce my father to do that, though he was always helping people who were in holes."

Again the girl paused, this time to sigh, as if the recollection of her father's tendency brought back painful memories.

"My father never saw that stowaway again, and, as far as I can make out from the paper, the stowaway never saw him. But he never forgot the man who had not only saved his life but given him a start in the world.

"That stowaway was Andrew J. Sloane. When, at the end of his life, he was casting about in his mind for some one to whom to leave his millions, he thought of the captain of the Alice —John Hudson. He left every penny to him, and if it should turn out that John Hudson was dead, then to his wife and children. Here's where the strangest part of the story begins."

"It seems to me that the part you have told already is pretty queer," Ronald observed.

"That's nothing—at least I don't think it's anything to what follows. I imagine that Mr. Sloane must have died at about the same time at which my father was lost at sea. Of course, my father couldn't be found, and he never heard of the great fortune that had been left to him.

"The people whose duty it was to see that Mr. Sloane's will was properly carried out traced the line of ship-owners in whose service my father was, and learned from them that neither he nor the ship in which he had last sailed had ever been heard of again. They also learned that he had a wife, and got from the ship-owners the last address at which they had heard of her. Those will-people wrote to my mother, and the letter they wrote came back marked 'Address unknown.'

"Some one on their behalf went to Paris. The boarding-house which had turned her out was shut up — it had failed, of which I am glad to hear; it served them thoroughly well right."

Sparks of anger came into the speaker's eyes.

"For ever so long nothing could be learned of my mother from any one until, it seems, the other day. Then they discovered that my mother was dead, the house in which she had died, and that she had had a daughter named Alice. And that, according to the paper, is all they had learned when it was printed.

"Now what's the inference? You know what inference means, don't you?"

She pointed the paper at him as if she had been addressing a question to a child in a class. In spite of himself he smiled.

"I think I have some vague notion of what it means."

She seemed to resent that smile; there was reproach in her glance.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at even if you do; I'm sure it's serious enough, because—don't you see?—they must have found out about my mother's death and about her having a daughter within probably a few days of Mme. Renaldi's having brought me here. So the inference is—you'll see what I mean in a moment — that instead of Mme. Renaldi's having brought me here, and Mme. de Constal's having taken me in out of goodness of heart, it looks as if it were very much like a conspiracy between the pair of them.

"I didn't know—how could I know?—anything about the Sloane millions, but it looks very much as if they knew everything. So Mme. de Constal kept me here, without letting me see a paper or write a letter or go outside the grounds, to all intents and purposes a prisoner, because she wished to keep me in ignorance of the true state of affairs. And that's why she wanted to marry me to M. Perret."

"It undoubtedly does seem that that consideration might have weighed with them."

"It's not a question of seeming; it must have done, because, as I have felt over and over again, M. Perret must have had a reason for wanting to marry me, and what other reason could there possibly be? No doubt, when M. Perret had married me, sooner or later, in some artful way, they would have let me learn the truth, and then they understood that, at the very least, I would be willing to give them at least half my fortune if M. Perret would only keep away from me. I have not the least doubt that that was the idea, or something very like it, that was in their heads about him; but why they wanted me to marry you I cannot think.

"One mystery becomes clear as day in the light of what this paper says, but the other becomes more mysterious than ever. I can quite understand your not wishing to marry me—although—although it's not very flattering, any one can guess the reason of that—but can you give me the slightest hint of why they should take such extraordinary steps to force you into marrying me—against your will?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Denton Dossier.

DENTON hesitated; for some seconds the truth was on the tip of his tongue, but when it came to the very pinch he could not speak it. He could not tell this girl, especially in the first flush of the discovery she had just made, what manner of thing he was. That exposure must come, he knew, and very soon; but he would rather that it came from other lips than his, and, if possible, when he was not there. She had said that he was brave, but he knew better; he lacked the courage to abase himself before the light that was in her eyes.

His answer was a juggling with words.

"Mme. de Constal seems to have had some very curious schemes in her head. You've got at the heart of one; perhaps before long opportunity will give you the solution to another. I think it's almost time to try those bells again, and perhaps that telephone. I'll try again."

He turned his back on her so that he might do as he had said. His action seemed to occasion her surprise—and something else. She seemed to resent his turning his back, as if it conveyed a suggestion that his interest in her had ceased. Her manner more than hinted at what she felt.

"I think you might have troubled yourself to give me some sort of answer before you bothered about those bells again. I don't know what sort of good you expect to get by ringing them, or trying to ring them."

"I fancy I'm going to get none."

He had tried the bell set in the table and the one in the wall, and it seemed without result. He took the receiver off the telephone.

"Hello! Hello!" he called.

No answer came.

"The only thing which remains to be done, unless chance sends some one here to release us, is to see if I can't find something which will serve as a crowbar, with which I can force open the doors."

He glanced around the apartment. It was not easy to see all that it contained, but nothing caught his eye which seemed as if it would serve the desired purpose.

"There are fire-irons in the fireplace; wouldn't you like to try the poker?"

The suggestion came from the lady; it seemed to be ironical. Ronald glanced at her and then at the poker; he ignored the irony.

"I am afraid that will hardly do; we want something with some sort of an edge. What's in the drawers? I wonder of they're all locked."

One in the table by which he was standing was not, as was shown by his instantly pulling it open. It seemed to be filled with papers. A bundle of them, fastened together by a rubber band, caught his eye. It was on the top, and on the outside page was an inscription in such bold characters that he could hardly fail to see it:

RONALD DENTON
SON DOSSIER

He knew that *dossier* was a French legal term for which we have scarcely an English equivalent. It meant a number of papers, or facts, grouped together, dealing generally with the history of a particular individual, in which the whole of his life's record was laid bare.

Why was his *dossier* in Mme. de Constal's drawer in such a prominent position that he could scarcely fail to perceive it directly the drawer was opened? Taking up the bundle of papers he stared at the inscription as people sometimes stare at the address upon an envelope.

"What have you got there? What have you found in Mme. de Constal's drawer?"

The lady's voice came to him from the other side of the room.

"That's just what I'm wondering. It seems to be something about—some one I know."

"Does that mean that it's about me? Please speak up; I can scarcely hear you."

"As a matter of fact, I fancy that it's about me. I am just looking."

He had taken off the rubber band and was glancing through the papers it had held together. He recognized the first with what might have been a sudden constriction of the heart. It was the warrant which he had taken out of the dead Inspector Jenner's pocket at the time of his escape from the wreck. Mme. de Constal had kept it carefully by her.

Almost unwittingly he unfolded it. He saw his own name—then something else. He read the whole thing carefully. It was a warrant to arrest Ronald Denton, of Buckingham Chambers, London, solicitor, for misappropriation of trust funds.

He read it through again to make quite sure that nothing had escaped him. Nothing had. The charge, it seemed, on which he had been arrested was misappropriation of trust funds, nothing else. Inspector Jenner had not told him for what he was arrested; he had not asked; he had taken it for granted. There was no mention of murder on the warrant.

What did it mean? Had not Inspector Jenner arrested him for the murder of Edward Osborne? And if not, why not? What was this charge of misappropriating trust funds compared to the other—especially as this was a charge which he could easily disprove?

The lady's voice came again to him from across the room—in more insistent tones even than before—as if she were impatient.

"What are you staring at? Why don't you tell me what you've got there? How secretive you are! It's always the same; I tell you everything and you tell me nothing. What are you reading?"

Not for anything could he have told her at that moment that he was reading a warrant for his own arrest. It was beyond his power. The way in which his heart was thumping against his ribs made him more powerless still.

"I—I was looking through a paper," he stammered.

"A paper! What paper? If it's anything very secret, pray keep it to yourself. I'll turn my back as you turned your back on me just now; then I sha'n't be able to see."

The lady's petulance seemed to go unnoticed. He appeared to ignore the fashion with which she turned her shapely back to him; he was reading a paper that had for him a fascination which constrained him to ignore everything. It was the story of his own life, told in a condensed form, written in French by a correspondent in London. He was amazed at the accuracy of the record—at the neat way in which his character was hit off, his fondness for pleasure, his distaste for work.

He came to the story of that memorable afternoon. It was told with a fidelity which astonished him. How could that unknown correspondent have learned these facts?

But when he read what followed the story of that afternoon something seemed to happen in his head. The written words seemed to swim before him; it was with difficulty that he could follow them with his eyes.

What exactly was said he was not sure. At the moment only the main facts penetrated his brain, the one great fact—that Edward Osborne was not dead. He had not killed his partner; he had struck him—as continually he had told himself ever since Osborne had thoroughly deserved. The man had crumpled up upon the floor, motionless, an inert mass.

Denton had taken it for granted that Osborne was dead. His passion had been so great as to rob him of his judgment, both at the beginning of that interview and at the end. If he had stayed to see the matter out, he would have learned that there was practically nothing to face—at the worst only a case of common assault. But he had fled for his life—and in so doing, what a fool he had been!

Inspector Jenner had not arrested him for murder; the policeman had arrested him, seemingly on Osborne's information, that he had been concerned with Osborne in the fraud of which Osborne alone had been guilty. He could not tell what exactly that information had been, but he could swear that it was false.

If he had only known! If his conscience had not played him so foul a trick! Half a dozen words and the matter would have been made clear. He would never have left the inspector to burn in that railway carriage, which meant that he would never have fallen from the frying-pan into the fire.

He had certainly fallen into the fire when he passed from the inspector's hands into Mme. de Constal's. The inspector might have shown pity; she had shown none.

The probability was that practically from the very first she had known the truth; and how she had used it, how she had dangled his own fears before his eyes, encouraging, as it were, the burden of his shame to weigh him down!

And all the time he had been practically guiltless—wholly guiltless—for if the chance had recurred he would have struck Osborne again. He need fear nothing; no one could do him hurt, no one bring him to shame. He could hold up his head with the best of them. He was an innocent man.

An innocent man! That meant—

Ronald looked round at the lady on the other side of the room. It seemed that she still was out with him. Her face was turned from him; she presented a pretty view of her back. He spoke to her.

"Alice!"

It might have been his imagination which caused him to think that at the sound of his voice she started. Apparently she did not mean to hear. Moving toward a chair, she gave it an ostentatious twist and placed herself on it with nothing of her for him to look at but a view of her back hair. He did not seem to mind in the least; he actually laughed. At the sound of his laughter she certainly started. He spoke to her again.

"Alice!"

Then in humble tones he added:

"I'm very sorry I did not answer your question when you asked it, but there are such strange things in these papers I have found that I simply couldn't. I had to read them first before I knew what to answer."

He paused for her to speak—in vain.

"Won't you speak to me if—if it is not asking too much?"

"Oh dear, no; it's not asking too much. But, as I told you before, if what was in the papers which you got out of Mme. de Constal's drawer was secret, I have no wish to force myself upon your confidence; and that's all."

"These papers explain why Mme. de Constal was so anxious that you should marry me."

"What?"

His words had a surprising effect upon the lady. She not only jumped up off her chair; she turned right round to him.

"Do you mean it—really? What is the explanation? I beg your pardon; perhaps still I ought not to ask."

"When I first made Mme. de Constal's acquaintance I was a prisoner. I was, as I supposed, being taken to England on a charge of murder."

"What?"

The lady's surprise this time was genuine; all trace of affectation was gone.

"The train was wrecked. The man who had arrested me was killed; I escaped. Mme. de Constal escaped also; she was a passenger in the same train. She knew I was a prisoner; she brought me here, not of my own free will. She kept me here, leading me to believe that if I once went outside her gates it would be to be taken to the gallows."

"I don't believe it—I can't believe it!"

"That's why she wished me to marry you—can't you see?"

"I don't see. Why—why—because of that—should she wish you to marry me?"

"She knew I was in love with you; she knew that from the moment I set eyes on you I was in love with you."

"That I know not to be true. How dare you say such a thing?"

"She knew that every moment I remained in your company I fell deeper in love. She knew that you had become all the world to me; that to me you were the only thing that mattered. She traded on my love for you—don't you see?"

"No, I don't. How dare you say such things to me? It—it isn't fair."

She pressed her hands to her bosom as if there were something there which hurt.

"When you wouldn't marry Perret—as if you ever could have married such a scoundrel!—she thought she saw a better way. She knew that I was head over heels in love with you—"

"How could she know it? You never told her. Did you tell her?"

"As if she didn't know without my telling her—as if every creature in the house didn't know it from Achille to Mme. Lamotte! Every one but you."

"You never told me."

"Don't you see that that was what she wanted me to do? She wanted me to marry you, meaning, directly we were married, to put the screw on both of us. She knew about old Sloane's money; she knew that the best way to get a good slice of it for herself was to have us man and wife. We should have been at her mercy.

"I don't know quite how the thing was going to be worked, but no doubt she meant to screw money — your money—first of all out of me by pretending to keep my whereabouts hidden from the police; then when I failed she no doubt proposed to screw money out of you by telling you what I had done, and making you pay her for saving me from the gallows. Now do you see why she wanted us to marry?"

"I—I'm beginning to have some sort of an idea. But—but it's all so dreadful!"

"Like you, she never let me see a paper nor write a letter; she kept me in absolute darkness. I was a fool, and she practised on my folly. I thought I had murdered a man who—who deserved it, anyhow; but I hadn't. She knew I hadn't, but I didn't. Here are the papers to prove it.

"If I had only guessed at what she knew, at what was here"—he struck the *dossier* with his open palm —"I'd have talked to her; I'd have talked to the lot of them. Above all, I'd have talked to you."

"Pray what would you have talked to me about?"

"Don't you know?"

Suddenly he moved toward her; he seemed to take her silence to imply a negative.

"Then I'll tell you. Within, I should say, twelve hours of my meeting you I should have told you that I loved you."

She seemed to be amazed, and also awed, by his sudden and surprising heat. She seemed to find a difficulty in meeting his eyes; she had been glaring at him only a minute before.

"I — I don't believe it. You are making fun of me. People don't do that sort of thing, not nowadays; they don't fall in love like that, especially with such an absurd creature as I am."

"Don't they? Then I'm an exception to the rule, because I did. I fell in love with you the moment I met you on the staircase; I swear I did."

"How could you possibly? You only saw me for half a second, if you saw me at all. Don't be so ridiculous."

"I fell in love with you when I met you on the staircase. I was head over heels in love with you before that first lunch was finished; you were all the world to me before we parted that afternoon on the terrace. If it hadn't been for—what I was afraid of—I'd have told you so within twelve hours. Though as matters have turned out it is as well I didn't."

"What do you mean by that? How you do jump about from point to point! Why is it just as well you didn't? I don't see."

"Not after what's in the paper what you've just been telling me about?"

"What's in the paper? What do you mean?"

"Haven't you just been telling me you're the sole heiress of a multimillionaire? Then am I the sort of person you ought to marry? Your own common sense must tell you better than that?"

"Of all the inconsistent persons! What—what has that to do with it? First of all, I'm not sure that I am the Alice Hudson that's wanted."

"I don't wish to say anything offensive, but that is a deliberate untruth because you are sure."

"Of all the rudeness! But if I am —what difference does it make if I am?"

"If you can't see I'm afraid I should

only incur your displeasure by trying to explain. What we have to do is to get out of this prison. I must try to find something which will serve as a crowbar."

"You will do nothing of the kind."

He had moved away; but she, rushing after him, placed herself directly in his way.

"Will you stand still?"

Since he could not advance without thrusting her aside, he had to.

"Will you answer my question? If for once in your life you are capable of answering a plain question, answer one now—the one I'm going to put to you. Mind you do. Is what you've been telling me all stories?"

"I have never said anything to you which entitles you to ask me such a question."

"Well, do you love me? Answer me!"

"You know — you know — that I love you."

"And you know—you know—that I love you!"

"Alice!"

"Well? Is that all you've got to say? After all we have gone through together have you nothing more to say to me than that? What kind of a heart you have I can't say, but do you think yourself entitled to break mine?

"I love you! I love you! I also fell in love with you when I met you on the stairs, and — and— Oh! Don't be so cruel! If you loved me as I love you, you—couldn't be! If you only knew how I have longed to hear you say that you loved me!"

In an instant he had her in his arms, and she heard him say it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

What Joseph Coton Remembered.

WHEN a young man and a young woman have reached the point to which those two young persons had come they have so much to say to each other which they feel forced to say that they are apt to have no notion of how long they take in saying it. So absorbed were they in those observations which had to be made that it is not impossible they altogether overlooked the extraordinary position they were in.

Certainly Mr. Denton did not try those bells again, nor did he test the telephone, nor did he search for something which would serve as a crowbar; on the contrary, he seemed not to be in the least degree anxious to get out of that compartment at all, nor to be conscious that he would find any difficulty in doing so if he so desired. And the lady was as oblivious as he was.

Fortunately, there often does seem to be a something up aloft which watches over lovers, and not impossibly that something was watching then. For what they failed to do when they had tried happened when they were not trying at all.

"What's that?" exclaimed the lady when they were in the midst of telling each other some of the most remarkable things which a young man and a young woman ever did tell each other, and which so very many young men and women have told each other before. The young man looked round.

"It sounds— I believe there's some one trying the door outside."

He dashed off toward the table on which the pair of revolvers lay.

"Oh, Ronald!"

He had told her his name was Ronald; it came from her pretty lips as if it were a name which she had had in constant use for years.

"Don't touch those dreadful things! Don't!"

The gentleman had one in either hand.

"Suppose it is that woman back again with her friends? Do you think I will let them find me powerless to defend you? Not much! You had better come and stand behind me on the other side of this table; trust me to see that they don't touch you."

The lady obeyed with a meekness which was wonderful. As she passed him she bent her head toward his, and their lips touched — just touched, for almost in the same moment she was standing on the other side of the table, presenting a really pleasing picture of agitation.

"Ronald, don't shoot if you can help it."

"You may be sure I won't. All the same, I've got to make them understand that I will shoot if they try to play any more of their tricks. Look out! The door is opening! They're coming in!"

The door did open, and they came in; but the persons comprised in the "they" were not at all those whom Ronald and Alice had feared, yet half expected. In front was an individual at whom Denton had to stare for several seconds before he realized that he had seen him once before. The lady, however, recognized him on the instant.

"Why, it's Joseph Coton! M. Coton, whatever are you doing here? And who are these people? Are they more friends of Mme. de Constal?"

It was Mr. Denton who answered; his air was slightly grandiose.

"These, my dear Alice, are the ladies and gentlemen who arrived yesterday as Mme. de Constal's guests. Let me introduce them. Mrs. Stacey, allow me to introduce to you Miss Alice Hudson."

Mrs. Stacey, who had been hanging on her husband's arm with an expression on her vivacious countenance which suggested consciousness of the magnitude of the adventure on which they were engaged, at the sight of the girl in her dainty gown, had advanced with outstretched hands to greet her. But when Ronald mentioned her name she stopped, stared, and gave a sort of little squeal.

"What name did you say?"

Ronald repeated himself with a difference.

"This, Mrs. Stacey, is Miss Alice Hudson, with whose name, I believe, you are not unfamiliar. I believe you have heard of the late Mr. Andrew J. Sloane?"

Mrs. Stacey's attitude was suggestive of something more than surprise; she was a live note of exclamation.

"Heard of him? Why, Andrew J. was George's partner! I heard enough about him while he was alive, but since he died it seems to me I've heard of nothing else—except Alice Hudson."

Mrs. Stacey moved a step nearer to the girl.

"Are you the Alice Hudson who is mentioned in this paper?" She pointed to the news-sheet Alice found.

"I believe I am. At least, I believe I'm that Alice Hudson."

"Well, of all the—"

The lady stopped short to address her husband.

"George, isn't she a peach? Isn't she a picture? Haven't I always said to those that have shall be given? With a face and figure like that she wouldn't need a cent, and now she's got that pile of Andrew J.'s. Isn't it just the last thing?"

Mr. Stacey advanced toward the girl with his hand held out.

"If you are Miss Alice Hudson, the daughter of the late Captain John Hudson, permit me to shake you by the hand. Your father sort of made Andrew J. Sloane, and Andrew J. Sloane made me, so you see I owe you something which can't exactly be expressed in words. I am very pleased to see you, Miss Hudson—very, very pleased indeed."

With the greatest solemnity Mr. Stacey shook the maiden's hand.

The gray headed man who had been addressed as Colonel Gardner was among those who had followed Joseph Coton. He spoke to Ronald.

"I believe your name is Denton—Ronald Denton."

The young man looked at him.

"I believe I heard some one remark that you were in some way connected with the police. Does that mean—"

The young man left his question unfinished. The other shook his head and smiled.

"No, it doesn't; it might have done once, but it doesn't now. I believe, Mr. Denton, you have been out of England for some little time, and that therefore you may be, as regards news, a little behind the times. I don't know if you are aware that your—partner, Mr. Edward Osborne, who has been arrested on a charge of misapplying certain trust funds which had been confided to his keeping, has made a full confession in which he has exonerated you entirely.

"It is possible that your presence may be required as a witness, but that is not certain; it will certainly not be wanted for any other purpose. All allegations against you, of every sort and kind, have been withdrawn."

"Thank Heaven!"

The young man, as he held himself straighter, seemed to open his chest and throw something off his shoulders.

"Alice, you hear that?"

"Of course I heard; but of course I should have known how it would be if I hadn't heard. Do you suppose I don't know you well enough?"

The question was rather presumptuous, but the gentleman only smiled, possibly a little too conscious of the integrity of his own intentions.

Colonel Gardner was looking about him curiously.

"So this is the apartment of which the world has heard so many stories—the famous room without windows! What queer things have been done in here! I take it that you have no idea of what has become of Mme. de Constal and her friends."

"I have not the vaguest notion," Ronald assured him. "Some one came rushing in, giving them what I suppose was a signal of alarm about something, and Mme. de Constal and her friends disappeared. I don't know how long ago that was; we've been prisoners here ever since."

Gardner looked at the girl, and again he smiled. Possibly he felt that the term of imprisonment had not been without alleviations. He turned to Joseph Coton.

"You have brought us here; and in so doing have rendered Mr. Denton and Miss Hudson a service, but there still remains the question of Mr. Spragg. Where is that—chamber of which you spoke?"

M. Coton moved across the room. He stood peering at what seemed to be the solid wall.

"It's some time since I've been here—a long time, and then I was only in this room perhaps once," he said.

"Your knowledge of the geography of the place would seem to point to a rather more intimate acquaintance than that, M. Coton."

Coton turned and eyed the speaker. Denton now remembered him quite well. This was the man who had stood on the other side of the wire fence that afternoon, and who had primed him with such unflattering stories about Mme. de Constal and the Château d'Ernan. He was regarding Colonel Gardner with the evil grin which Ronald recalled as his chief characteristic.

"If you're hinting anything against my character, I'll not have it. My character is well known in all this countryside."

"So I should imagine."

"And so you may imagine."

The grin grew more pronounced. "It's no news that I once lived at the Château d'Ernan, but that was in *monsieur's* time, before the woman whom he was fool enough to marry murdered him. It's been nothing but a den of thieves since then, and worse; no place for an honest man.

"I haven't been in this room since the woman had it. There were some nice goings-on in here in *monsieur's* time; but compared to what happened afterward— Bah!"

He rounded his sentence off by the utterance of a very singular sort of a grunt. There was a momentary pause before the other spoke.

"Does all this mean that you've forgotten where that room was, and the way into it, and that you were bragging when you said you hadn't?"

"We'll soon see if I've forgotten. Mind you, I never said I was certain sure; it was so long ago. Only don't you hint that I know more about the place than I ought. Now, let's see."

Where Coton stood a picture was painted in fresco on the wall, representing some amorous scene in the Olympian days. Carved beadings ran round it, serving as a sort of frame.

Coton moved his hand up and down that part of the beading which was on the right of the picture. His lips were moving. He seemed to be making certain measurements with the palm of his hand, which he recorded to himself under his breath. Presently his hand ceased moving.

"It's here. I know it was somewhere here. Now let me see; you turned it round, but whether to the right or left I don't remember. I've got it! I knew I'd recall the trick of it if I got the chance. There!"

He had gripped perhaps seven or eight inches of the beading and twisted it out of place. Where it had been was a narrow opening in the solid wall into which he thrust his fingers.

"There you are! Done it again! Who says that I've forgotten?"

He had drawn, apparently by sheer strength, a block of wood perhaps five or six inches square, out of the wall. He held it in his hand. Colonel Gardner and the others crowded round to look. Coton was pointing to what the block of wood had hidden.

"You see that metal plate? It's opened by a spring. Press the spring and the plate flies back on a hinge—like that—and behind is the handle of a door. You've only got to turn it, and pull, and you see what happens."

What did happen when he pulled was that the picture divided in half. It rose from the floor to a height of seven or eight feet. There had not been a trace of any division until Coton had pulled; now it was so obvious that it seemed incredible it should not have been noticed.

"Here, *monsieur,* is the room of which I spoke to you. What it was meant for when it was built I can't say; but they do tell some queer stories. Would *monsieur* like to be the first to enter?"

It seemed that *monsieur* would. Colonel Gardner, accepting the invitation conveyed by the sweep of Coton's hand, passed through the opening disclosed. The instant he was in, he uttered an exclamation.

"Hello, Spragg! Is that you? Poor old man! What infernal mischief have they done to you?"

When the others came crowding in they found an apartment which was not unlike a modern padded room. In one corner was a bed of sorts. On it lay a man, gagged, blindfolded, pinioned.

It was impossible that anything human could have been rendered more helpless. The thing was the work of an artist. Cords ran round him, securing his legs and arms; a bandage was across his mouth, another across his eyes. As if that had not been enough, he had been tied to the bed on which he lay.

"Why, Spragg!" exclaimed Mr. Stacey, so surprised at the sight which he presented as to be apparently unconscious of the banality of his own remark. "That woman, Mme. de Constal, said that you'd gone away! Did she dream it or was she just a liar?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

An Unsolved Mystery.

MR. THOMAS SPRAGG was not dead; but he had had a bad time. He was wont to speak of it in the years that followed as the very worst time he had ever had in his life, and he had had some pretty bad ones. What galled him, perhaps, most

was that he had been trapped so neatly. He had laid such excellent traps for others; those others had slipped through them—it was he who had been caught.

It is to be feared that Mme. de Constal had been guilty of her husband's murder; that she owed her escape to the skill with which her counsel had played upon the sentimental side of a jury of her susceptible fellow countrymen. Where a pretty woman is concerned, a French jury is loath to convict. Although they must often be married men themselves, they constantly let off interesting-looking females who, they must be aware, have killed their husbands.

M. Maximilien de Constal was not by any means all that a husband ought to be, from any point of view. But then, on the other hand, Mme. de Constal was not an ideal wife. She certainly was not entitled to sit in judgment on her other half's shortcomings; still less, because he was not all he might have been, to kill him.

Nothing is ever likely to be certainly known about the details of the crime, but the presumption is that she had two accomplices, at least. One, the active one, was Léon Perret. Probably he was the third person who was taking part in the disturbance which attracted so much notice in the small hours of the morning; in all probability it was he who, with or without *madame's* active assistance, killed the old man.

The man known as Achille was M. de Constal's body-servant. Almost beyond a doubt he was the second accomplice. Probably the part he played was that of looker-on. He might have saved his master if he had chosen, but he had not chosen, and so he shared the guilt of the others. Even at the trial he might have spoken the truth; he preferred to tell lies, and did tell them, and stuck to them with a face of brass—no doubt for solid reasons of his own. So justice miscarried, and Mme. de Constal was acquitted.

Old de Constal had not only made a settlement on his wife, he had left practically everything of which he died possessed to his widow. Mme. de Constal retired to the famous old house which had been in the De Constal family for so many generations; and she was accompanied there by a remarkable set of associates. There was M. Léon Perret, whom, of course, she dared not offend even if she had wanted to; there was Achille, who had her between his finger and thumb; there was Antoinette, who had been Mme. de Constal's maid and was Achille's sweetheart, and who, no doubt, knew enough.

There was also the Comte de Girodet, who had been a very good friend of the lady's in her earlier days, and who chose to attach himself to her now. To these, later, others were joined, male and female scamps of all sorts and kinds and of nearly all countries. The Château d'Ernan became one of the centers of the world's rascality.

On the face of it, Madeleine de Constal had been left a very handsome property; as a matter of fact she was the owner of, as it were, nothing but the bare bones. Her extravagance had been one of the causes of her constant quarrels with her husband.

Her debts were enormous; when they were paid there was not only very little left in hard cash, but money had been borrowed on the security of her real estate until, as Mr. Joshua Krauss had more than hinted, she owned nothing that was really hers. So long as the interest on the moneys lent was paid, she was allowed to continue in possession; but the interest had to be paid. And it was the necessity to find money with which to pay the interest which was the original cause of so many singular doings.

There were very few phases of criminality which were not represented at the Château d'Ernan. What actually wrecked the enterprise was the establishment they set up for coin-

ing false money. A regular mint was carried on, conducted on the most scientific principles. Silver was melted down, brought to the proper standard, and silver coins were turned out in vast quantities, which were in every respect equal to those issued by the authorized mints. Since scarcely any of the silver used was paid for, this was not difficult.

They had their agents in all parts of the world. Wherever silver was stolen, whether plate or in any other form, it was shipped to the Château d'Ernan and paid for in the silver coinage of the country from which it came. Since in every hundred pounds minted there was a profit of more than seventy-five per cent this was not bad business for those who managed this at the Château d'Ernan.

Governments in practically all countries found that silver coins were passing from hand to hand which were practically the same as those which were issued by themselves, but of which their own mints knew nothing. Little was said in public; the imitations were in every respect so good that it was felt that to say too much might produce a general feeling of unrest, even to the extent of dislocating the commercial standard; only the police of all countries were on the lookout to discover the source from which these coins were coming.

It speaks volumes for the adroitness with which the thing was managed and the organization which was at the service of the management that they were baffled so long. The way in which suspicion was first aroused shows that in the finest criminal methods there is always some weak point.

M. de Girodet occupied a strong position at the Château d'Ernan, and in one way he was worth it. It is singular how easy it is to make acquaintances at certain fashionable resorts. M. de Girodet would go to Biarritz, Cannes, Nice, Monte Carlo, Aix-les-Bains, Homburg, Ostend, even Saint Moritz in the winter, and there his charm of manner and fine Old-World courtesy would quickly make him one of the most popular persons in the place. Mme. de Constal would be hovering in the background. She would join in the circle of his acquaintance.

One thing would lead to another. When the time for parting came it was easy to point out what a pity it was that so many pleasant folk should separate, perhaps forever. Then on a sudden there would come a happy suggestion from Mme. de Constal. Why not, before the final separation took place, pay her country house a visit?

It was extraordinary how many of these people received the suggestion with rapturous acclamation. She would have a house-party of persons who, for the most part, had got some money in their pockets or within easy reach.

Those were delightful parties at the Château d'Ernan. Everything was done in perfect style, and if the guests found it a trifle expensive, that was by the way; one had to pay sometimes for good entertainment.

All the people who went to the Château d'Ernan were fond of play, and they played. M. de Girodet was the presiding spirit. It is doubtful if one of these persons who played with him ever knew what a skilful player he was; his skill was so great that they did not even suspect how great. Some of the guests won, some of them quite decent sums; but the sums won were but drops in the pond to the sums lost.

On one occasion they played roulette for five-franc pieces — just a little nursery game; no higher stake was allowed. One of the players, a lady, was a considerable winner; she actually left the *château* with more than a hundred five-franc pieces in her possession.

One morning soon after she reached Paris, a well-spoken gentleman called on her at her hotel, and laying several

five-franc pieces before her on a table asked her where she had got them from. He was a collector of five-franc pieces, he said; those were unique coins, so he declared, minted after a fashion which was no longer in vogue —the machine which made them was no longer in existence. The differences were so minute as to be visible only to the eye of a collector, but there they were. Would she mind telling him from where she had obtained these pieces so that he might be able to secure some more.

The lady laughed. She treated him as an amiable maniac; told him about her luck at the Château d'Ernan, and showed him the five-franc pieces which remained. He selected several, for which he actually paid her seven francs fifty apiece, which, of course, meant for her a handsome profit.

She was delighted. There are few things a woman loves better than a bargain, and she had obviously made an excellent one. The visitor, when he left, seemed contented also.

Within a very few minutes of the visitor leaving the hotel a certain representative of the Château d'Ernan, a M. Jules Monteil, knew all about that transaction in five-franc pieces, and within a few hours that collector of coins was found in a café—dead. Apparently poison had been put into a cup of coffee which he had just swallowed, but by whose hand was never certainly known.

Whoever was responsible for its presence was a little too late. That night all the chiefs of the Paris police knew about those five-franc pieces, and certain of them were on the lookout for M. Monteil.

M. Monteil seems to have rather lost his head. He tore back to the Château d'Ernan. We saw him there, standing in the great fireplace in the room without windows. He had a very clever scheme, which he thought would insure his safety; he failed. He doubled back to the *château* with an agent of police at his heels. That agent was killed; his body was buried in the grounds. Ronald Denton, standing on the terrace, saw it being borne to its grave.

But that agent did not count; killing him was no use. Officers from all quarters of France had eyes on the Château d'Ernan. Two English officers were actually among Mme. de Constal's invited guests. Mr. Thomas Spragg was one.

But those who had the interests of the *château* at heart were not to be caught napping. As soon as his feet crossed the threshold his hostess was warned that he was there. That night she and her associates did their best to insure at least his temporary silence. No warning had reached them concerning Colonel Gardner.

The whole company of the associates would have shaken the dust of the *château* off their feet if it had not been for two things. They were rather short of actual cash. It was necessary that M. de Girodet should win; and he did win.

Then there were Alice Hudson and Ronald Denton. Mme. de Constal and two or three of her immediate associates were extremely desirous that something should be made out of them. Alice Hudson represented such an enormous fortune, which they already counted as being in their hands, that the thought that they were to get nothing out of her after all was unendurable.

Alice Hudson had been regarded by the associates as a true windfall, one of the greatest that had ever come their way. It was quite by accident that Mme. Renaldi, an insignificant member of the firm, had discovered the truth. In Mrs. Hudson's hands as she lay dead there had been an English journal. It was not unlikely that the shock of what she had read in it had been the actual cause of her death. Mme. Renaldi knew English. She had found the journal somewhere; she heard from the landlady the story of where it had been. She glanced

through it, and there was the story all set forth; in a very short time the penniless orphan was within the hospitable walls of the Château d'Ernan.

It was recognized that the essential thing to be done was to keep Alice in ignorance of the true state of affairs —to allow her to continue to believe herself without a farthing. That was easy.

The second thing they tried to do was much more difficult. It was realized that the shortest way to her money was through the lady's marriage. Get her married to one of themselves, and her millions were at their mercy. So M. Léon Perret set out to woo her—with what results we have seen.

Ronald Denton was an accident, and the product of one.

As husband to the girl he might be more useful than their original choice —if he was at all amenable. That he was not was one of their most grievous disappointments.

They did not give up all hope till the very last moment. The Rev. Mr. Hayes was found; the mad scheme of that mock marriage was planned. If Ronald had not got hold of those revolvers he would have been drugged and the girl would have been drugged. They would have been carried away with the conspirators, and afterward they would have been made to believe that they were man and wife.

Ronald's finding of the revolvers made short work of that wild notion. Then there came the warning; the officers of the law were closing on the Château d'Ernan. It was a question of moments if they wished to have a chance of saving themselves; and the strangest part of it was that most of them did save themselves. The French authorities are still wondering how it was done. When they came upon the scene the birds had flown; only the guests remained, and Colonel Gardner and what was left of Mr. Thomas Spragg.

Certain minor members of that criminal society have been taken since —some of them a few hours afterward; but the leaders are still at large. The authorities of most of the countries of the world are anxiously asking themselves where.

The vanishing trick was very well done. There must have been some organization which had charge of that sort of thing a long way in advance; that organization did what was required of it extremely well.

The Château d'Ernan is in the market. The men who had lent money foreclosed. The beautiful machinery for making silver coins was taken into custody. It has been destroyed; the building which had held it has been razed to the ground.

From the Château d'Ernan and all that it stood for the glory has departed. But the police—north, south, east, and west—are still looking each other in the eyes, wondering who knows what has become of those who reigned there.

Mme. de Constal, M. Léon Perret, M. de Girodet, Achille—are they alive or are they dead?

CHAPTER XXX.

Two Wives.

THEY were married at a little old church in the city. Mr. and Mrs. Stacey, Sir Augustus and Lady Chorlston, and Miss Chorlston were practically the only persons present. The bride and bridegroom could have done very well without them, only they were not to be denied.

"It is one of the most romantic affairs," declared Lady Chorlston, "of which I have ever heard; and where romance is there I must be."

And she was—in a gorgeous gown. Miss Chorlston was inclined to be malicious. Mrs. Stacey would have liked a floral wedding—something in the latest Chicago style, with columns in the papers and bags full of money spent on nonsense. But Ronald Den-

ton was not to be beguiled, and his bride was as unpersuadable as he was.

"To think," observed Mrs. Stacey quite audibly in the church to Miss Chorlston, who was at her side, "that those two slips of things, standing up there at the altar without even a bridesmaid, and with not a flower in the place, should represent Andrew J.'s millions! When I was married half Chicago was there, and the other half wanted to come. It was one of the finest things in weddings that ever was. There was nothing else talked of in the whole city for twenty-four hours; was there, George?"

"The recollection of that wedding is one of those things that linger."

Mr. Stacey's observation seemed to be both sententious and impersonal. His wife gave him a quick glance; but even she was unable to be sure of the meaning which his words were intended to convey. But apparently she had her doubts, for one felt that after her own fashion she was trying to get even with him.

"The worst of it is that a function like that is a precedent; when I marry again it won't be easy to go one better."

"It would be a blessed moment," Stacey murmured, "for number two."

Just then the organ sounded; there was an organist.

"If it isn't all over!" cried Mrs. Stacey. "Why, it doesn't seem to have been any time at all."

When the newly wedded pair were on their way to Dover they commented in a manner of their own on the ceremony which had lately taken place. The bridegroom began:

"We are married at last, and it doesn't seem to have needed force, either,"

The bride retorted:

"I was rather expecting at the very last moment that it might have."

The gentleman was magnanimous.

"I'll forgive you. Between ourselves do you feel any different now it's over?"

"I sha'n't tell you."

"Which means?"

"That I sha'n't tell you."

"Then I'll tell you. It's rather difficult to describe one's feelings, but I certainly do feel somehow different. I feel— Oh, I don't know how I feel; but when I look at you and see you sitting there and realize—well, you know—I suppose that explains how I do feel."

"How very lucid you are! I'm afraid I haven't as great a gift of lucidity as you have, so I'd better say nothing."

The gentleman seemed suddenly to grow thoughtful. All at once, even against his will, his thoughts had traveled to the man who had lately been his partner. Ronald had seen him once in jail when Osborne was awaiting trial. The man had utterly broken down.

"You didn't hurt me," he said. "That crack on the skull you gave me was nothing; I deserved it. I've been a fool all through. When your father died everything was perfectly all right. But I had a feeling more than once that I'd like to have—a flutter. My income which came from my share of the business was not bad, but it didn't permit of what I called a flutter—not a regular one.

"Your father kept a sharp eye on everything. But you, you were only a boy. I looked upon you as a kid. I took care that you kept your eyes on nothing. There were securities of all sorts in the strong boxes, our people's securities. I had a nibble at this and a nibble at that; then I had a regular flare up. I got rid of a thousand pounds in a month — goodness knows how; I don't.

"I began to realize that that sort of thing couldn't go on; that I couldn't put the money back, and that exposure was bound to come. So I had spree after spree, and the money flew, and speculating on the Stock Exchange didn't make it go any slower.

"Then there came a letter, advising

me that certain trust money was required for a certain purpose on a certain date. And the trust money wasn't there. I couldn't say who knew where it was; I didn't. So I thought the time had come to make a clean breast of it to you and make an end of it.

"I told you that we were jointly responsible for the safety of those trust moneys, and that you would be called to account for them as well as I—that you would have to pay the penalty if they weren't there. Then you made those few candid remarks which ended in your giving me a crack on the skull. It was two or three days before I was worth anything—you had hit rather hard—and then I realized what kind of a thing I was, and I resolved that I wouldn't become a still meaner worm by trying to shuffle part of the responsibility of what I'd done on to you. So I didn't. I just told the truth.

"And the result is that you're there and I'm here—you're outside and I'm in, and I take it that I'm going to stay in for quite a while. I understand that you're going—well, that you're going where money is."

Ronald nodded. He could not trust himself to speak. The allusion was a little unexpected, and the man's face, attitude, and bearing were so eloquent of misery, shame, and despair that he was conscious that something was happening to him within for which he could not account. As usual in moments of emotion he was tongue-tied. But Osborne seemed to understand his silence.

"I've got a wife," he went on. "You wouldn't think it from the sort of thing I am and the kind of things I've done; but I have, and no man could want a better. And we've got two children; one five and the other three years old. She's stuck to me in spite of all that's come out, and her people have objected. They are of opinion that she ought to turn her back on me forever; but she won't, thank Heaven! So it looks as if they had turned their backs on her.

"I'm told that the house has been sold up, and that there's practically nothing left for her; and Heaven knows how she's living, and how she's going to live!

"I was only thinking that if—if you could spare her, say, a pound a week—her people won't give her a farthing unless she promises not to have anything more to do with me—till I come out it would be such a comfort! She's a first-rate manager and could live on that, I think."

There were tears in the speaker's eyes; Ronald was not sure that there were not tears in his own. He went straight away and told Alice what Osborne had told him. That afternoon they called on Mrs. Osborne. It must have been rather a singular interview. When Alice left Mrs. Osborne took her two babies in her arms and cried over them, and gave utterance to at least one remark which almost hinted at hysteria.

"If they ever tell you that there are no such things as miracles don't you believe them, because there are—and there's an angel, too!"

A few days afterward Edward Osborne was sentenced to five years' penal servitude. As the sentence was pronounced he leaned over and whispered to his counsel—there was actually a smile on his face:

"I don't care; Betty is provided for."

Betty was the name of his wife.

Ronald Denton was thinking of these things as he sat facing his own wife in the compartment in that Dover train. He leaned forward, and he took both her hands in his, and he said:

"Alice, it's absolutely, utterly impossible for me to tell you how I'm feeling."

It was probably because she did not know of what he was thinking that she wondered what he meant.

(The end.)

Class

by Suzanne Buck

MAIZIE was shopping. She was out to buy a necktie for her husband, and a belt and a hair-rat for herself.

Why she should have chosen Haltman's department-store for the scene of her activities when McCraken's "five and ten" was so much nearer home she could have told you in very few words. Briefly, she had lots of time and very little of anything else to spend.

So, even though she knew that the things she wanted to buy were on sale in the under-price basement, Maizie nevertheless entered an elevator going up and went with it to the top floor.

There she favored with only a cursory view the display of elegant Jacobean furniture. She wasted hardly a glance on the gorgeous old blue and gold of a Persian carpet. You must not suppose, however, that her indifference was occasioned by a lifelong acquaintance with these luxurious accessories to human comfort. On the contrary, it arose from an utter ignorance of their values, intrinsic or otherwise.

She also passed by the bric-à-brac and the statuary wrapped in the doubtful bliss that ignorance breeds; but in the sporting-goods department on the floor below, she lingered to admire a portable house and a canoe.

She had spent her summers like her winters in the city, yet the house and the canoe touched a responsive chord in her somewhere, awakened a sense of appreciation such as no Persian carpet or hand-carved desk *could* arouse. Those were the things she understood instinctively. The others lay beyond her comprehension.

On the floor devoted to women's apparel she wandered aimlessly through several valleys of gowns. In the millinery section she stood in a transport of delight. Maizie was susceptible to hats.

She watched covertly as a woman near her endeavored to make a selection from the array that an indefatigable salesperson produced for her approval. She continued to watch as the woman unbuttoned her coat, a long silken thing that fell in graceful folds about her slender form, disposed it comfortably about her shoulders, and meditatively tapped her foot on the floor as she fitted on an endless number of the confections.

Maizie's attention persisted when the woman rose from her chair and pirouetted before the mirror, studying herself from every possible angle. It became a frank stare of amazement when, balancing a perky little piece of headgear at a smart but precarious angle on her head, she turned to a man who, seated near, had watched the performance with an amused smile and an air of general toleration.

His utter indifference to all this allurement was scarce believable.

"Do you like this one?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he exclaimed, apparent-

ly roused from his apathy. "That is the most stunning hat here. It's vastly becoming. You look charming in it, dear. Take it at once."

Maizie let her eyes rest on the hat for a moment and then turned them on the perfectly groomed man, attracted, not so much by his appearance as by his words.

She wondered what he could see in that little thing to rave about. She wondered why he had remained indifferent to the fascination of the showier hats. The hat he liked was entirely black with but the faintest dash of green to relieve its plainness. Not at all the kind of hat that she would have chosen.

Her eyes dwelt with conscious pride on her own, reflected in the mirror opposite, then strayed again back to the man and the little black one he so admired. How carefully the saleswoman handled it. It must be expensive for all that it was so little and plain. Again she looked in the glass, and for the first time in her life dissatisfaction marred the pleasure she took in the contemplation of her own image.

Her own big picture-hat, several times too large for daytime wear, with its broad brim turned abruptly back from her face, and the immense feather laid across its crown, was indicative of her general taste.

Very suddenly in her eyes, apparently without cause, the little black hat that she had rated insignificant became transformed. It looked infinitely better than her own, hers, which up to that moment she had counted the essence of perfection.

She studied the buyer with such attention as only one woman can bestow on another of her sex, and then for the third time looked toward the glass. In features, figure, height, the ever-truthful mirror assured her, the advantage was hers, and yet, envy took possession of her heart.

"Why?" she wondered.

There was a wide distinction between Maizie and the object of her curiosity, but wherein it lay constituted a problem so enigmatical that with wrinkled brow she sought vainly to solve it.

Did it exist because the other woman wore her dark hair brushed smoothly and glossily back from her ears, and because the natural pink and white of her skin afforded a sharp contrast to it?

Maizie's own blond, crimpy hair, dry from too much curling, was pulled low over her ears and plastered close to her cheeks.

Or was it because the other woman's street dress and shoes were so uncompromisingly plain?

Maizie surveyed her own image again, this time with critical eyes. In one single, fleeting glance, even as her predilection for the hat of ultramode was born, she conceived a violent dislike for the twinkling buckles on her pumps, for the near-silk stockings above them, and for her cheap lace blouse.

She knew nothing of line or fit or distinctive style.

She patted the powder on her nose reflectively. Even the too-thick coating of white there was a factor in the problem. Thoughtfully she turned, and as mechanically as she had entered, made her way out of the store, troubled by a complexity of emotions so vague as to be impossible of analysis. It was only after she reached home that she remembered the necktie and the belt and the hair-rat.

All that day her thoughts ran in channels entirely different from their accustomed grooves. Her mind dwelt persistently on the other woman; she rehearsed mentally every inflection of her voice, every detail of her attire.

She was strangely silent when Jimmy came home to supper. Jimmy was her husband. He drove a truck, and he loved the thing just as he loved his horses and the reins that held them to him, and the bright, clean air and the sunshine.

When he came home it was to a

three-room flat on the fourth floor of a great tenement, where the careful neatness of the living-room that was also dining-room, reception-room, and parlor, and the cheap but substantial meal that Maizie spread before him all testified to her careful management in the expenditure of his fifty dollars a month.

"Say, Maizie," Jimmy said as he washed some of the day's grime from his neck and face at the little kitchen sink, "there's a new five-reeler at the movies to-night. Let's go round, huh?"

He sat down to the table and proceeded to mash up a plateful of potatoes and beans and cabbage into an indistinguishable stew.

Maizie watched him without a word as he shoveled this in quantities into his mouth to satisfy the normally healthy appetite that twelve hours in the open air had engendered.

When he had finished and pushed back his plate she hurriedly washed up the few dishes. Later, when she emerged from her tiny bedroom she wore a navy-blue suit she had discarded and a sailor hat that had seen ample service.

Jimmy took his pipe from his mouth and stared at her.

"Yuh ain't goin' out that way, are yuh, Maiz?" he said. "It ain't rainin'. Where's yuh swell clothes?"

Maizie flashed him one glance, then quickly turned her head away from him so that he might not see in her face the sudden wave of revulsion that swept over her.

"I don't feel like dressin' up to-night," she said evasively, and Jimmy's honest eyes opened with genuine concern.

"If yuh feel sick we c'n stay home," he offered with awkward affection. "Yuh do look kinder white."

The shadow of a smile touched Maizie's mouth. Could he understand if she told him why she had discarded her gaudy finery. She hesitated for the fraction of a second, then—

"I only left off the red stuff, Jimmy," she said.

Together then they descended the crooked stairs and walked on slowly toward the theater. At every door groups of frowzy women and tired-looking men sat on the steps or lounged against the rails, drinking in the breeze. The odors from the docks filtered over from the river.

Jimmy kept up a running-fire of conversation. One of the horses had gone lame that day. They'd had to shoot him. Pity—he was a big, heavy beast, and had been a dandy worker. Two parcels were missing. He (Jimmy) would report that in the morning.

Tommy Burns's mother was dead. She had left some money. Tommy was Jimmy's wagon helper. The kid hadn't shown up at all that day. But all the gossip fell on deaf ears. Maizie wasn't listening. In her mind ideas that let light in on a dark place—ideas concerned chiefly with men and women of a different mold—were assuming definite shape.

Around on the avenue the lights from the shops threw a steady glare across the sidewalk. As Maizie and her husband rounded the corner, Jimmy came to a dead stop before a millinery establishment.

"There's the hat for you, Maiz," he cried enthusiastically. "Gee, but you'd be the swell dame with that. Some doll, I tell yuh, some doll!"

Involuntarily, Maizie's eyes followed the direction of Jimmy's pointed finger, but she did not see the pink and gold atrocity, she did not hear Jimmy say, "Some lid, what? Some queen you'd be with that."

Instead, before her mental vision there rose a plain little black turban, and her inner consciousness heard a man say, "Oh, that is the most stunning hat here. You look charming in it, dear. Take it at once."

Maizie stole a glance at Jimmy from the corner of her eye. He was tall, and straight, and broad, with that strength of shoulder that comes from

carrying trunks and juggling cases. He was good-looking, too, but he differed from the man of her thoughts just as she had differed from the woman.

That strange man and woman had carried themselves with an air of superiority. Even after her whole day of concentration Maizie could give no name to the feeling of remoteness that they had inspired her with—

"—but I call it class."

Jimmy was finishing a slangy rhapsody on the hat and Maizie stopped abruptly. With just one word Jimmy had supplied an adequate explanation.

Those people were class, the real class; and she and Jimmy and all the others like them were hopelessly out of that class. Maizie sighed almost imperceptibly as they moved on toward the movies.

The house was crowded. It was hot and stuffy, but no one seemed to mind. On the screen was being depicted with startling reality the all-absorbing spectacle of a brave young fire laddie with a child in his arms making his way from a burning tenement down a staircase already wrapped in devastating flame.

Maizie and her husband had entered just as this picture faded from the screen. The girl, usually an ardent movie enthusiast, viewed the pictures with her usual enthusiasm somewhat abated until the much-heralded five-reeler made its appearance, and then the screen claimed her undivided attention.

The film was entitled "The Struggle of a Working Girl," and the opening picture showed a beautiful girl sewing on a machine amid the most squalid surroundings.

The typed head-lines boldly announced in substance that for four dollars a week the poor young thing worked excessively at the honorable vocation of wasting nine dollars' worth of eyesight.

Further developments showed the strike which left the machine minus its fair operator, and in the rapidly shifting pictures, after vicissitudes too numerous outside of the cinematograph to befall one lonely and unprotected woman, she presents herself at the stage door of a cheap playhouse, and there is chosen for chorus work from a host of applicants.

All this in two reels. For three more the audience forgot to fidget, forgot the oppressive heat and the flies and their own every-day worries, insignificant now by comparison, as they breathlessly followed the courageous young woman on her adventurous career; for the name of the credulous is legion.

With a host of lovers from both sides of the footlights fighting for her favor and a villainous manager to create trouble for her at every turn, the girl yet surmounted all the obstacles placed in her way and rose triumphant by virtue of her great beauty and talent (the development of which it occurred to no one to inquire about), and the last reel found her a grand-opera diva, bowing to the plaudits of an admiring throng.

By that time Maizie was leaning forward in her seat, her eyes glued to the screen. That tall, well-formed, beautiful singer, who carried her clothes with such easy grace; could she ever have been the poor, shabby shopgirl of the first pictures?

Every one said that pictures were stories from real life. If that were true, and it were possible for a shabby shopgirl to become a cultured singer, why could not she, Maizie O'Brien, rise above her station and also fill some enviable position, instead of remaining just Jimmy O'Brien's wife?

She drew a deep breath and reached for her hat.

"Some picture," Jimmy said as they elbowed their way out; "some picture, ain't it? On'y it never happens that way in real life, does it, Maiz?"

For the second time that day his remarks went unheeded, for Maizie was

again busy thinking of well-dressed women, of men with perfect manners, of chorus girls, and of shop-girls who developed into famous singers.

She pressed her lips and continued to think as she kept close to Jimmy while his broad shoulders forced a path for her through the crush. That shop-girl stuck in her thoughts tenaciously. She was so different from the singer.

The shop-girl had been ordinary. The singer had been high-class—*class—class*—that was it. That was the word Jimmy had used to describe even a hat that he considered better than the rest. That was the right word, and she, Maizie O'Brien, would, too, become high-class, cost what it might.

She permitted herself to be led into an ice-cream parlor. Jimmy always treated on the way home; but in spite of the lights, in spite of the cute little glass cup of frappé put before her, in spite of Jimmy's quips and the laughing remarks tossed by the others from table to table, Maizie's preoccupation continued.

She ate her cream abstractedly, for in her head nebulous plans were assuming definite shape, and these plans had already disturbed her usual serenity and threatened also, could Jimmy have known it, his own solid peace of mind.

She maintained an unbroken silence all the way home. It was the calm that preceded the storm. Once in her own home that storm broke in all its violence.

"Jimmy," she said, fumbling with her hatpins, and looking everywhere but in Jimmy's direction. "Jimmy, I'm tired of this."

"Poor kid," said Jimmy sympathetically; "I don't blame you."

He was tugging at his tie. It had become knotted through his unskilful efforts to untie it. "I don't blame you one bit, stewing around a dinky flat like this in such weather."

It never occurred to him to pity himself for having to guide a team of heavy horses from the front seat of a truck through all the broiling sun.

"I'll see if I can't get off Saturday afternoon an' take yuh to Coney," he added cheerfully.

Maizie turned on him fiercely.

"I don't want to go to Coney," she said passionately. "I want to go away—away—away from here."

"Well"—Jimmy was still amiable—"I ain't had no vacation yet. I wasn't goin' to take any because yuh wanted some money for a new outfit; but if yuh need a change so bad I'll let yuh go 'way somewhere by yourself. I could get along for a week or so without yuh."

Maizie made a gesture of despair. Jimmy's denseness was disconcerting. She walked to the window after throwing her hat aside and stared through the pane without seeing anything.

"When I go, Jimmy," she said slowly, cruelly, "I ain't never comin' back."

Jimmy paused, with his hand still at his throat.

"Yuh ain't never comin' back?" he echoed. "D' yuh mean that yuh ain't satisfied with these here rooms, an' that yuh want tuh move away?"

Maizie's reply was charged with ineffable disgust.

"No," she said. "*I mean I want to leave you.* I mean we ain't meant for each other. I mean I want to be something better than a truck-driver's wife." She spat the words out scathingly. "I want to do something big like the girl in the pictures did. The one who became the singer. Now d' yuh understand?"

Jimmy did not understand and he did not answer. He was silent for so long that Maizie turned to look at him. He had dropped into a chair, the two long ends of his string tie dangling down forlornly on his chest. His jaw had become set and had taken on the rigidity almost of a corpse. At last he spoke slowly and with an effort.

"So that's what's been botherin' yuh all this evenin'," he said. "That's what's been makin' yuh so glum. Are yuh—are yuh got any one else?"

"No." Her answer came sullenly.

"Then—then—then, how yuh goin' a manage?"

"Why—why—" Brought face to face with the question, she found it rather a difficult one to answer. She really hadn't given that matter very much consideration. "I'm goin' on the stage."

"The stage—that's rotten. You know it."

"Well"—lamely—"I don't intend to stay there. I'm goin' to get ahead an' be well dressed, an' know well-dressed women—"

"Ain't yuh well dressed now?"

"Yes—but—them ain't the kind of clothes I mean."

"I see"—Jimmy's tone was curious—"I ain't good enough for yuh. Yuh want a man who wears good clothes all the time. One who never works. One who's got lots of time to fuss around with yuh.

"A man like me who works twelve hours a day an' brings his whole salary home ain't good enough any more. A man who works overtime an' brings yuh the extra money to blow in any way yuh want ain't the man for yuh any more, huh? Yuh want to run with a better class now."

He gnawed his lower lip fiercely. "Don't yuh know that a woman's place is in the class her husband mixes up with?" he went on. "Don't yuh know that when she tries tuh get away from that she makes a big mistake? Don't yuh know that nobody'll have her? That she's locked out; locked out of her own class an' out of every other decent class? Yuh don't want tuh be one of them kind, do yuh?"

Maizie turned toward the window again.

"There ain't no use talkin', Jimmy," she said finally to the darkness outside. "I'm goin' away."

"Aw right." Jimmy's reply came just the least bit strangled. He rose from his chair like a man stricken in years.

"We ain't been married so long, Maiz," he said after a pause. "When I first seen yuh my heart said: 'That's the girl for yuh, Jim O'Brien; she's the one for yuh to get an' tuh love an' tuh keep,' an' I got yuh. My heart still says: 'Keep 'er, keep 'er', but my head tells me yuh ain't worth the keepin'. Yuh c'n go, Maiz; I ain't goin' tuh stop yuh."

Long after Jimmy had gone to bed Maizie stood at the window and twined her fingers nervously in and out the meshes of the square of white curtain that hung before it.

Early the next morning Jimmy rose and, after making his own breakfast, went out to work. This was his custom. He never disturbed his wife.

Maizie's slumbers, however, had not been sound. She heard him moving about the kitchen; heard the door close gently as he went down the stairs. She wondered if, after all, Jimmy's treatment of her was not better than anything she could expect from any one she might meet later.

Still, he had taken the news of her departure very quietly, she thought resentfully. Of course, she could not now, with any dignity, change her plans; besides she was not entirely sure that she wanted to stay.

She packed her valise half-heartedly, and when that piece of business was finished, when the three little rooms were in apple-pie order and she had no further excuse to linger, she skewered on her hat with a firmness intended also to sustain her rapidly oozing courage, counted out the last of Jimmy's salary into her own little purse, picked up her grip, and in a few minutes was on the outer side of her little kitchen door.

She went down the narrow flight of stairs slowly, her valise thudding beside her from step to step. The usual number of children cluttered the halls. Seldom, indeed, was the silence of the

house undisturbed by the slamming of doors; seldom were the halls clear of gossiping women and quarreling children.

Before she was half-way down, from behind the panels of the third floor back, Maizie heard the resonant tones of Mrs. Gatinni as she disciplined her swarthy youngsters and the shrill wails of the children that followed hard on the punishment.

An aroma of spaghetti and cheese emanated from the transom of the Gatinni apartment and mingled with the odors of pork, of cabbage, and of soup, that found its way into the halls through the keyholes and the crevices in the panels of other doors.

She gained the first floor without encountering any of her neighbors; without attracting undue attention from the children, and for this she was thankful.

The ethics of the neighborhood did not forbid the most minute and searching inquiry into other people's affairs, and such questions as: "Where yuh goin', Mrs. O'Brien? When yuh comin' back? What yuh got in that grip?" might be made with very little attempt to hide the interest that gave them birth.

She had no wish to encounter Mrs. Clary, from the top floor, or Mrs. Baretski, from the ground floor. Their friendship for each other was the wonder of the house, for Mrs. Clary was Irish and Mrs. Baretski was Polish. Both were adept, however, in the gentle art of extracting information which in nowise concerned them, and she seemed to be their connecting bond.

Though their methods differed, the results they accomplished were essentially the same, and comparison of these results, with additional comment, furnished the chief topic for conversation whenever they met for over the banister confidences.

Perhaps her very anxiety to avoid these two communicated itself to them and moved their loquacious tongues to greater effort; perhaps it was merely coincident; but as Maizie hesitated for a second on the landing first above the street level, she heard voices pitched in strident whispers.

It was Mrs. Clary and Mrs. Baretski beyond the possibility of any doubt. Maizie knew that those voices could belong to no two other women in the world. Mrs. Clary's accent was unusually thick; Mrs. Baretski's unusually thin.

She shrank back into the shadow of the windowless hall. She could see in the shaft of light that pierced the gloom through the street door, the fat face and frowzy hair of Mrs. Clary, followed by her ample bosom and the width of her hips as she mounted the stairs, and, close over her shoulder, the sharp face of Mrs. Baretski, thin almost to emaciation, her stringy hair pulled tight from her forehead, her long nose rendered longer by contrast with the hollows in her cheeks.

Only her eyes prevented the woman from being mistaken for a cadaver. Even in the half light they burned with an unquenchable fire, and mirrored in their depths the thousand desires of a starved soul and a half-starved body.

"An' so I sez t' thim," Mrs. Clary was saying, "I sez it shure wuz a turr-rible thing—"

She raised her voice and addressed the air above her head: "Mrs. Gatinni, phwat's the raison yer afther wallopin' thim dago kids o' yourn? Th' n'ise o' thim could wa-aken th' did! I sez it wuz a turr-rible thing, an' Mrs. Grady wanted t' know who fur it wuz so turr-rible, fur th' gurrl who wint wrong or th' bye who wint ba-ad, so I sez t' her, sez I—"

Before Mrs. Clary could communicate her opinion further, Mrs. Gatinni's voice, fraught with suppressed rage, rang from above.

"Mis' Clary," it said haughtily, "this me kids no dago kids. Him Eyetalian kids. Me kids, me like me lick." And with this cryptic utterance all sound ceased for the moment.

"Glory," said Mrs. Clary finally, leaning her bulk against the banisters, in her amazement at the unexpected reply, pausing for breath and delivering an ultimatum at the same time, "thot do beat aal, it shure do! Mrs. Gatinni"—she sniffed—"pshaw, I detist th' woman! She's thot sassy. But phwat c'n y' ixpict frum dago furriners?"

"She crazy, Mrs. Gatinni," volunteered the pallid Mrs. Baretski. "All tame babies hit. All tame babies cry. Soomtame baby gootnight, *die*. Mrs. Gatinni mooch cry. Baby no can brang back. Yas, yas, maybe." She shook her head dolorously. "Vat Mrs. Grady say?" she inquired.

The possible demise of any of the Gatinni children from an overdose of the punishment as administered by their mother concerned her no further.

"Mrs. Grady sez a turr-rible thing it wuz fur th' bye. Furst he spindt aal av 'is money on th' gurrl—him as wurrked loike th' viry divil in Furgunson's I'on Foundrry — baught her all av th' pritty drisses an' th' bunnets, an' aal av th' jimcracks thot she wuz afther wantin'; thin she turrns him down, smarrt as y' plaze, an' him takes t' hittin' th' booze, an' now bein' as droonk an' as good fur nawthin' as y' c'n think, aal fur wan slip av a gurrl wid crimpy hair an' not th' since av a cat. Ain't thot sumpthin' turr-rible?"

She slapped the Radowitz baby as he began to teeter down the narrow ledge of stairs that projected from the wrong side of the railing.

"Cum, git away frum there! Is it a brroken neck thot yez want?"

"She bad girl. She cam' beck," said Mrs. Baretski sagely.

Her knowledge of English was very limited, but her use thereof very telling. She strove to put as much meaning as possible into each word, and in this she succeeded admirably.

"She bad girl. Have nice fallar. Meke runway. Soomtame coom beck. Soomtame she no mooch mooney. Moost coom beck. Yoost lak you go ap laddar. Soombody top laddar no you lak. Soombody on you fingar step. Soomtame you fall. So"—she shrugged her bony shoulders eloquently—"new fallar make runway. Noobody moor want. Moost cam' beck. Old fallar no moor goot. She ver' mooch sarry. Yas, yas, maybe."

And with dolor, her head wagged again an affirmative to her second mournful prediction.

As they came up closer Maizie flattened herself against the wall. She heard them traverse the length of the hall, Mrs. Clary in the lead, Mrs. Baretski a close second—evidently *en route* for the Clary apartment, next to Maizie's.

"I towld Mrs. Grady," resumed Mrs. Clary, when she had fortified herself with a deep breath and had begun to mount the next flight — "I towld Mrs. Grady thot pritty soon this street 'u'd have anither sich like case, an' it's me that knaws it, too."

She stopped to extricate an unwashed youngster who had painstakingly stuck her head through a narrow space between two of the wooden sticks in the banister, and sought most conscientiously to impale herself on the poker with which she was playing.

"Stop thot, y' spalpeen, an' git away frum here. Ye'll git kilt wan av these days. There's thim people next dure av me," she ran on. "Him th' big felley as drives a trruck. A foine, han'some bye, an' her gallivantin' ivery day around thim sthures, buyin', buyin', spindin' aal av th' muney he wurrks his fingurs t' th' bone fur, drissed up aal av th' toime, hair curled aal av th' toime; no babies t' 'tind; nawthin' t' do but sit in th' pichurs.

"Last night I hurd thim. She bossez him all over th' flat aal av th' toime, an' him thot much in luve wid 'er he'd jump offen th' roof if she towld 'im to. An' d' y' think thot she cares? Naw." Her voice fell lower, cautious but contemptuous, as Mrs. Baretski admonished her that Mrs. O'Brien might be near. "She can't

see 'im at aal, she's thot stu-uck on hersilf.

"Sum day she'll be afther runnin' away, too, mind y' phwat I say, an' thin he'll go t' th' dogs—y' c'n see it in th' eyes av 'im—just loike th' ather bye, an' anither sowl lost, sez I. Bether be if she 'u'd turrn her toes t' th' daisies *now*," she continued piously, "an' l'ave 'im remimber 'er good an' swate loike he thinks she is. Howly Mither, I tell y' phwat, whin I wuz a gurrl—"

The voice faded as the woman mounted the next flight. It became a mere confusion of sound as they neared the third landing, a whisper as the distance between them and the motionless girl widened, and when a door on the fourth floor slammed to, Maizie knew that neither Mrs. Clary nor Mrs. Baretski was within sight or sound.

She dashed down the remaining flight and walked to the corner furiously, despite the heat. The nerve of those people to talk about her. The nerve! She thought of them viciously. The big, fat know-nothing Irish woman, and the skinny Pole who looked as if a square meal would kill her.

Was it any of their business how she was dressed, or how she spent her money? It wasn't their money she was spending, was it? And couldn't she treat her own husband any way she wanted? He was *her* husband, wasn't he?

How did Mrs. Baretski know that trying to get out of your class was like trying to climb a ladder? How did she know that you could climb to the top, but that you couldn't stay there? How did she know anything, anyway? Huh! Maizie almost snorted audibly her contempt of the woman. She'd show them. She'd be like the girl who became such a swell-looking actress. Or she'd look like the woman who bought the little hat in Haltman's.

What made Mrs. Baretski so sure that you had to come back, she'd like to know? The girl she was speaking of must have been pretty stupid. She, Maizie, would never come back. She was sure she'd never have to see any of them, the Gatinnis, the Radowitzes, the Clarys, and the score of others again. The thought yielded her an immense amount of satisfaction.

She would go on the stage. She'd have beautiful clothes, and lots of jewelry, and crowds of fellows. She'd never come back. She'd just prove that they were wrong. She'd make them jealous. That was the trouble now. They were all jealous of her; jealous because she didn't look like a scrub, like they did; because her husband was a whole lot better than any of theirs, huh!

She flounced along, a limp little mess of cheap finery growing limper at every step. The scorching sun blazing over her head was strong enough to wilt anything, any one, and yet it was as nothing compared to the burning of her indignation; the fires of wrath which had been lighted by Mrs. Clary's and Mrs. Baretski's oddly prophetic words.

Each step that she made was unnecessarily vigorous. Each step accented a word in a half-strangulated denunciation which laid their perspicacity to jealousy. But when her fury had mounted to a pitch where further than that it becomes insanity, it mercifully began to recede; and going, it left in her a feeling of unwilling admiration for the women's shrewdness, for their amazing foresight.

She faced an issue the realization of which cut her to the quick. She, who considered herself superior, was, to her more ignorant neighbors, transparent as glass, more readable than a page of writing.

Her resentment against them concentrated itself in but one idea as her anger flamed anew, and her determination to go back to Jimmy and the tenement became as strong as had been her desire to leave them. Her very perversity proved that she was wholly woman.

What right had those women to

guess what she was going to do? she stormed silently. And what right had they to be right about it, anyway? She jerked one shoulder up and down with a little vicious but rhythmic gesture, and her eyes snapped and blazed with an energy that was quite out of tune with the languor of that heat-baked street.

Little lumps of powder had formed on her face all unheeded, and rivulets of perspiration trickled down, coagulated until they formed larger streams, and dripped from her chin. Even her feather hat suffered from the reaction, and hung limp and dejected over one ear.

When she paused at the crossing she was still muttering anathema — vague words which held vague threats. When she walked back, it was with unfaltering purpose in every step.

She'd show 'em! She'd show 'em! She chewed the words over and over again. Nobody'd say: "I told yuh so" to Jimmy, if *she* could help it. No wisenheimer like Mrs. Clary or Mrs. Baretski would crow over him. She'd show 'em! She'd show 'em!

In the stuffy hall she came face to face with those arbiters of her destiny. Mrs. Clary still led, Mrs. Baretski still followed. One could almost imagine that they had broken their trip not at all, but had mounted to the topmost floor, had wheeled with military precision, and had marched right down again.

"Glory be!" cried Mrs. Clary; "Mrs. O'Brien, mam, y'r dhrippin' wit!"

Her constituency, the ghastly Baretski, felt called on, too, to make remark.

"O-oh, cam' beck, Mis' 'Brien!" she gurgled. "Mis' 'Brien, she cam' beck. You was out maybe, Mis' 'Brien, yas?"

The manner of her question made it a plain statement of indisputable fact.

"Yes, I'm back," said Maizie jerkily, half defiant, wholly angry at the flagrant hypocrisy of the two, and willing to invite opinions the better to pave the way for the scorn she wished to hurl at their heads. "I was out tuh the grocery-store, an' now I'm comin' back. Got anything tuh say about it?"

She reared her head and tried to insinuate her slim body between them to reach the stairs, but the phalanx held solid. Mrs. Clary and Mrs. Baretski looked at her with a keenness which defied the gloom of the musty hall, and took in her hat, her gloves, her valise, and her own sweat-bedraggled self.

"T' th' grocery, Hivins!" Mrs. Clary's eyes lingered on the accouterments which fairly shouted of a longer journey, and then sought Mrs. Baretski's inquiring gaze. "I wuz tellin' Mrs. Baretski, here"—that lady bore mute but eloquent witness to the lie — "I wuz tellin' Mrs. Baretski, here, phwat a foine wamin y'air, Mrs. O'Brien," she went on, her oily tones becoming conciliating.

"An' I wuz sayin' phwat a foine bye y'r husban' air. An' I sez to her, sez I, thot gurrl an' thot bye 'r' jis' craazy about each ither. Didn't I, Mrs. Baretski?"

"Yas, yas, she did!" affirmed the voluble Pole willingly. "She say all tame you hoosban' you moofin' pichers take. She say all tame you hoosban' you nice drasses brang. She say all tame you hoosban' you lotsa mooney brang. You hoosban' ver' mooch goot she say. She say you hoosban' you—"

With the last ounce of her strength Maizie pushed them apart and ran up the stairs. The laughter in her voice struggled with the tears, and when she reached the first landing she turned and leaned over the rail.

In that one magical moment the mainsprings of her mental and moral mechanism underwent complete revolution, and when next she spoke her words betrayed the fact that by every right of feminine contrariness she was entitled to a place in the universal opinion which held that a woman was life's most insoluble mystery.

In spite of that severe arraignment of her, Mrs. Clary and Mrs. Baretski were her very best friends, and the wish to taunt them with their hypocrisy faded from her heart, and in its place there welled up a prayer, a silent pæan of thanks.

They had brought her back—from where? She herself hardly knew except that its path led somewhere into a dim and hazardous future. They had brought her back to Jimmy and to her home—her home. She dwelt lovingly and tenderly on the familiar word.

"Mrs. Clary, Mrs. Baretski."

Both women looked up curiously at her. Mrs. Clary was sure that "th' turrible hate of th' wither" was responsible for the fluctuations of her temper. "My husban' *is* the *best*—he's the best man in this house! He's the best man on the *block!* He's the best man in the CITY! He's—he's the best man IN THE WHOLE WORLD!"

Her vehemence grew with her argument; she convinced herself with her own words, and she made the statement with an air of finality. And as Maizie ran swiftly up the stairs Mrs. Clary turned to Mrs. Baretski and ejaculated: "An' well ye know, Mrs. Baretski, she *belaves* it!"

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LOOKIN'

BY CLARA B. BURROWS

I AIN'T lookin' for no fortune,
I ain't lookin' for no mine;
I ain't lookin' for no jewels,
Tho' I like to see 'em shine.

I ain't lookin' for no piano,
I ain't lookin' for no house;
I ain't lookin' for no *wifey,*
Be she quiet as a mouse.

But I'll tell you this, old pardner—
Most the time I've been on earth,
I've been lookin' at th' people,
And a seein' what they're worth.

There ain't a bit o' difference
'Twixt all o' them an' each;
They'll "do" you if yo' let 'em,
And 't don't do no good to preach.

But lookin' at th' people,
And studyin' what they're worth,
Ain't brought me in no fortune,
Nor no soft, easy berth.

So now I've stopped a lookin'
At each man's freak an' hob,
And started in a lookin'
For a good, hard, steady job!

The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms

by Achmed Abdullah

Being Chapters from the Memoirs of Stuart Vandewater

THIS concludes the series. If you've read the other five you'll want to read this; if you read this you'll want to read the other five. Here you will encounter a climax the tenseness of which justifies the expectations raised by earlier encounters with the terrible Tatar, *Hussain Khan,* and his society sworn to kill those who meddle with the destinies of Asia.

"White man" in this story means European or full-blooded descendant of European emigrants. The time is after the general war which broke out in August, 1914.

VI—THE AFFAIR OF THE LUMINOUS DEATH

AS I sit here by the open window and see that same eternal great sun dwindling and blending into the nightly frame of clouds on the horizon; as my tired mind dwells on the memory of the world I have left behind me beyond the Atlantic; as the strange, incredible adventures of the past year come trooping back to me like a drift of seaweed, lazily tossing in the tide of remembrance—it seems dramatically fitting and appropriate that this last encounter of mine with the dread forces of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms (but will it really be the last?) should have begun in a tossing sea of flames, red and blood-stained like the passions of a slaughtered soul, and should have ended in pale-glowing, luminous death.

No thought of the end was in my heart that night when I heard the deep, booming, sonorous clang of the fire-bells; then the shouting and running of men and women, the opening of doors and windows, the shrill questions and exclamations.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

The waiter came rushing toward me, upsetting my *demi-tasse* in the agitation of the moment, and waving his napkin like a signal of distress.

"*Voyez donc, monsieur! Quelle conflagration! Oh, là là! Mais c'est énorme — énormément énorme!*"

("Just look, sir! What a fire! There now! My, but it's enormous—enormously enormous!")

This series began in the All-Story Weekly for September 18.

He pointed at the brown, evening sky, and at the lapping, swirling ribbon of scarlet-shot pink which curled up on the edge of the horizon.

I simulated surprise and excitement.

"My check! My check! Hurry up."

I gave a sigh of relief. It had come at last.

The next moment there was the dull, staccato thumping of hoofs and the jarring crunch of broad wheels on the wood-block pavement, and the engines, the ladders, and all the rest of the fire-fighting paraphernalia whirled madly round the corner, the drivers, with wide-open, urging arms, bending forward in their seats like charioteers in a Roman arena, half-dressed firemen clinging on behind, on the sides, wherever they could find an inch of support.

The pink glow on the edge of the heavens was darkening into ruby and ensanguined orange. Behind the stiff, lanky poplars and fir-trees a high-blazing, sooty mass of smoky flame was licking the clouds.

I paid my check to the excited waiter of the little café whose cuisine and château wines were the pride of Marly-le-Roi. I rose from my seat. I had taken an early boat from Paris to the little suburb. I knew what the night would bring.

The waiter bowed and gave me hat and stick.

"*Merci, monsieur.*"

He pocketed the tip; and with a hurried word of apology and explanation to *madame la patronne,* who sat high-throned behind the cash-register, he was off, his long white apron trailing behind him like a pennant.

I followed in a leisurely manner toward the red glow, toward the funeral pyre of that titanic organization of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms which had so long terrorized the western world.

Here, at the peaceful little Paris suburb of Marly-le-Roi, had been their headquarters, their temple. Here they had worshiped Doorgha, the grim, lust-scabbed, many-armed goddess of merciless destruction. Here Hussain Khan and the other "westernized" leaders of Asian thought and ruthless Asian daring had conceived their plans of murder. From here had gone forth the orders which had killed Senator Kuhne of California, Horst von Pless, the Viceroy of India, the Governor of Madras, and a dozen other prominent white men who had endeavored to meddle and play with the destinies of Asia.

Thus it was good and right and proper that this central place, this blood-stained temple should go up in flames.

There would be no stopping the conflagration. There could not be! I myself had been present at the interview between the Paris chief of police and the mayor of the little suburb.

The mayor had expostulated; in vain expostulated. The chief had smiled benignly, patiently, and a little sarcastically.

"It is not necessary that you understand, my dear sir," he had assured that anxious, pompous provincial official, proud in the dignity of the tricolor sash which is so dear to the heart of French bureaucracy. "It is the order of the government. You will obey, and you will be absolutely discreet. You will not say a word—not even to your wife."

He had laughed.

"Also, if you do exactly as you are told—who knows, *mon cher monsieur?*"

He had tapped the mayor lightly on the chest.

"Who knows, I say? I may speak a little word to the minister of the interior, and the minister of the interior may speak a little word to the president, and there would be a narrow red ribbon conferred upon you. It would go well with that splendid tricolor sash of yours, don't you think?"

The mayor blushed. He lifted up his hands. "But I don't understand," he expostulated.

"So much the better. It is simply that there will be a fire at a certain house of your so charming suburb. And we wish this fire to consume the building in its entirety. The house stands detached — by itself. There is absolutely no danger to any of the neighboring villas."

"But what excuse shall I give? How shall I explain? *Enfin, bon sang, monsieur*, it is I, I, I who am the mayor!"

"Oh, yes. You are the mayor. You must explain. *C'est bien vrai cela. Alors écoutez.* (That is very true. Listen then.) This afternoon I shall send down some of my detectives. I believe that your water-system is part of the greater Paris system; not so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Excellent! Most excellent! Therefore my detectives shall come attired in that so becoming uniform of municipal water-inspectors. They will examine your water-main, your pumping-stations. Perhaps they will turn a screw or two; they will fool with the pipes the least little bit. What do I know—I? *Que voulez-vous?* It is not I who am an engineer. I remain in profound and regrettable ignorance of the mechanical details. But I do know that there will be a fire, and I also know that there will be no water for an hour— Ah, those incompetent asses of Paris water-inspectors!

"Then the water-main will be fixed —after an hour or so. The water will spurt forth again, those brave firemen of Marly-le-Roi will do their heroic duty as citizens of this great French republic and spray a little water on the smoldering embers. Is it understood? *Bien.* Good afternoon."

So it was done.

Now, following the trail of my fugitive waiter, when I reached the outskirts of Marly-le-Roi the villa which had housed the temple and the black statue of Doorgha was a roaring furnace. The official incendiaries had done their work well.

The flames had burst through the front door. They had eaten with popping crash of heat-splintered glass, through the windows of the first floor, like speckled, blotched snakes — like those very cobras, stony-eyed, cruel-eyed, which writhe their death-trail toward their white victims during the festival of the Doorgha-Puja, in the far mother temple of golden Benares.

Speckled, blotched reptiles of flame —with dripping lips, stained with the blood of sacrifice—with forked tongues of fire—up, up through the windows! Up, and burn your way to the lust-scabbed idol of black basalt which sits enthroned on the floor above! Embrace her with the destroying heat of your flame-coiling bodies! Crumble her into dark, dry dust!

The smoke rolled on and up in gloomy, grotesque, sinister garlands.

The firemen were working madly at their pumps. But there was no water.

Hence excitement. Hence the easy, light-hearted, swiftly forgotten despair of the Latin. Also a crowd muttering in anger, in abuse.

"*Alors, quelle saleté!*" ("Oh, what a mess!")

"Only this afternoon they were here, these precious inspectors from Paris."

"*C'est inouï!*" ("It's unheard of!")

"Ah, these impossible types of Parisians!"

"These specimens of filthy ignorance!"

"The asinine big-town know-alls!"

Pump, pump, pump again! With bulging, laboring chests the air whistling through the lungs, mouths wide open in supreme effort, taut-smarting muscles of arm and leg! But not a drop of water—while the flames gather fresh volume and strength—while the speckled, blotched red reptiles creep ever closer and closer toward the second floor, toward Doorgha.

"*C'est infect!*" ("It's rotten!")

"*C'est ignoble!*" ("It's vile!")

"These crocodiles of municipal inspectors!"

"There's a specimen of graft for you!"

"Graft? But you joke, my friend. It's theft—theft!"

"*Ah, la belle besogne!*" ("A fine business!")

"These incompetent Parisians!"

Suddenly the flames burst up in an effort, a supreme travail of crimson-glowing strength. Up to the second floor, hissing, sputtering, thundering, roaring. Down came the ceiling in places, loud-booming like the black crack of doom.

Still the blaze spread up, twirled up, forked up, scarlet-hearted, blue-tipped, yellow-frayed, as loose powder under spark.

Yet that room behind the third window where Doorkha brooded in state, dreaming of smoking blood-sacrifices, still held. She fought well, that lust-scabbed goddess of iniquity.

And then, suddenly, with the moaning of all purgatory, the whole side of the house gave way, came tumbling down in a mad, twisting, writhing, smoking, burning heap. The temple was belching forth its cruel entrails of ensanguined murder and gangrened superstition and worship.

I caught sight of the black statue of Doorgha, the shiny, horrible body, the leering mouth, the twisting many arms. I caught sight of it behind the shifting curtain of popping, hissing flames. Up they came, lapping the idol's sensuous stone lips with hideous, caressing tongues.

I turned away. Not for me the sight of that terrible mouth, adrip with quivering human flesh—the flesh of the victims which had been sacrificed to her.

Then there was a crash. I turned. I looked up. The ceiling had finally given way completely. The statue had tumbled down — had disappeared in the smoky sea of flames. She was gone like the reeling, tremendous dream of a giant madman, blown into shivering nothingness by the cold, gray hour of awakening.

At the same moment the water had found its way back into the pipes. The pumps worked. Up came the water, sputtering, singing. It rose in sharp flashes of silver and gray and white. It played on the smoldering embers.

This was the end. The temple was gone forever. Doorgha had crumbled into black powder — and where once white-robed, scarlet-marked priests of Siva chanted unclean songs before the goddess of destruction, there was now a golden sea of flames, slashed with purple and black and orange, and furrowing into amethyst and pearl where the hissing water steamed up in vapory clouds.

I looked at the crowd.

To me—though they did not know the foul, secret history of this temple, based on bloody idolatry, cemented with murder and crime, and now blazing up into a red whirlwind of wholesome, salutary, cleansing fire — yes, to me there came a wordless message of hope and sympathy from that massed sea of staring faces—like the resounding, many-toned harmony of infinite peace and concordance; a soft sphere-melody, a soft, *racial* sphere-melody—to me, who had first discovered this temple, whose hands and mind had helped to lay it low, to destroy it.

And then the thought came to me of Hussain Khan and of his last, gigantic attempt, twisted into gigantic failure. It had been the salient point of the western world's deliverance.

For when two months ago, in the course of the masquerade ball given at the Moscow Kremlin, Hussain Khan had attempted with the help of bonbons to poison the Czar and the foreign envoys who had gathered in Russia's premier capital to sign the international treaty of peace and amity; when, thanks to the message which Mascasenhas, Hussain Khan's half-caste servant, had sent me over the telephone, I had stayed the Asian's murderous hand on the very threshold

of success; it was then clear that, whatever the risk, whatever the cost, we must chop off that yellow claw which was reaching out of Asia with ruthless, pitiless strength.

Enough blood had been shed — enough crimes had been committed.

And when I remembered that Hussais Khan had first killed in my own country—in America—I was doubly firm in my resolution to pit my square western power of reasoning against his Oriental, swift-shifty, sharp-crass cunning in one last attempt — an attempt to the death.

I had not been able to suppress a certain feeling of admiration for this daring Asiatic who had appropriated, who had tellingly enacted the famous maxim:

> De l'audace, encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace.
> (Audacity, again audacity, and always audacity.)

But I had made up my mind to fight him with every ounce of strength in my body, with every cell in my brain. I must revenge those murders of my own race.

He had surrounded the altar of the dread Hindu deity whose chief ministrant he was—and he was a Moslem, worshiping the one God who has no equals! — with a barrier of white corpses. And from the gruesome, rotting pile a clay-cold, shriveled, clutching hand seemed to point at me accusingly in pale, stark rigidity—the hand of Senator Kuhne, of California—pointing with a *de profundis* demand for revenge—for the bitter price of blood!

Thence had come a meeting in Downing Street, London. The chiefs of police of all the capitals of Europe had been there.

Together we had gone over the whole history of the organization, of all the crimes which had been committed in the name of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms. Then we had talked of the dangers of the future. The Czar last week! What would the next week bring, what the next month?

It had seemed to me that these pompous, brass-bound police moguls did not appear able to come to any conclusion. They had picked at each other like angry poultry in molting season. They had spoken well — uncommonly well—and fluently.

But they had not developed a single idea, a single remedy worth while. All they had done was to tear each other's propositions into shreds with splendid flourishes of rhetoric in fourteen assorted languages. A chaos as well as a babel. Finally I had considered that it was up to me, an American, a representative of the melting-pot, to new shape that inorganic dust of chaos-babel into some sort of working scheme.

I had developed it right then and there for their benefit and approval.

"We must fight deceit with deceit. We must choke quackery with dupery," I had concluded. "It's the only way. What do you say, gentlemen? How do you like my scheme?"

They had liked it.

It was a good, safe scheme, if I do say it myself. It had several advantages in its favor.

First of all, it was eminently suited to the peculiar talents of the Continental police, who are acknowledged experts and world champions at that charming game which is played with the use of *Polizeispitzel, agents provocateurs*—polite, and very, very official work in the nature of a stool-pigeon's with a bit of reverse English in the method.

Secondly, my scheme steered us clear away from that one danger of which we were all afraid; namely, that a public knowledge of the facts in the case, the facts that there existed an Asiatic organization plotting murder, making private, secret war against every man of note in Europe and in America, might *via* the trail of newspaper head-lines, public indignation,

and lynchings of Asiatics abroad embroil Europe in war with all the Orient. And Europe was still weak and dazed and white from her last fratricidal strife.

So the police had gone to work.

They had thrown wide their steely net. They had tagged every Oriental in Europe who had ever been seen near the temple of Marly-le-Roi, and then they had proceeded to draw the net tight.

Some were arrested on trumped-up charges with a dozen policemen swearing to their everlasting guilt. Others were framed up in a manner which would have made New York blanch with impotent envy. There were currents and wide-eddying side-currents. But the total result was that inside of two months everybody who was in the least tainted by the breath of suspicion was in jail — some as pickpockets, others as second-story men, others again as burglars, fences, and what not.

The jails of Europe had swallowed them—eaten them up. At the expiration of their various sentences there would be more trumped-up charges, more frame-ups, more official perjuries. They would be promptly rearrested, retried, resentenced, and back they would pop into prison—and again and again. Never would they leave prison except for the court-room, and never the court-room except for prison.

Such had been my scheme. They would never return to Asia. They would never again see the yellow, turbaned lands; never be able to speak to their friends and relations at home nor write to them. They would die in prison, silent, inarticulate, harmless—snakes with their fangs drawn.

They had reaped the whirlwind.

The Paris police had used especial care in watching the temple of Marly-le-Roi, including the boats which ply there, coming up the Seine. They had arrested every Asian who showed his face in the neighborhood. Their net had been of finest, deadliest mesh until the gray old villa, which had once been the secret meeting-place of those assassins, was deserted, and until Doorgha, the grim, black goddess of destruction, was alone with the palsying memories of the past.

Then had come the question:

"Shall we search the building, now that all the members of the club are under lock and key? Perhaps we shall find evidence, incriminating evidence."

But I had decided against it. I convinced them that they would be playing with fire which might burn their hands.

"See!" I told them. "You do not *want* to find incriminating evidence. Let sleeping dogs lie. The papers you'll find there in the temple may force your hands into that very life-and-death struggle with all Asia which we are trying to side-step. Discretion is the better part of valor."

"But what will we do with the building?" objected officialdom. "The owner may sell it—let it to somebody. Somebody may find the papers, if there are papers—blab about them, publish them."

"Destroy the villa," I ordered. "Fix up some sort of accident. Give it over to the flames."

Hence the fire. Hence the broken water-main—and the statue of Doorgha crumbling into dry, dark powder at my feet.

I looked at it. I thought of the things it had stood for in the past—the mad, unspeakable things, immeasurable, dusky-glooming, born of black, evil night.

And automatically my thoughts turned to Hussain Khan, who, so far, had escaped the police net; who, together with his servant Mascasenhas, the Goanese half-caste, had disappeared.

The police were sure that he was hiding in one of the great cities—always the safest place for a fugitive from justice. Perhaps he was even in Paris itself. The trains and steamships, the highways, the garages, and

the very aerodomes were being carefully watched. It was evident that he was still in Europe.

I was worried, not only for my own life, not only for Mascasenhas, who had served me faithfully ever since I had shamed him into a realization of what he owed to his ancient Christian faith, to the strain of white blood in his veins, and who was now helpless in the power, the steely web of this master criminal.

I was even worried for Hussain Khan himself.

I did not like the picture of him hunted, trailed, dogged by the police. He was a figure apart from those other Orientals who had been roped in by the wide-flung police net of the Continent. He was to me a personal foe, whom I wanted to fight, to bring down with my own personal weapons, single-handed, strength against strength, craft against craft. He was mine own enemy, and being my enemy, I respected him in a way.

I had known him in Washington when I was still a clerk in the State Department during the day and playing the dancing, social game at night. I had known him then as a charming Oriental polyglot, good-looking, extremely well-bred, with the manners of an eighteenth-century *seigneur,* interesting, a first-class polo-player, and superlatively witty. Since then fate had willed that I should encounter him as a merciless destroyer of the things the white man honors and holds high —the things I honor and hold high.

So we had fought. Sometimes I had won. Sometimes he had won. The honors were fairly even.

His weapons had been the cruel, merciless weapons of his race and faith. But with all that I could not help feeling that in his own wild heart the man was only trying to realize an ideal, evil though it seemed to me; that in his own wild heart he imagined he was doing high service to Asia, the Great Mother, as he used to call her; that in his own wild heart he was a patriot—a patriot every bit as much as Mara, as the *Septembriseurs,* who washed the streets of Paris with aristocratic blue blood during the Reign of Terror, and who forced Marie Antionette to gaze at the stark head of her friend, the Princess Lambelle, stuck on a pike.

Always I had the subconscious feeling that the fight would ultimately narrow down to where it had started—myself against him. And I was not sorry that he had escaped the police. Strange to say, though I loathed the man, I could not help a sneaking feeling of admiration for him, who outheroded Herod with steel of daring, who was a Leonidas in the tocsin of his eloquence, a Robespierre in his sincere, savage, incorruptible ruthlessness.

And here was the organization which he had built up as a strong-buttressed basis of his ruthlessness, smoldering into flame-blackened ruins.

The fire was under control. The crowd was beginning to drift away. I, too, turned to go.

And then I saw him.

He was standing a little apart, his head sunk on his chest, glaring from below his heavy brows with purple-black, cutting eyes.

At the same moment he saw me. But he did not move. He just glanced at me casually. A blue-coated policeman, busy with voluble directions to the homing crowd, came into focus. Hussain Khan pointed at him mockingly, meaningly, fearlessly. And then a smile curled his lips—a thin, pale, tragic smile.

I wondered what mystic voice had called to him through the night, and had brought him here to behold the funeral-pyre, the flame-grave of his savage, daring hopes.

I had no idea of turning him over to the *gendarme.* For again I thought of Mascasenhas. Also I considered again that the fight must narrow down to his hands against mine, his strength matching mine. I bowed to him, as one

saying good-by, and turned on my heel.

I walked down a dark, tree-sheltered side-street which leads to the landing-stage of the Seine boats. It was late. I wanted to catch the little penny steamer back to Paris. Then I heard a quick footstep behind me. A hand was laid on my arm. Instinctively I drew back. I jumped into a position of defense.

Then came Hussain Khan's soft, drawling, arrogant voice out of the dark:

"Do not be afraid, Vandewater. You spared me back there when a word from your lips would have called up those police dogs. I shall not attempt to take your life — not here. I am a Moslem. I know honor. I play the game."

I believed him. I walked on. He fell into step beside me. Once he stopped to light a cigarette. I could see his face illumined through the red glow of his cupped hands. His face was stony, without a quiver. His hands were steady. He had no nerves. He was an Asian.

When we neared the embankment of the river he stopped and detained me with a gesture.

"It is you and I," he said slowly. "You against me and I against you. As was the beginning, thus will the end be. You hate me?"

The question was so naive that I could do naught but smile. But I answered truthfully:

"Yes, Hussain Khan, I hate you."

"So do I hate you. It is fate. And I am an Afghan, and it is said of my people that we have the bowels of compassion of a tawny Bengal tiger. It is rightly said, my friend. Thus you will kill me or I will kill you. There is no other way. It is a blood feud, to be washed out with blood. It is written."

It was over a year since I had taken up the battle-pledge. For over a year I had played with him a deadly game of hide-and-seek—his life or mine. Yet the cold way in which he stated his intention of killing me startled me.

"A fight to the death?"

My voice quavered the least little bit.

He looked at me in silence for a minute. When he spoke his voice was the cold, passionless voice of hate.

"Yes. Even so it was written on the day of Allah's creation. Your life or mine. See, I shall come to you out of the dark, dressed in the robes of a Brahman priest, and on my forehead the scarlet caste-mark of Siva."

The caste-mark of Siva! And he a Moslem, a man who believes in the One Indivisible God, the faith of Islam as interpreted by the Prophet Mohammed! Was he then consciously playing the part of a grim, blood-stained clown in this tragedy of East and West? Was he polluting even his ancient faith for the sake of black, racial hatred?

Impetuously I asked him:

"You are a Moslem. Why, then, the caste-mark of Siva? Why back there"—I pointed in the direction of the ruined temple—"the idol of the Hindu faith which you hate and despise as pagan and blasphemous?"

He smiled.

"A logical question, though tactless. I will answer it, but you will not understand the answer. I will answer it because we both stand with one foot on the threshold of the portal of death; because Azrael, the angel of final oblivion, is hovering about us; because the shadow of his black wings is falling on you and me—on both of us."

His eyes blazed up with a dim-gloaming, sulfurous light which seemed to shine from the nether pit of his soul. But his voice was as cold and even as ever:

"You have been in Asia, my friend. You know how Asia hates and despises the white man. Multiply this hatred a million times, and you will not even near the shadow of the threshold of my hatred for you, for your race, for your land, your faith, your ideals,

your vices—and even your virtues. It is a hatred which chokes me.

"For the sake of it I have allied myself with this bloodiest of Hindu sects. For the sake of it I spit on the ninety-nine holy names of Allah, the One, the King of the day of judgment. For the sake of it I shall come to you dressed in the robes of a Siva priest. For the sake of it I shall daub on my forehead the scarlet caste-mark, that your departing spirit may recognize it."

He was silent. So was I. I could not speak. Something tense was in the atmosphere—tense and dramatic and still gray. Was it the shadow of Azrael's wings, the wings of the angel of death, of whom Hussain Khan had spoken?

Hussain's calm voice shook me back into consciousness of my situation:

"Yes, my friend, I shall come to you even as the destroyer came to Senator Kuhne, to Horst von Pless, and to all those others who have been sacrificed to the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms. Thus, with the caste-mark of Siva on my forehead, I shall come to you out of the dark. Thus shall I kill you. No other way! No other way! Remember that! And yet"—my heart pulsed madly as I heard the same warning he had given me once before—"yet it is possible that you will kill me. Who knows? That also may be written on the last page of the book of my life. But this I know: Even if your hand should bring death to my heart, even then I shall kill you. Even from beyond the grave I shall kill you. It is an assured thing."

"Are you not afraid?" I asked him. "You will have to cross the town—to show your face in the streets of Paris. The police might see you."

"Did they catch me to-night?"

He laughed.

"Gray-minded owls, they! Blind and most objectionable puppy-dogs!"

It was odd to hear how suddenly the man's Oriental blood came out in his phraseology—how he reverted to type through all his polite English veneer.

"The police will never find me!" he boasted. "Find me? By the face of the Prophet of the true God—can you sound the ocean with a jackal's tail?"

He turned to go. I put my hand on his arm.

"Tell me, Hussain Khan, about Mascasenhas. Is he—"

"Safe?"

Again Hussain laughed.

"Yes. Quite safe. I shall not touch him. I shall not bother him. I shall not kill him. I have used him. Now I am through with him. He worked against me. He worked for you. I know that now. But I do not care.

"No, I shall not touch him. The tiger does not paw the hyena's refuse. He is my slave until I die. You see, I am luxurious. I cannot dress or undress myself."

He laughed again, a harsh, demoniac laugh.

"Also, my friend—and this will interest you—he is an expert at mixing the scarlet pigment which I daub on my forehead when I hunt for Siva. So I need that dog of a Goanese. But after my death he will be free. Such is the law of the sacred book of the Koran. And I am a good Moslem.

"Also—what is he to me? Do I fear him? My friend, an elephant is not afraid of fishes. Also it is said that if a mouse be as big as a bullock, yet it would be the slave of the cat."

He turned to go.

"But count not on his help," Hussain warned me. "Not this time. I have clipped his wings. *Au revoir, mon ami!* To-morrow begins the hunting of Hussain Khan."

With a wave of his hand he was off into the dark.

I took the next river-boat back to Paris. I was awake for a long time after I reached my hotel in the Rue St. Honoré. I thought and thought and thought. So the final feud was on,

the last chapter! Beginning with tomorrow it would be a merciless feud; strength against strength, craft against craft.

I wrote several letters, one or two to former college chums, a long one to my mother in Washington, D. C. I wrote home to my lawyer. Then I went carefully over the manuscript of these memoirs, gathered all the chapters which referred in any way to the organization of assassins called the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms, and sent the bundle of typewritten sheets by registered letter to the American ambassador in Paris, asking him to read and forward the manuscript to the State Department in Washington unless I came to claim them myself within two weeks' time. I made a short extract of the same chapters of my memoirs, and with similar instructions sent it to the British colonial office.

I knew that if Hussain killed me he would sooner or later gather another organization around him. Let the British and American governments find a successor for me in case of my death.

I wrote assiduously until nearly lunch-time. I knew that I would be fairly safe by day—quite safe, in fact. For Hussain had told me that he would kill me, dressed as a Brahman priest, with the scarlet caste-mark of Siva daubed on his forehead. There was no doubt that he had told me the truth. To him my death was not plain killing, but a ritual. Hence the caste-mark. Therefore, he would strike me at night. And I considered that if a heavy-limbed, bungling burglar can climb up a porch and through a window, why not a desperate assassin, a fanatic, with the steely, feline strength —the steely, feline cunning of the Oriental?

Call in the police? Hire a bodyguard? Catch the next steamer home to America? No, no! It wouldn't be playing the game. Hussain Khan had played the game the night before when he could have killed me in the dark. I would let no Asiatic outdonquixote me.

Then I remembered one thing he had told me. Mascasenhas was still with him as his servant, as his slave. The Goanese helped him to dress and undress. Mascasenhas was an expert, Hussain had told me, at preparing and mixing the scarlet pigment which the Afghan daubed on his forehead in the form of Siva's caste-mark at night when he came out of the dark a destroyer.

If I could only communicate with the Goanese! But I had no idea where and how to find him. If Mascasenhas could only communicate with me! He would know that murder was in the wind when his master asked him to prepare the scarlet pigment. He would warn me if he could. But Hussain Khan had told me that he had clipped the half-caste's wings.

I was in a brown study. Again and again and again I considered the same two points. Mascasenhas acted as Hussain's valet, dressed and undressed him, and prepared the pigment; and Hussain Khan would attempt my life, robed as a Brahman priest, with the scarlet mark of Siva on his forehead. I looked at these two points from every possible angle. I moved them about like queens on a chessboard.

An idea came to me, a ray of hope and light. But without the help of Mascasenhas it would avail me nothing. Without his help it would be a weak, unfeasible fantom—a fantom glimmering pallid, doubtful, bewildering.

The fear of death was heavy, clogging on my soul. Hussain Khan would come to me out of the dark. He would strike at me as he had struck at all the others—quick, sharp, like the hooded cobra. His was a demoniac legerdemain way of dealing out death —death sneaking in pussy-footed, voiceless, jungle-steeped.

I would not hear his sinister approach. Of that I was certain. I would have to see it. That was my

only hope, but a wan, unfeasible hope without the help of Mascasenhas—and his wings were clipped. He could not communicate with me, nor I with him.

Yet the same idea was uppermost in my mind. I may not have a chance to utilize it. But at all events I would prepare it. So I left the hotel. I went to a drug-store and made a small purchase. I put it into a tiny, flat envelope, and slipped it into my pocket, ready to hand.

Craft against craft? Very well. I would find out.

I lunched at the Café de Naples. Then I returned to the Rue St. Honoré, to my hotel. I knew that I must not sleep nights. I knew that the sunny hours were the safe, sweet hours. It was only at night that danger loomed up, grim-visaged, iron-hearted, death-dealing.

I decided to sleep all afternoon. I stopped again at the drug-store and bought me a heavily opiated sleeping-potion.

I turned into the Rue St. Honoré. At the entrance to my hotel a crowd of shouting, laughing, gesticulating people attracted my attention. I walked up, curious to see what was happening. I looked, and was about to turn away again. It was only a street-fight between two newspaper *camelots*.

These boys have divided Paris into legal and executive wards as sharply defined and as jealous of their individual constitutions and state rights as the sovereign commonwealths which compose the United States of America.

Heaven help the adventurous newsboy who invades the *arrondissement* to which he is not duly accredited!

Just as I turned into the entrance of the hotel two more *camelots* joined the fray to chastise the hardy interloper, the pirate from the foreign *arrondissement*. It was a beautiful exhibition of the ancient and noble French art of self-defense — an upward, mulelike kick with the strength of a sledge-hammer; then run away as fast as you can, duck, fall on your hands and lash out sidewise like a polo pony helping its rider to pass the ball.

But this afternoon I had no time to admire the *savate*. I must go to sleep.

Just as I turned the predatory and adventurous interloper, who was being badly punished, caught my eye.

Now I am one of those obvious Americans. There is no doubt about my nationality. I do not have to have a passport, even in war-time. A foreigner, including a German policeman, has but to look at the toes of my shoes, the cut of my coat, the tilt of my hat, and my upper lip to classify me correctly. The eagle screams about me sartorially.

As soon as the newspaper boy saw me he shouted:

"*Enfin, c'est assez, sal' voyoux.* I know them, the rules; but the *monsieur* there — the American — he has asked me to come and see him. Not so?"

He raised his voice and looked at me with a peculiar, questioning look. The same questioning was in his voice as he addressed me direct:

"M. Vandewater, *hein?*"

I caught the cue.

"Why, certainly. I have been expecting you."

I walked into the thick of the crowd and pacified the other *camelots* with a few francs.

"A matter of business, my friends. He's not trying to steal your trade."

I led the ragged little lad past the staring desk-clerk, into the elevator, and up to my room.

There I turned to the boy to ask him what he wanted. He lost no time in coming to the point. He gave me one of the newspapers which he carried under his arm.

"Here, *monsieur*. Read. On the second page there is a message written for you."

I opened the paper. On the margin of the second page there were a few lines in the handwriting of Mascasenhas. I read:

Am prisoner. Can't leave, telephone, or write letters. Hussain watches me closely.

Ties and gags me when he leaves the house. Am helpless.

Only this boy. Brings morning and evening papers. I have paid him well. Hussain does not suspect him. Send answer by him. Don't know how I can help you. But shall try.

I told the boy to sit down.

"Do you know what this is about?"

"No. The gentleman who gave it to me he also gave me money. The other gentleman he is tall and dark. He says that this one—you know, the one who wrote those lines on the newspaper—is sick, very sick; cannot go out. Then he turns his back to find some money in his bedroom to give to me for the papers. And at once the sick gentleman writes these lines and gives me your name and address and a lot of money. This evening I return there with the newspapers. Is there an answer?"

"Yes, there is. But you must be very careful. Under no conditions must you let the tall, dark gentleman see or hear what you are doing. You understand? It is a little intrigue."

The boy grinned shamelessly and winked at me.

"Woman, *hein?* I thought so."

"Exactly. That's why you must be discreet and careful. Wait two seconds."

I took the small envelope from my pocket. I opened it to see if the contents, the little box I had bought in the drug-store, was intact, slipped it back again, closed it, and wrote a few words on the outside.

Then I gave it to the boy.

"Here you are."

I gave him a fifty-franc note.

"See that he gets this without the knowledge of the other gentleman. You won't have to say a word. Just slip this package to him."

"*Merci, monsieur! Merci bien!*"

A moment later he was gone. I telephoned to the office to call me at six o'clock. Then I undressed, took my opiate, and went to bed.

My nervousness had left me completely. I had made all the preparations I could make. Everything hinged now on Mascasenhas—on the little package I had sent to him.

My sleep was troubled by dreams.

I dreamed that I was in the temple of Doorgha at the festival of the Doorgha-Puja in the far city of Benares. All around me roared an invisible chorus, shouting:

"Kali! Kali! Kali!"

I tried to move, but could not. I was tied—a victim, a white sacrifice, at the feet of the dread, black idol. Death in the form of writhing, hooded cobras was creeping toward me. The temple was dark. There was only the cold, opaque, stony gleam in the eyes of the snakes; and beyond it a huge, pale-blue, phosphorescent light in the shape of the caste-mark of Siva! It seemed to be suspended in mid air by itself, cut off, like Mohammed's swinging coffin in the legends of Islam.

Even in my dream I thought this strange. The caste-mark had been scarlet—scarlet. And here it gleamed silvery-blue, phosphorescent!

A nightmare! Fear clutching and squeezing my soul like a slimy hand, And the snakes creeping nearer—nearer.

Dr-rrr-rrrr! There came the cold, clean ring of the telephone. I jumped out of bed. I took down the receiver.

"Hello! Hello!"

"This is the office, Mr. Vandewater. Six o'clock, sir. You left a call, sir."

"Oh, yes. Thanks. And say! Send to the café and tell them to send me up a large pot of the strongest, blackest coffee they can make."

I made every preparation to keep wide awake during the night. I proceeded mechanically: Ten minutes' stiff setting-up exercise. Then a cold bath; not a quick dip, but down into the water again and again till all my nerves tingled and my skin was aglow. A rub-down with alcohol.

By the time I had finished the waiter brought my coffee. I drank every drop of it.

Then I went for a short stroll in the cool of the evening.

Eight o'clock sharp found me back in my room. I locked neither the door nor the windows, which gave out on the balcony. If I had had only the intention of saving my own life, it would have been fairly useful, a fairly reasonable, thing to do. It would have been at least a barrier, if not a very steep one, between myself and Hussain Khan. It would have at least retarded his death-dealing hand.

But then it was not the question of my own life. My life was but a pawn in the game. It was the question of Hussain's death. I wanted to kill him. It was my sharp-defined duty to kill him. And I could kill him only by giving him a chance to get at me.

For exactly the same reason I turned out the electric light. He would not enter my room if he saw a light in it from the outside. It would show him that I was on guard. Perhaps he would even reckon that I was not alone. It would frighten him away. I would lose my chance. To be sure, he would come again, try again; but I wanted the whole thing finished soon—soon. There is a limit to a white man's nervous staying-power. I had nearly reached it.

I saw to my revolver—oiled it, reloaded it. I twirled the chambers. They rolled smoothly, obedient to the lightest touch of my finger. I kept the revolver in my hand, weighing it. I liked the cool, comforting touch of the steel. Then I moved the bed to the farthest corner of the room, the darkest corner. I stretched myself on it full length.

I was not afraid that Hussain Khan would try any gun-play. He would be afraid of the explosion, the noise, the certainty that he would be caught. He would come as a destroyer sacrificing to the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms the dread power of killing which leaves no trace behind. He would rely on his cunning and on his strength.

I knew that as to physical strength I was but a baby compared to him, though I have played varsity football. As to cunning—I would see. It depended on Mascasenhas, on the message and the little envelope I had sent to him by the hands of the *camelot*.

By ten o'clock it was pitch-dark outside, a bitter, stormy night. Banks of clouds were curtaining the moon—an advantage in favor of Hussain Khan, who would doubtless enter through the window and the balcony. He would appear dressed as a Brahman priest, so he could not come through the lobby of the hotel.

I have fairly good ears, but I had no illusion that I would be able to hear him, even though I was wide awake. This may seem strange, incredible, to the average Westerner. But I know Asia. I knew that Hussain Khan was jungle-bred. He could walk, run, move, even jump like a tiger, on soft-padded feet. I was resigned to the fact that I would not hear him.

There was, of course, a very fair chance that, notwithstanding the black night, I would be able to see him step through balcony and window. But what then? How would that profit me? Could I risk a random shot at a dim figure moving in the dark. Perhaps I would only wound him. And then he would either beat a hasty retreat or—for he had the vitality of an elephant—he would locate me by the flash of my gun and be at my throat in a jiffy. And then—

No, no. I had made certain preparations—the only preparations I could make. I must abide the issue.

I lay there wide awake, straining ears and eyes. I never heard a sound. Everything was perfectly still.

My mind ruminated on forgotten school-lessons—Asia and Europe—white man and brown. Always the brown man had come out of Asia, an avalanche on horseback, sweeping over the face of the earth—south, east, north, west. The Persians and Medes, Hannibal, the Phenicians;

later on Attila, Moors and Arabs, Tamerlane, Genghis Khan. And now again—only they had found new weapons, stealthy weapons of assassination. And Hussain Khan was the spirit of all Asia—calm, serene, merciless.

Suddenly I thought that a black shadow was outlined momentarily on the balcony. I was not sure. Perhaps it was only an illusion. It had been so quick, so fleeting. It might have been the shifting cloud-bank rolling away from the face of the moon.

But I left nothing to chance. I got a firmer grip on my revolver. If it was Hussain, if Mascasenhas had received my message and the little envelope, I would know in a second.

Only a second. But the sensations of a lifetime were swinging in toward me as a flaring-in, a roaring of Tophet and the abyss. Thus came my memories like a volcanic lava-flood. But my spirit was as a thing apart. All my faculties were wide awake. My hand firmly gripped the gun.

The next second—was it the next?—I saw again that silvery-blue, phosphorescent caste-mark of Siva which had haunted my dreams. But this time I was awake. As in my dream, it was swinging in mid air, cut off, without support. The caste-mark of Siva! Not scarlet, but luminously blue.

Still I waited, motionless. I was going to make sure of the end.

Always in front of me, that pale-blue, phosphorous light, shaped in the likeness of Siva's caste-mark. Now it began to swing away from the window, slowly, noiselessly, portentously. It was drawing nearer.

My nerves were taut, like newly stretched piano-wires. My hand was steady. I raised my revolver until the knuckle of my thumb was in a dead line with the middle of the phosphorous light.

I fired.

Then, in the passing, timeless flash of a second, I saw the gleam of the Asian's white teeth, a thin, satanic smile curving his lips, the tightly stretched olive skin over his high cheek-bones.

There was a short, tearing scream, choked off, ebbing into a moan; silence. Then the thump of a heavy body.

I jumped out of bed. I turned on the electric light.

And there, between the window and the bed, lay the body of Hussain Khan, Moslem, Asiatic, hater of the whites.

My bullet had hit him square in the forehead, puncturing that dread caste-mark of Siva. His dark blood flowed lazily across his cheek to the floor.

I looked at him for a long moment. The lips of the dead man were open, drawn back over the gleaming white teeth in an eery, unearthly grin, like the fangs of a wolf who sees, smells the victim, jumps, then finds himself in a trap—finds death in the trap in the moment of killing.

The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms! Like a giant orchid of evil, grown from the seeds of murder and superstition into terrific stature, terrific articulation, threatening all the western world — here, in that grinning, bleeding, yellow death-mask of Hussain Khan, the central Asian, the merciless dreamer of merciless dreams, he lay prostrate.

I looked at my dead enemy, thinking deeply, without hatred, without the sweet feeling of triumph. Then reverently I drew the folds of his turban across his face.

Perhaps I prayed.

I had won. But I was not glad of my victory.

Strength matching strength! Craft matching craft! And it was craft which had carried the day for me.

For in that small package which I had sent to Mascasenhas by the hand of the *camelot* were a few ounces of phosphorus. On the envelope I had written:

If you are faithful to me, Mascasenhas; if my life means anything to you, you will stir this drug into the pigment which Hus-

sain Khan uses to daub on his forehead the scarlet caste-mark of the God of the Invincibly Strong Arms.

Thus ended the affair of the luminous death.

All this happened months ago. As it happened so I wrote it down in these memoirs.

I have won. I have destroyed.

And yet—always the dread thought comes back to me of Hussain Khan's warning:

Even if your hand brings death to my heart, even then I shall kill you. Even from beyond the grave I shall kill you. It is an assured thing.

And here I sit and smoke. The gray dawn of morning comes leering through my open windows.

What dread mystery does the morrow hold forth?

HUSSAIN KHAN IS DEAD, BUT STUART VANDEWATER LIVES ON.

HEREWITH ends the first series of "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms" stories. When we bought them from Achmed Abdullah we regarded the series as complete. We believed that the sudden death of the indomitable, implacable, sinister arch-conspirator brought it to an inevitable and satisfactory close. But it doesn't seem to be destined to end with his demise.

Movements are bigger than the men who initiate them. *Hussain Khan* has gone to his reward, apparently; that is, he has if a bullet in the caste-mark can send him there. But the group of Doorgha-worshipers he trained to destroy the Caucasians who tread on Asiatic toes is still alive, still active, still relentless. However, the interesting question arises: What will happen to *Mascasenhas,* whose soul was as a moon to *Hussain's* sun, now that *Hussain* is dead?

No, decidedly there are still more adventures in store for our young friend, *Stuart Vandewater.* In fact, we have asked Achmed Abdullah to write another series of these entrancing tales for us. And we may safely say that they are going to be more thrilling, more mystical, than the first.

THE BLUSHING BRIDE

BY C. K. V. R.

THEY tell us of the blushing bride
Who to the altar goes
Adown the aisle of a church
Between the friend-filled rows.
There's Billy whom she motored with
And Bob with whom she swam.
There's Jack—she used to golf with him—
And Steve who called her "Lamb."
There's Ted, the football man she owned,
And Don of tennis days.
There's Hubert, yes, and blond Eugene,
They took her off to plays.
And there is Harry, high-school beau,
With whom she used to mush.
No wonder she's a "blushing bride":
Ye gods! She ought to blush!

O'Toole's Fatal Beauty

by Carewe-Carvel'

FAITH, it was this mornin's edition that had it in, and I don't know how manny times I was tryin' to be sneakin' down to Casey's news-stand on me beat corney to be gettin' a copy of the Greensport *Daily News;* but every time 'twas a hurried call over some disturbance in the street sent me flyin' in the opposite direction.

And faith, even this minute wasn't I just returnin' from payin' an official call on Mrs. Mamie Flanagan, a well-meanin' woman ordinary, which lost her common sense complete because her infant had took a suddint cramp, and which, if yez please, turns in two fire-alarm calls to relieve the child's pain I shouldn't wonder? Wurra, the brains of some people should not be let live to think!

Well, annyway, 'twas this mornin's edition had it in, and 'twas me for that paper now or never, so down to Casey's I beats it, bein' all excited concernin' the fact that fellys which had saw the same was tellin' me the *Daily* had me photygraph pictoor done conspicuous on the front page of itself.

Begorry, here it was, all right, all right; but nothin' compared with me true, natooral expression in real life. Sure, it didn't do me no justice at all, at all, accordin' to me idea of thinkin'.

"How is the war comin' on?" says I to Casey with me eyes glued on the pictoor, which he was surprised to see me be payin' out a good cent and takin' away the *News* in me hand which ordinary I was usual glancin' me eye over and takin' away in me head.

"'Tis a flatterin' likeness," says Casey, pointin' significant.

"Sure, it's a horrible war!" says I, not lettin' on I understands and walkin' away.

Faith, I want yez to know me heart beated important as I'm readin' what it was printed concernin' meself beneath the impression of me expression.

It says, so it did, it says:

During the ceremony every woman's eyes were upon handsome Officer Micky O'Toole, whose dashing physique and gallant bearing as best man yesterday at the fashionable Googan wedding, is to-day the talk of the town.

"What d'ye think of that now?" says I to meself, breathin' deep; "and me that modest I didn't know they had writ me up at all.

"Well, 'tis most beautiful!" says I in admiration of their sentiments. "Faith, I must cut it out and have it framed," says I to meself, reachin' for me knife to be doin' the act, when suddint the paper is busted into unceremonious and tore to shreds before me eyes by an excited mob which surrounds me, all talkin' to wunst.

Faith, I was mad!

"What the divil is this?" says I, drawin' me club. "Don't be knockin' into the law like this!" I bellows, indignant. "Divil a bit what is it, annyway?"

"A killin' at Frinch's. The cook has struck," says they, which I backs up upon hearin' the same, I did.

Faith, I had not the heart to be goin' forward. I did not.

"Wurra!" says I, reflectin', for the plain truth is I had her reputation by heart—that cook, I did.

Norah O'Brien were her name, and outrageous were her manners, and she a divil, every inch of her! Bless me soul, but she *were* a divil! Well, well, I would rather be hung than be havin' to interfere with her now, I'll have yez know.

Sure, I heard it on the quiet, I did, that poor old Frinchy—'tis himself keeps a high-toned *table-de-hôtie* eatin' concern next door to Mrs. Googan's house, which it was her daughter Mamie got married last night.

Well, I heard it on the quiet from Mrs. Googan how poor old Frinchy goes down on his own blessed knees to be pleadin' with this Norah O'Brien to please be vacatin' the premises. But, no, says she, she won't, because she likes the place, and the superior wine suits her superior taste, and the food agrees with her complexion; and if she wants to slape the bed is elegant; and says she, she'll not be leavin'. Much obliged she tells Frinchy, imitatin' his manners for a joke, which she's got none of her own, so Mrs. Googan was tellin' me.

And, says Mrs. Googan to me confidential that Mrs. Frinchy told her confidential that Frinchy told her confidential that 'tis mannys the gallon of his elegant fancy wine, which is for customers only, this Norah O'Brien drunk up without not so much as a "by your leave"; and says Mrs. Googan, the poor old soul, puts up like this for two months with the jags of her, which she uses up the mornin' to be acquirin', and the afternoon to be slapin' off the same; and in the evenin' isn't she in elegant fightin' condition, if yez please? And doesn't mind lettin' the neighborhood be knowin' about it, neither.

Faith, that was Norah O'Brien for yez now, so it was.

Sure, I had her number long ago, gettin' the big earful nightly as I'm runnin' in to visit a spell with Mrs. Googan. And wunst didn't we hear a riot in the house next door, and, peepin' through a peep-hole in the fence, didn't we see for ourselves poor old Frinchy come flyin' head first out of his own back kitchen and land sprawlin' in his own vegetable-garden; and didn't we see a good big, strong hoof appear with petticoats atop it, and didn't Mrs. Googan whisper to me audible:

"Whist! 'Tis the foot of Norah O'Brien, that *divil?*"

Wurra, did I know her? Divil a bit did I? And, knowin' so much, could anny man blame me that I wasn't so eager for doin' the big forward-march step toward the fatal spot to be witnessin' the annihilation of meself, perhaps—who knows?

"Whist!" says I, tryin' to be shakin' me two hundred and ninety pounds of uniformed official splendor free of the clingin' crowd; "'tis off of me beat, annyway, this *table-de-hôtie* eatin'-place. Isn't there no wan attendin' to it?" I asks, superior.

"Sure!" says eager voices; "three officers which can't get her out. She knocked wan unconscious."

"Wurra!" says I between me teeth in a nervous chill, I did.

"But dat wuz little Flynn," says a kid no higher than me hand; "Gowan O'Toole can't be licked like dat; he could knock a dozen like 'er t'ell," says he.

Sure, the size of him to be remarkin' like that now! Well, this challenge by a mere babe brings me to me senses, I suppose, for says I, twirlin' me club important and unconscious, takin' big

strides forward, says I, "Begorry, yer right, sonny," says I; "let me lead the way," says I, me fightin' blood riz and me struttin' along eager to the battlefield with half a hundred kids in me wake, makin' reckless bets on me handin' the knock-out blow to that terrible Norah O'Brien.

"Wurra!" says I as I see soup-ladles and bottles and dozens of thin loaves of funny foreign bread two feet long come whistlin' through the basement windy, which struck them rubbernecks violent, but didn't make them budge.

Frinchy and Mrs. Frinchy stands on top of their high front stoop, wringin' their hands and jabberin' t'gether foreign, and lookin' hopeful over the railin' into the basement below with the expectations anny minute to be seein' Norah O'Brien took into custody and be led out.

But Norah O'Brien was not took. Only more and more supplies comes flyin' rapid through the windy, and with the sound of dishes breakin' below Frinchy lifts his eyes to heaven.

'Twas then Frinchy lamps me, six feet three towerin' over the masses, and me form wadin' toward him through the mob; and he calls excited to me: "Mr. O'Toole, Mr. O'Toole!"

I run up the steps to be havin' speech with him, and he embraces me around the belt with affectionate demonstrations, which it was embarrassin' meself, though I'm understandin' he was lettin' me know he was glad to see me.

"Go in please, Mr. O'Toole, for you are beeg; you can do the business quick," says he. "Only leetle policemans," says he; "they sen' me from thee 'eadquarters, and they are of no consequence with thees here cook lady, Mees Norah O'Breean," says he. "She have sistaire in place call 'Peaceville, Massasschoosoots,'" says he. "'Twill be her pleasure to go there, she tell me so; two dollars is thee fare. 'All right,' I tell her; 'here is thee fare, two dollars, please.'"

"She lie to my 'usban'!" says Mrs. Frinchy, buttin' in. "She weel not leave thee kitchen of ourselves — no, navaire, and thee place ees ruin."

"You are so beeg and strong," says Frinchy, handin' me the blarney again. "Go in, please, Mr. O'Toole," says he, "and take away Mees Norah O'Breean," pleads he, which he is distracted 'tis plain, the poor man.

"Sure!" says I; "I'll do it," says I, settin' me jaw.

"What?" shrieks a voice at me back, and some one throws herself violent between Frinchy and me. 'Twas Mrs. Googan, which she spots me from her place in the crowd below, and runs excited up the steps.

"What," shrieks she, "and have his face come out with a pair of black eyes and his looks be all in rooins for the likes of the foreign pair of yez?" says she, wavin' her fist. "A handsome man like him, which he was best man at me daughter Mamie's weddin' only yesterday, and the papers praisin' him for his beauty on the front page!

"Don't yez read the paper?" says she, yellin' it into the ear of Mrs. Frinchy like she was deaf, and grabbin' her hard by the arm; "and haven't yez got no education in the least to be wishin' murder upon the lovely looks of a man like him!" yells she, indignant. "Why don't yez have yer own race disfigured and leave the Irish alone?" she hollers, and, turnin' to me, says she, "Micky O'Toole, you are not goin' down in there?" says she.

"I am goin' down," says I with official dignity, says I. "Mrs. Googan, it is me dooty as a custodian of the peace," says I, which Frinchy gives a sigh of relief, he did.

"What!" shrieks Mrs. Googan, incensed at me retort, blockin' me passage. "Haven't you got no common sense?" says she, "which you havin' saw the antics of Norah O'Brien from me house next door for months. Faith, I'm not goin' to have me daughter Mamie's social career rooined by her best man, which was writ up elegant to-day be gettin' his eyes blacked by a

common scullery maid, I am not, and the papers takin' it up immediate, I am not," says she in a towerin' rage.

"What do I care for your daughter Mamie," says I, "when me dooty calls?" says I, pushin' her aside and runnin' down the steps, which she runs after me, shriekin', and Frinchy runs after her.

And into the basement we goes to be beholdin' the fireworks of Norah O'Brien, which she had drew the kitchen-table into a corney, and herself was barricaded behind the same. Wurra, stuff was flyin' in all direction, and she yellin' she'd be killin' the first cop that'd be attemptin' to be layin' his hands on her, she would.

Well, it was plain by the way they was dodgin her aim that none of them heroes was willin' to be killed if they was knowin' it.

Faith, we no sooner gets inside the door when a loaf of bread strikes me chest and rolls to the floor.

Mrs. Googan was up in arms immediate over the assault, and throws back the loaf at Norah O'Brien. Frinchy runs reckless toward the table, which she rains things upon his head, yellin' at the top of her lungs at him:

"So yer sendin' in more cops, yer foreign heathen, to have me took to jail and locked up," says she. "Take this, and this, and this!" says she, rainin' things at him with a vengeance.

"You shall not be lock up, Mees Norah O'Breean," says Frinchy, excited, throwin' up his two hands like a sign of truce, he did, says he, "eef you will go immediate to thee sistaire in Peaceville, Massasschoosoots," says he. "Let us have a talk, Mees O'Breean, please, and stop for one secon' thees 'orrible bombardment, please."

Norah O'Brien tossed her head, seein' she had every wan at her mercy, annyway, and a few minutes restin' herself didn't make no difference to herself, so says she.

"Sure," says she, "go ahead. What is it?" says she.

"Mees O'Breean, please go to thee sistaire, please," says he. "Didn' I geev to you thee fare money, two dollars, please?"

"Sure yez did, Frinchy. Yer a good sport, so yez are," says she, "and it's right down in me stockin' this minute, so it is," says she, handin' him a beautiful smile.

"Then go, please, and you weel not be lock up. Go to thee station; you weel not be lock up then," says he.

'Twas then Norah O'Brien was filled with suddint emotion. Wurra, wurra, the changes of them wominfolk is tremendjous. From divils to saints before yer can wink. Well, Norah O'Brien bursts into tears. Sure, we all gasps, astonished to see her turnin' on the salt-water pumps like that. Faith, what would be happenin' next?

"You want to get rid of me, Frinchy," says she, sobbin' somethin' fierce. "Faith, we always got along all right t'gether, Frinchy; all the time, didn't we?"

"Sometimes we did, Mees O'Breean; only sometimes," says the little Frinchman, truthful.

"*All* the time," sobs Norah O'Brien, sentimental; "all the time, Frinchy. 'Tis that Mrs. Kangaroo that's causin' all the trouble; that frog-eatin' female—bad cess to her, anny day, from Norah O'Brien," says she. "Now, if yez could only bounce yer wife we could run this joint somethin' wonderful t'gether, we could," sobs she, her shoulders shakin'.

A shiver run through Frinchy, judgin' how he squirms.

"Naw!" says he, shakin' his head with a scowl. "Go to thee sistaire if you please, Mees O'Breean."

Faith, I couldn't stand it anny longer. So I steps forward with authority, seein' that the enemy had broke down, annyway, and things was safe for a minute at least, although Mrs. Googan was for holdin' me back.

"Norah O'Brien," says I, drawin' meself up to an inch over me natooral full height of six feet three, "I'll give yez just wan half-hour to be gettin'

yerself t'gether to take the next train out of here for this place called Peaceville, Massachusetts," says I, standin' over her and pullin' out me watch businesslike, "and if yez don't get a move on it's to the police station for yours without no further parleyin' nor nothin'," says I, bangin' me club on her table and makin' what was left of the dishes be rattlin' menacin'.

Every wan leans forward breathless to be hearin' her decision.

Norah O'Brien was still sniffin' into her apron from her recent cloudburst, which her shoulders was still goin' up and down with emotion.

"Well," says she, "it will take a mighty handsome man to lead me from this place at all," says she—which the other cops which has dodged her for twenty minutes couldn't help laughin' at that.

"Well, what's the matter with meself?" says I, replyin' to Norah O'Brien. "Sure, I don't mind showin' yez the front door," says I.

"Gowan," says she, lookin' up and tossin' her head, "I want proper escortin' to the station, I do."

"All right," says I; "go up for yer travelin' suit-case," says I.

"Not on yer life!" says she with a grand air. "Send it down by a page," says she.

Frinchy was not hesitatin' to be doin' her biddin', and he disappears immediate for her travelin' suit-case.

Then when the travelin' suit-case is brought down Norah O'Brien suddint finds fault with her black straw hat.

"It isn't in no style whatever to be wearin' in the company of a handsome young spark like yerself," says she. "Sure, it's lackin' color," says she. "I shall be wantin' one of them swell green stand-up ribbon bows sittin' smart on top of the crown," says she. "I shall have me hat trimmed before I go," says she, poundin' the table with her fist.

"Wurra!" says I, losin' patience. "Faith, the police department can't trim yer hat," says I.

"I don't care who does it," says she. "I shall not stir till the job is did to me satisfaction. A bolt of shamrock-green ribbon I'll be wantin' five inches wide," says she, sittin' down on one chair and puttin' the two big feet of herself upon another to await developments concernin' her hat.

Faith, I was moppin' me brow and Frinchy starts to wringin' his hands hopeless again, and sayin' unholy words to himself in his own language. And Mrs. Googan, which had been sittin' quiet, starts to have heated consultations with the other three cops, and Danny O'Moore finally announces he'll go down the street to be gettin' the ribbon.

When he comes back Mrs. Googan takes it from his hands, to be twistin' it into a bow, I'm thinkin'; but Norah O'Brien shrieks like a fiend and grabs it out of her hands.

"'Tis not for you to be doin' that," says she with a murderous look. "'Tis only them Frinch has the knack to be creatin' one of them high-toned chick do-funnys like I'm wantin'," says she. "'Tis Mrs. Kangaroo, which much as I'm ag'in' the creature," says she; "faith, 'tis her that has the little way with her of twistin' up one of them smart ribbon things."

No sooner she lets it out then Frinchy disappears and comes draggin' in Mrs. Frinchy, which says nothin', but speaks volumes in the looks she's handin' Norah O'Brien out of the coal-black eyes of herself. Immediate she sets to work on the fancy thingm'bob, and, faith, her fingers flew!

'Twas two whacks and a few stitches, and there was the millinery all did up with beautiful taste. Norah O'Brien grabs the same with not so much as a "Thanky, m'am!" and slaps it rakish on the top of her high pompadour. Wurra, she looked like the very divil; but nobody says a word, knowin' it was a critical moment; only herself is murmurin' admiration of her own looks in the lid.

Then, if yez please, Norah O'Brien sets to constructin' a big bow out of what's left of the shamrock-green ribbon, and ties it deliberate on to her travelin' suit-case.

Faith, we all give a gasp at that, and she informs us that she's ready to be startin'.

"Well, then," says I, pointin' dramatic, "take up yer travelin' suit-case and walk."

"What," shrieks she, "with a handsome Johnny like yerself in attendance! Don't make me laugh," says she.

Faith, the beat of her was never known for nerve! Sure, I stood thinkin' a minute.

"Please, for peace, Mr. O'Toole!" begs Frinchy.

"Well, take off that St. Patrick's Day decoration then," says I.

"What?" says she; "yer mad!" says she. "It goes as it is," says she; "so ye'd best be changin' yer mind before I'm changin' mine," says she.

"Bad cess to yez," says I, handin' her a black look.

"Please, for peace, Mr. O'Toole!" comes again the tearful voice of Frinchy at me back.

"Do I go or stay?" asks Norah O'Brien, standin' with arms akimbo and tossin' her head like she owned the earth.

"Divil a bit you *go!* Confound yez, annyway!" says I, in no good mood at all, takin' up the travelin' suit-case.

Norah O'Brien laughs inhuman then, and Mrs. Googan shrieks in rageful tones of speech:

"It is an outrage, Micky O'Toole. Me Mamie's social career is rooined if the reporters lamp yez escortin' a common cook."

"What about me own social career?" says I with some heat. Whereupon Norah O'Brien turns on Mrs. Googan, demandin' in menacin' tones and shakin' her fist:

"Who is a common cook?"

"Yerself. Who else?" shrieks Mrs. Googan. "Who d'ye think yer are, annyway?" she yells right into her face.

"Me?" yells back Norah O'Brien right into her face. "Me? I'm Cleopatry of Ireland, which the King of England he was forever at me feet!" says she.

"Some feet," comments one of the other cops, which forgot himself, I suppose; and Norah O'Brien, wavin' Mrs. Googan and meself aside, makes a lurch to pommel him with her umbrelly.

Wurra, I went after her then with me club to stop her from killin' the cop, and Frinchy starts to be tearin' his hair again in despair.

"Yer under arrest without no more to-do, Norah O'Brien," says I with a forceful air, says I, "if yer don't be leavin' this instant, and no more nonsense," says I.

"Very well," says she, readjustin' the hat of herself, which had slipped down the back of her neck in the shuffle, "I'll be led out right on yer arm with proper ceremony as becomes me high station in life," says she, wavin' her hand defiant at Mrs. Googan.

"Wurra!" says I with dread to be facin' the waitin' mob as Norah O'Brien deliberate takes me arm with airs like a grand lady.

Faith, with her hangin' to me arm I jerks her violent through the door then with no more argymints; only the fact that she was blowin' kisses to him and sayin', "Ta, ta, Frinchy, for a while, me darlint!" says she.

"Adoo *forever,* Mees Norah O'Breean!" says he fervent-like; "forever adoo!"

Well, I had to fight me way through the mob of waitin' rubbernecks blockin' the pavement, I'll have yez know; and, begorry, I was gettin' nervous chills to be hearin' the kids yellin' and fillin' the air with cries of, "Hooray for O'Toole! He licked 'er—he licked 'er!"

'Twas just as I thought. Norah O'Brien lifts up her ears at that.

"What?" says she. "Don't yez believe it," says she, stoppin' to be makin' a speech. "I want it understood, I do, that I'm leavin' of me own free will, I am," says she, addressin' the mob and wavin' her fist; "'twas the beautiful map and the sublime physique of himself," says she, "that charmed me over."

"'Tis a burnin' outrage!" yells Mrs. Googan, who is walkin' on the other side of meself. "Me Mamie's weddin's best man to be discussed like a political speech in the common street! Faith, and the reporters writin' up the disgrace! Wurra!" wails she.

Sure, I wasn't sayin' a word, was I? — only makin' rapid strides to the station as I'm pullin' ungentle along the heavy bulk of Norah O'Brien, which is entertainin' the lively mob with yellin':

"Hooray, hooray for the curse of fatal beauty!"

BRAVO! BRAVISSIMO!

BY JANE BURR

WHY should I borrow
A single sorrow
To cloud the morrow
And bring me pain?

To beam and rafter
I hurl my laughter
At what comes after—
My soul is vain!

I hate life's stubble!
I shun life's trouble!
For youth's a bubble
Of rainbow shades.

And I shall wander
The witching yonder
And rashly squander
Until it fades!

So swathe my graces
In golden laces
And veil the places
Of homely sights.

Yea, call my silly,
But youth's a lily
That, willy-nilly,
Shall have its rights!

Farquhar the Heroic

by Vance Palmer

THE winches had stopped rattling, and on the wharf the native boys, with beads of perspiration gleaming on their bronzed shoulders, squatted under the tin roof, smoking cigarettes and watching the handful of white passengers ascend the gangway.

It was a little after noon, and no wind stirred the palms that straggled down to the water's edge. The high-pooped, bluff-bowed old steamer, snuggling into the wharf and weighted down to Plimsoll mark with good island copra, looked like some big sea-monster asleep in the heat, though from her single stack a thin spiral of smoke curled up as the engines began to get up steam.

Under the vertical sun the very paint of the sides appeared to blister, and the cluttered decks sweated pitch at every seam.

Mowbray, the chief engineer, was in his overalls, leaning over the side and chatting with the mate.

"It's three years since I've been on this run," he said. "And it's the first time I've ever seen a pretty woman traveling, so keep your eyes skinned for a typhoon."

The chief mate was a big, bulky man, with a curious boyishness about his sun-bitten face, and gray, imaginative eyes. His whole figure looked as if it had been carved out of finely tempered steel.

"Who is she?" he asked lazily.

"I did know her name," said Mowbray; "but I forget. She's the resident magistrate's daughter, I believe, and she's just married Packenham, that big planter from over Honolulu way."

"What?" snapped the chief mate suddenly.

"Packenham," repeated Mowbray. "I guess you remember him—a big, husky fellow with three chins and a habit of going to sleep with a cigar in his mouth. He's traveled with us more than once when you were on this run before."

But Farquhar, the chief mate, was looking over the rail at the people who had gathered at the foot of the gangway, and he did not hear any more. Save for a slight rigidity of his features there was nothing to show that he took any particular interest in the proceedings, though Mowbray wondered why he let his cigar burn to white ash between his fingers.

A puzzling man at all times was Farquhar, with his big, slow ways, and the sense of slumbering force that always resided in his steel-gray eyes and the whole bulk of his heavy frame. The tropic suns that had baked his

skin seemed to have withered up all the softness of his nature, though the men in his watch swore by him and hung on the lightest word that fell from his lips.

"Another ten days to Honolulu," sighed Mowbray, throwing away the stump of his cigarette, "and our bunkers filled with rotten slag that 'll keep us up to our eyes in it all the time."

He sauntered back to the engine-room, while Farquhar remained looking over the rail, watching the bo's'n and three sailors haul up the gangway. The woman who had come aboard last was hanging over the side, talking to some friends on the wharf below; but there was a rather hysterical note in her laughter.

She was hardly more than a girl, with a figure slim as a young palm, and a soft, evanescent beauty in her creamy skin, full lips, and dusky hair.

As the boat edged away from the wharf and began to waddle out to open sea, she stood still, fluttering her handkerchief, while beside her the big man in a topi and white ducks set fire to a cigar and was clumsily facetious. Farquhar turned away with a curious little tension of the lips and nostrils.

"Well, why not?" he thought. "As well he as any other man—"

But there was a slight drumming in his ears as he went to see that the hatches were battened down and everything made tidy aft. Somehow his voice seemed unfamiliar to him as he rapped out his orders, and the life had gone out of his eyes.

Far behind them the little port, with its tin-roofed houses and thatched native huts, began to be covered in a haze of blue mist, and, with the screws leaving a path of opal water in their wake, they tramped on toward the Golden Gate.

It was only when the quick dusk came down and the lights showed out under the canvas awnings that Farquhar passed up the passenger-deck on his way to the bridge. The woman, lounging in her chair by the saloon-door, looked up from her novel, stared a moment in disbelief, and then colored to the roots of her hair.

"*You!*" she exclaimed.

It almost seemed as if the vitality had gone out of her. He stopped for a moment, and so perfect was his self-control that even his eyelids did not flicker.

"You're surprised," he said, with a touch of irony. "I might have been, too, if I hadn't seen you come aboard. And I was half expecting to meet you here, anyway."

Somehow, his voice made her wince, as if every word had a physical sting for her. She asked lifelessly:

"When did you come back?"

"This is my first trip on the old run," he replied. "I've been on the Australian coast for two years; in the China Seas for one. It isn't easy to get out of the old groove, though."

Her eyes were watching him as though trying to read what lay behind the iron mask of his face.

There was something almost brutal about his cold detachment. All the while as they talked on her fingers kept fluttering to the lace at her throat, and her lips were unsteady. It was obvious that he knew, yet by no word or gesture did he betray either interest or emotion.

While he lit a cigarette she lay still, looking up at him silently, and wondering why she remembered so well the wrinkles round his eyes and the way the hair curled on his temples.

"The chief engineer told me there was a pretty woman aboard, and that it was a bad omen," he said with a jerky laugh.

The woman's face made it plain that anger or contempt would have hurt her less than this forced jesting; but just then Packenham came lounging along the deck with the news that the first gong had gone for dinner, and, with a careless nod, Farquhar sauntered off to the bridge.

It was going to be a rough night, for the sea was leaden, and small, sul-

len clouds hung around the horizon. He was glad of it, somehow—glad of the unsteady, monsoonal wind that began to tug at every funnel and tarpaulin and blow the salt mist in his eyes.

It came as a relief, too, when the captain sent word from his cabin that he was sick, and left the whole responsibility on his shoulders, for he wanted something to fill his mind. After every port it was the same, for the captain was a hard-bitten old drunkard, with very little capacity left to him save that of knowing what men he could trust; and Farquhar never grumbled, no matter what lay before him. He went his quiet way always, saying little and seeing all things.

There followed varied days, when the water was like blue glass during most of the sunlit hours.

From time to time, however, little monsoonal storms came darting in and struck the high-pooped old steamer with the force of a shell, making the canvas awnings beat a fusillade like the crackle of musketry. For a while the sea would be whipped into a heaving mass of tortured foam, only to be beaten down an hour later by the driving rain.

Farquhar passed about the ship quietly, with apparently no thought in his head but the orderliness of the gear and the safety of the deck cargo, but a pair of dark eyes burned into his consciousness continually. In his soul he wished he could blot out the two thousand miles that lay between them and Honolulu.

It was Mowbray who touched the raw spot unthinkingly one evening when the green seas were washing over the for'ard decks.

"What did I tell you?" he grinned. "It's going to be a rough passage. A pretty woman is always a Jonah on board a ship."

Farquhar's eyes blazed suddenly.

"Fool!" he blurted out. "Why the devil can't you—"

But he pulled himself up abruptly and turned on his heel with a gruff laugh.

In the long, hot nights, when the boat slugged on through seas that were dappled with uncertain moonlight, he lay in his bunk wondering whether it had not been altogether his own fault that things had turned out thus. She had always been weak, responsive, dependent upon flatteries; the bigger part of him had recognized it and forgiven it, even when in self-righteous pride he had turned away from her.

That night three years ago came back to him with the sound of dull surf booming upon the reef, and he remembered the pain in her voice and the cold scorn in his own. There had always been a strain of hardness in his fiber, and he could not blind himself to the fact that she had let other men take her name lightly upon their lips.

"Ah, well," he thought; "we pay toll for most things, but most of all our pride."

But Packenham! It would have hurt him less if she had married one of the light-hearted boys she had flirted with in the days gone by.

Going about the deck in the busy round of his daily work he began to watch the man, and with every passing hour bitterness and hatred became concentrated in his eyes. He had always disliked him, but now that vague aversion became sharpened into a hard hostility, and was accentuated by a score of things.

From the bridge he watched him as he lay in his chair during the heat of the day, his eyes shut, his chin in three folds over his soft collar, and the butt of a burned-out cigar between his lips. There was nothing about him that would appeal to any woman, save, perhaps, the domineering masculinity that slept softly beneath his easy indolence.

And by the look in his wife's eyes it was plain to Farquhar that she had never really loved him; something

seemed to have withered in her, and her eyes, that had once looked out so lightly upon the world, were shadowed by a hint of tragedy.

He avoided her whenever he could, passing down the deck as if he were unaware of her cane lounge drawn up beneath the awnings, and even when their glances met there was a cold brusquerie about his nod. In a few more days the monsoonal storms were left behind, and the boat slipped softly through easy seas, with scarcely a ripple at the bows and a trail of opal water widening in their wake.

Two nights before a landfall was expected, violins sounded out on the deck, and the soft purring of the screws was drowned by the thrashing of feet and the low laughter of women as they swung in the dance.

Farquhar slipped quietly up forward and sat on the hatch to smoke his pipe, for through the port-holes of the smoke-room he had seen Packenham sifting playing bridge, with a glass of whisky at his elbow, and he knew that somewhere in the shadows there was a woman waiting alone. Old tunes hummed in his head and lilted in his blood, and he tried to shut out everything from his mind save the purple curve of the sky pricked with faint stars, and the dull vibration of the engines as they thrummed their way along.

"Two days," he thought. "I wonder—"

The woman who had come forward also to be out of the sound of the music did not not see him till he raised himself on his elbow to strike a match. The yellow, uncertain flame, as he sucked it into his pipe-bowl, lit up her face and his also. For a moment she was inclined to draw back, but his bantering smile brushed away the awkwardness that lay between them.

"Don't let me frighten you," he said with a touch of irony. "You came for'ard to get out of the crush, and so did I. Besides it's cooler here than under the awnings."

There was, at any rate, an atmosphere of easiness about his aloofness. She sat down and he smoked in silence.

A little way off a cockney steward had crawled out of the stifling heat of the glory-hole with his mandolin, and was humming a song to a three-fingered accompaniment. The woman said suddenly, with a touch of bitterness:

"I sometimes wonder whether you're made of steel."

"Indeed," he said laconically. "Why, please?"

"I don't know. You always take everything for granted. You never even ask for an explanation."

He took his pipe from his mouth, and for a moment the irony passed out of his eyes.

"I don't see that there's any particular need for explanations from either of us, Aileen. You were free enough, God knows. When I left you that night I never intended to come back."

She seemed to be trying to subdue something in her throat.

"The things you said were brutal," she put in. "And most of them were untrue."

"Perhaps so," he admitted. "They didn't come easily off my tongue then; and, anyhow, it's no use remembering them now when it's too late to call them back."

Something about the droop of her shoulders softened him in spite of himself, and in the dim light her brown hair held a dusky magic in its depths. The memories that had tormented him during the past three years came back with a peculiar force now, and in the open spaces of his soul they seemed to walk forth like ghosts and make grimaces.

She seemed so frail, so pitiful, so incapable of facing that irony of life to which he had become inured. On the farther side of the deck the steward, his white coat thrown open, lay back in a discarded steamer-chair and

hummed a sentimental song in a tired monotone:

"When I come back, my little Lulu girl,
I'll tell you what I'll do."

The woman shivered as though a chill wind had struck her, and the man rose. He was thinking of Packenham sitting at the bridge-table, his cigar tilted upward from the corner of his mouth, and his pale eyes fastened on the pips of his cards.

"Forget everything but the future," he said. "We can't call back what we've done, but at least we can face the consequences without whining."

"I only wanted to tell you I'm—sorry," she faltered.

"Sorry? Well, perhaps I am, too," he said dryly. "But I'm not going to let anything break my life, and I don't guess you will either."

There seemed little more to be said.

Lying awake in his bunk an hour later he wondered whether in the days to come he would ever forget the tilt of her chin or the way her mouth drooped at the corners. But an odd sense of fatality possessed him, and a mist shut out the horizon whenever he looked ahead.

There danced through his blood, too, a feverish unrest, almost a sense of expectancy that would not let him close his eyes, so that when the shock came he was prepared.

It was hardly more than a slight jolt that shook him in his berth, but there followed a sound like the tearing of coarse cloth. He sprang out of his bunk and dressed hastily, yet all the time he had a curious impression that he had foreseen all this long ago.

The little, red-faced captain was on the bridge when he got there, his eyes strained and bloodshot; and from the decks below there came shrill whistles as the bo's'n piped the crew to quarters.

"It's all up," said the captain bitterly. "It was an old derelict, with hardly a foot of freeboard above the water, and it's ripped the heart out of her. I always knew this old hulk would go down beneath me."

He was muzzy with drink and despair, and Farquhar knew that it was on himself that the whole responsibility rested, as it had done almost since he came aboard.

The engines had stopped, and the clumsy old trader, with her high, unstable decks, gave a lurch to port as the seas struck her. The deck-lights were blinking uncertainly, and there was a patter of bare feet in the passages as the passengers came running out with the sounds of the stewards' gongs in their ears and a half-hysterical excitement in their eyes.

"Get them into the boats, Farquhar," the captain shouted. "For God's sake hurry!"

But Farquhar needed no command. Before the captain's voice sounded out he had the first boat filled with women and swung out from the davits. More than once on wilder seas he had been through all this before, and he had no reason to lose his nerve now.

He stood like a granite image rapping out orders, while the sailors swarmed about the boats, and above the medley of voices one woman called out for her husband and another for her dog.

"Steady!" he shouted. "There's no need to lose your heads. There are places enough for all."

But he knew in his soul that this was untrue. A little careless handling had smashed one boat back at Pago, and two others had rotted in the davits where they had hung unused for a decade.

The wash on the port side was running to the rail, and from time to time the old tub shuddered like a thing in pain. When the third boat was filling Farquhar saw a white figure standing in the shadows, her eyes wide and staring, her lips shut tight. His fingers trembled as he seized her arm.

"Come on!" he said thickly. "There are a few more places."

But she clung to the stanchion.

"No; I'm going to wait till the last. I want to wait."

Packenham was beside her, but his throat was dry and he said no word. Down below them the starlit water was ripped from time to time as though by white lightning, and both men knew what it meant.

In the very air the presence of those silent scavengers of the sea seemed to make itself manifest, till even the inanimate wood and steel of the quivering ship appeared to register its horror. Farquhar seized the woman in his arms and bore her to the boat.

"There's no danger," he said. "Molokai's only a day's row away, and the sea's smooth. You've nothing to be afraid of."

But he was pitifully conscious of the touch of her warm hand on his throat. It vibrated through his being, purifying all his thoughts as he turned to the file of waiting men, so that the hard hostility died in his heart. There was but one more place, and he could see the tragic eagerness in their eyes as they watched for him to call.

"You, Packenham!" he jerked out.

The old captain, whom life had robbed of everything but the power to face things gamely at the end, was watching from the bridge, and Farquhar went up to take his place beside him. They lit their cigarettes and waited with a strange tranquillity, knowing what lay before them, and conquering it before it came.

Far out to sea the three packed boats kept together in the darkness, and there was hardly a sound but the splash of oars. Packenham, sitting in the stern of the last, looked at the black hull that was dimly outlined against the horizon, and said with a sigh of personal relief:

"She won't keep afloat more than a few minutes longer, and there are half a dozen poor beggars left behind. Farquhar's a white man. I suppose it was old time's sake made him give me the last place."

But he did not quite understand the sob that sounded from the throat of the woman beside him.

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THE SHORN LAMB

BY RUTH CROSBY DIMMICK

I HAS traveled fah by de dusty road
An' walked by de shady lane,
My back has toted a many a load,
My heaht felt many a pain.
I's got no home 'cept whah I am,
But I always feel dat He
Who sheltahs de win' to de po' sho'n lam'
Will somehow sheltah me.

Oh, de cloud sometime look a mighty black
An' lowerin' in de sky,
But I jus' rise and shif' my pack
An' 'low it will soon pass by,
Fo' it makes no diffunce whah I am
Somethin' seems to say dat He
Who sheltahs de win' to de po' sho'n lam'
Is a lookin' aftah me.

Co-incidents

by William Rose

THE Canadian Pacific Express flew wildly along. Every one in the sleeper had retired but the three of us occupying the smoking-room.

The man with the bald head and florid face was talking; in fact, he had done most of the talking. I ventured an occasional word, while the third member of the chance acquaintanceship, a white-haired traveler, had been mostly an interested listener as he smoked his pipe and smiled indulgently at our discussion.

"No," the first was saying, "this old world is a small affair, and to me quite commonplace. Pardon me if I seem to boast, but really I've traveled so extensively and view life from so many angles that now I find only repetition—'nothing new under the sun,' to use a trite expression."

"That's strange," I protested, "and just the opposite of my own experience, for new situations and unheard-of dénouements are constantly falling within my mental horizon."

The older man looked kindly at us with his deep-set blue eyes as he thoughtfully stroked the full white beard that covered his face. But still he left the conversation in our care, and smoked on in silence.

"Well, I'll grant you all that from your standpoint," the talkative one continued, "and yet, examined in the light of a well-rounded career like mine—again please excuse the apparent egotism—the things that might strike you as novel or unusual would impress me as not only uninteresting but entirely to be expected under the attendant circumstances. In other words, what you might accept as a *coincidence* probably would be taken by me as a mere *incident,* and soon dismissed as such from my mind."

"Undoubtedly," I returned, warming somewhat to the subject, "our view-points are quite at variance. My observation time and again has revealed many cases of positive coincidence, one of such being of vital importance to me, since it was directly concerned with my own life. It happens that this very section of country is the setting of the story—an occurrence of fifteen years ago."

"I shall be pleased to hear about it," cordially returned the other, "though you must not expect to convince me of the correctness of your theory."

Glancing toward the old man, I discovered that he was fast asleep, his head resting on the window-frame. His pipe, released from his loosened grasp, had fallen to the floor. Reaching down, I picked up the pipe, removed the ashes, and laid it on the window-sill beside him. Then I proceeded:

"As a young man, just out of college, I obtained employment as deputy city marshal. Apprehending offenders

was not particularly attractive to me, yet this job furnished an occupation till something better presented itself. The duties of my position were easy enough, and things rocked along quietly for a few months. The cases on which I had been detailed had been of minor importance, and it began to look as if I must seek new fields if I wanted adventure and excitement.

"Then one morning our little city awoke to the fact that its First National Bank was in serious straits, and the cashier, Bradford Stone, was nowhere to be found. Naturally, the community was perturbed, and when a few days later it was discovered that Stone was an embezzler to the extent of more than $50,000 we could hardly regard the matter with any degree of composure.

"For Bradford Stone was one of the honored young men of our city, prominent in church work and a social favorite. I remember how remarkable it was deemed that he should have been elected cashier of the First National at the age of thirty—this was five years later — but every one considered his promotion a just recognition of unusual ability.

"You can imagine that every energy was bent to trace Stone and bring him to justice. In my official capacity I followed several promising clues, but never could catch up with him. Right in this section of Canada, two months after his flight, hope burned high in my bosom, for several times I was close on his trail, in the end only to be outwitted by his cleverness.

"Well, Mr. Bradford Stone remained uncaptured, and so the reward offered for his return and prosecution was unclaimed. In the course of time, as in most cases, the matter was all but forgotten.

"Next year I engaged in a mercantile business, which I since have retained. A long time later — about a score of years, to be exact — I was traveling through Canada on a pleasure-trip—in just about this region.

"I had noticed a young woman of neat and refined appearance sitting two seats in front of me. Her eyes were red and swollen, and she seemed in much distress. It was evident that only great self-control enabled her to keep back the tears. My heart was moved; and, though unmarried, I felt that my forty years would permit me to address and comfort her without impropriety.

"She seemed grateful for my interest and sympathy, and explained that she had been called home from an Eastern college on account of the tragic death of her mother when their home burned two days before. She told me her name, Alma Storey, and some of her family history—how they had always lived at Canfield; how she, an only child, had been reared to make herself useful; and how, as a finishing touch to her education, she had chosen an economic course at college. Her mother and father she described as devoted to one another.

"'Poor dad!' she sighed; 'I almost fear to meet him at the station—I know he is heart-broken!'

"In an hour we drew up at Canfield. After assisting Miss Storey off the train with her bags I turned to get aboard, but she begged me to wait a moment and meet 'dad,' who at that instant was coming toward us.

"As his gaze met mine there was immediate recognition by both of us, for Alma's dad was none other than Bradford Stone, the man that had eluded all efforts at capture years before. I would have known his clear-cut features anywhere. He was clean-shaven as formerly, but of course looked much older than when I last saw him.

"Turning suddenly, he ran, soon disappearing into a thicket that skirted the river, which was quite near the station. The poor girl was utterly amazed, as was every one that had witnessed the affair. Several acquaintances followed his mad flight, but soon lost track of him in the dense un-

derbrush, as it was already dusk and none too light even in the open.

"Poor Alma, torn by grief and keyed to a high nervous tension, was unable to bear this latest shock, and with a gasp collapsed. I supported her until she could be removed to a near-by bench. Restoratives were administered promptly, and she regained consciousness soon after.

"Meanwhile, my train had pulled out, but I did not regret being left behind if I could be of any assistance to the young woman who had so strangely fallen into my care.

"To condense the story, I will state that shortly afterward I married Alma, and she has meant everything to me since then. Of course, I never revealed the true name of her father, nor the cause of his astonishing action that evening at the station.

"Instead, I let her believe, as all his townsmen did, that a sudden madness, following the loss of his wife in their burned home, had possessed the man and caused his suicide. For he was never heard of from that day, and his coat was found at the point on the river-bank where he jumped into the water."

"Most interesting, I'll admit," commented my listener, looking at his watch; "still, I can't see that it was so unusual for you to get on the train with the daughter of the man you had trailed years before. Your becoming acquainted with her and what followed was a matter of course. I'm sorry I must leave the train at the next stop. I would like to talk longer with you, and if possible elucidate my position to such an extent that you would come to my way of thinking."

Rising, he started to reach for his bag, and in doing so brushed against the old man, who all the while had been sleeping peacefully. The latter roused up and looked around stupidly as the other asked his pardon, and at the same time held out a hand to me.

"At any rate, I am indebted to you for an enjoyable evening, though we can't agree upon the relative values of 'incident' and 'coincidence.' My name is Bancroft. I hope we shall meet again, Mr. ——"

"Dugger," I supplied; "James Dugger. Good luck, Mr. Bancroft!"

Bancroft went out into the passageway just as the locomotive whistled shrilly for the next stop.

Turning, as I heard my name excitedly whispered through clenched teeth, I was amazed to see the hitherto silent old man swaying back and forth in his seat, his gaze fixed intently upon me, his whole face working and twitching with uncontrolled violence. His eyes stared wildly; he seemed transfixed with surprise—or terror.

"Jim Dugger!" he gasped. "My God, I might have known it, but I didn't recognize you till then. Don't—don't you know me, Jim?" His supplicating manner and trembling form were pitiful.

"Can it be Bradford Stone?" I whispered, amazement all but taking my breath. "Where in the world—We all thought you were dead! What—"

I was too excited to take in the situation clearly, but in the avalanche of words that all at once poured from his mouth what most impressed me was his inquiry about Alma.

"I married her, and—"

"Yes, yes! I learned that years ago," he interrupted breathlessly; "but where is she now, and does she know—all?"

"I never told Alma anything of your past, Mr. Stone. I thought it much better not to do so. Still—don't you want to see her?" I asked suddenly. "She's in this car. Or is it better to leave her—"

A sudden application of the air-brakes was a forceful reminder that the train was coming to a stop just as Bancroft poked his head into the room and said, smiling:

"Good-by, again! Remember, Dugger, not to be impressed unduly by the *incidents* of life!"