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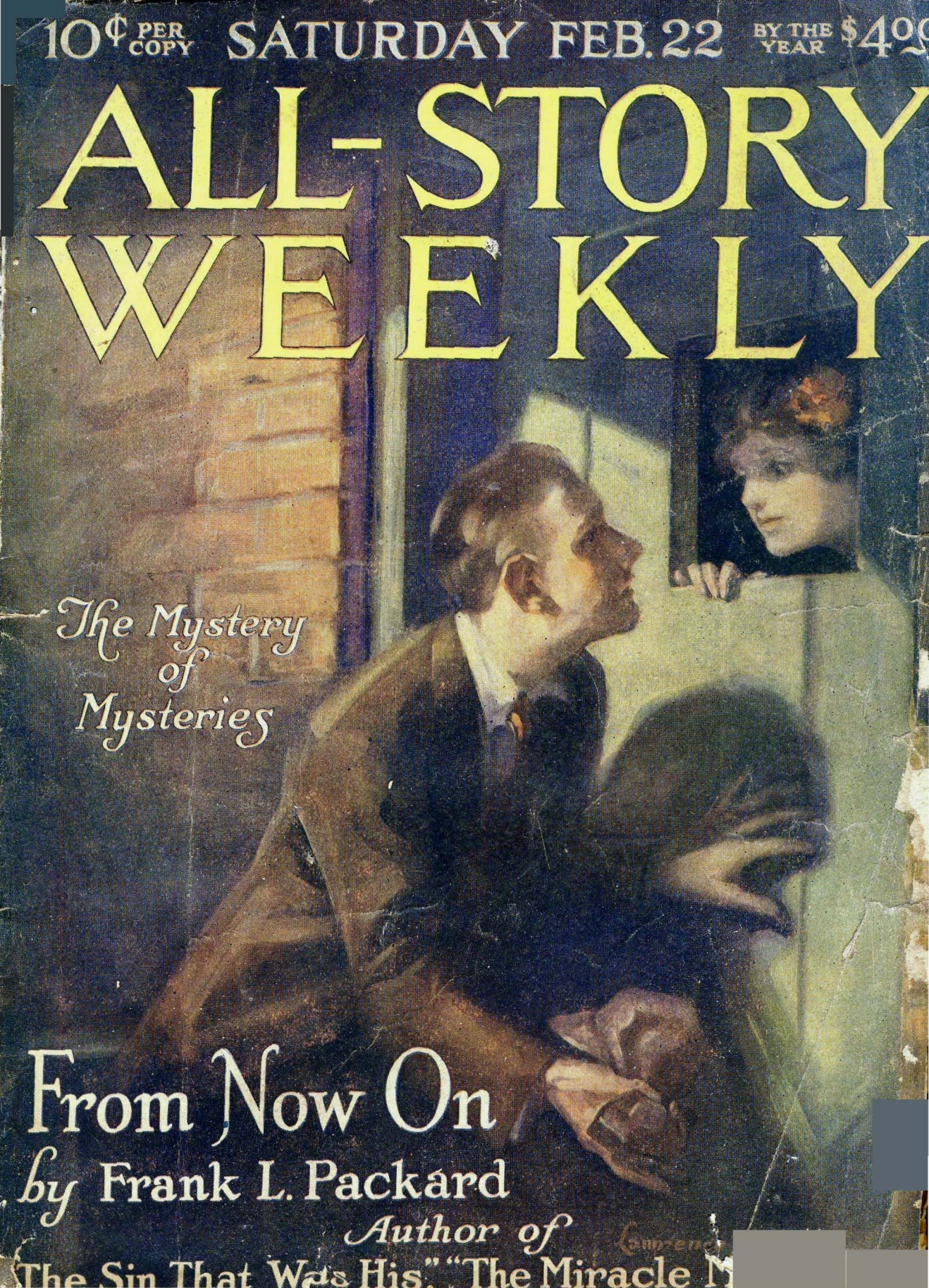
ALL-STORY WEEKLY



The Mystery of Mysteries

From Now On

by Frank L. Packard

Author of

"The Sin That Was His," "The Miracle M

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XCIV — NUMBER 2

CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY 22, 1919

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

TWO NOVELETTES

FOUR SHORT STORIES

VERSE

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOL. XCIV NUMBER 2
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1919

From Now On*

by Frank L. Packard

Author of "The Sin That Was His," "The Miracle Man," "The Iron-Rider," etc.

THE woods are full of writers, but the eagles soar aloft. Frank L. Packard has proved his altitude in a memorable series of stories, every one of which definitely placed him on the high peaks of the foremost range. "The Beloved Traitor," "The Sin That Was His," and "Greater Love Hath No Man" proved his title to distinction. "The Miracle Man" carried him into the ranks of the masters. In this new story he not only satisfies the highest expectations of his readers—expectations which he himself has created by his former works—but seems to touch the very stars of impassioned romance. Read but this first instalment, and you will be demanding the whole story in the next number.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I.

ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS.

A WILD and prolonged roar came from every quarter of the race-track. It swelled in volume. It came again and again. Pandemonium itself seemed loosed.

Outside the enclosure, a squat, fat man, the perspiration rolling in streams down his face, tugged at his collar with frantic, nervous jerks, as he leaned in over the side of a high-powered car, and with his other hand gripped at the arm of the young man in the driver's seat.

"Dave, listen to 'em! My God, listen to 'em!" snarled the fat man.

Dave Henderson, with the toe of his boot, moved the little black satchel the other had dropped on the floor of the car further to one side; and, by way of excuse for disengaging his arm, reached into his pocket for his cigarettes.

"I can hear 'em—even a yard away out here!" he said imperturbably. "Sounds like a great day for the bookies—not!"

The fat man secured his grip on Dave Henderson's arm again.

"I'm wiped out—every last cent—all I've made in years," he said hoarsely. "You get that, don't you? You know it! I'm cleaned out—and you don't seem to give a damn!"

"Why should I?" inquired Dave Henderson calmly. "I guess it's *their* turn, ain't it?"

Booky Skarvan's red-rimmed little gray eyes narrowed, and he swallowed hard.

"I've played square, I have!" he whined. "And I'm wiped out!"

"Yes—square as hell!" amended Dave Henderson.

"You don't give a damn!" shrilled Booky Skarvan. "That's like you! That's like the lot of you! Where would you have been if I hadn't taken you up—eh?"

"God knows!" said Dave Henderson dispassionately. "I'm not blaming you for trying to make a crook of me."

An apoplectic red heightened Booky Skarvan's flushed and streaming face.

"Well, that's one thing I didn't make a bull of, at any rate!" he retorted viciously.

Dave Henderson shifted his cigarette from one corner of his mouth to the other with the tip of his tongue. There was a curious smile, half bitter, half whimsical, on his lips, as he leaned suddenly toward the other.

"I guess you're right, Booky!" He shrugged his shoulders. "But I've only just found it out myself, so if you think there's any congrats coming to you, and you're sore because you didn't get 'em before, you know why now."

The scowl on Booky Skarvan's face deepened, then cleared abruptly, and the man forced a nervous laugh.

"You won't feel so blamed cool about it to-morrow morning when you come to size this up!" he was whining again, but plaintively now. "I'm wiped out, I tell you, and it's too hard a crack for Tydeman to give me any more backing after he's squared this up—so what are you going to do, eh?"

Dave Henderson glanced at the car's clock. It was already after three.

"I'm going up to Frisco—if I ever get started!" he said bruskly. "I've missed the train, as it is, and that means a ninety-mile run—and we're still wasting time! Get down to cases! You got Tydeman on the long-distance—what did he say?"

"I couldn't help your missing the train!" Booky Skarvan's voice had grown almost ingratiating. "There wasn't any use of you going until I knew Tydeman was at home, and unless I got hold of him before the banks closed, was there? And if I'd been able to get him at once we might have had time to arrange it by wire with a bank here—if they were carrying that much in ready cash—and you wouldn't have needed to go at all. But I didn't get him until just a few minutes ago. You know that! I couldn't help it, could I—and the run won't hurt you. You can grab the evening train back. I can stave this gang of wolves off until then by telling 'em Tydeman's making good."

"All right!" Dave Henderson was apparently much more intent upon the starting mechanism of the car than he was upon either his companion or his companion's words. The engine was already purring softly when he looked up at Booky Skarvan again. "Well, what's the arrangement?"

"Tydeman will have the money in cash at his house—one hundred thousand dollars. You go there and get it, and bring it back on the train to-night."

"Anything else?" inquired Dave Henderson.

"No; that's all." Booky Skarvan mopped at his face with the back of his sleeve, glanced in the direction of another sudden outburst of delirious cheering, and mopped at his face again. "That 'll be another long-shot—everybody's playing 'em—damn 'em! For God's sake, don't miss that train back, Dave! It leaves at nine o'clock. Some of these pikers that never turned a red in their lives before 'll be laying me out if I don't flash the long green then. You get me, Dave? I'll have all I can do to stave 'em off that long. I wish I could go with you and get out of here, but they'd think I was running away, and—"

"I get you!" said Dave Henderson. "They all love Booky Skarvan! Well, it's your car, and you've got a right there, but get off the step unless you're coming!" He threw in the clutch, and the car shot forward. "So-long, Booky!" he flung out over his shoulder.

An hour passed. Out in the free sweep of country the car was running at terrific speed. And now, from the road ahead, Dave Henderson's dark eyes, cool and self-reliant, strayed to the little black hand-bag at his feet as they had done many times before, while the tight lips parted slightly

in a smile; and suddenly, over the rush of the wind and the roar of the speeding car, he spoke aloud.

"One hundred thousand dollars—*in cash*," said Dave Henderson meditatively. "Well, it looks like the chance I've been waiting for—what? Only I can't go and let old Tydeman hand it over to me and trust me with it, and then beat it and give him the double-cross, can I? Once he shoves it at me, and says, 'Dave, my boy, take this back to Skarvan,' I'm stung, and there's nothing doing! That's right, ain't it? Well then, what's the answer?"

The broad, muscular shoulders set a little more rigidly over the steering wheel, and the square jaws clamped in a sort of dogged defiance in the face of his self-propounded problem. His mind, as though seeking therefrom the solution he demanded, was reviewing the facts and circumstances that had placed that little black hand-bag with its suggestive possibilities at his feet.

It had been a bad day for the bookmakers, and a particularly bad day for Booky Skarvan—for it was the culmination of several extremely bad days for Booky Skarvan. Shots at odds that were staggering had won again and again. There was absolutely no question but that the man was wiped out—a good many times over.

True, Tydeman was coming to the rescue, but that did not put Booky Skarvan on his feet again; it only paid the bills, and saved Booky Skarvan from being used as a street-cleaning device in the shape of a human mop! The curious thing about it was that Tydeman was in any way connected with Booky Skarvan!

Everybody knew that Skarvan was crooked from his boot soles up — except Martin K. Tydeman. But that was Tydeman's way! Tydeman must have been told often enough, but Tydeman wouldn't believe it. That was Tydeman's way!

Once, years ago, Skarvan had tipped Tydeman off that one of his string was being "doctored." It did not matter that Skarvan had juggled his information, and had tried first to play both ends to the middle by blackmailing and then double-crossing the man who had done the "doctoring"—Tydeman did not know that—and Tydeman from that moment was unshaken in his belief that there was no squarer man on the circuit than Booky Skarvan. It had resulted in Tydeman becoming a silent partner of Booky Skarvan—and the betting fraternity had been not a little pleased, for Tydeman's millions went up on the board better than even, against Booky Skarvan's trickiness.

Dave Henderson nodded his head. It was quite true. Martin K. Tydeman was getting to be quite an old man now, but Martin K. Tydeman was still hailed as the squarest, gamest sporting gentleman California had ever known—and it would be a little rough on that king of sports.

It was too bad that it wasn't Booky Skarvan! Skarvan was crooked from the ground up—and who knew it any better than he, Dave Henderson, who had worked for Skarvan for several years now? But, as it was, Tydeman would simply have to cough up a second hundred thousand out of his millions, that was all. No, it wasn't all! It depended entirely upon whether he, Dave Henderson, could get his hands on the money without accepting it as a trust from the old millionaire.

"You're a damned fool!" Dave Henderson informed himself with a sharp laugh. "What's the difference? You pinch it either way, don't you?"

He shook his head as the car tore forward.

"Mabbe," he muttered; "mabbe I am, and mabbe there ain't any difference—but there's nothing doing that way. I got a little reputation myself—left. No guy ever put a bean in my mitt that he didn't get a square deal on, and that's on the level—in spite of Skarvan! Damn Skarvan! He wouldn't have had a look-in on a two-bit for more seasons than one if I hadn't been running the cases for him—nobody 'd have trusted him!"

Again Dave Henderson relapsed into silence. He drove now in a purely mechanical way. His mind was rankling now in a sort of bitter speculation over the years that reached back as far as he could remember. They were not an altogether pleasing memory; and that was why he wanted, and not only wanted, but had made

up his mind to have—one hundred thousand dollars. He did not remember either his father or his mother. They hadn't had any money, but he had an impression that they had been rather decent people—only they had died. He had been a kid when it happened—he didn't know how old—just a kid.

Some one had put him in a school—an orphan school. It had been a hell of a place. And at ten he had run away. After that, beginning by making himself useful around one of the training stables, he had lived on the race-courses ever since—and had risen to the heights of becoming Booky Skarvan's clerk!

His jaws clamped hard. It was a piker life—but here was a chance to get out of it! He had been looking for the chance—and here it was—if he could get away with it. There had been lots of chances before—chances for a few thousand dollars—but the bet hadn't been good enough. He had even a little better than three thousand dollars himself, for that matter, and it was pulling interest, too—he had loaned it to Square John Kelly, who ran the Pacific Coral Saloon down on the Barbary Coast in Frisco. For that matter he had a couple of hundred dollars in his pocket now. But it was all chicken feed. He had won it, and he might win as much more again some time—or he might lose it.

The game wasn't any good. It didn't get anywhere. Maybe it was the interest coming in on that three thousand that showed up where the odds stood on a hundred thousand. There wasn't anything else involved.

Was it a good gamble?

The interest on a hundred thousand would make a blooming gentleman of independent means out of him at one crack. Sure, it was worth the risk! If he got caught, well, then—*good night!* If he got away with it, well, then—*zowie!*

Yes—but how? That was the question!

If he wouldn't go to Tydeman and let Tydeman trustfully hand the money over to him, how was he to get the cash into his possession? He was quite willing to accept the risk of pursuit and capture, given a few hours' start, he was quite willing to pit his wits against the machinery of the law, that was the gambling chance he ran; and it would be very simple to let Tydeman, in Tydeman's own library, say, assist in packing the little black hand-bag full of money, and then, instead of taking the train back to Stockton—to disappear.

The strong jaws clamped harder. But—nothing doing! Not that way! He'd go the limit, and he meant to have that hundred thousand, and he would have it; and, once decided upon getting it, he would drop in his tracks before he would give up the attempt, and he would drop in his tracks, if the attempt were successful, before he relinquished his grip on the money—but that way was *raw*. Rotten raw!

To get away with a hundred thousand dollars was a sporting proposition, a gambling and a fighting chance; but to double-cross a man who placed that money in one's keeping in good faith was in Booky Skarvan's line—not his!

Well, then—how? The miles and the minutes and the half-hours passed. Tight-lipped, the clean-shaven face set and hard, the dark eyes introspective as they held on the road ahead, Dave Henderson sat there, almost motionless, bent over the wheel. Once he stopped to replenish his supply of gasoline, and then the car roared on again, rocking in its speed. He drove perilously fast, in a sort of subconscious physical synchronism with his racing brain.

One hundred thousand dollars—that was the stake. In another hour or so that hundred thousand dollars would be his—some way! There was no question about that! But how? There was something ironical in the fact that Tydeman was waiting to throw it at him, and that while he racked his mind for a method of getting the money into his possession, he must also rack his mind for a method that would prevent it being forced upon him! He laughed out sharply.

"Now wouldn't that sting you?" mumbled Dave Henderson. "Say, wouldn't that sting you?"

And then, abruptly, Dave Henderson stopped the car at the side of the road. He had it now—almost. It had come, the germ of it, in a flash. And now he wanted

to think it out without the distraction of handling the machine. There came a smile, and the smile broadened—and he laughed again.

There was a picture before his mind's-eye now that afforded him a grim sense of humor. He could see the great bare dormitory in the orphan school, a room whose walls were decorated with huge scrolled mottoes—and there was the one on the end wall with its great red painted letters, and the same old crack in the plaster that zigzagged its way through the words. Sure, he could see it! "Virtue is its own reward."

He had never taken much stock in mottoes, but it looked now as though that one wasn't all to the bad! By refusing to double-cross old Tydeman, he had now found a very much better way. He wouldn't have to take the risk of pursuit now if he had any luck, for the very simple reason that there wouldn't be any pursuit; and instead of it being a self-evident fact that he had got away with the money, he would not now appear in the affair at all.

He began to elaborate the germ very carefully in his mind. He knew old Tydeman's house well, almost every inch of it, for he had been there on errands for Skarvan many times. Tydeman had secured the money from the bank just before closing time, and had taken it to his home. Tydeman's habit was to dine about half past six. These three facts woven together offered a most satisfactory solution to the problem.

One hundred thousand dollars in bills of the denominations that Tydeman would be likely to call for in order to make it convenient for Booky Skarvan's use, which was to say that it wouldn't all be in large bills, would be too bulky for Tydeman to carry around in his pocket. Therefore the money wouldn't be on Tydeman's person when the old millionaire sat down to his highfalutin dinner at half past six with his butler at his elbow. The money would be in the library, most likely—and the library was accessible—thanks to the hedge that flanked the driveway to the house.

Dave Henderson selected another cigarette from his package, and lighted it thoughtfully. So far, so good! And the rest wasn't so dusty, either!

He had the whole thing now.

As soon as he reached Frisco he would drive down to that shabby little street where he kept the shabby room in which he lived during the off seasons on the turf, and leave the car standing in front of the house. From his room he could easily gain the shed at the rear of the place, and from the shed he could gain the lane—and all this without the slightest chance of being observed. He should be able to go to Tydeman's house and return in, say, an hour, or an hour and a half at the outside. If any one noticed the car in front it would seem only natural that he had gone to his room to wash up and perhaps change his clothes after a ninety-mile run, especially in view of the fact that the train he was supposed to take back to Stockton did not leave until nine o'clock.

He leaned back in his seat and blew a smoke ring into the air complacently.

"Sure!" observed Dave Henderson. "I guess I've got the odds switched—to a little better than even money. I'll be back with that hundred thousand and no one the wiser; but I've got to hide it somewhere—what? And I can't make the fool play of hiding it in my room."

Another smoke ring followed the first. Almost any place would do—so that it was easy to get at, and at the same time would not attract attention to him when he went back to it. Well—the shed, then? He nodded his head suddenly. Yes, of course—Mrs. Tooler's old pigeon-cote in the shed! It was the one place in a million! The money would be perfectly safe there, and he could get it again any time at a minute's notice.

Again he nodded his head. The whole thing was as good as done now. After the money was hidden, he had only to get into the car, drive to Tydeman's house, mount the steps with the little black satchel in his hand—and request of Mr. Martin K. Tydeman, Esquire, the money that Booky Skarvan had sent him for, and which he had motored a matter of some ninety miles to obtain!

Dave Henderson's lips parted in a sud-

den smile, though the outthrust, dogged jaw was in no degree relaxed. There would be one whale of a hullabaloo! But the last man who could by the wildest stretch of imagination have had anything to do with the robbery was—Dave Henderson!

After that, maybe he *would* accept a second hundred thousand from Tydeman—and take it back to Booky Skarvan, too! That was all he had to do—play the game. In six months it would be soon enough to dig up and beat it out of the West for keeps.

There wasn't any hurry. Being already a man of affairs, it would take him some time to get those affairs settled up!

There was old Square John Kelly and that three thousand dollars, for instance. Kelly couldn't produce it in cash at an instant's notice, it was invested in Kelly's business; but if he tipped old Kelly off that he was thinking of chucking up the West, Kelly would have it for him at the end of a few months. There wasn't any hurry.

Dave Henderson glanced at the car's clock—and flipped the butt of his cigarette away. It was ten minutes of five. He started the car forward again—but now he drove leisurely. The plan he had decided upon no longer demanded an excess of speed. He was getting in pretty close to Frisco, and he did not now want to reach the city until at least a few minutes after six.

There was something superbly insouciant about the man, as, far back in his seat, his hands rested in a sort of masterful negligence upon the steering wheel.

Of ethics Dave Henderson knew little, and cared much less—ethics had been missing from the curriculum of the school in which he had been brought up.

He wanted a hundred thousand dollars, because with a hundred thousand dollars he was fixed for life; and, having weighed the betting odds that stood between him and his goal, and having decided to accept those odds it became simply a question of winning, or of being wiped out. If he got wiped out, he would neither whimper nor whine—he would simply swallow his medicine.

He was taking a sporting chance—he was staking his liberty, quite possibly his life, against Martin K. Tydeman's hundred thousand dollars. And Tydeman could afford to lose.

He wasn't for putting Tydeman or any one else on the rocks; that wasn't the sort of game he had any use for; but a hundred thousand to Tydeman was street-car fare. He admitted that he would have preferred it should have been some one other than Tydeman, in the sense that he possessed an unbounded admiration for Tydeman—for Tydeman, even though he was too old to take much of an active part in anything, was still the gamest sport on record. But it *was* Tydeman, it happened that it *was* Tydeman; and so, well—

Dave Henderson shrugged his shoulders.

"Step up, gentlemen, and place your bets!" murmured Dave Henderson softly. "And take a tip from me—bunch your wads on the dark horse!"

CHAPTER II.

THE THEFT.

IT was in front of a mean, down-at-the-heels frame-house in a shabby street that Dave Henderson stopped the car. It was five minutes after six. He lifted up the seat, and, leaning down, surreptitiously conveyed to his pocket a cold-chisel from the car's complement of tools.

Lacking any of the accessories of a professional burglar, the chisel would make a most excellent substitute for a steel jimmy.

He replaced the seat, picked up the little black hand-bag, alighted, entered the house, and from the musty hallway, after unlocking the door, stepped through into a room on the right. He closed the door behind him, and stood surveying his surroundings in a sort of half grim, half quizzical contempt.

It was possible that old Tooler, up-stairs, on hearing the car, and hearing him, Dave Henderson, enter the house, might come down; on the other hand, it was quite equally probable that old Tooler would not. It was, however, wise to wait a few minutes and see. That was part of the plan. He,

Dave Henderson, was supposed to be here in his room while some one else made that little raid on Martin K. Tydeman's library! If, therefore, Tooler should come down, and find no one—a shrug of his shoulders completed the obvious deduction.

His eyes traveled around the room. This was his home—that is, if he could claim a home anywhere, this was his home. It was dingy, comfortless, and uninviting. There was only the one window that faced the street, and the window was inadequate, and the light seemed to be imbued with a niggardly hesitation about coming in at all. Perhaps it was just as well—the furnishings weren't out of any prize collection!

He dug his hands impulsively into his side-pockets—and, one hand encountering the chisel, he smiled with a kind of cool, composed satisfaction.

Between this barren and God-forsaken hole and this bit of steel there had been born a connection that was both intimate and pertinent.

For nine years, ever since he had run away from school, the kind of existence this place stood for had got his goat—that was the reason why he had put the chisel in his pocket.

The room had served its purpose—better than any other place of like circumstances and surroundings would have served him—he had, indeed, chosen this particular room very carefully—but the place had always got his goat. He had had to have a room somewhere—he had taken it here.

There were many reasons why he had selected this one. It was cheap; and it was among the only class of people he had ever had a chance to associate with—the hangers-on of the race-tracks, the dance-hall crowd of the Barbary Coast, the night world of Frisco. He knew every one here—he knew the crooks and the lags of the underworld.

These latter had time and again even tried to inveigle him into active membership in their fraternity. They wanted him. They had even paid him the compliment of telling him he would make the slickest crook in the United States. He had refused. The game didn't look good enough.

It was all piker stuff. It wasn't morality that had held him back—his morality was the morality of his environment—nine years of it—what was morality anyhow? As far as he could make out it was simply a question of whatever you do, don't get caught. And he had seen some of the upper crust playing at morality, too! Sure, he knew what morality was—he had seen a lot of it in his nineteen years!

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Dave Henderson aloud, in a sort of surprised voice. "Sounds like I'm arguing with myself whether I ought to do this or not. Say, wouldn't that sting you! There's nothing to it! It's what you get for waiting—a lone hand that cops the sweepstakes, and sets you up for keeps like a nabob!"

He went to the door, opened it slightly, and listened. Up-stairs he could hear Tooler moving about. That was another reason why he had, having once taken the room, remained on as the sole lodger in this house.

Tooler minded his own business — and Mrs. Tooler couldn't help minding hers. She was a paralytic.

They were a couple well beyond middle age, and, having been thrifty in their early days, had purchased this house here some fifteen years ago. The neighborhood, even if still a cheap neighborhood at that time, had been a little more refined in those days. It had changed for the worse since then; but having invested their savings, the subsequent changes had to be borne, that was all. It hadn't apparently affected Tooler very much.

The man was naturally sour anyhow, and Mrs. Tooler's illness hadn't changed him into what might be called, by any stretch of imagination, genial! He was a mechanic of some sort; but his work had become spasmodic—Mrs. Tooler could not always be left alone.

Dave Henderson frowned. Tooler evidently wasn't coming down—but Tooler, for all that, must, if necessary, be the means of establishing an alibi, and that required something of at least a definite recognition by Tooler of his, Dave Henderson's presence. He stepped abruptly out into the hall.

"Heh, Tooler!" he called. "Tooler!"

A door opened somewhere above.

"Hello!" snapped a gruff voice.

"It's me," announced Dave Henderson.

"I heard you!" grunted Tooler.

"I just came in for a wash-up," explained Dave Henderson. "Came up in Skarvan's car. I'm going back to-night by train."

"All right!" Tooler grunted again.

"How's the wife?"

The only answer was the closing of a door up-stairs. Dave Henderson smiled pleasantly, and reentered his own room. When it came to sociability, Tooler was a star! Well, so much the better! He had no complaint to register on that score—especially to-night! He crossed to where his trunk stood against the wall at the lower end of the room, opened the trunk, lifted out the tray, and from somewhere in the lower recesses possessed himself of an automatic and a generous supply of reserve ammunition. With this in his pocket, he closed the trunk again, and sitting down on the edge of the bed, unlaced and removed his shoes.

And now Dave Henderson, silent as a cat in his movements, his shoes tucked under one arm, the black hand-bag under the other, made his way out into the hall.

The car standing in front of the house was mute evidence that he was still in his room. Later on, when he returned, in the course of an hour, say, he would call up to Tooler again to say that he was going.

It was a perfectly good alibi!

He crept on along the hall, reached the back door, opened it cautiously without a sound, and stepped through into the shed that connected with the house. Here he spent several minutes in a careful examination of the old pigeon-cote.

He had never been very much interested in Mrs. Tooler's abandoned pigeon-cote before—he was very much interested in it now! There was a small side window in the shed, and it gave just light enough to enable him to see. It was many years since Mrs. Tooler had kept any pigeons, or anything else, save the bare threads of her life together; but the old pigeon-cote was still here at the end of the shed, just above the door that opened on the lane.

It wasn't anything very elaborate, just a sort of ceiling platform, boarded in, and with a little door in it. Standing on the ground he could just reach up to the door, and he opened it tentatively. Yes, it would serve excellently. It was instantly accessible at any time, either from the house or from the lane, and certainly Mrs. Tooler's long-forgotten shelter for her bygone pets was not a thing to excite suspicion—especially in view of the fact that there never would be any suspicion excited on any score as far as he was concerned!

He put on his shoes again, and, opening the shed door at the rear, stepped out into the lane—and a moment later was walking quickly along a side street away from the house.

Martin K. Tydeman's house was on the hill. Dave Henderson smiled a little grimly at the airy lightness of the empty black bag in his hand—it would be neither as light nor as empty on the way back—if he had any luck! He pulled the slouch hat he was wearing a little further down over his eyes.

A man carrying a bag wasn't anything out of the ordinary, or anything to attract particular attention—he was much more concerned in avoiding the chance of personal recognition. And, anyway, the bag was a necessity. If the money, for instance, was in customary banded sheaves of bank-notes, and loose, how else could he carry it? Not in his pockets—and he couldn't very well make a parcel of them in Tydeman's library! Of course the bank might have made up a sealed package of the whole—but even then a sealed package would have to be kept out of sight.

The slouch hat was drawn down still a little lower, and by the less frequented streets Dave Henderson made his way along. At the expiration of some twenty minutes he had emerged, a block away, on the street upon which the millionaire's home fronted. The hurried pace was gone now, and he dropped into a leisurely and nonchalant saunter.

It was a very select neighborhood. There was little or no traffic, and the majority of the houses enjoyed their own grounds. Tydeman's house, for example, was approached by a short driveway that was

flanked on both sides by a high and thick hedge. Dave Henderson nodded his head complacently. He had pictured that driveway a dozen times on the run up from Stockton, and particularly he had pictured that hedge! It was a most convenient hedge! And it was exceedingly thoughtful of Martin K. Tydeman, Esquire, to have provided it!

If one crouched low enough there was nothing, unless some one were especially on the watch, to prevent one reaching the library windows at the side-rear of the house, and of accomplishing this without the slightest chance of being seen.

He was close to the driveway entrance now, and his eyes swept narrowly up and down the street. For the moment there appeared to be no one in sight—and, with a quick side-step, he slipped suddenly in from the street under the shelter of the hedge.

He moved swiftly now, running, half bent over. It was a matter of but a few seconds—and now, darting across the driveway where it branched off to circle around to the front entrance, he gained the side wall of the house, and crouched beneath the window of the library. He remained motionless for an instant, listening. Little as it was likely that he could have been seen, he could not be too cautious.

A minute passed, another—there was no sound—and then he raised himself guardedly to an upright position, pressing close against the wall, but keeping well back at one side of the window.

The window-sill was shoulder high, and now, edging forward inch by inch, he obtained a diagonal glance through the pane. The room, as far as he could see, for the portières within were but partially drawn, was unoccupied. It was what he had counted upon. Tydeman, if the millionaire were following his usual custom, was at dinner, and the dining-room was on the other side of the house. No one of the household, either family or servants, would ordinarily have any occasion to be in the library at this hour.

Ordinarily! A glint came into the dark eyes, and the eyes narrowed as in a dogged, uncompromising challenge—and then the shoulders lifted in a debonair shrug. Well, that was the chance he took—he was gambling, anyhow!

His fingers crept to the window-sash, and he tested it quietly. It would not move. Whether it was locked above or not, he did not know—the slight pressure that he was able to exert from the outside was at least not sufficient to lift it—but the improvised steel jimmy would quickly remedy that defect. He worked hurriedly now.

The Western summer evenings were long, and it was still light, and every minute he stood there was courting discovery.

The edge of the chisel slipped in between the sill and the window-sash, and with the leverage the window was raised an inch or two. His question was answered.

It had not been locked at the top.

And now his fingers came into play again—under the window-sash. There was not a sound. The window went up easily and silently—and with a lithe, agile spring, Dave Henderson swung himself up over the sill, dropped with a soft *pad* to the floor, and stood motionless, shrouded in one of the portières.

The room was empty. The door leading from the library, he could see as he peered out, was closed. From the other side of the door, muffled, there came a laugh, the murmur of voices, indeterminate little sounds. The set, straight lips relaxed a little. The way was quite clear. The chances in his favor were mounting steadily. The family was undoubtedly at dinner.

He made no sound as he stepped quickly now across the room. The rich, heavy pile of the velvet rug beneath his feet deadened his footfalls. And now he reached the massive flat-topped desk that stood almost in the center of the room. It was the most likely place, the natural place, for Tydeman to leave the money.

If it was not here—again there came that debonair shrug—well, then, he would look further—up-stairs in Tydeman's bedroom, if necessary—or anywhere else, if necessary.

One thing only was certain, and that was that, having started on the job, he would get the money, or they would get him—if he couldn't fight his way out. He had al-

ways done that! He had been brought up to it, hadn't he? Win or lose—he had always played win or lose. Cold feet and bet hedging was piker stuff—and that was in Booky Skarvan's line, too, not his!

Keen, alert, his ears were sentinels against the slightest external sound. He was gnawing now in a sort of grim impatience at his lower lip, as he pulled open drawer after drawer. Strange how his mind worked!

The slickest crook in the U. S. A., they had said he would make.

Well, perhaps he would, but, even so, it neither allured nor interested him.

This was his first job — and his last. There was enough in this to see him through for the rest of his life. It wouldn't have been worth the risk otherwise, and he wouldn't have tackled it. Once East and he could pretend to amass money, little by little, until no one would be surprised that he was worth a hundred thousand dollars.

That was the trouble with the bunch he knew! Some of them had brains, but they worked their brains overtime — on small stuff — and they had to come again — to keep the living expenses going—and sooner or later they came once too often—and then it was the jug for theirs!

He bent down suddenly to a lower drawer that was locked—the only one that he had found locked—and pried it open with the cold chisel.

"Sure!" said Dave Henderson imperturbably under his breath. "I guess this looks like it—what? And all done up in a nice little package, too! Even more thoughtful of 'em than I had hoped!"

He took out a parcel from the drawer. It was securely tied with stout cord and heavily sealed with great blobs of red wax that bore a bank's impression. There could indeed be but little doubt concerning the contents; but Dave Henderson, nevertheless, made a slight opening in one end of the wrapping-paper—and disclosed to view crisp piles of brand-new yellow-backs. He nodded pleasantly to himself as he consigned the package to the little black hand-bag.

It was what he had come for—and got—one hundred thousand dollars.

He closed the drawer and knelt for an instant to examine it. Closed, it did not show enough of the chisel's work to attract attention; open, it at once became very apparent that the drawer had been forced. He smiled in satisfaction. That was exactly what he wanted!

When, a little later, he drove up in Skarvan's car to the front door and requested the money, it was only then that it was likely to be missed for the first time, and certainly under such circumstances the last man on earth against whom any suspicion could arise would be himself. He had told himself that before. Well, why not repeat it? It was true, wasn't it?

He retreated to the window, lowered himself to the ground, and regained the street. The thing was done. He was in possession of one hundred thousand dollars. There had not been the slightest difficulty or obstacle. He hummed an air under his breath as he went along. It had been very simple — more so even than he had expected. It had been almost tame!

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAP.

DAVE HENDERSON lost no time on his return journey. Within some fifteen or twenty minutes after leaving the residence of Mr. Martin K. Tydeman, he slipped into the lane at the rear of the shabby house on the shabby street that he called his home, and, entering the shed, closed the door softly behind him.

Here it was but the work of an instant to take the sealed package of bank-notes from the black hand-bag, reach up, slide the package in through the little door of the old pigeon-cote, push the package over into one corner, cover it with the chaff and old straw with which, relics of bygone days of occupancy, the bottom of the pigeon-cote was littered, and to close the little door again.

He stooped then, and, unlacing his shoes quickly, removed them. He had only one thing to guard against now, and his *alibi* was perfect, his possession of one hundred thousand dollars secure.

Tooler must not hear him entering the house. Tooler must be morally convinced that he, Dave Henderson, had never left the house.

As soon as he got back to his room again he would put on his shoes, call up to Tooler that he was going, and, with the empty black hand-bag, get into his car—and drive up to Martin K. Tydeman's!

"Some uproar!" confided Dave Henderson to himself. "When I ask old Martin K. to fill the lil old bag, and he goes for the cash, there'll be—"

His mental soliloquy ended abruptly.

He had opened the door noiselessly that led into the house, and was creeping without a sound along the hallway toward the door of his own room at the front of the house—and now suddenly he stood rigid and motionless.

Was it fancy, his imagination playing tricks upon him — or had Tooler come down-stairs? It seemed as though he had caught the sound of a lowered voice—and it seemed as though it had come from his room there along the hall.

And then he smiled sarcastically at himself and began to creep forward again. He had complained of the whole thing being tame, and now he was getting an attack of nerves when it was all over!

How could he have heard a lowered voice through the closed door of his room? It was a physical impossibility. Tooler, in any case, was not in the habit of talking to *himself*—Tooler never talked to any one, if he could help it, the man always seemed to be nursing a perennial grudge that he hadn't been born a mute!

Dave Henderson's smile broadened at his little conceit—and the next instant had vanished, as his lips compressed suddenly into a hard, straight line. He had halted for the second time, crouched now close against the wall.

The door of his room was *not* closed, and it was *not* Tooler—and it was *not* nerves. The door was slightly ajar; words came quite audibly; and the guarded voice had a haunting familiarity about it.

"Sure, I grabbed the train, an' Booky stalled on being able to get old Tydeman on the long-distance until after the train—an' me on it—was on our way. Do you tumble?"

Dave Henderson did not move. Into his face there had come, set in a grayish-whiteness, a look that mingled stunned amazement and a gathering fury. He had recognized that voice now—and, in a flash, what that voice meant.

It was Runty Mott, a miserable little rat of a race-course tout and hanger-on.

Runty Mott—Booky Skarvan!

He remembered very well indeed that Booky Skarvan could not get Tydeman on the long-distance until after the train was gone!

Another voice chuckled in malicious assent.

"Take it from me"—it was Runty Mott again—"Booky Skarvan's got some head! *Some* head! He was wiped out, all right, but I guess this puts him on easy street again. Fifty thousand for him, an' we split the rest.

"Booky says to me, he says, 'If Dave goes an' gets that money an' disappears afterwards,' he says, 'it's a cinch, with the ragged reputation he's got, that he stole it, an' beat it for parts unknown; an' if them parts unknown,' he says, 'is a nice little mound of earth somewheres in the woods, about six feet long an' four feet deep, due to Dave having collided with a blackjack, I guess the police 'll be concluding, after a while, that Dave was smart enough to give 'em the slip an' get away with the coin for keeps! You grab the train for Frisco, Runty,' he says, 'an' wise up Baldy Vickers to what I say. You got a good two hours,' he says, 'to set the stage up there before Dave blows in!'"

Came that malicious chuckle again.

"An' the poor boob went an' cracked the crib himself!" ejaculated Runty Mott's companion—and chuckled once more.

"Sure!" said Runty Mott. "Booky called the turn, all right, on the guy's reputation—he was born a crook! Well, it makes it all the easier, don't it? It might have been harder to get him when we wanted him if he'd just gone up there an' got the money on the level. As it is now, he's ducking his nut, trying to play innocent, an' he comes back here to make a

nice fresh start up to old Tydeman's again. Only he didn't reckon on any one trailing him from the minute he got out of his car! I guess we got him—good.

"Spike telephoned ten minutes ago that Dave was on his way back. If he comes in by the shed the boys 'll see he don't get out that way again; an' if he comes in by the front he'll get a peach of a welcome home! Tumble? This is where he croaks—an' no noise about it—an' you look out that you swing the lead so's you won't have to swing it twice. We can carry him out through the shed, an' get the mortal remains away in a car with no one the wiser."

Runty Mott was chuckling now quite as maliciously as his companion. "Can't you see the head-lines in the papers! 'Promising Young Man Succumbs to Temptation.' Say, it's the safest thing that was ever pulled, an'—" He stopped suddenly. A low whistle sounded from the street in front. "Keep quiet!" cautioned Runty Mott. "He's coming in by the lane!"

It was silent in the house—a silence that began to pound and throb and become a world of riot and dismay and confused noises of its own. Crouched against the wall, Dave Henderson raised his hand to his forehead—and drew his hand away damp with beads of moisture. There was an overmastering rage, a tigerish ferocity upon him; but his brain, most curiously, was deadly cold in its composure, and was working now swift as lightning flashes, keen, alert, shrewd, active.

The words he had just heard meant—*murder!* His murder!

The very callousness of the words but lent a hideous sincerity to them. Also, he knew Baldy Vickers—if any further proof were needed. Baldy Vickers was a gangster to whom murder was a trade; and Baldy Vickers, with stakes in the thousands, when he would have committed any crime in the decalogue with greedy haste for a hundred-dollar-bill, meant—murder!

He was stooping now, silently, with the utmost caution, slipping on his shoes. And now from the rear there came a faint sound, a low creaking, like the stealthy rending of wood. He knew what it meant. They were forcing the shed door—to follow him in here—to cut off his escape, and to assist, if necessary, in the work those two would do in his room, which he was expected to enter.

His face was set, drawn in lines as hard as chiseled marble. And yet he could have laughed—laughed out in the bitterest of mockeries. The game was up—even if he saved his life. He would be "wanted" for the theft of one hundred thousand dollars. He could not cover that up now. If he escaped Baldy Vickers and his pack, he would still be a fugitive from the law.

And, worse still, he would be a fugitive empty-handed, chased like a mangy dog who had risked his all for a bone—and had dropped the bone in his flight! God, if he could only get back there and get that money! But there were footsteps coming now—his straining ears could hear them—they were coming nearer and nearer to the door that opened from the shed into the rear of the house.

Fury surged upon him again. Skarvan! Booky Skarvan! It was Skarvan, not Baldy Vickers, not that miserable, red-headed rat of a tout in there, that he would have sold his soul at that instant to settle with. It was Skarvan, the dirty Judas, not the others, who, smug and safe, had planned his (Dave Henderson's) murder in deliberate, cold-blooded hellishness!

Well, if he, Dave Henderson, lived, Booky Skarvan would pay—"an eye for an eye!"—that was God's law, wasn't it? Well, as certainly as God lived, Booky Skarvan would pay! It was another incentive for him, Dave Henderson, to live now.

The brain works with incredible speed. Those footsteps had not yet quite reached the door leading into the hall. His shoes were on now; and now his eyes fell upon the empty black hand-bag that, to facilitate his movements in putting on his shoes, he had set down on the floor beside him, and there came, flickering suddenly over the tight-pressed lips, a curious smile. He might not get through; there was only one way to get through—his car out there in front—a dash for it, though it was certain that there would be others of Baldy Vick-

ers's crowd lurking out there, too; he might not get through, but if he did, there was a way, too, to save that hundred thousand dollars, or, at least, to keep it from Booky Skarvan's claws!

Into the dark, narrowed eyes there came a glint of humor—but it was grim, deadly humor. They believed, of course, that he had the money in the bag since he would be credited with no object for having already disposed of it, as the natural presumption would be that, with the money once in his possession, he would make a run for it—and they must continue to believe that—be given no reason to believe otherwise.

It was dangerous, an added risk, but if he pretended to fall unwarily into their trap, pretended to be unconscious that there was, for instance, a blackjack waiting for him in his room, their suspicions would never be aroused—and neither they nor any one else would ever suspect for an instant that the money was not still in the bag as he dashed from the house.

He was creeping forward again silently toward the door of his room. That was logical. They would expect that. They would expect him to creep in silently and stealthily on account of Tooler up-stairs—or, if they did not exactly expect it, it would explain itself in that very logical way to them afterward.

Behind him now the door leading into the hall was being opened cautiously, so cautiously that he would not have heard it if he had not been listening for it, expecting it. But he was just at the edge of the jamb of his own door now. He straightened up, his hand reached out for the door handle, and, still retaining his grasp upon the knob and standing in full view upon the threshold, he pushed the door open to the extent of his outstretched arm.

The slickest crook in the United States, they said he would make! He would try and not disappoint them!

His eyes swept the interior in a flash. A burly figure was crouched low down against the wall within striking distance of the door, an ugly looking, leather-covered baton in his hand—Runty Mott was not in sight. It was for the fraction of a second that he stood there—no more—not long enough for that crouching figure to recover from its surprise.

"My God!" gasped Dave Henderson in well-simulated dismay; and, leaping backward, pulled shut the door, and dashed for the door to the street.

There was a yell from the room; it was echoed by a shout, and the pound of racing feet from the rear of the hall. Dave Henderson wrenched the front door open—and slammed it behind him. A figure rose before him on the steps. His left hand, free, swung with all his body-weight behind it, swung with a terrific blow to the point of a scrubby jaw that blocked his way—and the figure crumpled and went down with a crash on the doorstep.

It was but a yard to the curb and his car. He flung himself into the driver's seat. Pandemonium seemed loosed now from the house. The door was flung wide open, and the red-headed little tout in the van, four men were racing down the steps; and, over the chorus of unbridled blasphemy, there rose a shrill yell from Runty Mott; it was answered from somewhere down the street.

The car, like a mad thing stung into action, shot forward from the curb. A hand grasped at the car's side and was torn loose, its owner spinning like a top and pitching to the sidewalk.

Dave Henderson flung a glance over his shoulder—and his jaws clamped suddenly hard together. Of course! That shout of Runty Mott's!

But he had not underestimated either Baldy Vickers's cunning, or Baldy Vickers's resourcefulness. He had rather expected it. A big, powerful gray car had swept around the corner of the first street behind him, and, slowing for an instant, was picking up Runty Mott and his companions.

And now Dave Henderson laughed a little in a sort of grim savagery. Well, the race was on—and on to a finish! He knew the men too well in that gray car behind him to delude himself for a moment with any other idea. They wanted that little black hand-bag—and they would get it, if they could, and they would get him, if they could—at any cost. Again he laughed, and

now with the laugh came that debonair lift to his shoulders.

His brain was working in swift, lightning flashes. The only hope of shaking them off was in the open—if his car were the faster.

And if it were not the faster! Well, then, yes—there was still a chance—on a certain road he knew—the road he had traveled that afternoon—if he could make that road. It was a chance, a gambling chance, but the best chance—to win all—or lose all. There would be no hedging—it was all or nothing—win or lose.

They would not dare use their revolvers here in the city streets, they could only cling close on his trail; and neither of them here in the city could put the respective speed of their cars to the test—but in the open, in the country—

He looked over his shoulder again. The big, gray car, some fifty yards in the rear, held five passengers. He could distinguish the little red-haired tout in the front seat beside the man who was driving, a short, thick-set man, whose cap was pulled down over his eyes—Baldy Vickers. He nodded his head. His glance had measured something else. By leaning forward in his seat and crouching low over the wheel, the back of his car seemed high enough not to afford him absolute immunity but to afford him at least a fair chance of protection once he elected to invite the shots that would be fired from the car behind.

The thought came that by one of a dozen ways, by leaping from his car as he turned a corner, for instance, and darting into a building, he might give his pursuers the slip here in the city. But it was no good! The game was up! He was not only a fugitive from Baldy Vickers and his wolves, he was a fugitive now from the police. If by some such means as that he managed to give Baldy Vickers the slip, there was still the police — and with a police drag-net out he cut his chances of escape by better than half if he remained in the city.

It would not be long now before Tydeman, in view of his (Dave Henderson's) non-appearance, would become aware of the theft; and, granting that he eluded Baldy Vickers, the gangster, eager for revenge, would be the first to curry favor with the police. Baldy Vickers had only to state that one of his pals saw him crawling out through Tydeman's library window.

There was nothing to it! The game was up—even if he saved his life. Thanks to Booky Skarvan! His jaws clamped again, and the knuckles of his hands stood out in white knobs as he clenched in sudden passion on the wheel. Thanks to Booky Skarvan! By God, that alone was worth living for—to settle with Booky Skarvan!

Like some sinister, ominous thing, silently, attracting no attention from the passers-by, the big gray car maintained its distance fifty yards behind. That grim humor, deadly in its cold composure, was upon Dave Henderson again. He meant to be taken by neither Baldy Vickers, nor by the police—nor did he intend that a certain package containing one hundred thousand dollars in cash should fall into the hands of either Baldy Vickers or the police! Some day, even yet, he might find use for that particular package himself!

Block after block was traversed, corner after corner was turned, as Dave Henderson threaded his way through the streets, heading steadily for the outskirts of the city, and the road on which he had already traveled ninety miles that day. And fifty yards behind came on that big gray car.

They were well content, no doubt—the occupants of the car! He was playing their game for them! He was playing the fool! In the city their hands were tied! Out in the country they would be free to do something more than merely follow him!

Well, that was all quite true—perhaps! But out in the country, if he got away from them, he would not at least jump from the pot into the fire and have the police at his heels the very next instant—and, besides, there was that hundred thousand dollars! The further away he got from Frisco the more inviolate became Mrs. Tooler's old pigeon-coté!

Fifty yards! He glanced behind him again. It was still fifty yards — *start.* Well, fifty yards was fifty yards, and he might as well take it now. He was well in the outskirts, the houses were becoming scattered, an open road was ahead, and—

He bent suddenly low over the wheel and flung the throttle wide. The car leaped forward like a thoroughbred to the spur. There was a burst of yells from behind—and then silence, save for the rush of the wind, the creak of the swaying, lurching car, and the singing throb of the sixty horse-power engine, unleashed now, in full stride under the lash.

A mile, two miles—the speed was terrific. There was no sound from behind—just the roar of his own car in his ears. The houses were fewer now—it was the open country. Another mile! He was at his absolute maximum of speed now. He straightened up slightly, and shot a quick glance over his shoulder. The big gray car was fifty yards behind.

A shot rang out—and then a fusillade of them. He was low over the wheel again, his jaws set rigidly. *Was* it fifty yards! He was not sure—he was not sure that it was not *less*—he was only sure that it was not more.

The shots ceased for a moment. A car, coming in the opposite direction, had taken to the extreme edge of the road, half into the ditch. He had a flash of a woman's face as he swept by—great dark eyes that stared out of a death-white face—a beautiful face, even in its terror—it haunted him, that face!

A roar, furious, sustained, racketing like a thousand echoes reverberating through a rocky, high-walled cañon, stilled the roaring sweep of the wind and the roaring of his car. He shot through the main street of a town like a meteor, and laughed out like a madman! A dog, escaping by the fraction of an inch, scurried with a sharp yelp for the sidewalk. There was a dash for horses' heads at the curbs; people rushed to doorways and windows, peering out; women screamed; men yelled hoarsely; a fat woman, retreating wildly as she was about to cross the road, dropped a laden basket to shake her fist in panic-fury. It was kaleidoscopic—it was gone.

The shots came again. Another town was passed—still another. The big gray car was not fifty yards behind now—it was less than thirty—so near that now there came from time to time an exultant yell.

Dave Henderson's face was drawn, tense, its lines hard, sharp, strained; but in the dark eyes was still that smoldering light of grim, debonair humor. The race was almost at an end—he knew that now. He knew now that he could not shake off that gray streaking thing behind. It gained only by inches, they were well matched, the two cars, and it was a good race—but a few more miles would end it as those inches lengthened into feet and yards.

Well, then, since he could not escape this way, there was still the other way; and if that failed, he, too, in the last analysis had a revolver in his pocket. But it was not likely to fail, that other way. He had banked on it almost from the moment he had made his escape from the Toolers' house.

As between himself and the hundred thousand dollars, Baldy Vickers, if he could not get both, would very obviously and very earnestly prefer the hundred thousand dollars. His lips tightened in a sort of merciless irony. Well, Baldy Vickers would have a chance at least to exercise his preference.

A few miles further on, just a few miles, the road, in a wooded tract, made an abrupt, almost right-angled turn. He remembered that turn—and he had banked on that, too, if by then speed alone should have failed him! He could hold out that much longer. The inches did not accumulate fast enough to overtake him before he reached that turn—he was not afraid of that—but every one of those inches made of him a better target.

He was motionless, like a figure carved in stone, as he flung over the wheel. The car rocked to the furious pace—but it did not swerve. A swerve meant the gift of another of those inches to that gray thing behind. He held the center of the road, driving with all the craft and cunning that he knew, his arms like steel bands, his fingers locked in an iron grip upon the wheel.

He did not look behind him now. It was useless. Nearer and nearer the gray car was creeping up, he was well aware of that—but also, nearer and nearer, came that wooded stretch ahead. He could see it

now—a mile down the road. But a mile at this rate of speed did not take long to cover.

The shouts grew more exultant behind him; the shots came thicker. Murderers! The angry hum of a bullet past his ear roused a fury in his soul that was elemental, primal, and he cursed now under his breath. Murderers—six feet of earth—in cold blood—or, if they winged him, the car, amuck, slanting from the road to up-end itself, would do their bloody work for them. It was strange that all their shots had missed—even if the back of his car was a protection — they wouldn't have many more chances—the woods and the turn of the road were just ahead now, and—

There was a crash, the splintering of glass—a bullet shattered the windshield scarcely a hairbreadth to the right of his head. A demoniacal yell of triumph went up from behind. They had him now—and, with him, one hundred thousand dollars! Again that grimace of merciless irony was twisting at Dave Henderson's lips. It was the psychological moment, not only because that wood was just ahead, but because, realizing that his chances were desperate now, he would logically be expected to sacrifice anything—even that hundred thousand dollars—to save himself.

Something, like the flick of a fiery lash, bringing a hot, burning sensation, was laid suddenly across his leg above the knee. It did not hurt very much—a bullet deflected probably from the rim of the steering-wheel—but they had hit him at last. He laughed savagely—and snatched at the empty black hand-bag, and hurled it with all his might far out across the side of the road.

A chorused yell answered his act. He looked back—and laughed again. It had not failed! Wolves! Again he laughed. And like wolves with slavering fangs they were after their prey! It would give him a minute, perhaps two—but that was quite enough.

The car swept on—rounded the turn—the trees blotted out the view of the road behind. He jammed on the brakes, slewed the car half around, full across the road, and, leaping from it, dashed in among the trees. The foliage was thick. He ran on—he was safe for the moment here in the woods; and presently it would be dark, and he would make across-country to the railroad and work his way East.

The roar of the gray car coming on again at full speed reached him. He laughed as he ran, harshly, without mirth. They wanted vengeance now—vengeance because he had not let them murder him! Well, he did not mean to disappoint them! He had disappointed them once — with an empty bag! He would not disappoint them again! It was perfectly logical that there should be—vengeance. There was hardly room to stop that car around the turn!

A wild cry, echoed by another, and still another, shrill in terror, rang out from the road over the rear of the speeding car—and then a terrific crash—a scream—silence!

He had stopped mechanically. The wolves wouldn't bother him any more. It wasn't Baldy Vickers now — that smash would have taken the fight out of Baldy Vickers, if it hadn't taken anything more—it was the police.

He clenched his hands in sudden, passionate fury. He was safe from Baldy Vickers here in the woods, anyhow—but, for all that, he had played and lost. He was a hunted man now. He was not whining, he had played and lost—only he had played against stacked cards. The face of Booky Skarvan rose before him—and his hands clenched the tighter. He swept a knotted fist fiercely across his eyes. What was the use of that—now!

He had something else besides Booky Skarvan to think of now; there was the police, and—yes—his leg! It was burning hot, and it hurt now. He glanced downward. His trouser-leg was soaked with blood. His teeth gritted together—and he plunged on again through the woods.

CHAPTER IV.

$2,000 REWARD—DEAD OR ALIVE!

THREE days and four nights—was that it? It was hard to remember. It hadn't even been easy to get the little food he had had; it had been impossi-

able to get his wound dressed, save in the rough, crude, wholly inadequate way in which he had been able to dress it himself—with pieces torn from his shirt and underclothing.

They had hunted him like a mad beast. Those cursed police placards were everywhere! Everywhere! His description—Two Thousand Dollars' Reward—Dead or Alive!

The police had acted quickly, quicker than he had ever thought they could act—Joe Barjan, Lieutenant Barjan, of the Frisco plain-clothes squad, would have had a hand in this. Queer! He'd given Barjan tips on the races, straight tips, honest tips, in the old days—not this kind of a race. Barjan and he used to get along, all right, together. Funny business!

It was dark, pitch black—save only for a moon-ray that flickered and danced across the flooring of the bouncing, jolting box car, and came in through the half-open, rattling door. He should have closed that door more tightly when he had crawled in. It had got loose again. Well, no matter! It couldn't do any harm for the moment, except for the noise it made—a noise that beat a devil's tattoo on his aching head—but that didn't matter, either. It wasn't as bad as the clatter and jangle and damnable everlasting creaking of the car—and he couldn't stop the car from creaking, anyhow. When the train began to slow down for the next stop, he would go over and shut the door again. It was an effort to move—uselessly—before he had to.

Three days and four nights—was that it? It was hard to remember. But he must have put many miles, hundreds of them, between himself and Frisco.

And he had lived through hell—alternately hurling his way in some box car such as this, and hiding in the woods, or where he could. But the box cars were mostly for the night. Damn these police circulars—and that reward! Every one was on the hunt for him—every one—two thousand dollars. How far East would he have to go and not find one of the haunting things nailed up on a station wall! The drag-net *couldn't* reach out all the way—there was a limit—a limit to everything.

His brain caught at the last phrase—a limit to everything. His lips were cracked and dry, and he touched them with his tongue.

"No!" He shook his head, whispering hoarsely a dogged defiance. "No limit—win or lose—all the way—no limit."

Through hell! The whole countryside was hell! They wouldn't even let him buy food. Well, he had stolen it—what he had had. They had nearly trapped him the second time he had tried to buy food—the night following his escape—in a little grocery store—a big, raw-boned, leering man who ran the place—the man hadn't got the two thousand dollars' reward—no, not much of a fight—he had knocked the man out and run for it—that was all. After that he hadn't tried to buy any food—he had stolen it—only he hadn't stolen very much. It was hard to get.

It was even hard to get water—a drink of water sometimes. It didn't run everywhere. There weren't ponds and lakes and rivers everywhere. He couldn't ask anybody for a glass of water. There had been a ditch that afternoon. It had been muddy and slimy. Since then there had been nothing.

He would have sold his soul for a few of those drops that had splashed in lavish abundance from the spout of the water-tank at the station earlier that night when he had crawled into the car here. He had seen the fireman on the back of the tender manipulating the spout, and he had heard the water splash.

He spoke hoarsely again.

"I'm shot full of fever, that's what I am," he said. "I'm shot full of it."

Sprawled out on the floor of the car, he shifted his position a little—and, tight-locked though his lips were, there came an irrepressible moan of pain. God, how his eyes burned—how hot his head was, and how it throbbed and ached! The throbs kept devilish time, marching time, like the tramp of feet to the beat of the drum, to that ceaseless, brutal throbbing in his leg. He hadn't looked at his leg to-day; it had been bad enough yesterday. What was the use? He couldn't do anything.

He hadn't even any water—there wasn't

any use putting on that slimy, muddy stuff he had drunk. It would have to get better —or worse.

He touched his lips with his tongue again. There didn't seem to be any moisture on his tongue. It was thick and big in his mouth, so it couldn't be dried up, but there wasn't any moisture on it. Would the car never stop its jolting and that infernal *clack-clack-clackety-clack!*

There was abominable pain in every jolt; it seemed to shake his leg the way a mold of jelly would shake; it seemed to shake and vibrate to the bone itself. Sometimes it brought nausea and faintness.

Perhaps there *was* a limit! He had lain exhausted for a long time, bathed in sweat from his exertions, when he had climbed and clawed his way into the car. He remembered now—that was why he hadn't shut the door tightly.

He must be getting pretty near his limit to go down like a lump of putty just through climbing from the track into a box car. He clenched his hands in fierce denial. It was win or lose—even against stacked cards!

The pain was gone momentarily in a sweep of fury that brought him up from his back to sway like a pendulum upon his elbows with the swaying of the car. He owed Booky Skarvan for this. He owed it to Booky Skarvan that he was a hunted, wounded thing.

He owed every thrust of pain that caught at and robbed him of his breath to Booky Skarvan. He owed it to Booky Skarvan that he was an outcast for the rest of his life. He owed Booky Skarvan for as damnable and callous an attempt to murder him as was ever hatched in a human brain. And they had left Booky Skarvan to him!

His laugh rang loud and hollow, a bitter, sinister sound, unbridled in its deadly passion, through the car. They had left Booky Skarvan to him! It was good to think of that—very good, like a drink of water, icy water, with the beads frosting on the long glass.

He knew the story. Last night in a switchman's shanty in a railroad yard he had found a newspaper—the story was there. Baldy Vickers and Runty Mott, who had been sitting in the front seat, were in the hospital from the smash; the others had not been hurt much. Booky Skarvan's car had been identified, what there was left of it, and that formed an implicating link between him, Dave Henderson, and Baldy Vickers's crowd.

Runty Mott and Vickers had told a story that was almost true; but they had left Booky Skarvan out of it. The story was enough of a confession, smacked enough of State's evidence, to let them out of any criminal proceedings, even if there had been any really definite charge that could be brought against them.

They hadn't stolen the money! The story rang true because it was *almost* true —only, they had left Booky Skarvan out of it.

Runty Mott, according to the newspaper, had been the spokesman. Runty said he had overheard Booky Skarvan and Dave Henderson at the race-course, when they were making arrangements to get the money from Tydeman. He, Runty Mott, had taken the train for Frisco, and had put it up to Baldy Vickers.

Then they had followed Dave Henderson, meaning to take the money from him the first chance they got. But Dave Henderson had handed them a jolt by crawling in through Tydeman's library window and stealing it himself.

After that they had figured the easiest place to grab the coin was in Dave Henderson's room, when he sneaked back there with the black hand-bag.

And Dave Henderson had walked right into their trap, only they hadn't heard him coming any more than he had been wise to the fact that they were there, and in the show-down he had managed to jump through the front door and reach his car. He had the money in the black hand-bag with him. They had chased him in the other car that the police had found smashed up, and had nearly got him, when he threw the black hand-bag out of the car.

They stopped to pick it up, and found out the trick he had played on them. The hand-bag was empty; he still had the money in his car. They took up the chase again—and crashed into the other machine

where Dave Henderson had left it blocking the road just around a sharp turn.

Dave Henderson's laugh rang with a devil's mirth through the box car again. That was all! They hadn't split on a pal. They had left the pal to him. Runty Mott had told the story—and Runty Mott's story went!

He, Dave Henderson, wouldn't change it! They didn't know, and Booky Skarvan didn't know, *that he knew*. They had left Booky Skarvan to him—and they had made Mrs. Tooler's pigeon-cote as safe as a vault.

The slue of the car on a curve flung him with a savage wrench from his elbows to his back again, and he groaned in agony. Red flashes danced before his eyes, and nausea came again, and faintness—and he lay for a long time still. It seemed as though he no longer had any power to move; even the pain seemed to have become subordinate to a physical sense of weakness and impotence that had settled upon him. His head grew dizzy and most strangely light.

There came the blast of the engine whistle, the grind and thump of buffer beams, the shriek of the brake-shoes biting at the wheel tires, the sickening sensation of motion being unsmoothly checked. His mind did not grasp the significance of this for a moment—and then with a frantic effort he struggled to his feet.

The door! The car door! He must close it—he must close the door. The train was stopping. If any one passed by outside and saw the door open, and looked in, he was caught—he was too weak to fight any more, too weak to run any more; he must close the door.

He could not stand. The car swayed and bumped and lurched too much. No one could stand with the car jolting around in circles like that. He dropped to his knees. He could crawl, then. The door! The car door! It must be closed—even if he had to drag himself to it.

It wasn't far to the door—just a few feet. It was the pain in his leg that made him faint, but he could get that far—just to the door.

He touched his lips with his tongue again. They weren't dry now, his lips, and there was a curious taste upon them, and they hurt. They tasted of blood. That was funny. His teeth must have sunk into his lips somehow.

But he was almost at the door now—yes, he could reach it now. Only he couldn't close it when he was lying flat down like this. He would have to get up—on his knees at least.

His hand swept across his eyes and pressed fiercely upon his forehead. The moon-ray wavered in through the door in jagged, glancing streaks. He had to shut that moon-ray out—to make it black here in the car. Strange! It was growing black now, even though he had not shut the door. Perhaps it was a cloud—the moon passing behind a cloud. His body seemed to sway, to be out of control, and his knees, instead of balancing him, crumpled suddenly beneath him, pitching him forward, face downward, on the floor of the car—and something seemed to snap inside his head, and it was black, all blackness.

Repose, comfort, ineffable luxuriousness, something soft and soothing supporting his body, and a freedom from the excruciating, unbearable, intolerable pain that he had been enduring. He was dreaming! He dared not open his eyes. It was a dream. If he opened his eyes he would dispel the illusion and the pain would come again.

It seemed as though he had been upon a great journey that was crowded with a multitude of strange, fantastic scenes and happenings. He could not remember them all distinctly; they jumbled together in his memory—the orphan school, the race-track, Square John Kelly, and three thousand dollars in the Pacific Coral saloon on the Barbary Coast, all conglomerated into one.

He remembered only one thing distinctly, and that was because it had happened so often. He was in a great, gloomy forest, and always just ahead of him was Booky Skarvan. He did not know why it was, but he could always see Booky Skarvan in the darkness, though Booky Skarvan could not see him. And yet he could never quite reach that fat, damnable figure that kept flitting around the trees. Booky Skarvan was not running away, because Booky Skarvan did not even know that he was

being followed—and yet Booky Skarvan always eluded him.

If he was dreaming now, it was at least a very vivid dream. He remembered. He had just fallen unconscious on the floor of the car. Well, then, he must get the door shut, if he was to escape. Yes, the pain might come again if he moved; it would take all his will-power to shatter this blessed restfulness, and he was still very tired; but he had no choice—it was win or lose all the way—no limit.

He opened his eyes. He did not understand at first; and then he told himself quite simply that of course he could not still be lying on the floor of that lurching car, and at the same time feel these soft things all around his body. He was in bed—in a white bed, with white covers—and there was a screen around his bed.

But around the corner of the screen he could see other beds—white beds with white covers. It must be a hospital ward somewhere. There was some one sitting in a chair beside the foot of his bed—no, not the nurse; it was a man. The man's face for the moment was turned slightly away. He studied the face. It seemed familiar. His eyes opened a little wider. Yes, it was familiar!

A cry surged upward from his soul itself, it seemed—and was choked back. His hands, clenched fiercely, relaxed. There came a queer smile to twist his lips. The man at the foot of the bed was looking at him now.

It was Barjan—Lieutenant Joe Barjan, of the Frisco plain-clothes squad. The man spoke:

"Hello, Dave!"

"Hello, Joe!"

There was silence; then the other spoke again:

"Tough luck, Dave! Sorry to grab you like this. Feeling better?"

"Some," said Dave Henderson.

Barjan nodded his head.

"It was touch and go with you," he said. "Bad leg, bad fever—you've been laying like a dead man since the night they found you in the freight-car."

Dave Henderson made no reply. There wasn't any door shut now, and he wouldn't have to move now, until he went away with Joe there, back to Frisco. He wasn't squealing—stacked cards—a new deal with a new pack, perhaps—some day—he wasn't squealing, but he couldn't fight any more, not now—he couldn't fight: he was too weak.

"I've been hanging around two or three days waiting for you to come out of dreamland, so's I could ask you a question," said Barjan pleasantly. "Come across, Dave! Where'd you put that little package you had with you when you beat it from the car and handed Baldy the broken ribs?"

Dave Henderson smiled. He was very weak, miserably weak; it was an effort to talk, but his brain, because there wasn't any pain, was clear—clear enough to match Barjan's.

"Come again!" said Dave Henderson.

"Aw, can that!" A tinge of impatience had crept into the police officer's voice. "We got the whole story. Runty Mott and Baldy Vickers opened up—wide."

"I read about them in the papers," said Dave Henderson. "They said enough without me butting in, didn't they?"

"You mean," said Barjan sharply, "that you won't come across?"

"What's the use?" said Dave Henderson. "Their story goes, doesn't it? I wouldn't spoil a good story. They said I took the money, and if you believe them, that goes. I'm through."

"No good!" snapped Barjan. "You'd better open up on where that money is, or it will go hard with you."

"How hard?" inquired Dave Henderson.

"I dunno," said Barjan. "Five years."

Five years! How long was five years? His mind was growing tired now, too, like his body. He forced himself to the effort of keeping it active. It was a long way from where Baldy Vickers had broken his ribs, and where they thought he, Dave Henderson, had last had the money, to Mrs. Tooler's old pigeon-cote! And a hundred thousand dollars in five years was twenty thousand dollars a year—salary, twenty thousand dollars a year. Five years! It was win or lose, wasn't it? No hedging! Five years—five years before he could settle with Booky Skarvan!

He spoke aloud unconsciously: "It's a long time to wait."

"You bet your life it is!" said Barjan. "Don't fool yourself! It's a hell of a long time in the pen! And if you think you could get away with the wad when you get out again, you've got another think coming, too! Take it from me!"

"I wasn't thinking about the money," said Dave Henderson slowly. "I was thinking about that story." He closed his eyes.

The room was swimming around him. Five years—chalked up to Booky Skarvan! His hand on the coverlet clenched and raised, and fell impotently to the coverlet again. He was conscious that Barjan was leaning over the bed to catch his words, because he wasn't speaking very loud. "I was thinking it was a long time to wait—to get even."

A woman's voice seemed to come drifting out of space—that would be the nurse, of course—a woman's voice—

"That's all very well! You may be a police officer, but you had no business to make him talk. He is not strong enough to stand any excitement, and—"

The feminine voice drifted off into nothingness.

BOOK II

Five Years Later

CHAPTER I.

CONVICT NO. 550.

FROM somewhere far along the iron gallery a guard's boot-heel rang with a hollow, muffled, metallic sound; from everywhere, as from some strange, inceptive cradle, the source out of which all sounds emanated, and which, too, was as some strange sounding-board that accentuated each individual sound as it was given birth, came a confused, indeterminate, scarcely audible rupture of the silence that never ceased its uneasy, restless murmur. It was like water simmering in a caldron—only the water was a drear humanity, and the caldron was this gray-walled, steel-barred place.

A voice, low, quite inarticulate, falling often to little more than a whisper, mumbled endlessly on. That was the old bomb-thrower, old Tony Lomazzi, the lifer, in the next cell. The man was probably clinging to the bars of his door, his face thrust up against them, talking, talking, talking—always talking to himself.

He did not disturb anybody. Everybody was used to it; and, besides, the man did not talk loud. One even had to listen attentively to catch the sound of his voice at all. It had become a habit, second nature; the man was incorrigible.

Presently the guard would come along, and perhaps rap the old man on the knuckles; after that Lomazzi would retire to his cot quite docilely. It had been that way night after night, week after week, month after month, year after year.

Dave Henderson laid the prison-library book, that he had been fingering absently, down on the cot beside him. It was still early evening in early summer, and there was still light in the cell, though hardly enough to read by; but he was not reading even when there had been better light. His mind was too active to-night. And now there was a curiously wistful smile on his face.

He would miss that stumbling, whispering voice. A most strange thing to miss! Or was it the old man himself whom he would miss?

Not to-morrow, not even next week—there still remained sixty-three days. But sixty-three days, with all the rest of the five years behind them, gone, served, wiped out, were like to-morrow; and, as against a lifer's toll, it was freedom full born and actually present.

Yes, he would miss Tony Lomazzi. There was a bond between the old man and himself. In almost the first flush of his entry into the penitentiary he had precipitated a fight among his fellow convicts

on account of old Tony. Two of them had gone into the hospital, and he, Dave Henderson, had gone into the black hole.

He sat suddenly bolt upright on his cot. He had not forgotten the horror of those days of solitary confinement. He was not likely to forget them—the silence, the blackness. The silence that came at last to scream and shriek at him in a myriad voices out of the blackness until he was upon the verge of screaming and shrieking back in raving, unhinged abandon: the blackness that was as the blackness of the pit of hell, and that came at last to be peopled with hideous fantom shapes that plagued him until, face down on his cot, he would dig his fists into his eyes that he might not see.

His hands clenched hard as the memory of it surged upon him—but a moment later he laughed a little under his breath. It had been bad, bad enough—but he wasn't there *now*, was he?

Old Tony hadn't deluged him with any excessive thanks. The old man had simply called him a fool—but there had been a difference after that. On the march out from the cells, old Tony was always the man behind him, and old Tony's shoulder touch in the lock-step wasn't as perfunctory as it had been before. And there had been years of that. Yes, he would miss old Tony Lomazzi!

Instinctively he turned his head in the direction of that voice that whispered through the bars of the adjoining cell; and his face, lean and hard, softened, and, tingeing the dead-white prison pallor, a flush crept into his cheeks. The man was a lifer. A lifer! God, he knew what that meant! Five years of a living hell had taught him that. Five years that were eternities piled upon eternities, and they were only a short step along the path toward the only goal to which a lifer could look forward—death!

Yes, he knew! The massed eternities, that were called five years by those who walked outside in the sunlight, where men laughed and women smiled and children played, had taught him why old Tony Lomazzi clung to the bars and whispered.

Five years! Was it only five years since he had stood in the dock in that court-room, and the judge had sentenced him to five years? The scene was vivid and distinct enough! Even the ages that spanned the gulf between the now and then could not efface that scene, nor dim it, nor rob it of a single stark and naked detail.

Tydeman had been there—Martin K. Tydeman, that prince of royal sports. Tydeman was about the only man in that court-room whose presence had made him uneasy—and yet Tydeman, too, was the only man in that court-room who had been friendly toward him.

It was probably due to the old millionaire's plea for leniency that the sentence had been five years, and not ten or fifteen or twenty—or whatever it might be that the erect, spare little figure on the bench, with the thin lips, had had the right to pronounce. And Tydeman was dead now.

Dave Henderson stirred uneasily on the edge of the cot. He drew his hand slowly across his eyes. He had wished from the start, hadn't he, that it might have been some one else rather than Martin K. Tydeman? But it *had* been Tydeman's money, and the hundred thousand dollars alone was all that had counted; and Tydeman was dead now, had been dead two or three years, and on that score that ended it—didn't it?

The dark eyes, that had wavered abstractedly around the cell, narrowed suddenly, and from their depths a smoldering fire seemed to leap as suddenly into flame. But there was another score that was not ended!

Booky Skarvan! Baldy Vickers, Runty Mott, and the rest of Baldy's gang had lied speciously, smoothly, ingeniously, and with convincing unanimity. They had admitted the obvious, quite frankly, because they could not help themselves.

They had admitted their intention was to steal the hundred thousand dollars themselves. But they hadn't stole it—and that let them out. And they proved that he, Dave Henderson, had—and that saved their own hides. Also they had not implicated Booky Skarvan.

Their story had been very plausible. Runty Mott "confessed" that, on the morning of the crime, he had overheard Bocky Skarvan and Dave Henderson making their arrangements at the race-course to get Tydeman to put up the money to tide Bocky Skarvan over the crisis. He, Runty Mott, had then left at once for San Francisco, put the deal up to Baldy Vickers and Baldy's gang, and they had waited for Dave Henderson to arrive.

Naturally they had watched their proposed prey from the moment of his arrival in the city, intending to rob him when the money was in his possession and before he got back to the race-course that night; but instead of Tydeman turning the money over to Dave Henderson, as they had expected, Dave Henderson had completely upset their plans by stealing the money himself, and this had resulted in the prisoner's attempted getaway and the automobile chase which represented their own efforts to intercept him.

The dark eyes were almost closed now, but the gleam was still there—only now it was half mocking, half triumphant, and was mirrored in a grim smile that flickered across his lips. He had not denied their story.

To every effort to obtain from him a clue as to the whereabouts of the stolen money, he had remained as mute and unresponsive as a stone; cajolery, threats, the hint of a lighter sentence if restitution were made, he had met with silence. He had not even employed a lawyer: the court had appointed one. He had refused to confer with the lawyer. The lawyer had entered a perfunctory plea of "not guilty."

The grim smile deepened. There had been very good reasons why he had refused to open his lips at that trial—three of them.

In the first place, he was guilty; in the second place, there was Bocky Skarvan, who had no suspicion that he, Dave Henderson, knew the truth that lay behind Runty Mott's story; and in the third place, there was one hundred thousand dollars. There was to be no hedging. That was his creed.

Well, it had paid, hadn't it, that creed? The hundred thousand dollars was almost his now—there were only sixty-three days left. He had bought it with his creed, bought it with five years wrung in blood and sweat from his life, five years that had turned his soul sick within him.

He had paid the price—five years of sunlight he had given for that hundred thousand dollars, five years that had sought to bring the slouch of slavery and subjugation to his shoulders, a cringe into his soul, a whimper into his voice, and—

But he had won, hadn't he—even on that score? It was not often that the penitentiary would do for a man what this devil's hole had done for him. He had entered the prison a crude, unpolished assistant to a crooked bookmaker, his education such as he had acquired before he had run away from an orphan school at ten. And he could leave the place now, given the clothes and the chance, and pass anywhere for a gentleman—thanks in a very large measure to Charlie Millman.

Dave Henderson began to pace slowly up and down his cell. Millman had never understood, of course, just why he had had so apt a pupil. He had never explained to Millman that it had been from the very beginning his plan to rise to the level of a hundred thousand dollars that was waiting for him when he got out! Millman knew, of course, what he was up for. But that was about all, and had, perhaps, and very naturally, attributed his thirst for polish and education to be the outcropping of the inherent good in him that was coming to the surface of his better nature.

Millman, up for two years, had proved a godsend; for there hadn't been much progress along the line of "higher education" until Millman had come on the scene.

He liked Millman—and somehow Millman seemed to like him. A gentleman from the tip of his fingers was Millman—and he took his medicine like a gentleman. Millman wasn't the name that was entered on the prison books—there it was Charlie Reith.

It was strange that Millman should have given him his confidence; he could never quite understand that, except that it had

seemed to come gradually as their friendship grew, until finally it was almost the basis of that friendship itself. He had come to trust Millman as he had never trusted any other man, and he had come to believe in Millman as the soul of courtesy and honor.

And yet he had not been quite as open with Millman as Millman had been with him; he had not spread his cards upon the table, and Millman had never asked to see them; and somehow he had liked the man all the better for that. It was not that he did not trust the other; it was because his confidence was not the sort of confidence to give to an *honest* man—and Millman was honest. There was a queer twist to it all!

Dave Henderson smiled grimly again. It wouldn't be *fair* to make an honest man a party to the secret of where that money was; for it would make an honest man an accomplice after the fact. And there was no doubt of Millman's clean-cut, courageous honesty. The prison stripes could not change that!

He knew Millman's story: a nasty bit of work on the Barbary Coast, and viciously clever. Millman, a stranger in the city, and en route for a long trip through the South Seas, had been inveigled by a woman's specious plea for help into a notorious resort on the night in which a much-wanted member of the underworld was hard put to it to give the police the slip—and Millman had unsuspectingly made himself the vehicle of the other's escape.

The details were sordid; the woman's story pitifully impressive; and Millman's chivalry had led him, innocent of the truth, to deprive the plain-clothes squad of the services of one of their best men for the period of several months—while one of the slickest counterfeiters in the United States, and the woman with him, had made good their getaway.

It didn't look innocent in the eyes of the police, and Millman had stood for two years—convicted as Charles Reith—to save the name of Charles Millman and those that belonged to him back in New York. He had been found in a very unsavory place, and no amount of explanation could purify those surroundings. Millman had never said so in so many words, but he was buying a little woman's peace of mind back there in New York with two years' hard labor. And meanwhile he was supposed to be somewhere on a trading schooner in the out-of-the-way isles of the Pacific, or something like that—maybe it was Borneo on a hunting trip.

Henderson didn't remember just precisely how the other had fixed it. It didn't matter. The point was that they had made Millman one of the convict librarians in the prison, and Millman had become his tutor and his friend. Well, Millman was another he would miss. The day after tomorrow Millman's time was up, and Millman would be gone. He was glad for Millman's sake.

Five steps and a half from the rear wall of the cell to the steel-barred door, and five and a half steps back again—over and over. He was unaccountably restless tonight both in body and mind. He had spent his five years, less the time that had been manumitted for good conduct and less the sixty-three days that still remained, not altogether to his own disadvantage in an educational sense.

In that respect he was satisfied he was now ready to leave the prison and make the most of that hundred thousand dollars—not as a "raw skate," blowing it to the winds, but as one who would make it pay dividends on those five years of servitude that represented its purchase price. He was going out for good—in sixty-three days.

Sixty-three days! He wanted no piker, low-brow life at the end of those sixty-three days when he got out. He had had enough of that. He had spent the years here learning not to eat with his knife, either literally or metaphorically.

But there were only sixty-three days left, and there was still *one* thing he hadn't done—one problem still left unsolved which of late had been growing into nightmare proportions. In the earlier years of his sentence he had put it aside until the time came. That time was here now—and the problem was still aside. He had made all other preparations.

He had even communicated secretly, by means of a fellow convict who was going out, discharged, with Square John Kelly, of the Pacific Coral saloon in San Francisco, with whom he had invested his savings—that three thousand dollars at six per cent. And he had had foresight enough to do this months ago in order to give Kelly time to pull the money out of his business and have it ready for him in cash; for he wasn't quite sure where the law stood on this point.

Failing to recover the proceeds of the Tydeman robbery, the law might confiscate those savings—if the law knew anything about them. But the law didn't—and wouldn't. Square John had sent back word that everything was all right.

But there was still one problem left to solve—the way, once he was a free man again and outside these walls, of getting that hundred thousand dollars away from under the noses of the police and then giving the police the slip. And this, grown to monumental proportions in the last few months, rose before him now like some evil familiar that had taken possession of both his waking and sleeping hours.

And there came upon him now, as it had come again and again in these last months, that scene in the hospital when he had first opened his eyes to consciousness and they had rested on the face of the man who had run him to earth—Barjan, Lieutenant Joe Barjan, of the Frisco plain-clothes squad.

And Joe Barjan's words were ringing in his ears; ringing, somehow, with a cursed knell in them:

"Don't fool yourself! It's a hell of a long time in the pen! And if you think you could get away with the wad when you get out again, you've got another think coming, too! Take it from me!"

An acute sense of the realization of the *tangibility* of his surroundings seized upon him and brought a chill to his heart. That hard, unyielding cot; these walls, that caged him within their few scanty feet of space; his keepers' voices, that lashed out their commands; the animals, of which he was one, that toiled upon the eternal treadmill of days whose ends but foretold another of like horror and loathing to come!

Barjan had told the truth—more of the truth than Barjan ever knew, or could know, that he had told. It had been a hell of a long time. Long!

His face, as he still paced the cell, grayed under the prison paller. God, it had been long! Years of damnable torment that had shut him out from the freedom that he loved! It had been a price beyond all reckoning that he had paid for that hundred thousand dollars. But he had paid it! He had paid it—paid it!

He had gone all the way—gone the limit. Was Barjan, right in one thing, right in that other thing as well—that at the end they would beat him?

His hands curled into knotted lumps. There were not enough Barjans for that, though the world were peopled with Barjans! The thought had brought a chill of dread for a moment, that was all. He had paid the price; he was not likely to forget what that price had been; and he would never yield up what that price had bought.

True, he had no plan for this last play of his worked out in detail, but he would find a way—because he must. He was probably exaggerating what the police would or could do, anyhow! At first when he had come into the penitentiary they had tried to trap, sometimes to wheedle, him into disclosing where the money was, though they had long since given up those tactics and left him to himself.

But suppose the police did watch him now when he got out. He could afford to wait—to wait a long while—until the police got tired, perhaps, or perhaps came to the conclusion that, after all, they had got the wrong man.

They would not forget that, though he had refused to say anything at the trial, he had not been so mute in his attitude toward Runty Mott and Baldy Vickers, who had "sent him up"; and Barjan would not forget, either, that in the hospital that day, with scarcely strength to speak, he had threatened to get even with the gangster and the Runt.

There was a psychological factor in this. If he made no effort to get the money, showed no sign that he had any knowledge of its whereabouts, might not the police in

time come to the far from illogical conclusion that they might better have watched—five years ago—the men who had so glibly acted as witnesses for the State, the men who had, admittedly, themselves attempted to steal the money? It wasn't unreasonable, was it? And he could afford to wait. The three thousand dollars from Square John Kelly would keep him going for quite a while! He was a fool to let this thing madden his brain with its constant torturing doubts. It was their move—not his.

From far along the iron gallery again a boot-heel rang with a dull, metallic sound. It was the guard, probably, coming to rap old Tony Lomazzi over the knuckles. He stopped his restless pacing, and stood still in the center of the cell to listen. No, the old bomb-thrower wasn't talking any longer; there wasn't any sound at all except that boot-heel ringing on the iron flooring.

The sound came nearer, and Henderson frowned in a puzzled way. The guard was not alone, in any case. He could distinguish the footsteps of two men now. It wasn't usual at this hour for any one to be out there with the guard.

What was in the wind? The warden, perhaps, making an unexpected round, or—

His hands gripped suddenly hard and tight—but he did not move. There came flashing over him once more the scene in that hospital-ward of five years ago. The cell door had opened and closed. A man had entered. The guard's footsteps died away outside. The man spoke:

"Hello, Dave!"

It was Lieutenant Joe Barjan, of the Frisco plain-clothes squad. It *was* the scene of five years ago. That was exactly what Barjan had said then: "Hello, Dave!" And he had answered: "Hello, Joe!" But he did not answer now.

"This is a little irregular, Dave," said Barjan pleasantly; "but I wanted to have a quiet little chat with you, you know, before"—he stepped forward and clapped his hand on Dave Henderson's shoulder, and laughed—"well, before you changed your address."

Dave Henderson made no reply. He moved back from the other, and sat down on the edge of his cot.

"There's a couple of things I want to say to you," said Barjan, still pleasantly. "And the first of them is that I want to tell you on the level just where you stand. You're going out of here pretty soon now, Dave. I guess you've got a better line on that than I have—eh?" He laughed again good-humoredly. "Got the days counted, haven't you, Dave?"

No answer. Dave Henderson's eyes were fixed on the ungainly lines of the toe of his prison boot.

"Oh, come on, now, Dave!" Barjan's tones were still hearty and jocular, but the heartiness and jocularity, as though disconcerted, lacked some of their original spontaneity. "Loosen up! You've been a clam for five years. That's long enough. I've come up here to-night to play square with you. You know that whatever I say goes with both of us. I know you aren't holding against me personally just because I happened to be the one that put the bracelets on you, and back of that we used to be pretty good friends. I haven't forgotten the tips you used to give me in the old days—and don't you think I have, either!

"Remember when that old skeleton with the horse-hair cover pranced away with a forty-to-one shot? Bonnie Lass, her name was—or was it Boney? Remember? She got the hee-haw—but my missus got the swellest outfit of gewgaws and fixings the old girl ever had before or since. You wised me up to that, Dave."

No answer. There seemed to be something curiously significant in the uncouthness and the coarseness of that boot-toe—but the significance was irritatingly elusive in its application.

There was silence for a moment. Barjan walked the length of the cell, and back again.

"All right," he said, halting in front of the cot. "Maybe we'll get along better on another tack. I'm not beating about the bush, Dave"—his voice was a little harder, crisper, sterner—"I want to know where that hundred thousand dollars is. But I told you that I'd put you straight first on where you stand. Now, listen! We've played both ends to the middle.

"We believed that the story Runty Mott

and Baldy Vickers told was true; but both men had a record, and you can't be sure of a crook on his own say-so. We didn't take any chances, and so we're sure now.

"Those men were watched—not for a couple of weeks, or a couple of months, but for the last four years. They don't know where the money is, and they never did know what you did with it after you handed them that automobile smash and beat it for the woods.

"Get that? It's up to you! And now, get this: I told you in the hospital that day, you remember, that you could never get away with it, and that's as true as I'm standing here talking to you now. You've got some brains, Dave—use 'em now for you own sake.

"From the moment you step outside these walls you're a marked man, and not for just a little while either, but for all your life. They'll never let up on you, Dave. Let that sink in! And it ain't only just old Joe Barjan you've got to fool. Talking racy, Dave, your number's up on the board on every police track in this country from one end to the other.

"You can't beat that kind of a game. I'm talking straight, and you know it. Come on now, Dave, pry them lips of yours apart, and come across!"

Dave Henderson's lips parted—but it was only to touch them with the tip of his tongue. They were dry. His eyes were still on that coarse, ungainly toe. Its significance had taken concrete form now.

He knew now what it meant.

It typified a living hell of five long years, a ghastly hell and a ghastly price paid for that hundred thousand dollars—years that had left a stench in his nostrils that would live as long as he lived—years that piled the daily, never-ending details of petty persecutions, of loathsome associations, of miserable discomforts, of haggard dreariness, of heart sickness, of bitterness that was the bitterness of gall, into one overwhelming mass of horror from which the soul recoiled, blanched, seared, shriveled.

And it went back further than that. It went back to a night of the long, long ago, eternities ago, a night when, in physical torture and anguish from his wound, his teeth had sunk into his lips, and he had become blood-fanged like the hunted animal at bay he was, and he had endured until the blackness came. That was what it meant, this rough, heavy ungraceful clod of a prison boot upon his foot! It meant that he had gone the limit, that he had never hedged, that he had paid the price, all of it—all of it—except only the sixty-three days that were left.

"Ain't you going to say anything, Dave?"

Tony Lomazzi must have shuffled his way back to the bars of his cell door. The old Italian was whispering and muttering again. If one listened very intently, one could hear him. There was no other sound.

Barjan cleared his throat.

"Look here," he said slowly, "what's the use, Dave? I've showed you that you're bound to lose, and that on that score it don't pay. And it don't pay any way you want to look at it. You don't have to go out of here a marked man, Dave. There ain't any truth in that—that the police never give a guy a chance to go straight again. There ain't anything in that. It's all up to the guy himself.

"You come across, make good on that money, and I'll guarantee you'll get the squarest deal any man ever got.

"Why, it would be proof in itself that you meant to go straight, Dave, and everybody 'd fall over himself to give you the glad hand. You can see that, can't you, Dave? Don't you want to look the other fellow in the eye for the rest of your life? Don't you want to be a free man? You've got a lot of years ahead of you. Ain't you ever thought of a home, and kiddies, maybe? It don't pay, Dave—the other way don't. You've got the chance now to make good. What do you say?"

Tony Lomazzi was still muttering. Strange the guard was letting the old bomb-thrower have so much license to-night! Tony seemed to be chattering louder than he had ever chattered in all the years he had occupied that next cell there!

Barjan laughed a little in a low, but not unpleasant way.

"Well then, listen again, Dave," he said. "I got one more thing to tell you. You

know what I've said is right. You come across, and I'll see that you get your chance—and you don't have to wait for it, either, Dave. I've got it all fixed, I've got the papers in my pocket. You come across, and you walk out of here a free man with me right now—*to-night!*" He leaned forward and slapped Dave Henderson's shoulder again. "To-night, Dave—get that? Right now—to-night—this minute! What do you say?"

It was true! The tentative plan he had half formulated was no good! He realized that now. To lay low and wait was no good—Barjan had made that clear. The hope that the police might veer around to the belief that Runty Mott and Baldy Vickers were, after all, the men to watch, was no good either—Barjan had made that equally clear.

There didn't seem to be any way out—and his number was up on the board on every police track in the country. Yes, that was true, too. He lifted his eyes from the toe of his boot for the first time, and met Barjan's eyes, and held the other's for a long minute in a steady gaze.

And then Dave Henderson spoke—for the first time.

"You go to hell!" he said.

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.

The Story Basket

by Herman Howard Matteson

TO-LO TALAPUS, "the wolf that kills," had had a way of ridding himself of enemies, and treacherous, seeming friends, that had earned for him, at his death, ten yellow stripes painted across the blade of the war-canoe paddle thrust into the earth at the head of his grave.

Malah, his daughter, inherited, apparently, none of the old brave's bloodthirsty traits.

On the contrary, she was so thrifty and gentle, and withal so pleasing to the eye, that Lars Arend, Finnish sailor, within a few hours of the time that he had deserted ship at Victoria and landed on Cypress Island of far lower Puget Sound, on the American side, hunted up To-lo Talapus, and paid over, as earnest of honorable matrimonial intention, one California gold slug. Then Lars built his cabin; the witch doctor hung about the sailor's neck and about the neck of Malah each a deerskin sack of strong medicine, and they were wed.

In time was born Klikwillie, from whose eyes, black and hard as shoe-buttons, shone the implacable, reincarnated spirit of To-lo Talapus, the wolf that kills.

Lars, entertaining still some old country notions, attempted to tame little Klikwillie, wearing out in the futile effort many a bundle of slender, stinging willow-withes.

Never under castigation, which decidedly was none of the gentlest, did the girl ever shed a tear except upon one occasion. The girl, then five or six years old, had been beating her dog with a stick. Lars began beating Klikwillie with a switch when the dog fastened its teeth in the calf of the sailor's leg. At once, Klikwillie, who had shed never a tear, flung her arms about the dog's neck in a paroxysm of weeping.

Never again did Lars lay a hand upon the girl who rapidly grew from childhood into young womanhood, sullen, vicious, unconquered.

When Klikwillie had been about fourteen years of age, Lars had died. Shortly thereafter had come to the island the mining man, whom the Indians called "Tukomonuk," "the one who talks big," and his daughter, called for convenience, "Little Tuk." Tuk and Klikwillie became playmates, loved each other dearly for five years, when— But that's the story.

Treading stealthily, parting the branches before her cautiously, Klikwillie made her way to the edge of the clearing where stood the cabin of Little Tuk. Glad voices sounded from within—Tuk's, and the voice of the newcomer, the young white man, Ross Hardy. The half-breed's brown fingers, where they rested upon a madroña branch, tensed as if clutching themselves about a knife-haft.

The man's voice grew louder as his hand rattled at the latch, swung open the door. Tuk and Hardy were standing upon the porch, the man prattling away nonsensically as he glanced down at the girl. He had never talked that way, looked that way at Klikwillie.

Hardy picked up an immense basket, loaded into it a pair of garden trowels, then he and the girl made off into the wood by a trail that opened from the cabin clearing.

Boldly now Klikwillie advanced from hiding, sent a malevolent look after the couple, stood scowling at the cabin where, more than once, she had played the drudge for Lady Tuk. But no more; now she was as good as Little Tuk: better, if one took for a standard the white man's gage of wealth. Old Tukomonuk, the man who talked big, was dead, leaving his daughter worse than penniless.

Sheer above the cabin, at a height of nearly a thousand feet, showed in the side of the mountain, the round hole of the mine-tunnel from which old Tuk had surely expected to extract a fortune, and where, firing a faulty fuse, his mortal body had been annihilated, wafted into nothingness by a shot of dynamite. Soleks, an Indian who had helped in the mine work, thinking to save Little Tuk from any untimely visits of her father's ghost, had boarded up the tunnel with heavy stringers and planks, and had tumbled from place the long, fir-tree ladders by which the shaft had been reached.

The tunnel, which pierced the mountain-top, opened on the side opposite to the cabin. This opening, Soleks had left open, reasoning sagaciously that if the spirit of the miner took to wandering and chanced to emerge by the far hold, it would never, never find its way around into the cañon where the cabin nestled.

Immediately after the death of her father, Little Tuk had dispensed with the services of Malah and Klikwillie, who had been hired, if not always paid, by old Tuk to do the housework. Really mistress of the miner's house for more than five years, it had transpired naturally enough that Malah had trained together her own girl and Little Tuk in the arts of housewifery. Together the girls had learned to prepare seaweed, dig and hoard the edible fern roots, and side by side upon a little bench they had learned the art of basket-making.

The Indian girl of the San Juan Islands, after she had served proper apprenticeship, and when approaching marriageable age, is required to make what is known as the *ekhanum opekwan*, or story-basket. The story-basket design is literally the girl's history and depicts, to him who knows the Indian sign language, notable events in her own career, the very longings and ambitions of her heart. The story-basket completed, is laid away, to become, at the girl's marriage, the principal culinary implement in the household of the new establishment.

Little Tuk, under Malah's instruction, had become a famous weaver of baskets,

and, following her father's death, she had taken seriously to making them in order to pay off her father's debts, the greater majority of which she had discharged when, one day, a camp outfit had been dumped upon the shore, and a young man had come knocking at the cabin door.

The attractive young man had asked for her father. Eloquently she had pointed to the boarded mine-shaft, when, stammering and ill at ease, the young man had started to back away. Little Tuk insisted upon knowing what business had brought the man in search of her father.

He was Ross Hardy. Years before, his father, Dr. Hardy, had grubstaked old Tuk. Under the terms of the agreement Dr. Hardy was to have an undivided half-interest in any mining or other property acquired as a result of the expenditure of the Hardy money. Dr. Hardy had died. Young Ross Hardy's sole heritage, as he had discovered, was the ancient grub-stake agreement, and he had come on to the San Juan Islands to claim his own, which, strictly under the law, would have been a half-interest in one cedar shake cabin, an abandoned mine tunnel in Cypress Mountain, and about a hundred and twenty acres of rocky hillside and cañon where grew cedar-trees, madroñas, and the delicate, beautiful sword-fern.

After Little Tuk had called him back, demanded and received the explanation, young Ross Hardy had laughingly declared that he was going to claim his partnership rights. He would pitch his tent somewhere on the beach. Was there any fishing, any hunting? Then, when he learned that Little Tuk was making baskets, filling them with sword-ferns, selling them to vacationists all over the islands, he had declared himself in on the basket business.

Many times young Hardy had encountered Klikwillie as she suddenly emerged into the trail, or confronted him in the depths of the glen. The half-breed interested, yet repelled him. The girl's eyes were so black, intense, tragic. Several times Klikwillie invited him to come to her cabin. Laughingly he had accepted, but had never gone, and the proud, revengeful heart of the granddaughter of To-lo Talapus began to fester and ooze poison like a snake-bitten heel.

Klikwillie stared down the trail in the direction whence Little Tuk and Ross had disappeared. He had never come to see her —never. He wanted a white girl. Tuk was white; she was a half-breed. Little Tuk had claimed that any one by earnest, persistent effort could make of himself what he chose.

Fool! Liar! She, Klikwillie, might study, toil until the protesting soul of her flew from her body to the skies, and still she would be a half-breed, granddaughter of the wolf that kills.

Ah, yes. Fate had made of her a half-breed. Well enough. Let then this same fate guard preserve those who mocked, despised, flaunted the granddaughter of To-lo Talapus.

Still, Klikwillie wanted to be very, very sure. She and Little Tuk, in girlish confidence, had talked often of love and marriage, and Little Tuk had advanced the astounding rule that no nice girl should ever, ever betray her liking for any certain man. Perhaps Little Tuk was dissembling with Ross Hardy. How Klikwillie prayed to her savage gods that this might be so. But presently she would know Tuk's secret. For this very opportunity the half-breed had waited, watched for more than a week.

The glad voices of Tuk and Ross were still audible down the trail when Klikwillie opened the door, crossed the kitchen floor. Behind the stove was a cupboard. The half-breed opened this door, drew up a wooden-bottomed chair, mounted it. From the topmost shelf Klikwillie drew forth Little Tuk's unfinished story-basket.

The story-basket was of pliable, tough, yellow cedar-roots, with the designs worked in with other cedar-roots stained a deep scarlet in the sap of the blood-bush. Near the bottom of the basket showed a rhododendron-leaf, the Indian hope sign. Next came a design showing half the disk of the sun showing above the horizon. This was the Indian "klipsun," or sunset, the death sign, and commemorated the death of Tuk's father.

Lastly—Klikwillie's face, as a look of hatred swept over it was something appall-

ing—lastly, was the figure of the *chee kalakala,* the fabled, whisper bird of the Siwashes which, said the old wives' tales, came at dusk, breathed the word into a maiden's ear when love drew near.

Klikwillie's hands clenched into the delicate fabric of the basket, she made as if to tear it, but threw it disdainfully back onto the shelf, closed the door. She stood glaring about the room like some wild thing at bay. Voices sounded, and she sped from the cabin and into the brush.

Plan after plan for revenge with the mentor, caution always at her elbow, Klikwillie meditated as she went sullenly about the tasks imposed by the thrifty Malah. Whenever she could shirk or evade a duty, Klikwillie haunted the vicinity of Little Tuk's cabin, shadowed the lovers through the wood, stalking them as it is said the forest cougar will—days, weeks even—before the kill.

Still Klikwillie waited. For one thing, her wish fashioning the thought, she was not absolutely certain that Little Tuk was not coquetting with the white man. For another, she hoped against hope that something might arise to estrange the white folks, break up forever the growing intimacy of the partnership which had grown from jest to dangerous earnestness. Then, one afternoon, Klikwillie, hidden in a covert, saw Ross fling down his trowel and gather Little Tuk into his arms.

By an obscure trail Klikwillie slunk to her miserable cabin.

For several days Little Tuk had not seen Klikwillie, so, perhaps a week later, it was with genuine pleasure that the white girl welcomed her old playmate and invited her to enter.

Abruptly, Klikwillie began. "Soleks ever tell you he find anything strange in tunnel time Papa Tukomonuk die?"

Little Tuk's eyes started, her lips opened apprehensively. "Anything strange? No. What? Tell me, Klikwillie."

The half-breed shook her head. "I don't know. Something, I think, not right. But I don't know."

"But you suspect something, Klikwillie. It isn't kind not to tell me."

"I know nothing," protested Klikwillie. "Just one time I hear Soleks say it that it is strange. Besides, you remember how Soleks board up the tunnel quick, throw down the ladders?"

Little Tuk stood studying the half-breed's immobile, dark face. Soleks, the white girl reflected, had been in a great hurry to board up the tunnel, but this she had always attributed to the Indian's superstitious fears. "If you know nothing, Klikwillie, why did you mention this at this time? You must have some reason."

Klikwillie shook her head. "No. I just think all time what Soleks say, and I wonder. I know nothing."

The white girl glanced from the window to where the landing steps, dug out of the cliff side for the ladders, still showed. "If the ladders were in place," said Little Tuk, "I'd have a look."

There was just a trace of eagerness in the gesture as Klikwillie touched the white girl's arm. "On other side," offered the half-breed, "tunnel is not boarded up. Easy to go in with a rope."

Some subtle warning of treachery flashed to Tuk's consciousness, but vanished before Klikwillie's unwavering regard.

"With a rope, two folks go in easy; then they find out. Soleks say it. I don't know."

As if dismissing the subject, Klikwillie pointed suddenly to the cupboard behind the stove. "You finish story-basket yet?" she asked.

Little Tuk's cheek flushed. "Not yet—quite," she answered. "Have you completed yours?"

The half-breed shook her head. "No. No picture to finish with—yet."

Abruptly, as is the Indian fashion, Klikwillie started for the door. "*Klakowa,*" she said, and disappeared down the trail.

Half a dozen wild conjectures entered Tuk's mind. Perhaps the blast that had destroyed her father had opened up the long sought, priceless vein of chrome iron. Her father had related many such fateful instances. Or, perhaps her father had hidden in the tunnel treasure, something. Highly improbable. But she could never rest until she knew for certain. Klikwillie had said that two folks could go into the tunnel easily with a rope. Two folks. That

had meant herself and Ross. But Tuk felt a delicacy about broaching the subject to Ross. The long, dark tunnel through the mountain was but a mine-shaft; still, it was the grave of the dreamer father whom she loved. If two people could enter the tunnel with a rope, one could. She'd try it alone. Later, perhaps, she'd tell Ross about it.

Klikwillie, with an impressive show of hurry, plunged noisily down the trail, came to pause when well out of sight of Tuk's cabin, stealthily retraced her steps, hid herself in the shrubbery. Presently, the young white man appeared, coming from his tent on the beach. Little Tuk met him at the door, thrust at him a bit of paper.

"You'll have to go to the store, Ross. Be sure about the coffee and don't let them give you the wrong kind: the last bacon was too fat."

Laughingly, Ross bantered her about having so serious a face over a tin of coffee, started for the trail, playfully pretending that he proposed to take one of Little Tuk's hands along with him.

As Ross passed her hiding-place, Klikwillie's savage, muttered exclamation almost betrayed her. Her plan had gone agley. She had never dreamed but that Tuk would take the white man into her confidence.

Then, a moment later, when Little Tuk appeared upon the step, a coil of stout rope in her hand, Klikwillie's evil heart gave an exultant bound. Fate, this was fate, the hand of the *Saghalie Tyee* directing that Little Tuk alone should pay.

For nearly a mile the trail led down the cañon to where a second trail joined winding by a circuitous route to the top and opposite side of the mountain where opened the tunnel. As swiftly as the white girl traversed the path, never once did the softly footing half-breed lose sight of her.

Where the trail emerged upon the bald, rocky top of the mountain, the side dropped away, leaving an immense mushroom stone, which actually shelved above the waters of the shallow bay far beneath. The bay side of the island was entirely uninhabited, and as it afforded no fishing was visited but rarely.

As Tuk came to a pause on the crest of the mushroom rock, Klikwillie dropped from sight behind a boulder. Half a dozen scraggly cedars found precarious rooting in the cracks of the rocks. Selecting the tree nearest the edge of the rock, Tuk made fast one end of the rope, then began tying knots in the free portion. Then she tested the rope with her weight, and, clutching it firmly, walked cautiously to the brim. Slowly she leaned, until she gazed down into the depths below. An involuntary shudder passed over her, and she drew back. A moment she stood staring at the frail bit of cord to which she must trust her life, dropped to her knees, backed to the edge of the stone, slipped over, disappeared from sight.

Swiftly, Klikwillie ran to the edge of the precipice, and with never a tremor of fear, leaned over the abyss and looked below. Little Tuk had gained the tunnel mouth, ten feet below, no great feat for an island girl with muscles steeled by tugging at a dory's heavy oars, and was drawing the length of rope in after her. Klikwillie stretched forth her hands. The instant that Tuk laid down the rope-coil, the half-breed would seize it, yank it from the tunnel-mouth, loose it from the tree, fling it into the bay beneath.

Reaching forward and downward, Klikwillie laid hold of the rope and gave a sudden yank. One piercing scream the half-breed uttered, clutching madly at the rock as she fell, and managed to gain a hold upon the line, to come to a stop opposite the tunnel-mouth with a sudden violence that almost dislocated her arms.

She had seized the rope too soon. Little Tuk had not yet laid it coiled upon the tunnel-floor. Thinking that the wind was whipping it about, the white girl, at the instant the half-breed had seized the line, had given it a twitch, which had caused Klikwillie to lose her balance.

But the half-breed had nerves of iron. As Little Tuk uttered a terrified scream, Klikwillie uttered a cold laugh, jerked her body, placed one foot upon the edge of the tunnel-entrance and scrambled in.

As she stood calmly coiling the rope in her hand, Klikwillie stared insolently into the horror-stricken countenance of the white girl. "You wish I was in bay below,"

said the half-breed. "Don't lie. I know you do."

Her lips snarled away from the strong, white teeth, as she coiled the rope tighter and tighter.

At the murderous look upon the breed's dark face, Little Tuk backed away. "You 'fraid to die, Little Tuk? My plan go wrong. It's no matter. I got nothing to live for; you have everything. We see who cry out first."

She drew back her arm, and as Tuk, divining her purpose, sprang toward her, gave the rope-coil a heave and a twist which landed it upon the rock above, a single, depending coil hanging over the brim, but far beyond arm's reach.

Tuk was running back and forth in the tunnel, crying, moaning, clasping and unclasping her hands. Had Klikwillie gone mad! "Klikwillie, why did you? We'll die! We'll die, starve, miserably alone in this tunnel! Why, why did you, Klikwillie?"

The half-breed, her countenance as hard, as impassive as the rock against which she had imperturbably seated herself, began to grin horribly. "We just alike now, Tuk, you and me; white girl going to die no better than half-breed going to die. Just alike now, you and me. He—"

"He!" repeated Little Tuk. "He! Now I understand. You would have left me here purposely to die. Murderer! Oh! Oh! Ross! Ross!"

Again and again she screamed his name, the frantic call echoing faintly over the deserted bay.

"No good to call. Nobody hear. You 'fraid to die?"

By an effort the white girl regained control of herself. Walking back into the tunnel to where a sharp curve cut off the light from the narrrow entrance, she felt her way to the boarded entrance above her cabin. Soleks had done his work well. Scarcely a ray of light found its way past the snugly fitted double planking.

Back she crept through the tunnel. Klikwillie sat near the entrance staring out at the circle of blue sky. A panic of fear seized upon the white girl as she contemplated the tall, muscular form of the half-breed. What if Klikwillie, in a sudden access of savage rage, should seize her and fling her from the rock. Back into the tunnel Little Tug retreated a distance, to sink weakly upon the floor.

The morning passed, midday, afternoon. Away in the distance sounded faintly the whistle of the packet boat landing on Cottonwood Island. Five o'clock.

About midway in the tunnel Tuk had felt the drip of cold water seeping through a crack in the rock. Hither she crept, held open her parched lips and drank.

Again the white girl returned, took her seat a distance from the half-breed, who still sat staring into space. Settling her back against the wall of the tunnel, Little Tuk made herself as comfortable as possible. Desperately she searched her mind for some way of escape. Her hand, feeling idly about on the rock beside her, encountered a bit of shale which had been chipped from the wall. Instantly a plan occurred to her. If only Klikwillie would fall asleep.

Klikwillie, listening with ears as sharp as those of a wild thing, was thinking, if only Tuk would fall asleep. She, too, had a plan, if only Tuk would fall asleep. She'd wear the white girl down. She could wait. She was an Indian. She was the granddaughter of To-lo Talapus, the wolf that kills.

Morning came, and again Little Tuk sought the dripping rock and drank. Klikwillie, as insensible to physical want apparently as the rock at her back, had scarcely moved.

Noon came, afternoon, then night.

Little Tuk's head sagged upon her bosom, but she awoke with a scream. Klikwillie uttered a sharp reprimand, laughed harshly, asked the white girl sneeringly if she were afraid to die.

Again morning. Little Tuk had scarcely the strength to drag herself to the dripping rock. Even while she held her open lips up for the blessed drops, Klikwillie came, thrust her aside, drank and returned to the tunnel-mouth.

The brain of the white girl was reeling madly. Sleep! She must sleep! What if the half-breed did creep upon her, fling her from the rock. Sleep! Better death than this. Sleep!

She bowed her head upon her breast, slept.

A wailing cry, a cry of mortal fear, sounded through the tunnel, electrifying Little Tuk's palsied limbs into action. To the tunnel-mouth she went lurching.

Morning was just breaking over the bay. Hanging by the rope, staring down into the void below, was the half-breed.

She had worked her plan. While Little Tuk had slept, the half-breed had raveled threads from her dress, twisted them into a string, attached a bit of stone, had tossed it and hauled in the coil of rope. Bereft of strength by hours, days of fasting, Klikwillie had not the strength to gain the top, or even to scramble in at the tunnel-entrance.

Though her brain reeled, the white girl clutched her dead fingers into a depression in the tunnel side, reached, drew Klikwillie to safety. The half-breed sank into a helpless heap.

Finally she lifted her head. A seizure of rage distorted her face into an expression truly fiendish. "Why not let me die then? It's no business of yours. Fool!"

Klikwillie clasped her hands to her face; her shoulders began to shake.

Little Tuk was by her side. "I couldn't, Klikwillie, let you die. Never! Never! I don't hate you, Klikwillie, even—"

Little Tuk threw her arms about her old playmate, drew the black head onto her bosom. "Listen, Klikwillie. I think, I am sure, I can make it up the rope. I have slept. I am stronger."

"And leave me here? It is right. Go!"

"Leave you? Never! I'd bring help. Leave you? I understand, Klikwillie, but I've forgiven you."

"Forgive me!"

"Yes."

The half-breed's arms tensed about the white girl as she moaned: "She forgives me! Oh, God! she forgives me!"

Little Tuk laid her hands to the rope, swung out over space. But for the half-breed she would have fallen. The white girl was too weak, too spent to make the ascent. Too long they had waited.

Morning passed, noon and again it was night. Side by side, hands clasped, the girls waited, waited for the bitter end. They slept the deep, merciful sleep of utter exhaustion.

Little Tuk thought she must be dreaming. From afar off, somewhere in the darkness, from another world it seemed, some one called her name.

Stupidly she smiled at the pleasing fantasy. But no.

"Tuk! Little Tuk! Oohoo! Tuk!"

"Ross! Ross! Here in the mine-tunnel! Here, Ross!"

The light of a lantern shot over the black abyss. "Here, Ross!"

Then they called back and forth to each other. "Don't try to climb," he admonished her. "Just make the rope fast about your waist. Careful! Are you ready?"

No answer. Tuk had made the line fast about her waist, then had fainted dead away.

Carefully the young man, suspecting what had happened, tensed the rope, made certain that she was securely fastened, drew her up.

She awakened in her own clean, little bed. Beside her stood the white doctor, Ross, and good, old Malah. In her own little bed. "How long had she been there? Why, two weeks."

Two weeks. Ah, it was good to feel the cool, soft sheets, to turn her head in the hollow of the big, soft pillow. Just two weeks.

Suddenly she reared her body erect, fell back, crying, "Klikwillie! Klikwillie! Where's Klikwillie!"

Malah placed her hard, brown hand upon the girl's forehead.

"Klikwillie's gone," said Ross softly. "You raved of her in your delirium, so I went back, entered the tunnel. She was gone. We dragged the bay. There had been a long run out of tide."

"Gone!"

Little Tuk's lips moved, and Malah bent her head. "I'm so glad," whispered Tuk, "that I forgave her. So glad. Poor Klikwillie."

"*Malah tikegh tenas Tuk.* For that, Malah loves Little Tuk," whispered the Indian woman in reply, a tear shining upon her cheek. "*Malah tikegh tenas Tuk.*"

The Consolation Prize

by E. K. Means

CHAPTER I.

THE CLOUD ON THE HORIZON.

"SKEETER, kin you rickoleck in your mind about a nigger man who called hisse'f Wash Jones?"

"Suttinly," Skeeter answered. "He snuck in here about a year ago an' tried to refawm Tickfall cullud sawciety. Us made him Fust Grand Organizer of de Nights of Darkness Lodge fer de whole worl' an' sont him out of town on his fust gran' organize. Ain't seed him since dat time."

"He's done snuck in agin," Figger informed him. "He's all here—de same flossy vest an' de same big watch-chain 'thout no watch to it, an' de same mouthful of chawin' terbacker. But his mouth is done changed."

"Whut done happened to his mouth?"

"He's growed two long mustaches whut comes down from de sides of his nose plum below his chin. He looks like a nigger whut had swallowed two cat-squirrels an' lef' deir tails hangin' out!"

"Whut you reckin he done dat fer?" Skeeter asked.

"Done disguised hisse'f."

"He ain't refawmin' nothin', is he?" Skeeter asked uneasily.

"Naw, suh. He's organizin'. He done throwed up his Nights of Darkness Lodge job an' is cornductin' health resorts fer cullud pussons."

"Dar ain't no sick niggers in Tickfall," Skeeter said with relief. "He's done busted in bizzness an' don't know it."

"Dar ain't no real sick niggers," Figger agreed. "But plenty of us feels jes' tol'able an' b'lieves dat we needs a rest."

"Restin' time an' Sunday comes nachel wid niggers," Skeeter grinned. "You ain't sweeped out dis saloon fer about six mont's."

"Cain't sweep her out now, Skeeter," Figger replied hastily. "Fer a fack, I done come to ax you fer a lay-off fer about two weeks. I needs a change."

"Wharabouts you gwine change to?" Skeeter asked grouchily.

"Out to de ole tabernacle an' de prize-fight, picnic, baseball-groun's, whar Brudder Wash is organizin' his health resort."

"How come I ain't heerd tell 'bout dat?" Skeeter asked.

"He's been keepin' it sly because he wus skeart somebody else would think it up an' beat him to it," Figger explained. "He done leased de ole camp-groun's complete, fixed up all de little shacks whar niggers kin stay, hired Shin Bone to run de resteraw, made a dancin'-floor in de ole tabernacle, rented a brass band, an' is gittin' ready to rake in de dollars."

"My Lawd!" Skeeter exclaimed in dismay. "I been livin' in dis town all my days an' I never thunk of dat gorgeous idear in my whole life."

"It shore is a dandy notion," Figger said

with admiration. "Dar's fo' springs of water, a great big lake to fish an' swim in, plenty woods an' play-groun's."

"Gosh! Jes' think of de money dat's gwine miss my pants' pocket," Skeeter sighed.

"Wash specifies dat dar is a Cooney Island in New Yawk an' he's gwine hab a Coon Island in Tickfall."

"Dat shore is put somepin over on me," Skeeter mourned.

"Ef you ain't got no real good objections, I goes out dar to-night an' stays a week," Figger remarked.

"I don't like de notion of keepin' dis saloon while you gallivants off to a nigger frolic," Skeeter protested.

"But I gotter go," Figger assured him.

"Nobody ain't gotter go no place onless he wants to, excusin' jail," Skeeter grumbled.

Figger Bush ended the argument by rising from the table, knocking the ashes from his pipe, and retiring to a little room in the rear of the bar to dress. Ten minutes later he came out with a new suit of clothes, a sunburst tie, a high collar and most expansive cuffs, and all the other paraphernalia of a dead-game sport out for a vacation.

"I hates to leave you, Skeeter," Figger remarked apologetically. "I's sorry you is got a grouch. But ef I don't show up at de tabernacle my grandpaw won't like it."

"How come you is so suddent oneasy about displeasin' Popsy Spout?" Skeeter wanted to know.

"Dat ole man is got money in de bank. Some day he's gwine haul off an' die. When he do, he'll inherit me his house an' all his cash spondulix. After dat happens, I'll buy one-half of dis Henscratch Saloon."

"Dat ole gizzard says he's gwine live till he's one hundred year ole," Skeeter reminded him. "Dat means you got to wait thirty year fer yo' money."

"Mebbe he's done miscalculated 'bout how long he's gwine hang on de bush," Figger grinned. "I been pussuadin' him to take a little swim in de Cooley Lake eve'y atternoon when we gits out dar, an' you know dar's allergaters in dat lake whut kin swaller Joner an' de whale."

"Ef a allergater swallered Popsy, he'd treat him jes' like de whale done Joner—he'd git dat nigger off his stomick as soon as he could," Skeeter growled.

"'Tain't so, Skeeter," Figger argued earnestly. "When one of dese here Loozanny allergaters swallers a nigger, he crawls out on a mud-bank an' goes to sleep an' fergits all about dat cullud pusson in his midst."

"Ef I could git my wish, I'd be glad if one dem things would chaw up you an' Popsy, too," Skeeter retorted.

Figger sat down and lighted a cigarette, wondering how he could placate Skeeter for leaving him alone with the saloon. He could think of nothing else to say, so he changed the theme a little:

"Whut bothers my mind a little, Skeeter, is de fack dat Popsy ain't got no real good notion whut kind of doin's will be at de tabernacle. He remembers how 'twus befo' de war when de white folks helt religium-meetin's out dar. He wants me to go an' attend de religium services so me an' Scootie will git gooder dan we are."

Skeeter brightened up and laughed.

"Dat means de joke is on you an' Scootie, Figger," he guffawed. "I'd druther hab de seben-year itch wid nothin' to scratch wid—I'd druther be a drag-log tied to a houn'-dawg—dan listen to dat ole Popsy fussin' 'bout how good things useter wus an' how much wusser things is now. Go to it, Figger! You got my permission fer a week's leave-off."

"I been tellin' you I warn't so awful anxious to go," Figger reminded him.

"You ain't 'pressed dat fack on my mind very hard," Skeeter replied. "I wants you to come in eve'y mawnin' an' barkeep. You kin go out an' enjoy Popsy at night."

"I'll be in to-morrer mawnin' early," Figger answered, as he left.

But Figger did not appear in the saloon until the next day at noon. Skeeter had spent the time thinking up some especially cutting things to say to his partner, but Figger entered the place like a personified calamity and Skeeter forgot all his unkind words in an intense curiosity to know what had happened.

"I done run up on somepin awful bad,

Skeeter," Figger groaned. "Pap Curtain is fixin' to start a saloon."

"My Lawd!" Skeeter exclaimed. "De Henscratch has been de onliest cullud saloon in Tickfall fer twenty year. Now dis here Pap Curtain is aimin' to rival us out of bizzness."

"Dat's de way de rabbit p'ints his nose," Figger assured him.

"Whar do he git de money?" Skeeter asked.

"He's makin' arrangements to marrify it," Figger wailed. "Dar's a great big ole cow of a woman out dar whut owns five hundred dollars. Her paw an' maw is talkin' it around' an' dey's huntin' somebody dat 'll marry her fer her money."

"Is she as bad lookin' as all dat?"

"Shore is. She looks like a puddin' dat iz too high an' spread out too much. She kinder comes outen her clothes an' rolls over de edges of a chair an' de big of her pears like it's boilin' over all de sides all de time."

"I ketch on," Skeeter grinned. "She jes' outniggers herse'f by bein' so fat."

"Pap 'll take her ef he kin git her," Figger sighed. "He ain't pertickler. He wants money to start a saloon."

"Us 'll bofe close up dis saloon to-night an' go out an' take a look on," Skeeter announced. "Dis town kin do without two nigger saloons. One is a plum' plenty. Who is dis here nigger woman anyhow?"

"She's ole Isaiah Gaitskill's stepchile," Figger informed him. "She takes atter her maw in fathood. She's a widder woman an' her deceasted husbunt left her a lot of insurance dollars."

"Gosh!" Skeeter sighed in desperation. "Pap Curtain an' a widder woman! Two ag'in' one—I ain't got no show. Life ain't fitten to live no more."

CHAPTER II.

PLEASURE AND PROFIT.

IN the evening Skeeter Butts followed Figger out to the old tabernacle grounds and was amazed at the transformation of the place.

Wash Jones had moved many of the benches out of the building and had placed them under trees and in the groves. He had made sawdust trails from the tabernacle to the edge of the lake, to the Shin Bone eating-house, and to all other places where a little money could be coaxed from the pocket of the pleasure-seeker.

He had made a dancing-floor in a part of the tabernacle, arranging seats around it for the sightseers. He had erected refreshment-booths in other portions of the building, and also a band-stand, where the sweating, hard-worked black Tickfall brass-band was having the most hilarious time of their lives.

Negroes had come in from the plantations for miles around. Horses were tied to all the trees, wagons and buggies were sheltered in the woods, and a great mob of folks moved up and down the sawdust avenues or tramped the woods, shouting, laughing, cutting monkey-shines, and eating pop-corn balls, hot dogs, and sandwiches made of fried catfish.

It was a noisy, boisterous, rollicking place which Skeeter entered.

Ordinarily Skeeter would have been the center of the whole thing. But this affair had slipped up on him and had suddenly developed business complications and his mind was too occupied with his troubles to enjoy the fun going on around him.

Soon after entering the grounds he found Pap Curtain. Pap was entertaining himself by paying five cents for three baseballs. He would then try to throw each ball so it would stay in a bucket about twenty feet away. Whenever he placed one to stay, the proprietor of the amusement feature would give Pap a cigar. The cigars sold three for a nickel in Tickfall and as Pap never succeeded in placing more than two balls in the bucket, the proprietor of the place always made a fair profit in the transaction. Pap had his pocket stuffed full of cheap cigars and promptly offered a handful to Skeeter.

"I don't smoke garbage," Skeeter said impatiently, waving aside the offer.

"I figger I done acquired enough of dese cabbage-leafs. Less move on an' git some fun somewhere else."

A short distance down the sawdust trail

they ran into something new. A dimunitive darky named Little Bit was standing on a frail platform erected over a hogshead full of water. There was a trigger shaped like a skiff-paddle about fifty feet away, and men were throwing baseballs at this paddle. If some one hit the trigger, the platform, on which Little Bit was standing, fell and ducked the diminutive darky in the hogshead of water. Little Bit was well-known in Tickfall and this particular attraction was a riot. Sometimes thirty baseballs would be flying toward that paddle-shaped trigger at one time, and the hapless Little Bit spent more time in the hogshead of water than he did on the platform.

"Lawd, Skeeter!" Pap exclaimed when he had laughed himself nearly to exhaustion. "I'd druther be de owner of dis Coon Island dan de pres'dunt of de Europe war. I feels like I's jes' nachelly cut out fer a job like dis. I been huntin' fer somepin I been fitten fer all my life an' dis am it."

"I wish you had dis job, Pap," Skeeter replied. "I stopped by to ax you a question."

"I'll answer yes or no, like de gram-jury always tells me to do," Pap grinned.

"Word is done been sont to me dat you is fixin' to start a saloon. Is dat so?"

"Yep."

"Whar you gwine git de money at?"

"A fat widder-woman's husbunt is kicked de bucket an' lef' her a wad of dough," Pap chuckled. "I's gwine marrify de widder, mix dat dough wid my brains an' start me a place of bizzness."

"I thought you wus done through wid marryin' womens," Skeeter wailed. "You done been kotched fo' times already."

"Yas, suh, but in all dem fo' times I never married no widder. My edgycation is been neglected. Dey wus all young an' foolish gals. Dis here is a sottled woman—so dang fat dat when she sottles down it takes a block an' tackle to h'ist her agin."

"Aw, shuckins!" Skeeter exclaimed. "Whut you marryin' dat kind of gal fer?"

"Fer five hundred dollars!" Pap said.

Skeeter turned away with a troubled face. Pap looked after him a moment, then purchased three more baseballs to throw at the trigger-paddle.

At the far end of the grounds, Skeeter found Wash Jones.

"Wash," he said after a little conversation, "I understands dat you is got a prize widder in dis show."

The big black eyed Skeeter for a moment with suspicion. He took the time to help himself to a big chew of tobacco before he answered, watching Skeeter covertly all the time. At last he said:

"I ain't heerd tell about dat. But I ain't supprized none. I got all de attrackshuns on dis Coon Island whut is."

"Dey tells me dis widder is got a dead husbunt an' five hundred dollars," Skeeter continued.

Wash dropped his plug of tobacco and stooped to pick it up. That Skeeter had this information was not a surprise to him; it was a shock.

"Who mought dat widder be?" Wash asked.

"Sister Solly Skaggs," Skeeter informed him.

"I knows her," Wash groaned. "Fat—O Lawd! Ef dat gal wuster drap dead, dey'd hab to git a mud-scow outen de river fer a coffin an' de only hole in de groun' big enough to put her in is Marse Tom's sand-pit. Dat five hundred dollars don't int'rust my mind, naw, suh, not at all, not at all!"

"Don't waste no time thinkin' about it," Skeeter sighed. "Pap Curtain is done spoke fer it—de fat's in de fire."

"Which?" Wash Jones exclaimed in a tone that popped like a gun. "Pap Curtain?"

"Pap done pulled de curtain down on de widder," Skeeter assured him. "Nobody else needn't look at her charms."

Wash Jones turned around three times, as if looking for some place to go and practically undecided about what direction to choose.

Skeeter wandered on disconsolately and finally found himself beside the old tabernacle. An aged man approached him. Skeeter looked for a place to escape, but found no avenue of exit and stood his ground. The venerable man was Popsy Spout.

"I don't ketch on 'bout dis, Skeeter,"

he said in the high, shrill, complaining voice of senility. "Dis here ain't de place whut I thought it wus. 'Tain't de same place whut it uster be befo' an' endurin' of de war. When do de religium exoncises begin?"

"I dunno," Skeeter answered. "Ax Wash Jones."

"I axed him. Wash said ef de people wanted religium doin's dey could start 'em deyselfs." Popsy whined. "Wash said he wus jes' de servunt of de people fer so much money per each people."

"Dat's right," Skeeter laughed.

"I thought dey wus gwine hab preachin' in dat ole tabernacle to-night," Pap complained. "Instid of dat, dey's gwine had a dance fer a prize! Yas, suh—whut do Gawd think of dat? A dance fer a prize?"

"I hopes dat Pap Curtain slips up an' breaks bofe behime legs," Skeeter remarked bitterly.

"Tain't no use hopin'," the old man chuckled. "Pap is like me—spry on his legs fer a ole man. But Pap an' me don't favor dancin'. We been talkin' it over. I deespise a nigger dat dances. Ef any of my kin-folks cuts a shuffle on dat flo' dis night, dey ain't no kinnery of mine no more."

"I 'speck I better go gib Figger a warnin' right now," Skeeter exclaimed eagerly, glad to find a reason for departure.

"Dat's right!" Popsy exclaimed, in his high, cracked falsetto. "You warn him good!"

Skeeter wandered down to the shore of the little lake and sat down alone to think out some method of defeating Pap's designs. After an hour Figger Bush found him by the glow of his cigarette, and came and sat beside him.

"De only way to bust Pap's plans, Figger, is to marry dat fat Solly Skaggs to somebody else."

"Who'll take her?" Figger inquired.

"It 'll hab to be somebody dat ain't married already," Skeeter said.

"You's de only onmarried man I knows, excusin' Pap," Figger giggled. "I guess you'll hab to make de riffle."

Skeeter considered this a moment in silence. Then he asked:

"Is she so awful fat as people says she is?"

"Ain't you never seed her?" Figger exclaimed. "Honey, de half ain't never yit been told! She's been reg'lar to her meals ever since she wus borned, an' her meals is been frequent an' copious, an' her vittles is agreed wid her too well! Come on, Skeeter, lemme interjuice you to yo' future wife!"

Figger rose to his feet with eagerness. Skeeter shook his head and sighed.

"I wouldn't choose any, Figger. I'd druther Pap Curtain would rival me out of bizzness."

"Mebbe we could wish her onto somebody else," Figger proposed.

"I been tryin' to think up some onmarried man," Skeeter told him, "but I don't see none in sight."

They smoked for an hour longer without producing a spark of an idea. At last Skeeter said:

"All I kin do jes' now, Figger, is to keep Pap away from dat gal ontil I finds a fitten secont husbunt fer her. Dar's gwine be a prize dance to-night an' I nominates you to dance wid Sister Solly Skaggs."

"Ef she trods on me I'll be a squashed worm of de dust," Figger wailed.

"Don't talk back," Skeeter replied sharply. "I'll fix it so you an' Sister Solly win de prize."

CHAPTER III.

"DAT FAT, FLOUNDERIN' FOOL."

MRS. SOLLY SKAGGS was a widow of the sod variety and had enjoyed her matrimonial release for about six months. She had not mourned too much for Solly nor had she loved him much. For he was about as lovable as a sick dog and his departure from the world was a distinct blessing to all the inhabitants thereof.

Old Isaiah Gaitskill, in discussing her chances for matrimony again, assured her that no negro would marry her because she was too fat. But this did not discourage the lady and there was no indication of despair either in her manner or her deportment, for she dressed and acted like a miss of sweet sixteen.

Old Popsy Spout stood on the edge of the throng and watched her elephantine performances on the dancing-floor. Growing weary, he walked over and sat down upon a bench beside Pap Curtain.

"Look at dat fool nigger gal, Pap," he whined. "I been livin' off an' on nigh onto one hundred year an' I done seen plenty sights, but dat fat fool flounderin' on dat floor is de wust sight till yit."

"Don't preach so loud, Popsy," Pap said with a warning hiss. "You mought hurt dat cullud lady's feelin's."

"I ain't preachin'," Popsy snapped. "I's tellin' facks. Excusin' dat, she ain't got no feelin's. Her feelin's is padded two-foot deep in fat. I bet she's got some age on her, too."

"Not too much age fer a widder," Pap said. "An' she's wuth consid'able money since her fust husbunt up an' died on her. Five hundred dollars will keep dat woman fat fer a long time."

"Why don't you git in de race, Pap?" Popsy suggested. "You ain't got no wife now."

"Dat's my bizzness right now," Pap grinned. "I needs a little cash money to start a saloon."

"You ain't figgerin' to buy out Figger an' Skeeter in de Henscratch, is you?" Popsy asked.

"Naw, suh, I's fixin' to run 'em out," Pap said confidently, as he arose and walked away.

Popsy arose, too, pushed his way through the crowd and went in search of Figger Bush. He found Figger and his wife and Skeeter Butts in the Shin Bone eating-house. He hastened to their table, rested his rusty stove-pipe hat upon the top of the table and sat down.

"How come you an' Skeeter is bofe lef' yo' bizzness to come out here, Figger?" he inquired.

"Dar ain't no bizzness wid dis frolic gwine on," Figger said.

"You better git to wuckin' up some new bizzness," the old man remarked. "Pap Curtain is jes' tole me he wus gwine run you-alls out."

"We been talkin' about dat," Skeeter broke in. "Pap's tryin' to pick a widder an' us is wonderin' how we kin bump him off de job."

"I's gittin' to be a awful ole fool," Popsy sighed. "I jes' dis minute suggested to Pap dat he ought to marry dat widder an' git her out of her misery an' her mournin'."

"Whut you mean by doin' dat, Popsy?" Skeeter snapped. "You done ruint us. I's thinkin' about firin' Figger now because our bizzness is got so bum wid prohibition an' all dem yuther troubles."

"Mebbe I could go back an' tell Pap he is makin' a miscue at his age," Popsy proposed.

"You better go do somepin," Skeeter snapped. "You go potterin' aroun' an' spile my trade an' I'll kick Figger out an' you'll hab dis here wuthless nigger to suppote."

"Not ef I kin he'p it," Popsy said positively. "I'll shore git busy an' c'reck dat mistake. I needs my dollars fer my own use. I's fixin' to spend 'em in my ole age, when I gits ole."

At this moment Wash Jones stepped to the middle of the floor, pulled proudly at one of his squirrel-tail mustaches, knocked upon a dining-table with the nicked edge of a thick, granite saucer, and commanded silence.

"I announces dar will be a prize dance at de tabernacle to-night. It will be de last dance of de evenin'. Five cents lets you into de tabernacle to perceive de dancers, ten cents will gib you de right to dance. At de end of de last dance a prize will be gib away to de lucky winner. De show begins at ten o'clock."

"I's reckin I'll hab to trod 'em a few," Skeeter sighed. "Got to do somepin to ease up my mind."

"I don't allow Scootie an' Figger to dance," Popsy snapped. "'Tain't decent an' religium to cut monkey-shines like dat at a camp-meetin'. Married folks oughter sottle down an' behave."

"I agrees wid you," Skeeter grinned, winking at Figger Bush. "Bofe of 'em is gittin' too ole an' stiff to dance an' Figger never wus no account dancer nohow. As fer Scootie, she dances like one dese here Teddy bears."

"'Tain't so," Scootie snapped. "You

gimme a couple dances wid you to-night an' I'll show you—*ouch!*"

Figger kicked Scootie under the table and pounded on the top of the table with his fist to drown her voice, looking fearfully the while at Popsy Spout to see if he was listening to her remarks.

"Shut up!" he hissed. "Whut you want to be such a splatter-jaw fer? Watch whut you's sayin'!"

Scootie cast a frightened look at Popsy, but the old man showed by his next question that he had not noticed her break.

"Whut kind prizes does dey gib fer de dance, Skeeter?"

"Nobody ain't know but Wash Jones," Skeeter informed him. "Dis is de fust night of de show an' no prizes ain't git bestowed yit."

"'Twon't be nothin' but a pack of chawgum fer de lady an' a box of cigareets fer de man," Figger said disgustedly. "Wash Jones ain't gwine gib nothin' away. I think I'll cut out de dance an' go to bed."

"Me, too," Popsy whined. "I got a little bed out here in one of dese shacks ef I could find it."

"It's down by de lake, Popsy," Figger told him, glad that Popsy was leaving them. "You won't hab no trouble gittin' dar."

As soon as Popsy had departed, Scootie turned to Figger and snapped:

"You mighty nigh kicked my leg off an' ole Popsy didn't pay no mind to whut I wus sayin' at all."

"Stop talkin' 'bout dancin' whar Popsy is," Figger growled. "Dat ole man will git mad an' gib all his money to furin missionaries when he dies."

"You's makin' yo'se'f tired fer nothin', Figger," Skeeter giggled. "Popsy will find out about yo' dancin' powerful soon."

"How soon?" Figger asked.

"As soon as you an' Sister Skaggs wins dem prizes to-night."

"I ain't gwine win no prize. Dar cain't be no prize-dancin' wid dat fat ole cow. De judges would laugh at us."

"I'll fix de judges," Skeeter laughed. "Leave it wid me an' Wash Jones."

"You ain't fixin' to buy up de judges, is you?" Figger asked.

"Naw. I's fixin' to buy Wash Jones. 'Twon't cost much. Wash is a cheap nigner."

CHAPTER IV.

THE JOYOUS TROUBLE-MAKERS.

WASH JONES was standing behind the tabernacle, mopping the copious perspiration that streamed from his baboon face.

"I finds dis here bizzness a heap more wuck dan I bargained fer," he complained to Skeeter Butts. "When I fust started out I thought dat niggers would jes' entertain deyselfs an' not expeck nothin' from me but de pleasure of my comp'ny. But I finds dat dey expecks me to be on de job of waitin' on 'em all de time."

"Suttinly," Skeeter snickered. "Ef I charged admissions to my saloon I wouldn't allow no niggers to wait on demselfs. I'd hab to serve 'em."

"I done collected all de admission-fares I expecks to git," Wash sighed, fanning himself with his big hat. "As fer as I'm concerned, dis here show kin end right now."

"Ef you end her up now de people will kick an' want deir money back," Skeeter reminded him. "You done collected up fer a week in eegsvance."

"I'd be powerful glad to turn de job over to some yuther feller fer whut he kin make out of it, ef I had a good excuse fer hittin' de grit out of here," Wash suggested.

"I ain't candidatin' fer de place," Skeeter chuckled. "But I kin show you how you kin make a few more easy dollars ef you ain't keer too much how you got 'em."

"Spill de beans right here, Skeeter," Wash answered earnestly. "Dat sounds good to me."

"My trouble am dis," Skeeter began. "You is givin' a prize-dance to-night an' I wants to pick de winner."

"I'll app'int you one of de judges fer one dollar," Wash said promptly.

"Dat won't he'p none," Skeeter said. "Dat 'll jes git one vote."

"I'll be a judge myse'f an' dat 'll gib you two votes—dat is, ef you is willin' to bestow anodder dollar fer my vote."

"Who will de yuther judge be?"

"Ef you gib me anodder dollar I'll let you name him yo'se'f," Wash replied without hesitation. "Pick yo' own nigger an' trade wid him pussonly fer his pussonal vote."

"Here's three dollars, Wash," Skeeter chuckled as he rattled the money in his hand. "You shore is a easy nigger to trade wid."

"Jes' ile my machinery a plenty an' I'll run along smooth," Wash grinned as he pocketed the money. "Who is de couple you wants to win dis prize-dance?"

"Figger Bush an' Sister Solly Skaggs."

"Gosh!" Wash Jones exploded as he thrust his hand into his pocket, brought out the three dollars and handed them back to Skeeter. "I loves money, but I ain't troublin' trouble."

"Whut ails dem plans?" Skeeter asked, thrusting back the hand which offered him the money.

"In de fust place, Sister Solly Skaggs can't win a prize in no kind of dance whutsoever. She cain't dance no more dan a Mefdis meetin'-house. In de secont place, it's a little too raw fer you to be de judge of a dance an' gib de prize to yo' own pardner in de saloon bizzness."

"I sees de light," Skeeter said in a surprised tone. "I suttinly did mighty nigh slip up on dat plan. Wonder whut we kin do to he'p you earn dat money an' still act honest?"

"Dat question is 'most too heavy fer my mind," Wash said indifferently. "I'll keep dis three dollars an' let you think up yo' own plan. Ef it don't wuck, I'll gib you yo' money back."

"Whut kind of prizes is you gwine gib, Wash?" Skeeter asked.

"Whutever kind of prizes you wants to buy," Wash grinned. "I leaves it wid you to pick 'em an' pay fer 'em."

"I thought you had 'em already selected!" Skeeter exclaimed.

"Naw, suh, I figgered it out dat some nigger would want hisse'f an' his gal to win dem prizes so I wus waitin' fer him to bestow a little money on me an' furnish de prizes outen his own cash money."

"You shore is a skilful nigger, Wash," Skeeter said admiringly. "I oughter run wid you a little while an' git some new notions in my head. You knows how to rob 'em widout gittin' in jail."

"You better git some notions in yo' head 'bout dem prizes," Wash warned him. "Dat dance is startin' off pretty soon."

"'Tain't no trouble to seleck de prizes," Skeeter laughed. "I'll git Sister Skaggs a little round lookin'-glass 'bout big enough fer her to see her fat nose in; an' I'll git Figger a nickel-plated cigareet holder."

"Cigareet holders comes pretty high, don't dey?"

"Yes, suh, but I don't mind payin' fer one. I been needin' one dem things fer a long time an' I'll make Figger gib it back to me."

"Dat shows I ain't de only nigger wid notions," Wash laughed. "Dat's a real good trick. Is you got it mapped out how you will git de prize to dem two dancers?"

"Dat ain't no trouble."

"I hopes it won't make no trouble," Wash remarked.

"Not at all!" Skeeter assured him. "You will be de onliest judge. Write de names of each couple on a card an' put all de cards in a bag. When de times comes to gib de prize, shake de bag up, put in yo' hand an' fotch out de card wid de names of de winners."

"How 'll I git holt of de card wid Figger's name on it when it's shuck up in a bag?" Wash wanted to know.

"Take a pin an' pin Figger's card to de bottom of de bag on de inside," Skeeter explained. "All you got to do atter dat is to reach down an' onpin dat card an' fotch it out."

Wash looked at Skeeter with the utmost admiration.

"Brudder Butts," he said earnestly, "some day I'll take a notion to rob a rattlesnake of de skin under its chin. When I git ready to do it, I'll plan a littie wid you an' learn how to do it."

"Dat wus easy," Skeeter grinned. "I kin always think up plenty good plans fer de yuther feller. I falls down when I begins to study fer myse'f."

"How come you wants dese two to win so bad?" Wash asked.

"I's tryin' to break Pap Curtain's nose!" Skeeter exclaimed. "He's atter de fat widder an' her easy money. He aims to start a saloon, an' I's de leader of de highest alcoholic circles in dis town an' don't need no competition."

"Nachelly you is ag'in' dat," Wash said promptly. "Mebbe ef you could loant me twenty dollars I could think up some good plan to he'p you out."

Skeeter produced two ten-dollar bills.

"Jes' keep Pap away from Sister Skaggs, Wash," Skeeter said earnestly. "Dat earns dis money. I think Pap is got a sure thing. He's de only onmarried nigger in Tickfall, an' de widder will take anybody she kin git. She ain't choosy or she wouldn't never choose Pap."

"I makes you one promise fer dis twenty, Skeeter," Wash said. "Pap won't start no saloon in Tickfall. As fer marryin' de widder, I cain't promise dat he won't. Not even Gawd knows whut kind of man a widder is gwine to marry."

CHAPTER V.

AN UNFORESEEN COMPETITOR.

THE one negro in Tickfall who never dressed up was Pap Curtain. He was the well-digger and the grave-digger of that community, and he carried the marks of his trade upon him, clay on his clothes, on his hands, on his hat. But to-night for the first time in the memory of men, Pap was arrayed in gorgeous garments. He attracted much attention.

"Whoo-pee, Pap!" Vinegar Atts bellowed. "I cain't make up my mind whether you is a young nigger beginnin' to show yo' age, or a ole nigger tryin' to look lesser dan yo' real age."

"I done heerd remarks like dat a plum' plenty, revun," Pap snarled. "I admits dat I's gwine on seventy odd year ole."

"I didn't say you wusn't, brudder," Vinegar said propitiatingly. "But whut do an ole nigger like you dress up like you fer? Dar ain't no fun'ral to go to an' us ain't habin' no lodge meetin' to-night."

"Dey's yuther reasons fer dressin' up," Pap said with a grin.

Vinegar slapped his hand to his head and a sudden remembrance transformed his countenance.

"I like to fergot dat weddin' complete! I onderstan' now—you's ragged out fer de weddin'. I muss be gittin' ole an' fergitful. An' I got some questions to ax dat widder befo' she steps off."

Vinegar hurried away and Pap stood grinning after him. When the colored clergyman was lost to sight in the crowd, Pap turned away, mumbling to himself:

"Dat Vinegar Atts never did hab no sense. Now he raves an' rambles when he talks wid his mouth. De Shoo-fly needs a new up-to-date preacher."

Pap walked over to the tabernacle, sought out Mrs. Solly Skaggs, and bowing with exaggerated courtesy, he asked:

"Kin I dance dis here prize dance wid you, Sister Solly?"

A shrill cackle of laughter rattled in Pap's ear and he turned to look into the sardonic face of Skeeter Butts.

"I done saved you, Sister Solly," Skeeter snickered.

"You done got left, Pap," Solly remarked. "I's dancin' fer de prize wid Figger Bush."

"You's gwine to win de prize, too, Solly," Skeeter said in a low tone. "Dat is, ef you dances wid Figger. You cain't git a showin' dancin' wid Pap. Ole age an' fatness makes a powerful poor combine in a dance."

"We ain't axin' you fer no remarks," Pap snarled, turning to Skeeter.

"Beg parding fer buttin' in, Pap," Skeeter laughed. "I wus jes' surprised dat you wus takin' up dancin' at yo' age."

Skeeter turned away, and as Pap had failed to secure a partner, there was nothing for him to do but retire from the floor, lamenting the fact that he had paid a dime for the privilege of dancing and lost his money. He sat down on a bench on the edge of the throng and gave himself up to deep meditation.

"I got lef' dat time," he grumbled to himself. "But dis am jes' de fust day of de frolic. I got plenty time yit. Fur as I know, I's de only man aimin' fer her, an' de only onmarried man in de town."

He lighted a pipe and sat smoking for five minutes. Then a new idea came:

"Wash Jones is de high boss of dis show, an' I reckin Wash knows de widder. I oughter git Wash to he'p me hook her."

At this point Popsy Spout wandered up to the bench and addressed Pap.

"I done loss my way in dese groun's, Pap," he complained. "Dar's so many wagins an' buggies an' niggers dat I can't find de cabin whar I sleeps at."

"You ain't aimin' to sleep now, is you?" Pap asked.

"I goes to bed reg'lar 'bout dis time."

"Eve'ybody is stayin' up to see de dance," Pap said.

"I's ag'in' dancin'," Popsy declared, with disgust in his tones. "Me an' none of my kinnery follers atter de sinful dance. I done teached 'em better."

"Teached who better?" Pap asked quickly, planning for revenge.

"Figger an' Scootie," Popsy declared. "Bofe of dem young folks abstains from de dance."

"Who say dey does?"

"I says," Pap replied impatiently.

"What would you do ef you wuster see Figger dancin' to-night, Popsy?" Pap asked in wheedling tones.

"I'd bust his head wid my stick an' I wouldn't let him inherit none of my dollars, an' I'd drive him an' his nigger wife outen my cabin," the old man announced irately.

"I's kinder skeart Figger is a deceitful nigger, Popsy," Pap said in a bitter voice. "I happens to know dat he is gwine dance in de prize dance to-night."

"'Tain't so," Popsy snapped. "I done tole Figger to go to bed."

The music had started in the pavilion and Pap rose to his feet.

"Come wid me, Popsy," Pap said. "I'll show you dat Figger ain't as good as you thinks he is."

On the edge of the crowd Popsy shaded his age-dimmed eyes with the palm of his hand and watched the swaying forms until he recognized Figger Bush. Figger's dancing partner was the easiest thing to see on the floor, but Figger was completely eclipsed at intervals in the convolutions of the dance.

If Mrs. Solly Skaggs had been white, she would long ago have been signed up by some enterprising showman and her monstrosities exhibited to every community in the country. But being of color, she furnished a free show to all the colored people in her vicinity, and to-night Figger Bush looked like a piccaninny swinging on to a balloon and trying to drag it to the ground. Mrs. Skaggs was active, not graceful, and most of the time Figger's feet were in the air and he was swinging onto the ample form of his partner with both hands.

The crowd saw the fun and went into hysterics. Popsy Spout saw the exhibition and became hysterical also, but for other reasons. He walked forward and pounded upon the floor with his patriarchal staff and screeched Figger's name, demanding that he desist at once and go to bed. But four big horns in the Tickfall brass band were blaring as the performers tried in vain to blow out their brains through the mouthpieces, and Popsy's whining voice was like the note of a cricket in a storm.

The old man finally snorted his disgust, expressing his sentiments for the amusement of the few around him who could hear, and tried to push his way out of the crowd. But they were packed densely around him, and in spite of his wishes, Popsy had to stay and see the rewarding of the prizes.

Wash Jones stepped out and made the announcement:

"Dis am de fust night of de prize dancin' an' so I's bestowin' de prize on whut I calls de lucky-name dancers. I done wrote de name of eve'y couple on a card an' put de names in dis sack. I now proceeds to shake 'em up an' will put my han' in dis sack an' draw out one card. Ever who's name is writ on de card is de winner of dis dance, no matter ef dey kin dance or not. To-morrer night we will hab reg'lar ap'inted judges an' nobody cain't win dat cain't dance."

He thrust his hand into the bag, stirred the cards around for a moment, created suspense by fumbling with the bag and making jocose remarks to entertain the crowd. At last he found the card pinned to the bottom of the bag, took out the pin,

and brought forth the names of the winners.

"Figger Bush an' Mrs. Solly Skaggs!"

There was a moment of intense silence which made Wash Jones wince with fear. Then a howl of derisive laughter swept over the crowd and every dancing couple was completely satisfied. All thought that mere chance had determined the selection, and all knew that Solly and Figger were the worst dancers in the world.

The lucky couple advanced and received the prizes, bowed to the derisive crowd and started to retire. Then Popsy Spout advanced to the center of the dancing floor, waving his big staff like a baseball bat, his high, shrill, whining voice cutting the silence like a knife.

"Figger Bush, you is a wuthless, lyin', deceitful cuss! I done advised you to abandon dancin' an' you promised to do it. I tole you to go home an' go to bed, an' now you done put on yo' clothes an' snuck outen yo' cabin an' come down here to dis sinful dance. You git on home an' when I comes I's gwine hide you wid dis stick!"

"Don't make no scenery, Popsy," Figger pleaded. "I didn't really intend to dance but dis here woman betrayed me into treadin' a tune or two wid her an' I couldn't resist."

"You means dat you wus tempted by dis here woman?" Popsy whined.

"Dat's whut," Figger replied solemnly.

"You go home an' repent an' refawm!" Pap shrieked. "Do it befo' de good Lawd draps a brickbat on yo' head outen de sky! Git!"

Figger pocketed his nickel-plated cigarette holder and moved away.

Popsy turned and surveyed the ample proportions of Mrs. Solly Skaggs.

"You needs a good steady husbunt to keep you back from yo' evil ways, sister," he announced. "You didn't hab no call to lead my little Figger Bush into evil ways."

"I won't do it no more, Popsy," Mrs. Skaggs said easily.

Old Popsy Spout growled like a senile bear and moved away. On the edge of the platform Pap was waiting for him, feeling well satisfied with himself and the revenge he had achieved.

"Pap, Figger Bush is done cut hisse'f off from me ferever," the old man snapped. "I's gwine drive him an' his wife outen my house an' home."

"You'll git pretty lonesome, won't you, Popsy?" Pap asked idly.

"Naw!" the old man snapped. "I's gwine marry agin right away."

"Who you done picked fer de gigglin' bride, Popsy?" Pap asked with utter indifference.

"I done picked de widder Solly Skaggs," Popsy proclaimed. "I's gittin' ole an' blind an' she's big enough fer me to see as fur as my eyesight goes. By dis time nex' year, she'll be too fat to dance an' us 'll bofe be of de same mind on dat. She needs some sottled husbunt to lead her outen de error of her ways. Excusin' dat, she's collected her insurance money an' I ain't got no real good objections to a little more dough. I needs it fer my ole age."

He moved away leaving Pap Curtain gasping for breath, stupefied by utter amazement.

CHAPTER VI.

"A CUSSIN' CASE."

HALF an hour later Skeeter and Figger met in the Henscratch Saloon to discuss the events of the evening.

"We shore knocked de skin offen Pap Curtain's nose to-night, Figger," Butts exulted. "Dat's de way to keep on. We'll show dat ole man dat he cain't beat us at dis game."

"Never no more fer me, Skeeter," Figger said earnestly. "I got to repent an' refawm an' dodge brickbats. Atter you dances one time wid a ole sook-cow like Solly, 'tain't no trouble to repent an' refawm. But I's shore much obleeged fer dis cigareet holder. I been needin' one fer a long time."

"You gimme dat cigareet holder back," Skeeter snapped. "Us kin use it fer all de yuther prizes, an' I proposes to git my money back by smokin' it myself."

"I knowed you warn't gwine be lib'ral wid yo' gifts," Figger said, as he reluctantly produced the holder and passed it to

Skeeter. "I oughter lost dat prize befo' I showed up here."

"You kin git de good outen it by watchin' me smoke it," Skeeter snickered. "An' ef we bust Pap's plans about startin' a saloon, mebbe I'll let you smoke it a few times to keep yo' feelin's from gittin' hurt."

At that moment the door of the saloon opened and old Isaiah Gaitskill came across the room to where the two men sat at a table. Isaiah was one of the landmarks of Tickfall, withered and wrinkled and dry like the hull of a walnut, his gray hair fitting his head like a rubber cap, over eighty years of age, but as hard and active as a soldier.

"Ole fellers like you oughter be in bed, Isaiah," Skeeter announced as he waved the visitor to a chair.

"Fellers nearly as ole as me is not only stayin' up late but dey is figgerin' 'bout gittin' married," Isaiah replied with a grin.

"Pap Curtain ain't nigh as old as you," Figger retorted.

"'Tain't Pap I's alludin' to," Isaiah answered. "It's brudder Popsy Spout whut's studyin' mattermony."

Many things had happened to those two young men in their variegated and adventurous careers, but nothing had ever happened to produce such a shock as Isaiah's announcement. Figger uttered a startled exclamation, started to rise from his seat, then sank back with his chin in his collar and collapsed like a punctured tire. Skeeter Butts pawed the air in front of his face with both hands as if fighting off invisible insects; he made inarticulate noises in his throat, shut his teeth down so hard on his celluloid nickel-plated cigarette holder that he split it for two inches, and then exclaimed despairingly:

"Oh, whoosh!"

The sound was like the feeble exhaust of an automobile that is utterly worn out and broken down and never intends to be serviceable again.

"I come aroun' to ax you-alls is Popsy still got dat thousan' dollars in Marse Tom Gaitskill's bank," Isaiah proceeded, taking no notice of the terrible effect of his announcement.

"Whoosh!" Skeeter sighed again.

"I got a notion dat Popsy's suttinly still got it," Isaiah continued. "Dat ole monkey don't spen' no money—he saves it."

"Whoosh!" Skeeter muttered.

There was a long silence, the men looking at each other without a word. After a while Isaiah began to drum on the table with his horny finger-nails, and the sound was as annoying and as startling in the stillness as the *rat-a-tat-tat* of a woodpecker trying to drill a hole through a tin roof. Slowly Figger recovered his power of speech. He glared at Skeeter uttering one intelligible sentence:

"You is to blame fer dis!"

And then he began to "cuss." It was an edifying exhibition to one interested in the use of forcible words, interested in the efficiency attained through long practise and experience, and interested in knowing how copious is the English language in terms of profanity, blasphemy and execration.

Isaiah listened, casting a glance of admiration toward Figger now and then as he heard some especially pregnant phrase of vituperation, then he said:

"Save a few cuss-words fer future use, Figger. You'll need 'em."

"Keep on, Figger," Skeeter said encouragingly. "Dis here is a cussin' case an' you ain't done de case justice even yit."

"I ain't gwine stay here an' listen," Isaiah snapped. "I jes' stopped by to ax about Popsy's finances. Ef he's still got de dough he had when he arrived up at dis town, he's got twicet as much as de gal he's studyin' to marry an' dat 'll make a good match."

"Hol' on, Isaiah," Figger wailed. "Who did you say Popsy wus aimin' to marry?"

"I ain't specified," Isaiah grinned, reaching for his hat and preparing to go. "But I don't mind tellin'—it's my stepchile by my fourth wife's fust marriage, Mrs. Solly Skaggs!"

The exclamation which Figger uttered at this information indicated that he had exhausted all the treasuries of speech: language could go no further.

"I tole you to save some cuss-words," Isaiah grinned.

Skeeter groaned, fanning himself with his hat.

"Dar won't be enough room in Popsy's little cabin fer Figger an' his wife an' Popsy an' his wife," he meditated aloud. "Solly is a cabin-full all by herse'f."

"Popsy is shore gittin' plenty fer his money," Isaiah chuckled. "I's glad she's ended up dat way. Dat fat gal kin eat as much as fo'teen chillun an' a cow an' calf. I don't hanker to suppote her."

"How come Popsy made up his mind to ack a fool so suddent?" Skeeter wailed.

"He seen Figger dancin' wid Solly an' he don't approve of dat exoncise. He's marryin' Solly to refawm her an' to git him a new housekeeper because he's gwine chase Figger an' Scootie outen his cabin fer deceivin' him."

Sometimes when you step on the shell of a dead turtle it makes a ridiculous squeak. Figger made a noise like that.

"Bad luck, Figger," Skeeter said sympathetically, as he took the broken nickel-plated cigarette holder from his mouth and handed it to Figger. "I gives you dis little present to show my sad feelin's todes you."

Figger's mental perturbation was such that he stuck it in his mouth, struck a match and tried to light it without placing a cigarette on the end.

"Dis is awful," he sighed.

"I reckin Popsy is expeckin' me back about now," Isaiah remarked as he arose. "As Solly's nachel gardeen, he axed me to speak up to Solly an' find out ef she wus willin'. But fust I come to see how Popsy wus fixed financial. Solly ain't hankerin' to take in no white folks' washin's to suppote a ole gizzard like Popsy."

"Whar is Popsy now?" Skeeter asked eagerly.

"He's at Shin Bone's resterant here in town," Isaiah replied.

"Us will go wid you, Isaiah!" Skeeter exclaimed. "Ef dar's a weddin' plannin' I wants to he'p it along."

The three men hurried to the eating-house as rapidly as Figger's feeble knees could carry him. Skeeter had to support his friend by holding his arm, for all Figger's vital force was gone. They found Popsy the only patron of the place and he was using a long table in the middle of the room, not for the consumption of food, but for a bed! He was stretched out full length on the table, his arm under his head for a pillow, his rusty stove-pipe hat placed beside him.

"Dis here bridegroom is takin' a nap," Skeeter snickered, as he walked in and sat down at the table beside the sleeping man. The others saw no reason to arouse him from his slumbers, so they sat down beside him and looked at the sleeper. Skeeter walked to another table, picked up a stalk of celery and brought it back and placed it in Popsy's hand where it rested upon his breast.

Taking off his hat, he placed it with exaggerated solemnity over his heart and sighed with pitiable sadness:

"Don't he look nachel? Ain't dat a sweet smile on his face? He looks jes' like I seed him yistiddy—ain't changed a bit!"

He walked over to Figger, leaned down, and whispered:

"Wus you acquainted wid de corp'?"

"I knowed him real good," Figger answered, glaring at the prostrate form. "He shore wus a devilish ole cranky nigger."

"When does de fun'ral orgies take place?" Skeeter whispered. "Is de Revun Vinegar Atts gwine 'fishiate at de 'terment? Po' ole man—atter all his troubles, he is at rest!"

A slovenly waitress approached the whispering men, yawned prodigiously, and gazed at Popsy with a stupid face.

"I wants you-alls to wake up Popsy an' tote him off home to bed. Dis here ain't no nursery. I's sleepy an' it's time to shet up dis house."

Pap Curtain, on his way home from Coon Island, saw the men gathered around Popsy and entered.

"Whut ails Popsy, brudders?" he exclaimed. "Is de ole man sick?"

"Naw," Skeeter snapped. "No such good luck. Mebbe ef he sleeped here till mawnin' he'd roll off dis table an' break his fool neck!"

"He's love-sick," old Isaiah cackled. "He gittin' ready to marry."

"Shore!" Pap snarled. "He tripped up my legs an' throwed me down. I wus in hopes Popsy wus sick—less shove him off dis table an' kill him!"

Then another man entered the restaurant. He was a fat, pot-bellied negro, his head bald except for two tufts of hair growing over his ears which made him look like a big fat-faced mule wearing a blind bridle.

"Hello, brudders!" the Rev. Vinegar Atts bellowed. "How come you-alls didn't stay at de weddin'?"

"Never heerd tell about dat'n," Skeeter exclaimed. "Who is de victims?"

"Brudder Wash Jones an' Sister Solly Skaggs!"

"Whoo-pee-ee!" Figger Bush screamed. "De Lawd wus shorely wid me. Wash is done saved my life!"

Figger's wild yell of exultation aroused Popsy from his slumbers. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. Then he saw Isaiah Gaitskill.

"I done decided not to marry Solly, Brudder Isaiah," he whined. "I tuck a little nap an' I dreamt a dream dat Calline, my fust wife, come to me an' warned me to beware of widders. She said dey wus awful treach'rous an' deceivin'."

"Calline is got it right, Popsy," Pap sighed. "My little romance is snipped in de bud."

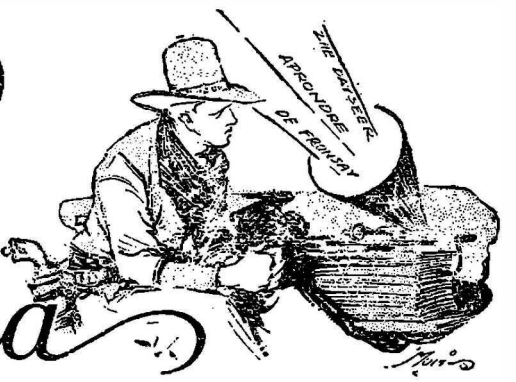
"Wash an' Solly had dat case fixed up in N' Awleens," Vinegar told them. "Solly wouldn't marry Wash onless he had de same amount of money dat she inherited from her husbunt. So Wash arrived in Tickfall, started a Coon Island like N' Yawk has, collected five-hundred admissions at one dollar per each, married Solly an' lit out on de midnight train."

"Whut becomes of dat Coon Island?" Pap asked.

"Wash axed me to hand dat whole shebang over to you fer a consolation prize," Vinegar answered.

(The end.)

F.O.B. Arizona



by Frank Condon

IN a manner of speaking, the events date back for some time and begin with Mrs. Boss Keller, who is one of the finest and best beloved ladies in Arizona. She has been held in esteem as a sort of guardian angel for miles around, a friend to the unfortunate, a dispenser of charities, and a general haven in time of trouble.

Everybody used to go to her in confidence, whether it was a pain on the chest or a jam recipe. Sympathy was Mrs. Keller's middle name, and a list of our people who owe her debts of various kinds would sound like a neighborhood census.

A month or so before her last birthday the folks woke up and began talking.

"The lady has done a heap for us all," said Jerry Coakley. "Seems to me we ought to club in and show our gratitude."

"What ought we do?" I inquired.

"Give her a birthday present," Jerry said. "Her anniversary is at hand, and we ought to make it a humdinger."

"Sensible talk," Joe Dormer put in.

"Every now and then you can't tell Jerry from a regular human person."

I thought they meant a red plush album or a silver hair curler with the lady's initials, but it appears I was wrong. During previous conferences on the same subject the suggestions included everything from a team of spirited horses to a house in Mesa Grande. Henry Deering, whose belt has been slipping for years, stood out for a tombstone and a burial plot.

"A nice, pleasant gift," George responded to Henry's delicate thought. "The lady ain't dead, fool. This is a birthday."

There was a heap of talk on the subject before I finally decided it. Turning my mammoth and unparalleled intellect upon the problem, I uncoiled what appeared to be a brainy idea; and as generally happens when I get hold of a giant thought, that idea came back home later on, covered with cinders, and crawled into bed with me.

"You boys are on the right trail, all right," I told them, "but you haven't gone far enough. Mrs. Keller wouldn't want any spirited horses, seeing she's scared to death of a horse, whether he's spirited or a total abstainer. She don't need a house in Mesa Grande.

"As for Henry's suggestion about the burial plot, of course Henry has been cheating the asylum for years. If you want to make the lady a real man-size present, what's the matter with an automobile?"

"The boss has two flivvers now," Jake Davis argued in his discouraging way. "There ain't much sense in having a flock of them things around the place."

"You know very well that Mrs. Keller never rides in the flivvers," I returned, "and never will, while she has her sense and her rheumatism. I don't say I'm discussing such kinds of automobiles, anyhow.

"What I mean is one of these roomy, rampant gasoline gulpers with purple plush insides, a silver candlestick for flowers, and a rubber hose with a telephone on the end of it."

"Oh!" exclaimed the roughnecks. "One of those regular automobiles, hey?"

"Sure," I said, encouraged. "A Palm Beach palanquin, with enough cylinders so that nothing happens if eight or nine of them quit working."

"Andy," put in George Hicks warmly, "some people may sneer at that thing on the end of your spine, but I contend it's a head."

We shook hands all around, and that tender young idea floated down the ways and breasted the stream, like you might say. I had pictures of a moderately expensive machine in my mind, but the boys saw my ante and raised me.

"If we're going into this thing," Martin Pulsifer declared, "let's go in right. Mrs. Keller is a queen among women, so we got to buy her a noble automobile."

"A limousine," suggested Rufe Lewis. "A mahogony limousine with a foot-warmer and more plate glass than a saloon."

Thus do ideas fall upon fertile soil and take root. The longer the boys deliberated over that limousine idea the better it looked to them, and you could see the warm enthusiasm welling in each lad's honest eye.

First we appointed a ways and means committee to go out and gather the funds.

I became chairman of the committee automatically, and also the official cash collector, and it was also I who finally selected the breed of automobile desired. The boys felt that I knew more about mechanical topics than they did.

I picked it out, and it was a bird, too. I might even mention the name, if the ungrateful makers had thought to slip me something; but up to the present writing I am unslipped, so the opportunity is lost.

When the purchasing committee departed from Mesa Grande for the Coast, I couldn't go, and it broke my heart. I handed Jerry Coakley the birthday fund; and after he sewed it into his shirt, they started gaily off for San Francisco.

There are details about that junket to the marts of trade. Two of the boys got arrested for trying to cow an Irish policeman on Market Street. Any one who has ever tried to cow an Irish officer on Market Street will know how the boys got arrested.

Joe Hicks was put out of seven public-houses and one church, which he got into in a moment of confusion.

In about two weeks a freight-car paused in front of Levi's grocery in Mesa Grande, and when they pried open the doors, there she stood.

I won't say much about this triumph of the builder's art, except to remark that it was a passionate maroon automobile, with Mrs. Keller's monogram on the door, and it looked like nine million dollars on the sitting-room table.

Jake gazed at it in profound amazement and admiration.

"A royal flush!" he exclaimed, and that's what we called it thereafter.

Well, we smuggled the limousine into Art Loomis's livery and swathed it in soft bandages, and then set ourselves to wait until Mrs. Keller could gaze back upon another completed year.

When that fatal day arrived somebody had to drive the limousine up to the ranch, and I was the goat.

I know something about automobiles. I know that the best thing to do to an automobile is to walk rapidly away from it and pretend you don't see it, but nobody else in the gang would drive it, so I climbed in and drove to the ranch in state, fooling with strange levers and buck-jumping at intervals.

That was a great day at the Keller ranch, with a crowd looking on. Jake Davis made one of his nervous speeches of welcome, which makes you think he is trying to swallow and can't. He took off his hat, twisted it into a funnel, and told Mrs. Keller that it gave him great pleasure.

We tried to hit the psychological moment by having the limousine appear to the lady at the right point in Jake's speech, but that proved impossible.

There was no right point. It was as wrong a speech as ever was, and about half way through his senile and jaundiced gibberings Jake fell off his barrel and collapsed. Jerry Coakley later on stated that he pulled Jake off the barrel on account of it being so plain Jake would ruin the occasion for one and all if allowed to continue.

Meantime I sat on the limousine, which was concealed from Mrs. Keller by a corner of the house, waiting patiently for my entrance cue. I never got one at all.

Eventually I saw people waving frantically at me, so I judged it was time to dash upon the scene, and I dashed. I pulled up in front of the Boss's wife, and she stared at the limousine as if she didn't believe it.

"Here's your new automobile, Mrs. Keller," Jake said. "It's a token of the great regard in which we all hold you."

He said other words. Nobody in the world could have made a worse speech, but the excitement covered Jake's wabbly effort; and while Mrs. Keller grew bright-eyed, the crowd cheered, and I honked the horn.

"Well," she said eventually, and a little breathlessly, "isn't it perfectly lovely! Who's going to drive it for me?"

Right there the fell blow of circumstance both fell and blew.

"Why, Andy, of course!" I heard one bright young fathead exclaim.

"Certainly, Andy," added some other hidden coward.

It shows my mental tonnage when I confess that up to this moment I had never even thought about who would be the chauffeur of that limousine. The detail had escaped me.

The truth is, I loathe automobiles with all my heart. I would rather be shot than have anything to do with an automobile. Later on in the day I encountered a group of the skulking criminals and questioned them.

"Who spoke up and said for me to drive that thing?" I asked, hoping the low skunk would confess. Nobody would answer.

"Why not?" Jake asked. "You're the only man who knows how."

"I know how to eat tripe, too," I agreed, "but I ain't going to eat any. I want to state that I won't drive that automobile, or any other automobile. Mrs. Keller will have to get a driver somewhere else."

"All right," Jake said carelessly. "Don't howl to us. Tell the lady about it."

Right after that, events proved that I

was no prophet. At least I wasn't a good prophet.

Somehow or other, Mrs. Keller connected me with the limousine, probably because when she first beheld it, I was sitting on the seat. Anyhow, she set her mind on me, and from then on I was about as happy as a man who has buried a victim where they're going to begin putting in a sewer.

"Andy," she said to me, "this is a very beautiful automobile. I am almost overcome."

I answered that it was, feeling it only a matter of time till there would be two of us overcome, because I could see what she meant.

"I want it to look nice," she went on, and I agreed that this, also, was a good thought.

"I have talked with Mr. Keller," said the lady, "and he has consented to let me have you from now on. You're to take care of the limousine, and drive it for me. No ranch work at all."

I smiled the pleasant smile of a man who is trying to remove a hornet from a position which will presently become embarrassing to all. Under any other conditions I would have resigned the job and told Boss Keller what I thought of him in a low, bitter voice.

But as I said, Mrs. Keller is one grand specimen of a sex which is sometimes very spotty; and when I broke my leg that last winter, she brought me a peck of flowers and a book by Homer K. Yamm.

"All right, Mrs. Keller," I answered heartily, trying to act like a little boy in his nighty standing before his first Christmas tree. "I'll tend to that limousine, and don't you forget it."

Then I walked away, feeling that if I was going to break into tears I might as well be out of the lady's sight. On the way across the yard I met Jake Davis.

"If you want to buy a head," I said to Jake, "I can let you have one for a dime."

"A head?" Jake asked.

"Yes, a head. My head. It's brand-new; never been used."

Jake looked after me with a sympathetic grin, and then I went in where the limousine was and cursed it so earnestly that the paint curled off one door.

II.

IMMEDIATELY after being appointed chambermaid to this ornate gasoline chariot, Boss Keller relieved me of all my regular ranch duties and chuckled at me, as if it was a joke.

Somehow, my old work had never seemed so good to me. And when the rest of the ranch hands observed me at my new post, they undertook to josh me. Joe Keane started it.

"I suppose his purple livery and the monkey hat has to be bought in Chicago," Joe said to the bunch. "I take it that automobile chauffeurs live with the Chinamen, don't they?"

"You take that, do you?" I answered. "You can take this too," and I poked him one on the nose with great suddenness.

That was one morning I really enjoyed a fight, though you couldn't call it a battle. When they pried me off Joe he was yelling like a lost soul, and he would have been one, too, except for the crowd.

From then on, when the boys kidded me they did it at a distance. By working eight or nine hours a day I kept the Royal Flush shined up, but a permanent sadness had come over my fair young life. Whenever Mrs. Keller went driving I had to run the machine, and the longer I chauffed the more miserable I got.

"You don't seem as gay as you used to be," Jake said to me one morning.

"No," I answered. "I'm about as happy as a cow coming into Chicago. Why do you speak to me about gaiety, anyhow? You don't remind me of Easter Sunday yourself."

Jake tossed away his cigarette dolefully and breathed through his nose.

"Me," he confessed — "I ain't very happy, Andy."

"I know it," I said. "Ka-voo-la-voo?"

"Yeah," he went on. "That wife of mine is going to drive me mad yet. Once I didn't have any troubles. Now look at me."

I looked at him with deep sympathy,

because I knew he had a bunch of woes, the same as me, though his were different. There was a secret anguish gnawing at Jake's vitals, a steady, relentless anguish, which threatened to break all the old gnawing records for our neighborhood.

His young wife had turned to him abruptly one day in the spring, and decided that he wasn't cultured enough to suit her. Looking at him, she discerned certain signs of savagery in Jake, and she began to fret in the usual female way because her spouse wasn't refined.

He ain't, either. Jake and a valley buzzard are about the same thing when it comes to genteel polish. To be sure, he quit chewing tobacco under the pressure of wifely words, but he wears red suspenders and admires to talk about his bunions, which is certainly no mark of elegant refinement.

Jessie Davis—Jake's wife—read one of those magazine advertisements where it says that if you can talk French people will look on you as a polished aristocrat. No matter how rough-house your general character, if you can parley-voo, it's about the same as having Mary, Queen of Scots, and Charlemagne for ancestors.

So Jessie looked under the clock and sent the money, and back came one of those square, bulldog phonographs, with a large penetrating horn, a bunch of numbered records and some books. You started in with the first record, and kept on going until you were thoroughly refined and full of French phrases.

It's a queer thing, but women named Jessie generally have small, receding chins, weak mouths, and a constant appearance of being about to burst into tears, but they always get their own way.

Jake regarded his wife's effort to cultivate him with cold disapproval. He told her he didn't want to learn French any more than canary wants to keep cats.

"What for?" he demanded of me. "Why would I want to learn French? Nobody around here talks French, do they? It 'd be a lot of use to me, wouldn't it? Same as a time-table to a man going up for murder."

However, Jessie Davis lived up to her name, and from the hour the French-speaking phonograph arrived at the Davis home, Jake was an unhappy cuss. Most miserable and forlorn, he was, and if you spoke to him sometimes you risked getting your arm bitten off.

At night, instead of leaping over to Mesa Grande for a quiet game of pool and a couple of beers, Jake leaned his elbow on the dining-room table and let the horn shoot repeated loads of French into his quivering form, while Jessie stood over him like the statue of "No Quarter."

I will pause here to state that Jake was not a ready or lightninglike learner. He was one slow and devious imbiber of the Gallic tongue.

I know, because there for a while Jessie used to let me loaf around and watch Jake in the midst of his sufferings; but she finally put me out, and announced that I'd have to stay out while her Jake was being polished. She said that if I thought it was a show I was mistaken. But I wasn't.

They used to wind up the machine of an evening and Jake would set himself. First the machine would say it in a harsh but passionate tone, and then Jake would echo the remark. I could always tell which was Jake and which the horn.

"Go ahead," Jessie said, this first night, while I was still permitted to sit in. They started, with Jake out in front and running easy.

"Zhe dayseer aprondre le fronsay," said the mechanical apparatus, using an asthmatic accent. Then Jake repeated the sentence.

"That means: 'I wish to learn French,'" Jessie stated.

"I don't wish to learn French," Jake grunted irritably. "Let's sell this thing and buy a goldfish."

"Go on," Jessie commanded, and when she pushed a button the machine continued:

"Poorkwa dayseeray-voo aprondre le fronsay?"

"See!" said Jessie, explaining how simple it was. "It says, 'Why do you wish to learn French?'"

"Because I'm a sucker," Jake retorted. "I ought to take an ax to this thing."

After that Jessie told me to go on home, because I wasn't doing Jake any good. Poor old Jake! The only sentence he ever could remember from day to day was this:

"Let us take a train in Paris." That transportation remark stuck to him — and why, I don't know, except that Jake's brother-in-law was a brakeman.

"What good will your French education do you?" I demanded of him. "Suppose you get to Paris and want to take a hack—where'll you be?"

"I know where you'll be in a minute," he replied wrathfully, and I let up on him, after suggesting that if he was going to learn only one French sentence, to make it "Let us take a beer in Paris."

III.

Frontier Week comes once a year in Arizona, and during that hectic period our community is denuded of men. The male population packs up the safety razor and the extra shirt and starts north, leaving Hassayampa County to its women.

When you leave anything exclusively to women, something is bound to happen to it, and what happened to Hassayampa County, with all its males far away, was nothing other than the Swami Maramba.

Get that straight. The Swami Maramba came to us, clad in the panoplies of his calling.

I still contend that you can't blame Mrs. Keller about the Swami. She's a woman, and all women are weak when it comes to mysticism and ceremonials. Besides that, the coming of the gent gave her a *protégé*, and most ladies like to have *protégés*.

On an otherwise unclouded Arizona morning the wife of the boss informed me that I would have to drive the Royal Flush down to the railway station, where I would meet an incoming train and a stranger.

"His name is the Swami Maramba," she said in a clear voice. "Treat him with courtesy, and take Jake along to attend to his baggage."

"Treat him with courtesy and take Jake along. It can't be done," I said.

The lady insisted, however, so I hunted up my side-kick and broke the news.

"Good," said Jake, concealing whatever enthusiasm he might have felt over the job. "Finish it up. What's a Swami?"

"For all I know, it's something that comes off a harness. The missus didn't tell me any particulars, but I think he's a male object."

We hitched up the limousine ahead of time and left for town. On the journey we amused ourselves by conjecturing as to what a Swami might turn out to be, and Jake gave it as his opinion that a Swami was probably a gent who taught swimming.

"Which will get the poor walrus a lot of money in Arizona," Jake grinned.

The noon train arrived at Mesa Grande on schedule, for the first time since they built the road, and we observed six innocent passengers and one guilty one.

The seventh traveler was a deep brunette, clad in a torrent of black hair and a purple bath-robe. He also wore a rope of pearls, and his complexion was like that of a piece of liver which the butcher tries to sell you against your better judgment.

"Could that be the Swami?" I asked Jake incredulously.

"I saw one of them once at a magic lantern show," Jake admitted. "They usually sit on an elephant."

"The sucker looks sort of tanned, don't he?" I went on, wondering what could have come over Mrs. Keller.

"Tanned!" said Jake. "When Boss Keller sees who came to call on his wife, I want to be at least three miles from the scene of carnage.

"And when he discovers that you and I brought the Swami out to the ranch, it 'll be bad for our health. That is, if this bird of paradise is really the Swami."

The train started west, and the six Caucasian passengers moved away, so I finally walked over to the stranger and asked him was he Mr. Maramba.

"I am the Swami," he answered, looking down on me and frowning. "I am the Swami. Peace be with you."

"All right," I said politely. "I came down for you."

"May you see the light," he went on.

I explained nervously that my present supply of light was all I could use, and

that if he had enough of his own to notice our limousine, to hop across and get in.

He gathered his purple robe around him and moved toward the Royal Flush. Jake was in some sort of a trance, but I woke him up, and we loaded the Swami's baggage.

Then I drove the man of mystery out to the Keller ranch, and our neighborhood lost a good deal of its regular monotony.

Later on we learned how came this fat man into our helpless midst. It seems Mrs. Keller first met him in Chicago, where you are always liable to meet something you're not expecting.

Being a polite Arizona lady, she invited him to stop off at her ranch any time he found himself skyhooting around the State. She probably never expected the Swami to come true, but he did; so there we were with the odd-looking fish all ready to settle down and be one of us.

As Jake prophesied, Trouble didn't take long to leap out of bed that day. The first faint signs of uproar appeared after we reached the Keller ranch and turned the Swami over to the reception committee, which consisted of Mrs. Keller and all the women who could get away from their homes.

Boss Keller was standing under the water tank, and he watched the Swami unload himself from the Royal Flush and walk up the porch steps, surrounded by excited and twittering females. The boss took a long and undisguised glance at the purple bathrobe and then took off his muffler.

"Who told you to drag the *perfecto maduro* out here?" he demanded of me in loud and bitter tones.

"Your wife did," I said cheerily. "Personally, I don't know the gent."

I was glad to get back at the boss on account of his having loaned me in such a shameful manner to his wife.

"Well," he snorted, and with deep feeling, "anybody who thinks this kiwi bird is going to live on my place can get a bet out of me. There are some things I don't have to stand, and this is all of them."

Jake and I grinned, and passed innocently on to the barn. That afternoon there was a family discussion up in the ranch-house. You couldn't hear Mrs. Keller, but you knew she was there.

You could hear Boss Keller. So could the boys in France.

It seems he held certain opinions, and he was explaining them to his wife. Whatever kind of a game they were playing, he won. It was announced that the Swami Maramba would be officially domiciled in the house of Luke Reed, on the Tempe Road.

Luke was in Omaha. Mrs. Reed gave her consent, and when Luke got back we almost had another one of those sensational divorce trials.

Without waiting for any one to push them over the thin line that divides the sane from the insane, the women folks of Hassayampa County flocked in, surrounded the Swami, and gave fresh evidence that the human race not only came from monkeys, but knows the way back.

They confronted the brown man, bowed low before him, and asked him a lot of fool questions. It must have made him grin, because while the ladies of Chicago are notoriously soft, they couldn't be as easy victims as this Arizona bunch.

Being an observant gent, it took the Swami about one look to conclude that he had fallen into a land of milk and honey. When the ladies asked him when he thought he could hold his first séance and initiate them into the mysteries of the Orient, he stated that he thought he could begin at once. So the séance was scheduled for the next day.

IV.

Of course, this ocher-faced yap didn't fool Jake or me. From the minute he got off the train we figured him as a wise visitor with an eye for the coin. And the funny thing about it was the way the situation worked out for him.

The boys were gone, and Boss Keller was going, so Mr. Maramba had the place to himself, if you leave me and Jake out. Jake couldn't go north on account of Jessie, and I had to linger and guard the Royal Flush, which didn't increase my happiness.

When we saw the Swami toward noon the next day, he was a spectacle for the

eye to pause upon. He was on his way to the Keller ranch, and he was clad in a yellow robe, this time, with a silver bag hanging on a chain.

He passed Jake and me without asking us about our light supply, and I suppose he figured us as trouble-makers.

The séance was for ladies only, but I had a strong curiosity. I wanted to learn how the Swami worked, and so Jake and I horned into that meeting without any one knowing we were there.

It was a simple matter of going into the ranch-house through a rear door. We observed that the ladies of the vicinity were present in force. The Swami came in at one o'clock, mounted a rostrum, and sang forty-five verses of some Hindu song which nobody could understand.

Then he stopped and moaned a while.

The ladies formed a circle about him, and when he moaned they moaned too. They tried to sing with him, which resulted in some confusion; and when he began telling them about their souls and their egos, the expression on each lady's face was one of rapt awe.

He informed them that they would have to take a daily soul bath, which was news to the crowd; and after a pile of talk which I couldn't understand at all, he announced that the session was over, and there would be another one the next day.

There was, too. There was a séance daily.

Still, we couldn't figure the Swami. Why was he working so hard, apparently without pay, because there was no passing the vulgar hat at his séances? He didn't try to collect money from the stricken ladies.

"What's the answer?" Jake asked me. "This gent don't look like he enjoyed working for his health, and yet nothing has been said about the dough. Who pays him and when is pay-day?"

"Search me," I answered. "He has a system of some kind, but we haven't seen it yet."

Toward the end of the week my eyes suddenly opened. I was passing Luke Reed's house on the seat of the Royal Flush, and I noticed something familiar-looking hanging on a post in the back yard.

"That's funny," I said to myself, stopping the machine. "That looks like Joe Dorman's saddle."

When I walked back by the house and looked, it *was* Joe's saddle, and Joe thinks the same of that saddle as I do of my right eye.

I reflected, and then knocked on the Swami's door. He was not at home, but the detail failed to halt me. I went in through a window in the kitchen, and the sight that met my astounded gaze left me full of admiration for the Swami.

As I stood there in the door, I beheld a multitude of personal belongings, all the property of the boys, who were innocently enjoying the pleasures of Frontier Week up-State.

While their husbands were away, the hypnotized females had been making gifts to the Swami. They had been showering him with free votive offerings, and one of the first donations I noticed was Boss Keller's watch. It was hanging on a dresser.

I can't remember all the things I saw in the Swami's temporary home, but I judged that each lady in the county had made him at least one present, of something belonging to her husband, father, or son.

Hank Savage's banjo rested against a table, and Rufe Lewis's dress suit hung on a nail. There were cigarette cases, silk shirts, umbrellas, clothes, and also household implements. For a moment I felt glad that I had never married.

I stood there wondering what I had better do about this astonishing situation. Finally I sneaked out the way I entered and breezed on into town, where I consulted Grover Griscom, the station-agent.

"Has this here Swami Maramba made any plans for leaving our fair community?" I asked Grover.

"Yes," he answered. "The Swami is going East on Monday. He has his tickets. Furthermore, he is evidently going out heavier than he came in."

"How?" I asked.

"He's ordered a freight-car on the siding by Monday morning," said Grover.

"Which seems a reasonable move," I remarked, and then I drove slowly back, thinking things over.

I turned into Luke Reed's lane, and this time the disciple of mysticism was at home. His front door was locked, but I saw him through a window, and when he wouldn't open his door like a gentleman, I leaned against it, and went in anyhow.

"What does this mean?" he demanded as I crashed in upon him.

"I'm looking for a little light," I said cheerfully enough. "Nice collection you have here."

I had caught him trying on Henry Deering's pink pajamas, which fitted him.

"I pursue my own methods," he said haughtily, looking at me. "These objects about you are free-will offerings made by the ladies."

"Quite so," I agreed. "And, as you are aware, also made in the absence of their devoted husbands, who will be home from up-State early next week."

"This does not concern you," the Swami said, glaring at me most cordially.

"Maybe not," I went on, "but you ought to know that this collecting habit of yours is likely to get you something when the men folks return and look into this room.

"You may be able to sleep on a board full of sharp spikes, as you said in your lecture, but that ain't going to do you any good, Swami, unless you can also hang freely at the end of a rope without stopping your breath. When the boys see this loot, they're just naturally going to think of ropes and such."

The Swami shuddered and clawed at his necklace.

"Now," I remarked genially, "I don't want to seem too hard on an industrious Swami, because I can see that you're trying all the time, so I think I'll give you a chance to stay away from this hanging bee.

"By rights, I ought to hold you here till the men get back from Frontier Week, after which nothing much would happen except your funeral services. Still, I have a feeling of sympathy for you, Swami. If I want to, I can let you take that passenger-train Monday, and I can also let you load that freight-car you've ordered; but if I give you this desirable freedom, there's a condition to it."

"A condition?" said the Swami faintly but with interest.

"Yeah, a condition."

"What is it?"

Then I told the Swami what my condition was. First he grew as pale as he could and shook his head.

"Ain't it better to try than to get hung when the boys get you?" I demanded, and he admitted it was.

"All right," I said. "You do your best. You see about this condition, and remember you can't fail, because if you do, you stay right here till the boys come marching home."

He promised in faltering tones.

"And don't think you can skip out on me," I said in parting. "When I ain't watching you personally I have others on the job. You can't escape, Swami."

Then I went away. That same afternoon, while hurrying the Royal Flush into town for the missus, I saw Jake Davis on the road, and it seemed to me he had just turned out from the Swami's temporary abode.

This alarmed me, because I didn't want Jake or any one else to find out about the loot—not then.

"Where were you?" I demanded of Jake.

"Me?" he said, looking at me innocently. "I'm taking a walk."

"Didn't you just come out of Luke Reed's house?"

"Me?" said Jake in astonishment. "No. I'm just walking along the road."

I doubted the sucker at the time, but said nothing more. He climbed into the limousine and rode to town with me, very thoughtful. That evening I dropped in again on the Swami, who looked a little worn.

"It's all right," he said. "I have fulfilled your condition. Everything will be as you wish."

"Fine," I said, and then I went home.

On Monday morning I wandered down to the railroad station at Mesa Grande to make sure that the Swami left nothing undone. The Swami was present, but there were no ladies, because he had thought it better to say nothing about his departure.

"The car is fully loaded," said Mr. Maramba.

He was walking up and down with a strip of green railroad ticket, waiting for the east train, and there was an air of nervousness about him.

Over on the freight siding in front of Levi's grocery stood a red box car, which would be picked up by the east-bound freight. With the help of a friendly Mexican, I pried open a door and looked inside. The car was neatly packed with those votive offerings.

"Good," I said to the Mexican, and we closed the door.

After the Swami's train came in and I saw him on board, I trotted over to the Last Chance saloon, whistling to myself, and reflecting that this isn't such a bad world after all. At the lunch end of the bar I found Jake Davis sunning himself with a drink.

"Jake," I said, slapping him on the back, "this is a big day. I'm going to buy you a drink."

"No, you're not," Jake returned heartily. "This is my day to howl. I'm going to buy you one."

We had a friendly argument, but compromised by buying two.

"Jake," I said, "the Swami is leaving us to-day."

"I just saw him get on the train," Jake grinned. "You know, Andy, this here Swami ain't such a bad sort, after all. We treated him raw, but he's a pretty nice guy."

I looked at Jake and wondered where he got such notions.

"You're feeling pretty good, ain't you?" I demanded in some surprise.

"Why wouldn't I?" he chuckled. "Let's have another."

We had it. Now and then Jake sang, which is a very rare thing with him. For a long time we stood there in the Last Chance, anointing ourselves with an occasional snifter and getting more care-free and abandoned every minute.

Finally we heard the snorting of an engine, and we knew that the east-bound freight had come in. I glanced out of a window and noticed the trainmen shifting that red box car, and after they hooked it to the freight the train started east. Jake was standing beside me, and his eyes were shining.

When the red box car passed the Last Chance I kissed my fingers and blew a salute out to the train.

"Good-by, old girl," I said hilariously.

"Good-by what?" Jake demanded.

"The limousine, fool!" I roared. "You'll never lay an eye on the Royal Flush again, because she's in that box car, along with the other votive offerings. That Swami sure is one grand collector of gifts."

Jake looked his astonishment. Then, grinning, made motions indicative of joy.

"That's a coincidence," he said. "The Swami has been doing a little job for me, too."

"What are you talking about?" I inquired.

"I'm saying good-by, too," Jake howled. "Something else is in that car with the gifts."

"What is it?"

"The French phonograph!" Jake yelled.

"Then you *were* coming out of Luke's house on Saturday," I accused him. "You been dickering with the Swami, too."

"Sure," said Jake happily. "You ain't the only sucker around here who's got brains. Let's have another drink. These Swamis sure do have a lot of influence with ladies, don't they?"

Thereupon we gazed once more at the departing freight train, and rapped on the bar for a little service.

The Conquest of the Moon Pool

by A. Merritt

A Sequel to "The Moon Pool"

A "DIFFERENT" SERIAL

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

FOLLOWING the strange and inexplicable disappearance of Dr. David Throckmartin's wife, his associate, Dr. Stanton, and his wife's maid, Thora Helverson, in the uncanny depths of the Moon Pool, and the still more amazing disappearance of Throckmartin himself from the ship Southern Queen, in midocean (the details of which have already been given to the world in a statement made by Dr. Walter T. Goodwin, Ph.D., F. R. G. S., and published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, June 22, 1918), Dr. Goodwin, backed by the International Association of Science, set out to investigate thoroughly the appalling phenomena, and if possible effect a rescue of the victims.

While proceeding toward the Caroline Islands, on the outlying island of which, Nan-Matal, was the entrance to the vast cavern in which was the Moon Pool, in the little sailing vessel, Suwarna, Captain Da Costa, they encountered another small vessel, the Brunhilda, Captain Olaf Huldrichson. Olaf, a huge giant of a man, was alone on the ship, his hands lashed to his wheel and in the last stages of exhaustion. From him, when he had been cared for, they learned that a "sparkling devil" had come down the path of the moon and taken his wife and his little daughter, Freda. The crew, terrified, had deserted the ship, and he, binding his wrists to the wheel that he might keep awake, had followed the direction taken by the sparkling devil. On learning of Dr. Goodwin's mission, he willingly consented to join him, and the two, with Larry O'Keefe (a young half-American, half-Irish member of the Royal Air Force, whom the Suwarna had picked up from his wrecked hydroplane the day after the rescue of Olaf), landed on Nan-Matal.

The full of the moon was past, but by means of light condensers Dr. Goodwin managed to focus the moon rays in sufficient strength to cause the rock door to the Moon Pool to open. Scarcely had it done so when Olaf, shrieking, rushed through the portal; a rifle cracked, and the bullet, missing O'Keefe by a narrow margin, shattered a condenser. The next moment a figure catapulted out of the shadows, and in a second O'Keefe and the stranger were struggling on the threshold of the Moon Rock. They rolled past the opened slab, Dr. Goodwin following. It was over in a moment, however, and presently the Irishman rose, leaving the stranger unconscious on the rock floor.

Even as he did so, however, the great rock door, released by the breaking of the light condenser, swung to, and they were imprisoned in the lair of the Dweller of the Moon Pool.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MOON POOL.

"LARRY!" I cried, turning to O'Keefe, "the stone has shut! We're caught!"

O'Keefe took a brisk step toward the barrier behind us. There was no mark of juncture with the shining walls; the slab fitted into the sides as closely as a mosaic.

"It's shut all right," said Larry. "But if there's a way in, there's a way out. Anyway, Doc, we're right in the pew we've been heading for—so why worry?" He grinned at me cheerfully, and although I could not accept his light-hearted view of the situa-

tion, I felt a twinge of shame for my momentary panic. The man on the floor groaned, and O'Keefe dropped swiftly to his knees beside him.

"Von Hetzdorp!" he said.

At my exclamation he moved aside, turning the face so I could see it. It was clearly German, and just as clearly its possessor was one of considerable force and intellectuality.

The strong, massive brow with orbital ridge unusually developed, the dominant, high-bridged nose, the straight lips with their more than suggestion of latent cruelty, and the strong lines of the jaw beneath a black, pointed beard all gave evidence that here was a personality beyond the ordinary. The hair was closely cropped on the square head, and the short, stocky body with its deep chest and abnormal length of torso as compared to the legs, indicated extraordinary vitality.

Unscrupulous, I thought, looking down upon him, remorseless, crafty, and with a brain as unmoral as is science itself, for I hold that what we call science is infinitely beyond all code, and is good or bad or neutral only as it is applied by humanity; that, *par example*, the Nature whose laws bring about that condition of unstable equilibrium among atoms which we call a high explosive, cannot be blamed if man uses those laws to destroy the bodies of his fellow man instead of leveling rocky barriers to commerce or tearing up the subsoil of earth for a greater fertility—nor can any responsibility for their use be held against the student who, discovering the laws, gave them to man.

"Couldn't be anybody else," said Larry, breaking in on my thoughts. "He must have been watching us over there from Chau-ta-leur's vault all the time. When he saw that we had the slab open I suppose he figured that now we had picked the chestnuts out of the fire, he'd better collect 'em all for himself. So he took a pot shot at me first, and meant to get you and Olaf next. But his aim was bad—too damned good, rather—and when he saw what he'd done he took a crazy chance. That's Heinie all over—"

The man on the corridor's floor stirred, and swiftly O'Keefe ran practised hands over his body; then stood erect, holding out to me two wicked-looking magazine pistols and a knife. "He got one of my bullets through his right forearm, too," he said. "Just a flesh wound, but it made him drop his rifle. Some arsenal, our little German scientist, what?"

I opened my medical kit and knelt beside Von Hetzdorp—if indeed it was he. The wound was a slight one, and Larry stood looking on as I bandaged it.

"Got another one of those condensers the Dutchman here broke?" he asked me suddenly. "And do you suppose Olaf will know enough to use it?"

And then it dawned upon me that O'Keefe could not have heard, as I had, the Norseman race into the moon door's passage before the door had closed! I arose swiftly.

"Larry," I answered, "Olaf's not outside! He's in here somewhere!"

His jaw dropped.

"The hell you say!" he whispered.

"Didn't you hear him shriek when the stone opened?" I asked.

"I heard him yell, yes," he said. "But I didn't know what was the matter. And then this wild cat jumped me—" He paused and his eyes widened. "Which way did he go?" he asked swiftly. I pointed down the faintly glowing passage.

"There's only one way," I said.

"Watch that bird close," hissed O'Keefe, pointing to Von Hetzdorp—and pistol in hand stretched his long legs and raced away. I looked down at the German. His eyes were open, and he reached out a hand to me. I lifted him to his feet.

"I have heard," he said. "We follow, quick. If you will take my arm, please, I am shaken yet, yes—" I gripped his shoulder without a word, and the two of us set off down the corridor after Larry. Von Hetzdorp was gasping, and his weight pressed upon me heavily, but he moved with all the will and strength that was in him.

As we ran I took hasty note of the tunnel. I saw that its sides were smooth and polished, and that the light seemed to come not from their surfaces, but from far within

them—giving to the walls an illusive aspect of distance and depth; rendering them in a peculiarly weird way—spacious. The passage turned, twisted, ran down, turned again. It came to me that the light that illumined the tunnel was given out by tiny points deep within the stone, sprang from the points ripplingly and spread upon their polished faces. Involuntarily I stopped to look more closely.

"Hurry," gasped Von Hetzdorp. "Explain that later—etheric vibration—set up in that composition—stones really etheric lights—stupendous! Hurry!"

Through his panting speech broke a cry from far ahead. It was Larry's voice.

"Olaf!"

I gripped Von Hetzdorp's arm closer and we sped on. Now we were coming fast to the end of the passage. Before us was a high arch, and through it I glimpsed a dim, shifting luminosity as of mist filled with rainbows. We reached the portal and I drew myself up short, almost tripping the German. For what I was looking into was a chamber that might have been transported from that enchanted palace of the Jinn King that rises beyond the magic mountains of Kaf.

It was filled with a shimmering, prismatic lambency that thickened in the distances to impenetrable veils of fairy opalescence. It was a shrine of sorcery!

Before me stood O'Keefe, and a dozen feet in front of him, Huldricksson, with something clasped tightly in his arms. The Norseman's feet were at the verge of a shining, silvery lip of stone within whose oval lay a blue pool. And down upon this pool staring upward like a gigantic eye, fell seven pillars of fantom light—one of them amethyst, one of rose, another of white, a fourth of blue, and three of emerald, of silver and of amber. They fell each upon the azure surface, and I knew that these were the seven streams of radiance, within which the Dweller took shape—now but pale ghosts of their brilliancy when the full energy of the moon stream raced through them.

Then Huldricksson bent and placed on the shining silver lip of the Pool that which he held—and I saw that it was the body of a child! He set it there so gently, bent over the side and thrust a hand down into the water. And as he did so he stiffened strangely, moaned and lurched against the little body that lay before him. Instantly the form moved — and slipped over the verge into the blue. Rigid with horror, I watched Huldricksson recover himself and throw his body over the stone, hands clutching, arms thrust deep down—and then heard from his lips a long-drawn, heart-shriveling cry of pain and of anguish that held in it nothing human!

Close on its wake came a cry from Von Hetzdorp.

"*Gott!*" shrieked the German. "Drag him back! Quick!"

He leaped forward, but before he could half clear the distance, O'Keefe had leaped too, had caught the Norseman by the shoulders and toppled him backward, where he lay whimpering and sobbing. And as I rushed behind the German I saw Larry lean over the lip of the Pool and cover his eyes with a shaking hand; saw Von Hetzdorp peer down into it with real pity in his cold eyes; heard him murmur—"*Das armes Kind! Ach! das armes Kleine Mädchen!*"

Then I stared down myself into the Moon Pool, and there, sinking, sinking, was a little maid whose dead face and fixed, terror-filled eyes looked straight into mine; and ever sinking slowly, slowly—vanished! And I knew that this was Olaf's Freda, his beloved "yndling" whose mother had snatched her up from the Brunhilda's deck when the Dweller had wrapped its awesome, coruscating folds about her, and had drawn her, the child still in her arms, along the moonbeam path to where we stood!

But where was the mother, and where had Olaf found his babe?

Simultaneously, it seemed, we straightened ourselves, the three of us, and looked into each other's faces; each of us, yes, even Von Hetzdorp, shaken to the heart. The German was first to speak.

"You have nitroglycerin there, yes?" he asked, pointing toward my medical kit that I had gripped unconsciously and carried with me during the mad rush down the passage. I nodded and drew it out.

"Hypodermic," he ordered next, curtly;

took the syringe, filled it accurately with its one one-hundredth of a grain dosage, and leaned over Huldricksson, who, with arms held out rigidly, was fighting for breath as though a great weight lay on his chest. He rolled up the sailor's sleeves half-way to the shoulder. The arms were white with that same strange semitranslucence that I had seen on Throckmartin's breast where a tendril of the Dweller had touched him; and his hands were of the same whiteness—like a baroque pearl. Above the line of white, standing out like marble on the bronzed arms, Von Hetzdorp thrust the needle.

"He will need all his heart can do," he said to me.

Then he reached down into a belt about his waist and drew from it a small, flat flask of what seemed to be lead. He opened it and let a few drops of its contents fall on each arm of the Norwegian. The liquid sparkled and instantly began to spread over the skin much as oil or gasoline dropped on water does—only far more rapidly. And as it spread it seemed to draw a sparkling film over the tainted flesh and little wisps of vapor rose from it. The Norseman's mighty chest heaved with agony, and I could see the overstimulated heart beating in a great pulse in his throat. He strove to rise to his feet—but his weakness was too great. His hands clenched. The German gave a grunt of satisfaction at this, dropped a little more of the liquid, and then, watching closely, grunted again and leaned back. Huldricksson's labored breathing ceased, his head dropped upon Larry's knee, and from his arms and hands the whiteness swiftly withdrew.

Von Hetzdorp arose and contemplated us—almost benevolently.

"He will all right be in five minutes," he said. "I know. I do it to pay for that shot of mine, and also because we will need him. Yes." He turned to Larry. "You have a poonch like a mule kick, my young friend," he said. "Some time you pay me for that, too, eh?" He smiled; and the quality of the grimace was not exactly reassuring. Larry looked him over quizzically.

"You're Von Hetzdorp, of course," he said. The German nodded, betraying no surprise at the recognition.

"And you?" he asked.

"Lieutenant O'Keefe of the Royal Flying Corps," replied Larry, saluting. "And this gentleman is Dr. Walter T. Goodwin."

Von Hetzdorp's face brightened.

"The American botanist?" he queried. I nodded.

"*Ach!*" cried Von Hetzdorp eagerly, "but this is fortunate. Long I have desired to meet you. Your work, for an American, is most excellent; surprising. But you are wrong in your theory of the development of the Angiospermæ from *Cycadeoidea dacotensis*. *Ja*—all wrong—"

I was interrupting him with considerable heat, for my conclusions from the fossil *Cycadeoidea* I knew to be my greatest triumph, when Larry broke in upon me rudely.

"Say," he sputtered, "am I crazy or are you? What in damnation kind of a place and time is this to start an argument like that? What's up to us is to fix Olaf here, get his wife back to him, and find a way to get out ourselves.

"Angiospermæ, is it?" exclaimed Larry. "*Hell!*"

Von Hetzdorp again regarded him with that irritating air of benevolence.

"You have not the scientific mind, young friend," he said. "The poonch, yes! But so has the mule. You must learn that only the fact is important—not you, not me, not this"—he pointed to Huldricksson—"or its sorrows. Only the fact, whatever it is, is real, yes. But"—he turned to me—"another time—"

Huldricksson interrupted him. The big seaman had risen stiffly to his feet and stood with Larry's arm supporting him. He stretched out his hands to me.

"I saw her," he whispered. "I saw mine Freda when the stone swung. She lay there—just at my feet. I picked her up and I saw that mine Freda was dead. But I hoped—and I thought maybe mine Helma was somewhere here, too. So I ran with mine yndling—here—" His voice broke. "I thought maybe she *was* not dead," he went on. "And I saw that"—he pointed to the Moon Pool—"and I thought I would

bathe her face and she might live again. And when I dipped my hands within—the life left them, and cold, deadly cold, ran up through them into my heart. And mine Freda—she fell—" he covered his eyes, and dropping his head on O'Keefe's shoulder, stood, racked by sobs that seemed to tear at his very soul.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FLAME-TIPPED SHADOWS.

VON HETZDORP nodded his head solemnly as Olaf finished.

"*Ja!*" he said. "That which comes from here took them both—the woman and the child. *Ja!* They came clasped within it and the stone shut upon them. But why it left the child behind I do not understand."

Larry was watching him, in his eyes incredulous indignation and amazement.

"You, too, try to tell me that *something* carried a woman and a child from a ship hundreds of miles away, through the air over the seas to here?" he cried, an edge of contempt in his voice. "*Something* that Dr. Goodwin has said is made of—moonshine—carried a strong woman and a child. How do you know?"

"Because I saw it," answered Von Hetzdorp simply. "Not only did I see it, but hardly had I time to make escape through the entrance before it passed whirling and murmuring and its bell sounds all joyous. *Ja!* It was what you call the squeak close, that."

"Wait a moment," I said—stilling Larry with a gesture. "Do I understand you to say that you were *within* this place?"

Von Hetzdorp actually beamed upon me. "*Ja,* Dr. Goodwin," he said, "I went in when that which comes from it went out!"

I gaped at him, stricken dumb; into Larry's bellicose attitude crept a suggestion of grudging respect: Olaf, trembling, watched silently.

"Dr. Goodwin and my impetuous young friend, you," went on Von Hetzdorp after a moment's silence—and I wondered vaguely why he did not include Huldricksson in his address—"it is time that we have an understanding. I have a proposition to make to you, also. It is this; we are what you call a bad boat, and all of us are in it. *Ja!* Also in this troublous water we find ourself we need all hands, is it not so? Let us put together our knowledge and our brains and resources—and even a poonch of a mule is a resource," he looked wickedly at O'Keefe, "and pull our boat into quiet waters again. After that—"

"All very well, Von Hetzdorp," interjected Larry angrily; "but I don't feel very safe in any boat with somebody capable of shooting me through the back."

Von Hetzdorp waved a deprecating hand. "It was natural," he said; "logical, yes. Here is a very great secret, perhaps many secrets to Germany invaluable. You are an enemy of Germany, although why as an Irishman you should be I do not know—" He watched the flush of anger in Larry's face with interest, shook his head and turned to me. "And here, too, is Dr. Goodwin, a Yankee and an enemy. And besides, am I not a scientist, and do I like to see the fruits of my labors taken from me? *Nein!* Dr. Goodwin understands, do you not?"

"I don't understand how anything could justify you in shooting us down from ambush," I replied hotly.

"No?" he said, almost sadly. "And yet that was nothing, nothing, weighed with the possible results. *Ach,*" he sighed, "the point of view of these outlanders! They cannot understand!" He seemed lost in perplexity at our indignation; then resumed: "But it is not important! Let us forget that now and face our situation. My proposal is this: that we join interests, and what you call, see it through together; find our way through this place and learn those secrets of which I have spoken. And when that is done we will go our ways, each to his own land, to make use of them as we may. On my part I offer my knowledge—and it is very valuable, Dr. Goodwin—and my training. You and Lieutenant O'Keefe do the same, and this man Olaf, what he can of his strength, for I do not think his usefulness lies in his brains, *nein.*"

I considered—but after all, what else was there to do? The German was undoubtedly

a man of resource and courage, and, as he said, possessed of special information regarding the phenomena I had come to seek, for this his remarks concerning the lighting of the corridor and his treatment of Olaf's arms had plainly shown. What good would there be in—disposing of him? But how much could he be trusted? Larry echoed my thoughts:

"In effect, Goodwin, the professor's proposition is this," he said: "He wants to know what it is that's going on here, and he knows he can't do it by himself. Also he knows we have the drop on him. We're three to his one, and we have all his hardware and cutlery. We could throw him down the Pool if we wanted to, or tie him up and leave him. I haven't the slightest doubt that if he saw a way to do it and to get away with it, he'd do all of that to us. But in the mean time *we* can do better *with* him than without him—just as *he* can do better *with* us than without us. It is an even break. If you say so, all right. I'll guarantee to watch the professor here for any little German manifestations such as he showed outside."

There was almost a twinkle in Von Hetzdorp's eyes. As Larry ended he bowed.

"It is not just as I would have put it, perhaps," he said, "but in its skeleton he was right. Nor will I turn my hand against you while we are still in danger here. I pledge you my honor on this!" He drew himself up rigidly.

I glanced at Larry half doubtfully and back at the German. Then I thrust out a hand to him. He gripped it, dropped it, and thrust his to Larry. The Irishman hesitated, then with a laugh, took it.

"But I'll just keep the guns, professor," he said. Von Hetzdorp bowed again.

"Now," he said, "to prove my good faith I will tell you what I know. Something I knew of what was occurring here before I was sent"—he corrected himself hurriedly—"before I came. I found the secret of the door mechanism even as you did, Dr. Goodwin. But by carelessness, my condensers were broken. I was forced to wait while I sent for others—and the waiting might be for months. I took certain precautions, and on the first night of this full moon I hid myself within the vault of Chau-ta-leur. There is"—he hesitated—"there is a something there also which I do not quite understand that—protects. But I did not know this when I first hid myself, *nein!* All I thought was that I could see from there and perhaps come through."

An involuntary thrill of respect for the man went through me at the manifest heroism of this leap in the dark. I could see it reflected in Larry's face.

"I hid in the vault," continued Von Hetzdorp, "and I saw that which comes from here come out. You are," he turned to me, "familiar with its appearance?" I nodded. "But how you learned—well, of that later. I saw, I say, *it* come out. I waited—long hours. At last, when the moon was low, I saw it return—ecstatically—with a man, a native, in embrace enfolded. It passed through the door, and soon then the moon became low and the door closed. I had found it difficult—and had it not been for—whatever it is of protection there in the vault—" He hesitated again, perplexedly.

"The next night," he went on, "more confidence was mine, yes. And after that which comes had gone, I looked through its open door. I said, 'It will not return for three hours. While it is away, why shall I not into its home go through the door it has left open?' So I went—even to here. I looked at the pillars of light and I tested the liquid of the Pool on which they fell, and what I found led me to believe the shape of light emerged from there." I started. Evidently then, he did not *know* just how the Dweller materialized from the Pool. He saw my movement and interpreted it correctly.

"You know how it comes?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," I answered, "later I will tell you."

"I analyzed that liquid," he went on, "and then I knew I had been right in one phase at least of my theory. That liquid, Dr. Goodwin, is not water, and it is not any fluid known on earth." He handed me a small vial, its neck held in a long thong.

"Take this," he said, "and see."

Wonderingly, I took the bottle; dipped it down into the Pool. The liquid was extraordinarily light; seemed, in fact, to give the vial buoyancy. I held it to the light. It was striated, streaked, as though little living, pulsing veins ran through it. And its blueness even in the vial, held an intensity of luminousness.

"Radioactive," said Von Hetzdorp. "Some liquid that is intensely radioactive; but what it is I know not at all. Upon the living skin it acts like radium raised to the *n*th power and with an element most mysterious added. The solution with which I treated him," he pointed to Huldricksson, "I had prepared before I came here, from information I had of what I might find. It is largely salts of radium, and its base is Loeb's formula for the neutralization of radium and X-ray burns. Taking this man at once, before the degeneration had become really active, I could negative it. But after two hours I could have done nothing." He paused a moment.

"Next I studied the nature of these luminous walls. I concluded that whoever had made them, knew the secret of the Almighty's manufacture of light from the ether itself. Colossal! *Ja!* But the substance of these blocks confines an atomic—how would you say—atomic manipulation, a conscious arrangement of electrons, light-emitting, and perhaps indefinitely so. These blocks are lamps in which oil and wick are—electrons drawing light waves from ether itself! A Prometheus, indeed, this discoverer! *Hein?* Hardly had I concluded these investigations before my watch warned me to go. I went. That which comes forth returned—this time empty-handed.

"And the next night I did the same thing. Engrossed in research, I let the moments go by to the danger point, and scarcely was I replaced within the vault when the shining thing raced over the walls, and in its grip the woman and child—

"Then you came—and that is all. And now—what is it you know?"

Very briefly I went over my story. His eyes gleamed now and then, but he did not interrupt me.

"A great secret! A colossal secret!" he said at last. "We cannot leave it hidden."

"The first thing to do is to try the door," said Larry, matter of fact.

"There is no use, my young friend," said Von Hetzdorp mildly.

"Nevertheless we'll try," said Larry. We retraced our way through the winding tunnel to the end, but soon even O'Keefe saw that any idea of moving the slab from within was hopeless. We returned to the Chamber of the Pool. The pillars of light were fainter, and we knew that the moon was sinking. On the world outside before long dawn would be breaking. I began to feel thirst—and the blue semblance of water within the silvery rim seemed to glint mockingly as my eyes rested on it.

"*Ja!*" said Von Hetzdorp, reading my thoughts uncannily. "*Ja!* We will be thirsty. And it will be very bad for him of us who loses control and drinks of that, my friend. *Ja!*"

Larry threw back his shoulders as though shaking a burden from them.

"This place would give an angel of joy the willies," he said. "And you two with your damned scientific superstitions would drive a prohibitionist from a trough of grape juice to a vat of rye! We're four able-bodied men up against a bunch of moonshine and a lot of dead ones. Buck up, for God's sake!"

"Do you suggest that we poonch our way out?" asked Von Hetzdorp mildly.

"Forget it, professor," answered Larry almost testily. "If I can forget that bullet of yours that came within an inch of clicking me, you can forget that smash of mine. I suggest that we look around this place and find something that will take us somewhere. You can bet the people that built it had more ways of getting in than that once-a-month family entrance. Doc, you and Olaf take the left wall; the professor and I will take the right."

He loosened one of his automatics with a suggestive movement.

"After you, professor," he said politely. And I knew that despite the German's apparent frankness and docility he did not trust him.

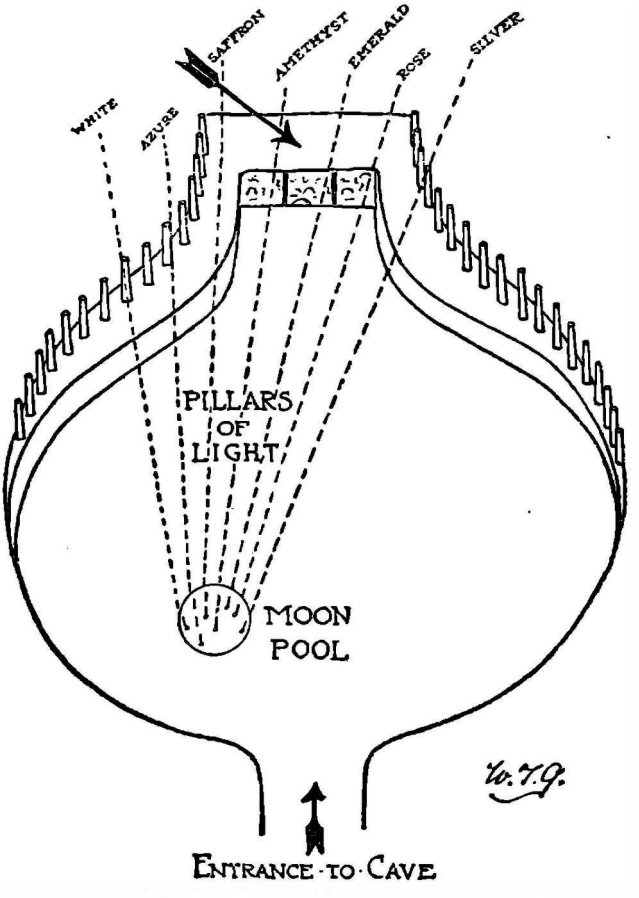
Nor did I. And how much did Von

Hetzdorp really know, I wondered, as the Norseman and I started off. Clearly more than he had told us; and from whence had come the information that had been detailed enough to enable him to prepare an antidote for the exact effects the touch of the Moon Pool produced? So, wondering, I walked with Olaf—and then soon forgot my perplexity in the contemplation of that greater wonder which I was observing.

The chamber widened out from the portal in what seemed to be the arc of an immense circle. The shining walls held a perceptible curve, and from this curvature I estimated that the roof was fully three hundred feet above us. It occurred to me that perhaps the Chamber of the Pool was shaped like half a hollow sphere—an inverted bowl—and as we silently passed on, I was confirmed in this belief, for clearly we were circling. If I were right, the circumference of the place, reckoning the radius at three hundred feet, must be one thousand eight hundred feet—or a little less than a third of a mile.

The floor was of smooth, mosaic-fitted blocks of a faintly yellow tinge. They were not light-emitting like the blocks that formed the walls. The radiance from these latter, I noted, had the peculiar quality of *thickening* a few yards from its source, and it was this that produced the effect of misty, veiled distances. As we walked, the seven columns of rays streaming down from the crystalline globes high above us waned steadily; the glow within the chamber lost its prismatic shimmer and became an even gray tone somewhat like moonlight in a thin cloud.

Now before us, out from the wall, jutted a low terrace. It was all of a pearly rose-colored stone, and above it, like a balustrade, marched a row of slender, graceful pillars of the same hue. The face of the terrace was about ten feet high, and all over it ran a bas-relief of what looked like short-trailing vines, surmounted by five stalks, on the tip of each of which was a flower. Behind the vines ran a design of semiglobes from which branched delicate tendrils. I did not recognize the carved flowers; they were, I thought, some symbolization in which the true form of the original had been lost.



DR. GOODWIN'S DIAGRAMMATIC SKETCH OF THE MOON POOL CHAMBER SHOWING THE COLOR ARRANGEMENT AND APPROXIMATE POSITION OF THE SEVEN PILLARS OF LIGHT. THE ARROW POINTS TO THE WALL THROUGH WHICH THE EXPEDITION PASSED DOWN INTO THE CAVERNS, AND UPON WHICH THE MYSTERIOUS FORMS OF THE GOLDEN-EYED GIRL AND THE FROG WOMAN APPEARED.

How then could I have known the incredible thing which these stones pictured!

We passed along the terrace. It turned in an abrupt curve. I heard a hail, and there, fifty feet away, at the curving end of a wall identical with that where we stood, were Larry and Von Hetzdorp. Obviously the left side of the chamber was a

duplicate of that we had explored. We joined. In front of us the columned barriers ran back a hundred feet, forming an alcove. The end of this alcove was another wall of the same rose stone, but upon it the design of vines was much heavier.

We took a step forward, and then stopped, every muscle rigid. There was a gasp of terrified awe from the Norseman, a guttural exclamation from Von Hetzdorp. For on, or rather within, the wall before us, a great oval began to glow, waxed almost to a flame, and then shone steadily out as though from behind it a light was streaming through the stone itself!

And within the roseate oval two flame-tipped shadows appeared, stood for a moment, and then seemed to float out upon its surface. The shadows wavered; the tips of flame that nimbused them with flickering points of violet and vermilion pulsed outward, drew back, darted forth again, and once more withdrew themselves—and as they did so the shadows thickened—and suddenly there before us stood two figures!

One was a girl—a girl whose great eyes were golden as the fabled lilies of Kwan-Yung that were born of the kiss of the sun upon the amber goddess the demons of Lao-Tz'e carved for him; whose softly curved lips were red as the royal coral, and whose golden-brown hair reached to her knees!

And the second was a gigantic frog—a *woman* frog, head helmeted with carapace of shell around which a fillet of brilliant yellow jewels shone; enormous round eyes of blue circled with a broad iris of green; monstrous body of banded orange and white girdled with strand upon strand of the flashing yellow gems; six feet high if an inch, and with one webbed paw of its short, powerfully muscled forelegs resting upon the white shoulder of the golden-eyed girl!

CHAPTER IX.

"I'D FOLLOW HER THROUGH HELL!"

MOMENTS must have passed as we stood in stark amazement, gazing at that incredible apparition. The two figures, although as real as any of those who stood beside me, unfantomlike as it is possible to be, had a distinct suggestion of —projection.

They were there before us—golden-eyed girl and grotesque frog-woman—complete in every line and curve; and still it was as though their bodies passed back through distances; as though, to try to express the well-nigh inexpressible, the two shapes we were looking upon were the end of an infinite number stretching in fine linked chain far away, of which the eyes saw only the nearest, while in the brain some faculty higher than sight recognized and registered the unseen others.

It crossed my mind that so we three-dimensional beings might appear to those dwellers in the hypothetical two-dimensional space we use to help us conceive the fourth dimension. And yet there was nothing of any metaphysical fourth dimension about them; they were actualities—real, breathing, complete.

The gigantic eyes of the frog-woman took us all in—unwinkingly. I could see little glints of phosphorescence shine out within the metallic green of the outer iris ring. She stood upright, her great legs bowed; the monstrous slit of a mouth slightly open, revealing a row of white teeth sharp and pointed as lancets; the paw resting on the girl's shoulder, half covering its silken surface, and from its five webbed digits long yellow claws of polished horn glistening against the delicate texture of the flesh.

But if the frog-woman regarded us all, not so did the maiden of the rosy wall. Her eyes were fastened upon Larry, drinking him in with extraordinary intentness. She was tall, far over the average of woman, almost as tall, indeed, as O'Keefe himself; not more than twenty years old, if that, I thought. Abruptly she leaned forward, the golden eyes softened and grew tender; the red lips moved as though she were speaking.

Larry took a quick step, and his face was that of one who after countless births comes at last upon the twin soul lost to him for ages. The frog woman turned her eyes upon the girl; her huge lips moved, and I knew that she was talking! The girl held

out a warning hand to O'Keefe, and then raised it, resting each finger upon one of the five flowers of the carved vine close beside her. Once, twice, three times, she pressed upon the flower centers, and I noted that her hand was curiously long and slender, the digits like those wonderful tapering ones the painters we call the primitives gave to their virgins.

Three times she pressed the flowers, and then looked intently at Larry once more. A slow, sweet smile curved the crimson lips. She stretched both hands out toward him again eagerly; and then I distinctly saw a burning blush rise swiftly over white breasts and flowerlike face.

And in that instant, like the clicking out of a cinematograph, the pulsing oval faded and golden-eyed girl and frog-woman were gone!

And thus it was that Lakla, the handmaiden of the Silent Ones, and Larry O'Keefe first looked into each other's hearts!

With their evanishment a spell was lifted from us. Olaf Huldricksson ran a hand over a brow from which tiny beads of sweat had sprung; Von Hetzdorp turned to me with an exclamation; Larry stood rapt, gazing at the stone.

"Eilidh," I heard him whisper; "Eilidh of the lips like the red, red rowan and the golden-brown hair!"

"Clearly of the Ranadae," said Von Hetzdorp, "a development of the fossil Labyrinthodonts: you saw her teeth, *Ja?*"

"Ranadae, yes," I answered. "But from the Stegocephalia; of the order Ecaudata—"

"Upon what evidence do you base your theory that she was of the Stego—"

I think I never heard such complete indignation as was in O'Keefe's voice as he interrupted the German.

"What do you mean—fossils and Stego whatever it is?" he asked. "She was a girl, a wonder girl—a real girl, and Irish, or I'm not an O'Keefe!"

"We were talking about the frog-woman, Larry," I said, conciliatingly.

His eyes were wild as he regarded us.

"Say," he said, "if you two had been in the Garden of Eden when Eve took the apple, you wouldn't have had time to give her a look for counting the scales on the snake!"

"But I took especial note of the girl, too, Larry," I pleaded mildly, "and she couldn't have been Irish. Now how could she?"

"Couldn't, eh?" he said. "But she was. Didn't you notice the sweet little tilted nose of her, an' the hair an' the eyes like the sunshine? She's a daughter of the old people, of the Taitha-da-Dainn. I'm thinkin' that's who it was, anyway, that made this place on their way to Erin. Not Irish? A girl like *that* couldn't be anything else!"

He strode swiftly over to the wall. We followed. He sounded the stone. It did not ring hollowly—nor indeed had I expected it to, for the figures had shadowed themselves *through* the terrace, and had stood *upon* its surface. Larry paused, stretched his hand up to the flowers on which the tapering fingers of the golden-eyed girl had rested.

"It was here she put up her hand," he murmured. He pressed caressingly the carved calyxes, once, twice, a third time even as she had—and silently and softly the wall began to split; on each side a great stone pivoted slowly, and before us a portal stood, opening into a narrow corridor glowing with the same rosy luster that had gleamed around the flame-tipped shadows!

O'Keefe leaped forward. I caught him by the arm. The far wall of the tunnel that had been revealed was not more than eight feet from where we were, and it ran, apparently, at right angles to the entrance. There was little of it to be seen, therefore, save the space just in front of us—and I will confess that my nerves were slightly shaken.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Wait," I answered. "Don't rush in there. Let us go together and carefully."

"Come, then, quickly," he said, curiously distrait. "I won't wait. I must follow. That's what she meant, you know."

"What she meant?" I echoed stupidly.

"What she meant when she pointed out the way to open the wall, of course," he said impatiently. "Don't you know that was why she pressed those flowers? She meant us—me—to follow her. Follow her?

God, I'd follow *her* through a thousand hells!"

Huldricksson stepped beside him. He set a great hand upon the Irishman's shoulder.

"*Ja!*" he rumbled. "That was no *Troldkvinde*, no black witch, that *Jomfru!* She was a white virgin, *Ja*. Well I know that this is Trolldom—but she will help me find my Helma! You go, and Olaf Huldricksson's arm you have with you—always; *Ja*, ready to hold or to strike. Come!"

His hand fell from Larry's shoulder and gripped the Irishman's own. I reached down and picked up my emergency kit.

"Have your gun ready, Olaf!" said Larry. With Huldricksson at one end, O'Keefe at the other, both of them with automatics in hand, and Von Hetzdorp and I between them, we stepped over the threshold.

At our right, a few feet away, the passage ended abruptly in a square of polished stone, from which came the faint rose radiance of what Von Hetzdorp had called the "etheric lights." The roof of the place was less than two feet over O'Keefe's head. Behind us was the portal leading into the Chamber of the Pool.

We turned to the left to look down the tunnel's length—and each of us stiffened. A yard in front of us lifted a four-foot high, gently curved barricade, stretching from wall to wall—and beyond it was blackness; an utter and appalling blackness that seemed to gather itself from infinite depths and to be thrust back by the low barrier as a dike thrusts back the menacing sea threatening ever to overwhelm it. The rose-glow in which we stood was cut off by that blackness as though it had substance; it shimmered out to meet it, and was checked as though by a blow; indeed, so strong was the suggestion of sinister, straining force within the rayless opacity that I shrank back, and Von Hetzdorp with me. Not so O'Keefe. Olaf beside him, he strode to the wall and peered over. He beckoned us.

"Flash your pocket-light down there," he said to me, pointing into the thick darkness below us. The little electric circle quivered down as though afraid, and came to rest upon a surface that resembled nothing so much as clear, black ice. I ran the light across—here and there. The floor of the corridor was of stone, so smooth, so polished, that no man could have walked upon it; it sloped downward at a slowly increasing angle.

"We'd have to have non-skid chains and brakes on our feet to tackle that," mused Larry. Abstractedly he ran his hands over the edge on which he was leaning. Suddenly they hesitated and then gripped tightly.

"That's a queer one!" he exclaimed. His right palm was resting upon a rounded protuberance, on the side of which were three small circular indentations.

"A queer one—" he repeated—and pressed his fingers upon the circles. They gave under the pressure much, I thought, as an automatic punch does. O'Keefe's thrusting fingers sank deep, deeper, within the stone—

There was a sharp click; the slabs that had opened to let us through swung swiftly together; a curiously rapid vibration thrilled through us, a wind arose and passed over our heads—a wind that grew and grew until it became a whistling shriek, then a roar and then a mighty humming, to which every atom in our bodies pulsed in rhythm painful almost to disintegration!

The rosy wall dwindled in a flash to a point of light and disappeared!

Wrapped in the clinging, impenetrable blackness we were racing, dropping, hurling at a frightful speed—where?

And ever that awful humming of the rushing wind and the lightning cleaving of the tangible dark—so, it came to me oddly, must the newly released soul race through the sheer blackness of outer space up to that Throne of Justice, where God sits high above all suns!

I felt Von Hetzdorp creep close to me; gripped my nerve and flashed my pocket-light; saw Larry standing, peering, peering ahead, and Huldricksson, one strong arm around his shoulders, bracing him. And then the speed began to slacken.

Millions of miles, it seemed, below the sound of the unearthly hurricane I heard

Larry's voice, thin and ghostlike, beneath its clamor.

"Got it!" shrilled the voice. "Got it! Don't worry!"

The wind died down to the roar, passed back into the whistling shriek and diminished to a steady whisper. In the comparative quiet O'Keefe's tones now came in normal volume.

"Some little shoot-the-chutes, what?" he shouted. "Say—if they had this at Coney Island or the Crystal Palace! Press all the way in these holes and she goes top-high. Diminish pressure — diminish speed. The curve of this—dashboard—here sends the wind shooting up over our heads—like a wind-shield. What's behind you?"

I flashed the light back. The mechanism on which we were ended in another wall exactly similar to that over which O'Keefe crouched.

"Well, we can't fall out, anyway," he laughed. "Wish to hell I knew where the brakes were! Look out!"

We dropped dizzily down an abrupt, seemingly endless slope; fell—fell as into an abyss—then shot abruptly out of the blackness into a throbbing green radiance. O'Keefe's fingers must have pressed down upon the controls, for we leaped forward almost with the speed of light. I caught a glimpse of luminous immensities, on the verge of which we flew; of depths inconceivable, and flitting through the incredible spaces—gigantic shadows as of the wings of Israfel, which are so wide, say the Arabs, the world can cower under them like a nestling — and then — again the dreadful blackness!

"What was that?" This from Larry, with the nearest approach to awe that I had yet heard from him he had yet shown.

"Trolldom!" croaked the voice of Olaf.

"*Gott!*" This from Von Hetzdorp. "What a space!

"Have you considered, Dr. Goodwin," he went on after a pause, "a curious thing? We know, or, at least, is it not that nine out of ten astronomers believe, that the moon was hurled out of this same region we now call the Pacific when the earth was yet like molasses; almost molten, I should say. And is it not curious that that which comes from the moon chamber needs the moon-rays to bring it forth; is it not? And is it not significant again that the stone depends upon the moon for operating? *Ja!* And last—such a space in mother earth as we just glimpsed, how else could it have been torn but by some gigantic birth—like that of the moon? *Hein!* I do not put forward these as statements of fact—no! But as suggestions—"

I started: there was so much that this might explain—an unknown element that responded to the moon-rays in opening the moon door; the blue Pool with its weird radioactivity, and the peculiar mystery within it that reacted to the same light stream—

"But if earth was then viscid, as it must have been, the scar would have closed without leaving trace; the torn sides have flowed together," I objected.

"Ah—but depending entirely upon how viscid, how fluid it was," he answered.

I grasped his idea. It was not inconceivable that a film had drawn over the world wound, a film of earth-flesh which drew itself over that colossal abyss after our planet had borne its satellite — that world womb did not close when her shining child sprang forth — it was possible; and all that we know of earth depth is four miles of her eight thousand.

What is there at the heart of earth? What of that radiant unknown element upon the moon mount Tycho? What of that element unknown to us as part of earth which is seen only in the corona of the sun at eclipse and that we call coronium? Yet the earth is child of the sun as the moon is earth's daughter. And what of that other unknown element we find glowing green in the far-flung nebulæ — green as that we have just passed through—and that we call nebulium? Yet the sun is child of the nebulæ as the earth is child of the sun and the moon is child of earth.

How did Mme. Curie find radium but by searching in earth for that other once sun mystery called helium? And what miracles are there in coronium and nebulium which, as the child of nebula and sun, we inherit? Yes—and in Tycho's enigma which came from earth heart? And we were flashing

down to earth heart. And what miracles were hidden in earth heart?

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE JOURNEY.

"SAY, Doc!" It was Larry's voice flung back at me. "I was thinking about that frog. I think it was her pet. Damn me if I see any difference between a frog and a snake, and one of the nicest women I ever knew had two pet pythons that followed her around like kittens. Not such a devilish lot of choice between a frog and a snake—except on the side of the frog? What? Anyway, any pet that girl wants is hers, I don't care if it's a leaping twelve-toed lobster or a whale-bodied scorpion. Get me?"

By which I knew that our remarks upon the frog woman were still bothering O'Keefe.

"He thinks of foolish nothings like the foolish sailor!" grunted Von Hetzdorp, acid contempt in his words. "What are their women to—this?" He swept out a hand. "And yet"—his tone held an edge of mockery—"the biological factor is not one to be ignored." He raised his voice. "At least, O'Keefe, you will have a friend at whatever court we go to—that was plain—and it will be useful to us, *Ja*, if you press your luck!"

The mockery had intensified, and into it had crept a thickness—a throaty note of sinister suggestiveness unmistakable. O'Keefe turned as though cut by a whiplash. But—

"You can't help being boche, can you, Von Hetzdorp?" was all he said.

The German laughed and was silent. And crystallizing clearly in my mind came a thought that was, in essence, formulation of my dislike for him. I had seen Throckmartin, my friend, in the embrace of the Dweller, and Von Hetzdorp had seen Huldricksson's wife and child in the same dread enfolding — but I knew that there was all the difference between our points of view of those tragedies that there is between that of one who interestedly observes the struggles of a fly in the clutch of a spider and that of another who helplessly and in agony watches a beloved battling with death.

It was the modern German mind—observant, careful, admirably analytical, and —inhuman; a point of view not to be helped either by the boche or by the world which he has so curiously and deliberately set apart from himself.

The car seemed to poise itself for an instant, and then again dipped itself, literally, down into sheer space; skimmed forward in what was clearly curved flight, rose as upon a sweeping up-grade—and then began swiftly to slacken its fearful speed. I glanced at the illuminated dial of the watch on my wrist. It had been exactly twelve minutes since we had seen the roseate door fade into the blackness. But how far had we gone in those twelve minutes—scores of miles or hundreds of miles—there was no knowing.

Far ahead a point of light showed; grew steadily; we were within it—and softly all movement ceased. How acute had been the strain of our journey I did not realize until I tried to stand—and sank back, leg-muscles too shaky to bear my weight.* The car rested in a slit in the center of a smooth walled chamber perhaps twenty feet square. The wall facing us was pierced by a low doorway through which we could see a flight of steps leading downward.

* It was then I noted that the car, for so I must call it, that had brought us to this place was shaped somewhat like one of the Thames punts. Its back must have fitted with the utmost nicety into the end of the passage upon which the inner doors of the Moon Pool Chamber had opened, for certainly when we stepped within it there had been no sign that it was other than part of the wall itself. But what, then, had happened to kill its radiance; to blot out the etheric lights set deep in its substance? And whence had come the two sides that linked it with the curved frontal barrier; where was its guiding mechanism? As to the latter, I remembered the *click* that had followed O'Keefe's pressure upon the little circles, and I could only conjecture that as the car moved away from the entrance these were slabs that slipped ingeniously into place, protecting those within from what would have been instant annihilating contact with the tunnel walls when the car ran close to them, or from pitching out when it skirted in the blackness, abysses such as that luminous green space that had sent each of our souls shivering back in awe.

I glanced upward. The light streamed through an enormous oval opening, the base of which was twice a tall man's height from the floor. A curving flight of broad, low steps led up to it. And now it came to my steadying brain that there was something puzzling, peculiar, strangely unfamiliar about this light. It was silvery, shaded faintly with a delicate blue and flushed lightly with a nacreous rose; but a rose that differed from that of the terraces of the Pool Chamber as the rose within the opal differs from that within the pearl. In it were tiny, gleaming points like the motes in a sunbeam, but sparkling white like the dust of diamonds, and with a quality of vibrant vitality; they were as though they were alive. The light cast no shadows!

A little breeze came through the oval and played about us. It was laden with what seemed the mingled breath of spice flowers and pines. It was curiously vivifying, and in it the diamonded atoms of the light shook and danced.

Something flashed within the opening—fluttered and came to rest. A bird stood there regarding us; a bird as large as a pheasant, whose golden eyes were the color of the eyes of the maid of the rosy wall, and whose body was a floating, shimmering cloud of moonlight plumes as fairylike as those that veil the gigantic silver moths which guard, the fellahs say, the secret shrine of Isis in the desert beyond the second cataract, and whose touch brings madness.

For a moment it looked at us, then slowly floated like a little shining cloud through the doorway. From without came a sudden sweet chiming as of tiny golden bells.

O'Keefe leaped over the low parapet to the floor; sprang to the portal; peered down.

"She sent that!" he said with conviction, turning to me. "She sent it to show the way!"

I caught a faint sardonic grin from Von Hetzdorp, stepped out of the car, the German following, and began to ascend the curved steps toward the oval opening, at the top of which O'Keefe and Olaf already stood. As they looked out I saw both their faces change—Olaf's with awe, O'Keefe's with half incredulous amazement. I hurried to their side.

At first all that I could see was space—a space filled with the same coruscating effulgence that pulsed about me. I glanced upward, obeying that instinctive impulse of earth folk that bids them seek within the sky for sources of light. There was no sky—at least no sky such as we know—all was a sparkling nebulosity rising into infinite distances as the azure above the day-world seems to fill all the heavens—through it ran pulsing waves and flashing javelin rays that were like shining shadows of the aurora; echoes, octaves lower, of those brilliant arpeggios and chords that play about the poles. My eyes fell beneath its splendor; I stared outward.

And now I saw, miles away, gigantic luminous cliffs springing sheer from the limits of a lake whose waters were of milky opalescence. It was from these cliffs that the spangled radiance came, shimmering out from all their lustrous surfaces. To left and to right, as far as the eye could see, they stretched—and they vanished in the auroral nebulosity on high!

"Look at that!" exclaimed Larry. I followed his pointing finger. On the face of the shining wall, stretched between two colossal columns, hung an incredible veil; prismatic, gleaming with all the colors of the spectrum. It was like a web of rainbows woven by the fingers of the daughters of the Jinni. In front of it and a little at each side was a semicircular pier, or, better, a plaza of what appeared to be glistening, pale-yellow ivory. At each end of its half-circle clustered a few low-walled, rose-stone structures, each of them surmounted by a number of high, slender pinnacles.

"Of a hugeness, that!" It was Von Hetzdorp speaking. "Have you considered that those precipices must from eight to ten miles away be, Dr. Goodwin? And, if so, how great must that so strange, prismatic curtain that we see so clearly be, eh? What hands could carve those columns between which it hangs? It is in my mind that we will carry back with us many new things, Dr. Goodwin—if we carry back at all—" he concluded slowly.

We looked at each other, I think, a bit helplessly—and back again through the opening. We were standing, as I have said, at its base. The wall in which it was set was at least ten feet thick, and so, of course, all that we could see of that which was without were the distances that revealed themselves above the outer ledge of the oval.

"Let's take a look at what's under us," said Larry.

He crept out upon the ledge and peered down, the rest of us following. We stared in utter silence. A hundred yards beneath us stretched gardens that must have been like those of many-columned Iram, which the ancient Addite King had built for his pleasure ages before the deluge, and which Allah, so the Arab legend tells, took and hid from man, within the Sahara, beyond all hope of finding—jealous because they were more beautiful than his in paradise. Within them flowers and groves of laced, fernlike trees, pillared pavilions nestled.

The trunks of the trees were of emerald, of vermilion, and of azure-blue, and the blossoms, whose fragrance was borne to us, shone like jewels. The graceful pillars were tinted delicately. I noted that the pavilions were double—in a way, two-storied—and that they were oddly splotched with circles, with squares, and with oblongs of—opacity: noted too that over many this opacity stretched like a roof; yet it did not seem material; rather was it — impenetrable shadow!

Down through this city of gardens ran a broad, shining green thoroughfare, glistening like glass and spanned at regular intervals with graceful, arched bridges. The road flashed to a wide square, where rose, from a base of that same silvery stone that formed the lip of the Moon Pool, a Titanic tower of seven terraces; and along it flitted objects that bore a curious resemblance to the shell of the Nautilus. Within them were — human figures! And upon tree-bordered promenades on each side walked others!

Far to the right we caught the glint of another emerald paved road.

And between the two the gardens grew sweetly down to the hither side of that opalescent water across which were the radiant cliffs and the curtain of mystery.

Thus it was that we first saw the city of the Dweller: blessed and accursed as no place on earth, or under or above earth has ever been — or, that force willing which some call God, ever again shall be!

"*Gott!*" whispered Von Hetzdorp. "Incredible!"

"Trolldom!" gasped Olaf Huldricksson. "It is Trolldom!"

"Listen, Olaf!" said Larry O'Keefe. "Cut out that Trolldom stuff! There's no Trolldom, or fairies, outside Ireland. Get that! And this isn't Ireland! And, buck up, professor!" This to Von Hetzdorp. "What you see down there are people—*just plain people*. And wherever there's people is where *I* live. Get me?

"There's no way in but in—and no way out but out," said O'Keefe. "And there's the stairway. Eggs are eggs no matter how they're cooked—and people are just people, fellow travelers, no matter what dish they are in," concluded Larry. "Come on!"

With the three of us close behind him, he marched toward the entrance through which the white bird had floated.

Was Throckmartin out there in that strange place, I wondered — Throckmartin and his bride, Stanton and Thora — and Olaf's wife? And how would we find them —in what state? Was the Dweller *not* malign? A weird, inexplicable messenger carrying those on whom it set its seal to some unearthly paradise? No—this I could not believe.

But, whatever it was, I had found the place I had aimed for. My quest, my atonement was partly finished. Somewhere here, certainly, I was convinced, was my lost friend and those he loved—and the mate of Olaf Huldricksson.

CHAPTER XI.

YOLARA, PRIESTESS OF THE SHINING ONE.

"YOU'D better have this handy, Doc." O'Keefe paused at the head of the stairway and handed me one of the automatics he had taken from Von Hetzdorp.

"Shall I not have one also?" rather anxiously asked the latter.

"When you need it you'll get it," answered O'Keefe. "I'll tell you frankly, though, professor, that you'll have to show me before I trust you with a gun. You shoot too straight—from cover."

The flash of anger in the German's eyes turned to a cold consideration.

"You say always just what is in your mind, Lieutenant O'Keefe," he mused. "*Ja*—that I shall remember!" Later I was to recall this odd observation—and Von Hetzdorp was to remember, indeed.

In single file, O'Keefe at the head and Olaf bringing up the rear, we passed through the portal. Before us dropped a circular shaft, into which the light from the chamber of the oval streamed liquidly; set in its sides, the steps spiraled, and down them we went, cautiously. The stairway ended in a circular well; silent—with no trace of exit! The rounded stones joined each other evenly—hermetically. Carved on one of the slabs was one of the five flowered vines. I pressed my fingers upon the calyxes, even as Larry had within the moon chamber.

A crack—horizontal, four feet wide—appeared on the wall; widened, and as the sinking slab that made it dropped to the level of our eyes, we looked through a hundred-feet-long rift in the living rock! The stone fell steadily—and we saw that it was a Cyclopean wedge set within the slit of the passageway. It reached the level of our feet and stopped. At the far end of this tunnel, whose floor was the polished rock that had, a moment before, fitted hermetically into its roof, was a low, narrow, triangular opening through which light streamed.

"Nowhere to go but out!" grinned Larry. "And I'll bet Golden Eyes is waiting for us with a taxi!" He stepped forward. We followed, slipping, sliding, along the glassy surface; and I, for one, had a lively apprehension of what our fate would be should that enormous mass rise before we had emerged! We reached the end; crept out of the narrow triangle that was its exit.

We stood upon a wide ledge carpeted with a thick yellow moss. I looked behind—and clutched O'Keefe's arm. The door through which we had come had vanished! There was only a precipice of pale rock, on whose surfaces great patches of the amber moss hung; around whose base our ledge ran, and whose summits, if summits it had, were hidden, like the luminous cliffs, in the radiance above us.

"Nowhere to go but ahead—and Golden Eyes hasn't kept her date!" laughed O'Keefe—but somewhat grimly.

We looked down. At the left the green roadway curved, and, at least thirty feet below us, swept on. Far off to the right it swerved again and continued as the glistening distant ribbon we had seen from the high oval. Within its loop, like a peninsula, its foot bathed by the lake, lay the gardened city. What was beyond the road we could not see for, all along its outer side, it was banked with solid masses of high-flung verdure.

We walked a few yards along the ledge and, rounding a corner, faced the end of one of the slender bridges. From this vantage point the oddly shaped vehicles were plain, and we could see they were, indeed, like the shell of the Nautilus and elfinly beautiful. Their drivers sat high upon the forward whorl. Their bodies were piled high with cushions, upon which lay women half-swathed in gay silken webs. From the pavilioned gardens smaller channels of glistening green ran into the broad way, much as automobile runways do on earth; and in and out of them flashed the fairy shells.

There came a shout from one. Its occupants had glimpsed us. They pointed; others stopped and stared; one shell turned and sped up a runway—and quickly over the other side of the bridge came a score of men. They were dwarfed—none of them more than five feet high, prodigiously broad of shoulder, clearly enormously powerful.

"Trolde!" muttered Olaf, stepping beside O'Keefe, pistol swinging free in his hand.

But at the middle of the bridge the leader stopped, waved back his men, and came toward us alone, palms outstretched in the immemorial, universal gesture of

truce. He paused, scanning us with manifest wonder; we returned the scrutiny with interest. The dwarf's face was as white as Olaf's—far whiter than those of the other three of us; the features clean-cut and noble, almost classical; the wide set eyes of a curious greenish gray and the black hair curling over his head like that on some old Greek statue.

Dwarfed though he was, there was no suggestion of deformity about him. The gigantic shoulders were covered with a loose green tunic that looked like fine linen. It was caught in at the waist by a broad girdle studded with what seemed to be amazonites. In it was thrust a long curved poniard resembling the Malaysian kris. His legs were swathed in the same green cloth as the upper garment. His feet were sandaled.

My gaze returned to his face, and in it I found something subtly disturbing; an expression of half-malicious gaiety that underlay the wholly prepossessing features like a vague threat; a mocking deviltry that hinted at entire callousness to suffering or sorrow; something of the spirit that was vaguely alien and disquieting.

He spoke—and, to my surprise, enough of the words were familiar to enable me clearly to catch the meaning of the whole. They were Polynesian, the Polynesian of the Samoans which is its most ancient form, but in some indefinable way — archaic. Later I was to know that the tongue bore the same relation to the Polynesian of today as does *not* that of Chaucer, but of the Venerable Bede, to modern English. Nor was this to be so astonishing, when with the knowledge came the certainty that it was from it the language we call Polynesian sprang.*

"From whence do you come, strangers—and how found you your way here?" said the green dwarf.

I waved my hand toward the cliff behind us. His eyes narrowed incredulously; he glanced at its drop, upon which even a mountain goat could not have made its way, and laughed.

"We came through the rock," I answered his thought. "And we come in peace," I added.

"And may peace walk with you," he said half-derisively—"if the Shining One wills it!"

He considered us again.

"Show me, strangers, where you came through the rock," he commanded. We led the way to where we had emerged from the well of the stairway.

"It was here," I said, tapping the cliff.

"But I see no opening," he said suavely.

"It closed behind us," I answered; and then, for the first time, realized how incredible the explanation sounded. The derisive gleam passed through his eyes again. But he drew his poniard and gravely sounded the rock.

"You give a strange turn to our speech," he said. "It sounds strangely, indeed—as strange as your answers." He looked at us quizzically. "I wonder where you learned it! Well, all that you can explain to the *Afyo Maie.*" His head bowed and his arms swept out in a wide salaam. "Be pleased to come with me!" he ended abruptly.

"In peace?" I asked.

"In peace," he replied—then slowly—"with me, at least."

"Oh, come on, Doc!" cried Larry. "As long as we're here let's see the sights. *Allons mon vieux!*" he called gaily to the green dwarf. The latter, understanding the

* When one considers that in the unchanging East, speech persists almost unaltered in its form for centuries, that its flux in comparison with that of Occidental races is almost nil, it can readily be seen that the time-space between their forms and those of the Polynesian we knew must have been fully as great as these people claimed for it. Max Muller, the great philologist, has asserted that in three hundred years the tongue of the Tahitians has changed in only six inflections, and has added to itself only sixty new words, of which fifty-three are corruptions of traders' tongues. I have a very fair knowledge of the Polynesian, acquired of necessity in my explorations; Huldrickson spoke it well, and understood it better than he spoke it; O'Keefe had a working smattering. At the moment of my surprise I was uncertain about Von Hetzdorp—later I was to find him a master of it. In all that follows, I spare my readers the variations of our speech due to our differing attainments. I also translate into our own language and its idioms much of the necessarily untranslatable words and images with which we had to deal. I abridge as well the conversations to that which alone seems essential to the complete understanding of my narrative.—W. T. G.

spirit, if not the words, looked at O'Keefe with a twinkle of approval; turned then to the great Norseman and scanned him with admiration; reached out and squeezed one of the immense biceps.

"Lugur will welcome *you*, at least," he murmured as though to himself. He stood aside and waved a hand courteously, inviting us to pass. We reached the bridge again; he spoke two words to his men, who immediately lined up on each side of the arch, watching us as we walked between them with that same suggestion of expectant, malicious derision that I found so disquieting in their leader. We crossed. At the base of the span one of the elfin shells was waiting.

"Free ride in the subway patrol," whispered O'Keefe, grinning.

Beyond, scores of the shells had gathered, their occupants evidently discussing us in much excitement. The green dwarf waved us to the piles of cushions and then threw himself beside us. The vehicle started off smoothly, the now silent throng making way, and swept down the green roadway at a terrific pace and wholly without vibration, toward the seven-terraced tower.

As we flew along I tried to discover the source of the power, but I could not—then. There was no sign of mechanism, but that the shell responded to some form of energy was certain—the driver grasping a small lever which seemed to control not only our speed, but our direction.

"If you could only substitute these for the New York taxi—eh, Doc?" said O'Keefe, clearly enjoying himself.

We turned abruptly and swept up a runway through one of the gardens, and stopped softly before a pillared pavilion. I saw now that these were much larger than I had thought. The structure to which we had been carried covered, I estimated, fully an acre. Oblong, with its slender, varicolored columns spaced regularly, its walls were like the sliding screens of the Japanese —*shoji*. I had little time to note them, nor, to my regret, to satisfy my very eager curiosity as to the character of the trees and the bowering blossoms.

The green dwarf hurried us up a flight of broad steps flanked by great carved serpents, winged and scaled. He stamped twice upon mosaicked stones between two of the pillars, and a screen rolled aside, revealing an immense hall, scattered about with low divans on which lolled a dozen or more of the dwarfish men, dressed identically as he.

They sauntered up to us leisurely; the surprised interest in their faces tempered by the same inhumanly gay malice that seemed to be characteristic of all these people we had as yet seen.

"The Afyo Maie awaits them, Rador," said one.

So the green dwarf's name was Rador.

He nodded, beckoned us, and led the way through the great hall and into a smaller chamber whose far side was covered with the opacity I had noted from the aerie of the cliff. I examined the—blackness—with lively interest.

It had neither substance nor texture; it was not matter—and yet it suggested solidity; an entire cessation, a complete absorption of light; an ebon veil at once immaterial and palpable. I stretched, involuntarily, my hand out toward it, and felt it quickly drawn back.

"Do you seek your end so soon?" whispered Rador. "But I forget—you do not know," he added. "On your life touch not the blackness, ever. It—"

He stopped, for abruptly in the density a portal appeared; springing out of the shadow like a picture thrown by a lantern upon a screen. Through it was revealed a chamber filled with a soft, rosy glow. Rising from cushioned couches, a woman and a man regarded us, half leaning over a long, low table of what seemed polished jet, laden with flowers and unfamiliar fruits.

About the room—that part of it, at least, that I could see—were a few oddly shaped chairs of the same substance. On high, silvery tripods three immense globes stood, and it was from them that the rose glow emanated. At the side of the woman stood a smaller globe whose roseate gleam was tempered by quivering waves of blue.

"Enter Rador with the strangers!" a clear, sweet voice called.

Rador bowed deeply and stood aside, motioning us to pass. We entered, the green dwarf behind us, and out of the corner of my eye I saw the doorway fade as abruptly as it had appeared and again the dense shadow fill its place.

"Come closer, strangers. Be not afraid!" commanded the bell-toned voice.

We approached.

The woman, unimaginative scientist that I am, made the breath catch in my throat. Never have I seen a woman so beautiful as was Yolara of the Dweller's city—and none of so perilous a beauty. Her hair was of the color of the young tassels of the corn and coiled in a regal crown above her broad, white brows; her wide eyes were of gray that could change to a corn-flower blue and in anger deepen to purple; gray or blue, they had little laughing devils within them, but when the storm of anger darkened them—they were not laughing, no!

The silken webs that half covered, half revealed her did not hide the ivory whiteness of her flesh nor the sweet curve of shoulders and breasts. But for all her amazing beauty, she was—sinister! There was cruelty about the curving mouth, and in the music of her voice—not conscious cruelty, but the more terrifying, careless cruelty of nature itself. And she exhaled an essence of vitality that made the nerves tingle toward her and shrink from her, too, as though from something abnormal.

The girl of the rose wall had been beautiful, yes! But her beauty was human, understandable. You could imagine her with a babe in her arms—but you could not so imagine this woman. About her loveliness hovered something unearthly. A sweet, feminine echo of the Dweller was Yolara, the Dweller's priestess—and as gloriously, terrifyingly evil!

CHAPTER XII.

THE JUSTICE OF LORA.

AS I looked at her the man arose and made his way round the table toward us. For the first time my eyes took in Lugur. A few inches taller than the green dwarf, he was far broader, more filled with the suggestion of appalling strength.

The tremendous shoulders were four feet wide if an inch, tapering down to mighty thewed thighs. The muscles of his chest stood out beneath his tunic of red. Around his forehead shone a chaplet of bright-blue stones, sparkling among the thick curls of his silver-ash hair.

Upon his face pride and ambition were written large—and power still larger. All the mockery, the malice, the hint of callous indifference that I had noted in the other dwarfish men were there, too—but intensified, touched with the satanic.

The woman spoke again.

"Who are you strangers, and how came you here?" She turned to Rador. "Or is it that they do not understand our tongue?"

"One understands and speaks it—but very badly, O Yolara," answered the green dwarf.

"Speak, then, that one of you," she commanded.

But it was Von Hetzdorp who found his voice first, and I marveled at the fluency, so much greater than mine, with which he spoke.

"We came for different purposes. I to seek knowledge of a kind; he"—pointing to me—"of another. This man"—he looked at Olaf—"to find a wife and child."

The gray-blue eyes had been regarding O'Keefe steadily and with plainly increasing interest.

"And why did *you* come?" she asked him. "Nay—I would have him speak for himself, if he can," she stilled Von Hetzdorp peremptorily.

When Larry spoke it was haltingly, in the tongue that was strange to him, searching for the proper words.

"I came to help these men—and because something I could not then understand called me, O lady whose eyes are like forest pools at dawn," he answered; and even in the unfamiliar words there was a touch of the Irish brogue, and little merry lights danced in the eyes Larry had so apostrophized.

"I could find fault with your speech, but none with its burden," she said.

"What forest pools are I know not, and the dawn has not shone upon the people of Lora these many *sais* of *laya*. But I sense what you mean!"

The eyes deepened to blue as she regarded him. I saw Lugur shift impatiently and send a none too pleasant look at O'Keefe. She smiled.

"Are there many like you in the world from which you come?" she asked softly. "Well, we soon shall—"

Lugur interrupted her almost rudely and glowering.

"Best we should know how they came hence," he growled.

She darted a quick look at him, and again the little devils danced in her wondrous eyes.

"Yes, that is true," she said. "How came you here?"

Again it was Von Hetzdorp who answered—slowly, considering every word.

"In the world above," he said, "there are ruins of cities not built by any of those who now dwell there. To some of us above these places called, and we sought for knowledge of the wise ones who made them and of those wise ones passed on. We were seeking, and we found a passageway. The way led us downward to a door in yonder cliff, and through it we came here."

"Then have you found what you sought!" spoke she. "For we are of those who built the cities. But this gateway in the rock—where is it?"

"After we passed, it closed upon us; nor could we after find trace of it," answered Von Hetzdorp.

The incredulity that had shown upon the face of the green dwarf fell upon theirs; on Lugur's it was clouded with a furious anger.

He turned to Rador.

"I could find no opening, lord," thus the green dwarf quickly.

And there was so fierce a fire in the eyes of Lugur as he swung back upon us that O'Keefe's hand slipped stealthily down toward his pistol.

"Best it is to speak truth to Yolara, priestess of the Shining One, and to Lugur, the Voice," he cried menacingly.

"It is the truth," I interposed. "We came down the passage. At its end was a carved vine, a vine of five flowers"—the fire died from the red dwarf's eyes, and I could have sworn to a swift pallor. "I rested a hand upon these flowers, and a door opened. But when we had gone through it and turned, behind us was nothing but unbroken cliff. The door had vanished."

I had taken my cue from Von Hetzdorp. If he had eliminated the episode of car and Moon Pool, he had good reason, I had no doubt; and I would be as cautious. And deep within me something cautioned me to say nothing of my quest; to stifle all thought of Throckmartin—something that warned, peremptorily, finally, as though it were a message from Throckmartin himself!

"A vine with five flowers!" exclaimed the red dwarf. "Was it like this, say?"

He thrust forward a long arm. Upon the thumb of the hand was an immense ring, set with a dull-blue stone. Graven on the face of the jewel was the symbol of the rosy walls of the Moon Chamber that had opened to us their two portals. But cut over the vine were seven circles, one about each of the flowers and two larger ones covering, intersecting them.

"This is the same," I said; "but these were not there"—I indicated the circles.

The woman drew a deep breath and looked deep into Lugur's eyes.

"The sign of the Silent Ones!" he half whispered.

It was the woman who first recovered herself.

"The strangers are weary, Lugur," she said. "When they are rested they shall show us where the rocks opened."

I sensed a subtle change in their attitude toward us; a new intentness; a doubt plainly tinged with apprehension. What was it they feared? I wondered; and why had the symbol of the vine wrought the change? and who or what were the Silent Ones.

Yolara's eyes turned to Olaf, hardened, and grew cold gray. Subconsciously I had noticed that from the first the Norseman had been absorbed in his regard of the pair; had indeed never taken his gaze from

them; had noticed, too, the priestess dart swift glances toward him.

Upon Olaf's face had been an early look of puzzlement, of uncertainty. Now this had changed to decision; clearly he had made his mind up about something. His gaze was fixed; he returned the woman's scrutiny fearlessly, a touch of contempt in the clear eyes—like a child watching a snake which he did not dread, but whose danger he well knew.

Under that look Yolara stirred impatiently, sensing, I know, its meaning.

"Why do you look at me so?" she cried.

An expression of bewilderment passed over Olaf's face.

"I do not understand," he said in English.

I caught a quickly repressed gleam in O'Keefe's eyes. He knew, as I knew, that Olaf must have understood. But did Von Hetzdorp?

I glanced at him. Apparently he did not. But why was Olaf feigning this ignorance?

"This man is a sailor from what we call the North," thus Larry haltingly. "He is crazed, I think. He tells a strange tale—of a something of white fire that took his wife and babe. We found him wandering where we were. And because he is strong we brought him with us. That is all, O lady whose voice is sweeter than the honey of the wild bees!"

"A shape of white fire?" she repeated eagerly.

"A shape of white fire that whirled beneath the moon, with the sound of little bells," answered Larry, watching her intently.

She looked at Lugur and laughed.

"Then he, too, is fortunate," she said. "For he has come to the place of his something of white fire—and tell him that he shall join his wife and child, in time; that *I* promise him."

Upon the Norseman's face there was no hint of comprehension, and at that moment I formed an entirely new opinion of Olaf's intelligence; for certainly it must have been a prodigious effort of the will indeed that enabled him, understanding, to control himself.

"What does she say?" he asked.

Larry repeated.

An expression of gladness spread over his face.

"Good!" said Olaf. "Good!"

He looked at Yolara with well-assumed gratitude. Lugur, who had been scanning his bulk, drew close. He felt the giant muscles which Huldricksson accommodatingly flexed for him.

"But he shall meet Valdor and Tahola before he sees those kin of his," he laughed mockingly. "And if he bests them, he shall meet me. After that—for reward—his wife and babe!"

A shudder, quickly repressed, shook the seaman's frame. The woman bent her supremely beautiful head.

"These two," she said, pointing to the German and to me, "seem to be men of learning. They may be useful. As for this man"—she smiled at Larry—"I would have him explain to me some things." She hesitated. "What 'hon-ey of 'e wild bees-s' is." Larry had spoken the words in English, and she was trying to repeat them. "As for this man, the sailor, do as you please with him, Lugur; always remembering that I have given my word that he shall join that wife and babe of his!" She laughed sweetly, sinisterly. "And now—take them, Rador—give them food and water and let them rest till we shall call them again."

She stretched out a hand toward O'Keefe. The Irishman bowed low over it, raised it softly to his lips. There was a vicious hiss from Lugur; but Yolara regarded Larry with eyes now all tender blue.

"You please me," she whispered.

And the face of Lugur grew dark with passion.

We turned to go. The rosy, azure-shot globe at her side suddenly dulled. From it came a faint bell sound as of chimes far away. She bent over it. It vibrated, and then its surface ran with little waves of dull color; from it came a whispering so low that I could not distinguish the words—if words they were.

She spoke to the red dwarf.

"They have brought the three who blasphemed the Shining One," she said slow-

ly. "Now it is in my mind to show these strangers the justice of Lora—that, perhaps, they may learn wisdom from it. What say you, Lugur?"

The red dwarf nodded, his eyes sparkling now with a malicious anticipation.

The woman spoke again to the globe. "Bring them here!"

And again it ran swiftly with its film of colors, darkened, and shone rosy once more. From without there came the rustle of many feet upon the rugs. Yolara pressed a slender hand upon the base of the pedestal of the globe beside her. Abruptly the light faded from all, and on the same instant the four walls of blackness vanished, revealing on two sides the lovely, unfamiliar garden through the guarding rows of pillars; at our backs soft draperies hid what lay beyond; before us, flanked by flowered screens, was the corridor through which we had entered, crowded now by the green dwarfs of the great hall.

The dwarfs advanced. Each, I now noted, had the same clustering black hair of Rador. They separated, and from them stepped three figures—a youth of not more than twenty, short, but with the great shoulders of all the males we had seen of this race; a girl of seventeen, I judged, white-faced, a head taller than the boy, her long, black hair disheveled, and clad in a simple white sleeveless garment that fell only to the knees; and behind these two a stunted, gnarled shape whose head was sunk deep between the enormous shoulders, whose white beard fell like that of some ancient gnome down to his waist, and whose eyes were a white flame of hate. The girl cast herself weeping at the feet of the priestess; the youth regarded her curiously.

"You are Songar of the Lower Waters?" murmured Yolara almost caressingly. "And this is your daughter and her lover?"

The gnome nodded, the flame in his eyes leaping higher.

"It has come to me that you three have dared blaspheme the Shining One, its priestess, and its Voice," went on Yolara smoothly. "Also that you have called out to the three Silent Ones. Is it true?"

"Your spies have spoken—and have you not already judged us?" The voice of the old dwarf was bitter.

A flicker shot through the eyes of Yolara, again cold gray. The girl reached a trembling hand up to the hem of her veils. She thrust it aside with her foot cruelly.

"Tell us why you did these things, Songar," she asked. "Why you did them, knowing full well what your—reward—would be."

The dwarf stiffened; he raised his withered arms, and his eyes blazed.

"Because evil are your thoughts and evil are your deeds," he cried. "Yours and your lover's, there"—he leveled a finger at Lugur. "Because of the Shining One you have made evil, too, and the greater wickedness you contemplate—you and he with the Shining One. But I tell you that your measure of iniquity is full; the tale of your sin near ended! Yea—the Silent Ones have been patient, but soon they will speak." He pointed at us. "A sign are *they*—a warning—harlot!" He spat the word.

In Yolara's eyes, grown black, the devils leaped unrestrained.

"Is it even so, Songar?" her voice caressed. "Now ask the Silent Ones to help you! They sit afar—but surely they will hear you." The sweet voice was mocking. "As for these two, they shall pray to the Shining One for forgiveness—and surely the Shining One will take them to its bosom! As for you—you have lived long enough, Songar! Pray to the Silent Ones, Songar, and pass out into the nothingness—you!"

She dipped down into her bosom and drew forth something that resembled a small cone of tarnished silver. She leveled it, a covering clicked from its base, and out of it darted a slender ray of intense green light.

It struck the old dwarf squarely over the heart, and swift as light itself spread, covering him with a gleaming, pale film. She clenched her hand upon the cone, and the ray disappeared: thrust it back into her breast and leaned forward expectantly; so Lugur and so the other dwarfs. From the girl came a low wail of anguish; the boy dropped upon his knees, covering his face.

For the moment the white beard stood

rigid; then the robe that had covered him seemed to melt away, revealing all the knotted, monstrous body. And in that body a vibration began, increasing to incredible rapidity. It wavered before us like a reflection in a still pond stirred by a sudden wind. It grew and grew—to a rhythm whose rapidity was intolerable to watch and that still chained the eyes.

The figure grew indistinct, misty. Tiny sparks in infinite numbers leaped from it—like, I thought, the radiant shower of particles hurled out by radium when seen under the microscope. Mistier still it grew—and then there trembled before us for a moment a faintly luminous shadow which held, here and there, tiny sparkling atoms like those that pulsed in the light about us! The glowing shadow vanished, the sparkling atoms were still for a moment—and then they shot away, joining those dancing others.

Where the gnomelike form had been but a few seconds before—there was nothing!

O'Keefe drew a long breath, and I was sensible of a prickling along my scalp.

Yolara leaned toward us.

"You have seen," she said. Her eyes lingered tigerishly upon Olaf's pallid face. "Heed!" she whispered. She turned to the men in green, who were laughing softly among themselves.

"Take these two, and go!" she commanded.

"The justice of Lora," said the red dwarf. "The justice of Lora and the Shining One under Thanaroa!"

Upon the utterance of the last word I saw Von Hetzdorp start violently. The hand at his side made a swift, surreptitious gesture, so fleeting that I hardly caught it. The red dwarf stared at the German, and for the first time I saw complete amazement upon his face.

He glanced at Yolara, found her intent in thought, and as swiftly as had been Von Hetzdorp's action, returned it. I thought I saw the latter make an answering sign.

"Yolara," the red dwarf spoke, "it would please me to take this man of wisdom to my own place for a time. The giant I would have, too."

The woman awoke from her brooding; nodded.

"As you will, Lugur," she said. She beckoned Rador.

As he led us out I saw from the corner of my eye Olaf following quietly the German and the red dwarf. And again I wondered.

And as, shaken to the core, we passed out into the garden into the full throbbing of the light, I wondered if all the tiny sparkling diamond points that shook about us had once been men like Songar of the Lower Waters—and felt my very soul grow sick!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ANGRY, WHISPERING GLOBE.

OUR way led along a winding path between banked masses of softly radiant blooms, groups of feathery ferns whose plumes were starred with fragrant white and blue flowerets, slender creepers swinging from the branches of the strangely trunked trees bearing along their threads orchidlike blossoms both delicately frail and gorgeously flamboyant. There was no single species that I could name; although here and there I noted a characteristic that seemed familiar. Either, I thought, the flora was indigenous, a product of the peculiar conditions of the place, or else it was the result of long ages of hybridization, cross-pollenization, manipulations of the germ plasm itself.*

*The ferns illustrate the observation perfectly. These pteridophytes showed in their flowers unmistakable characteristics of the phanerogams amazing to the botanist and destructive of certain universally accepted theories of botanical science. I was to find that they, like the fruits, were the results of centuries of cultivation. Equally upsetting of the dictum that the origin of the pteridophytes was certainly not of the bryophytes were my discoveries among the giant mosses in the caverned road to the Sea of Crimson in our flight to the Silent Ones. For these were clearly nature's own work in which man had never a hand. But enough of this. I do not think it advisable to burden the narrative, written for the layman, with matter intelligible only to the comparatively few experts in my field of research. I shall therefore confine myself in my story to general descriptions of the flora of Muria, reserving technical discussion of it for my lectures and the publications of the International Association of Science.

The path we trod was an exquisite mosaic —pastel greens and pinks upon a soft gray base, garlands of nimbused forms like the flaming rose of the Rosicrucians held in the mouths of the flying serpents. Here and there in the boskage I caught a glimpse of moving figures.

The green dwarf hummed a merry little air, curiously gay and haunting, as he marched along. Larry, though, was as silent as I, walking with head bent, glancing neither to right nor left. A smaller pavilion arose before us, single-storied, front wide open.

Upon its threshold Rador paused, bowed deeply, and motioned us within. The chamber we entered was large, closed on two sides by screens of gray; at the back gay, concealing curtains. The low table of blue stone, dressed with fine white cloths, stretched at one side flanked by the cushioned divans.

At the left was a high tripod bearing one of the rosy globes we had seen in the house of Yolara; at the head of the table a smaller globe similar to the whispering one. Rador pressed upon its base, and two other screens slid into place across the entrance, shutting in the room.

He clapped his hands; the curtains parted, and two girls came through them. Tall and willow lithe, their bluish-black hair "bobbed" and falling in ringlets just below their white shoulders, their clear eyes of forget-me-not blue, and skins of extraordinary fineness and purity—they were singularly attractive. Each was clad in an extremely scanty bodice of silken blue, girdled above a kirtle that came barely to their very pretty knees.

O'Keefe's absorption dropped from him on the instant; the sparkle in his eyes telling plainly that these charming images had banished, for the moment at least, the memories of that weird evanishment beneath the green ray of the Dweller's priestess.

The maidens returned our stares with interest—and now I noted that the uncanny deviltry written so large upon the faces of the dwarfs, limned so delicately upon that of Yolara, was here but a shadow. Present it certainly was, but tinctured, underlaid, with a settled wistfulness almost melancholy.

They gave me, I must admit, only a slight share of their attention; Larry the most of it. But that was natural, after all. I lack nearly a foot of his height, my eyes are spectacled, and although not more than half a score years older than Larry, science, alas, is a jealous mistress who, unlike Bellona, contrives in subtle ways to make her priests and lovers not too strongly attractive to mortal sirens who might lure them from her.

Their wistfulness fled; they laughed with little gleams of milky teeth—the laughter of careless youth—and Larry laughed with them. The green dwarf regarded all with his malice-tipped smile.

"Food and drink," he ordered.

They dropped back through the curtains.

"Do you like them?" he asked us.

"Some chickens!" said Larry. "They delight the heart," he translated for Rador.

The green dwarf's next remark made me gasp.

"They are yours," he said.

Before I could question him further upon this extraordinary statement the pair reentered, bearing a great platter on which were small loaves, strange fruits, and three immense flagons of rock crystal—two filled with a slightly sparkling yellow liquid and the third with a purplish drink. I became acutely sensible that it had been hours since I had either eaten or drank. The yellow flagons were set before Larry and me, the purple at Rador's hand.

The girls, at his signal, again withdrew. I raised my glass to my lips and took a deep draft. The taste was unfamiliar but delightful.

Almost at once my fatigue disappeared. I realized a clarity of mind, an interesting exhilaration and sense of irresponsibility, of freedom from care, that were oddly enjoyable. Larry became immediately his old gay self.

Still there did not seem to be any of the characteristics of alcohol in the drink. The bread was excellent, tasting like fine wheat. The fruits were as unfamiliar as the wine, and seemed to have the quality of making one forget any desire for either flesh or

vegetables. The green dwarf regarded us whimsically, sipping from his great flagon of rock crystal.

"Much do I desire to know of that world you came from," he said at last—"through the rocks," he added mischievously.

"And much do we desire to know of this world of yours, O Rador," I answered.

Should I ask him of the Dweller; seek from him a clue to Throckmartin? Again, clearly as a spoken command, came the warning to forbear, to wait. And once more I obeyed.

"Let us learn, then, from each other." The dwarf was laughing. "And first—are all above like you—drawn out"—he made an expressive gesture—"and are there many of you?"

"There are—" I hesitated, and at last spoke the Polynesian that means tens upon tens multiplied indefinitely—"there are as many as the drops of water in the lake we saw from the ledge where you found us," I continued; "many as the leaves on the trees without. And they are all like us—varyingly."

He considered skeptically, I could see, my remark upon our numbers.

"In Muria," he said at last, "the men are like me or like Lugur. Our women are as you see them—like Yolara or like those black-haired two who served you." He hesitated. "And there is a third; but only one."

Larry leaned forward eagerly.

"Brown-haired with glints of ruddy bronze, golden eyed, and lovely as a dream, with long, slender, beautiful hands?" he cried.

"Where saw you *her*?" interrupted the dwarf, starting to his feet.

"Saw her?" Larry recovered himself. "Nay, Rador, perhaps I only dreamed that there was such a woman."

"See to it, then, that you tell not your dream to Yolara," said the dwarf grimly. "For her I meant and her you have pictured is Lakla, the handmaiden to the Silent Ones, and neither Yolara nor Lugur, nay, nor the Shining One, love her overmuch, stranger."

"Does she dwell here?" Larry's face was alight.

The dwarf hesitated, glanced about him anxiously.

"If she does, Doc, we're going to beat it her way quick." Larry shot the words to me quickly.

"Nay," Rador was answering—"ask me no more of her." He was silent for a space. "And what do you who are as leaves or drops of water do in that world of yours?" he said, plainly bent on turning the subject.

"Keep off the golden-eyed girl, Larry," I interjected. "Wait till we find out why she's *tabu*."

"Love and battle, strive and accomplish and die; or fail and die," answered Larry—to Rador—giving me a quick nod of acquiescence to my warning in English.

"In that at least your world and mine differ little," said the dwarf.

"How great is this world of yours, Rador?" I spoke.

He considered me gravely.

"How great indeed I do not know," he said frankly at last. "The land where we dwell with the Shining One stretches along the white waters for—" He used a phrase of which I could make nothing. "Beyond this city of the Shining One and on the hither shores of the white waters dwell the *mayia ladala*—the common ones." He took a deep draft from his flagon. "There are, first, the fair-haired ones, the children of the ancient rulers," he continued. "There are, second, we the soldiers; and last, the *mayia ladala*, who dig and till and weave and toil and give our rulers and us their daughters, and dance with the Shining One!" he added.

"Who rules?" I asked.

"The fair haired, under the Council of Nine, who are under Yolara, the Priestess and Lugur, the Voice," he answered, "who are in turn beneath the Shining One!" There was a ring of bitter satire in the last.

"And those three who were judged?"—this from Larry.

"They were of the *mayia ladala*," he replied, "like those two I gave you. But they grow restless. They do not like to dance with the Shining One—the blasphemers!" He raised his voice in a sudden great shout of mocking laughter.

In his words I caught a fleeting picture of the race—an ancient, luxurious, close-bred oligarchy clustered about some mysterious deity; a soldier class that supported them; and underneath all the toiling, oppressed hordes.

"And is that all?" asked Larry.

"No," he answered. "Beyond the Lower Waters, over the Black Precipices of Doul are the forests where lie the feathered serpents and the secrets they guard. The Black Precipices of Doul are hard to pass—but none *can* pass through the feathered serpents. And there is the Sea of Crimson where—" he stopped abruptly; drank and set down his flagon empty. Whatever the purple drink might be, it was loosening the green dwarf's tongue and neither of us cared to interrupt him.

"It is strange, strange indeed to be sitting with two who have newly come from that land that we were forced from so many *sais* of *laya* agone," he began again, half musingly, gone upon another tangent. "For we too came from your world—but how long, long ago! I have heard that the waters swept over us slowly, but dragging, ever dragging our land beneath them. And we sought refuge in the secret heart of our land, refusing to leave her. And at the last we made our way here—where was the Shining One and where had been others before us who had left behind them greater knowledge than we brought—and that was no little, strangers. And now the *laya* turn upon themselves. The tail of the serpent coils close to his fangs—" He took a great drink of the yellow liquid; his eyes flashed—

And without warning the globe beside us sent out an almost vicious note, Rador turned toward it, his face paling. Its surface crawled with whisperings—angry, peremptory!

"I hear!" he croaked, gripping the table. "I obey!"

He turned to us a face devoid for once of its malice.

"Ask me no more questions, strangers," he said. "And now, if you are done, I will show you where you may sleep and bathe."

He arose abruptly. We followed him through the hangings, passed through a corridor and into another smaller chamber, roofless, the sides walled with screens of dark gray. Two cushioned couches were there and a curtained door leading into an open, outer enclosure in which a fountain played within a wide pool of polished green stone. Its opalescent column rose high, and from it fell sprays of shimmering, milky water.

"Your bath," said Rador. He dropped the curtain and came back into the room. He touched a carved flower at one side. There was a tiny sighing from overhead and instantly across the top spread a veil of blackness, impenetrable to light but certainly not to air, for through it pulsed little breaths of the garden fragrances. The room filled with a cool twilight, refreshing, sleep-inducing. The green dwarf pointed to the couches.

"Sleep!" he said. "Sleep and fear nothing. My men are on guard outside." He came closer to us, the old mocking gaiety sparkling in his eyes.

"But I spoke too quickly," he whispered. "Whether it is because the *Afyo Maie* fears their tongues—or—" he laughed at Larry. "The maids are *not* yours!" Still laughing he vanished through the curtains of the room of the fountain before I could ask him the meaning of his curious gift, its withdrawal and his most enigmatic closing remarks.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THERE WAS CAIRILL MAC CAIRILL."

"BACK in the great old days of Ireland," thus Larry breaking into my thoughts raptly, the brogue thick, "there was Cairill mac Cairill—Cairill Swiftspear. An' Cairill wronged Keevan of Emhain Abhlach, of the blood of Angus of the great people when he was sleeping in the likeness of a pale reed. Then Keevan put this penance on Cairill—that for a year Cairill should wear his body in Emhain Ebhlach, which is the Land of Faery and for that year Keevan should wear the body of Cairill. And it was done.

"In that year Cairill met Emar of the Birds that are one white, one red, and one

black—and they loved, and from that love sprang Ailill their son. And when Ailill was born he took a reed flute and first he played slumber on Cairill, and then he played old age so that Cairill grew white and withered; then Ailill played again and Cairill became a shadow—then a shadow of a shadow—then a breath; and the breath went out upon the wind!" He shivered. "Like the old gnome," he whispered, "that they called Songar of the Lower Waters!"

He shook his head as though he cast a dream from him. Then, all alert—

"But that was in Ireland ages agone. And there's nothing like that here, Doc!" He laughed. "It doesn't scare me one little bit, old boy. The pretty devil lady's got the wrong slant. When you've had a pal standing beside you one moment—full of life, and joy and power and potentialities, telling what he's going to do to make the world hum when he gets through killing boches, just running over with zip and pep of life, Doc—and the next instant, right in the middle of a laugh—a piece of boche shell takes off half his head and with it joy and power and all the rest of it"—his face twitched—"and when you see this happen a whole lot of times—well, old man, in the face of *that* mystery a disappearing act such as the devil lady treated us to doesn't make much of a dent. Not on me. But by the mighty brogans of Brian Boru—if we could only get some of that stuff and turn it on the Kaiser—oh, boy!"

He was silent, evidently contemplating the idea with vast pleasure. And as for me, at that moment my last doubt of Larry O'Keefe vanished, I saw that he did believe, really believed, in his banshees, his leprechawns and all the old dreams of the Gael—but only within the limits of Ireland.

In one drawer of his mind was packed all his superstition, his mysticism and what of weakness it might carry. But face him with any peril or problem and the drawer closed instantaneously, leaving a mind that was utterly fearless, incredulous and ingenious; swept clean of all cobwebs by as fine a skeptic broom as ever brushed a brain.

If there *are* actually fairies out of Ireland, Larry O'Keefe I now knew would be the very last man in the world to recognize them as such. His curious beliefs were, in a way, lightning rods—and I felt that he would need them all here—and grew suddenly warm with gladness that he had them.

"Some stuff!" Deepest admiration was in his voice. "Can you imagine half a dozen of us scooting over the boche batteries and the Heinies underneath all at once beginning to shake themselves to pieces! Wow!" His tone was rapturous.

"It's easy enough to explain, Larry," I answered. "The effect, that is—for what the green ray is made of I don't know, of course. But what it does, clearly, is stimulate atomic vibration to such a pitch that the cohesion between the particles of matter is broken and the body flies to bits—just as a fly-wheel does when its speed gets so great that the particles of which *it* is made can't hold together."

"Shake themselves to pieces is right, then!" he exclaimed.

"Absolutely right," I nodded. "Everything in Nature vibrates. And all matter—whether man or beast or stone or metal or vegetable—is made up of vibrating molecules, which are made up of vibrating atoms which are made up of truly infinitely small particles of electricity called electrons, and electrons, the base of all matter, are themselves perhaps only a vibration of the mysterious ether. Thomas Edison has said that when man knows how to harness this vibratory force, a block of wood one foot square will light all New York for a year. The force itself is called interatomic energy.

"There is no such thing as solid matter. The electrons that make up the atoms are as far apart in comparison to their mass as our earth is from the sun. In the last analysis we are all sieves of infinitesmal particles of electricity, each of which is held at the end of an invisible cord we call attraction, cohesion, affinity—something akin no doubt to that most mysterious of energies, gravitation.

"If a magnifying glass of sufficient size and strength could be placed over us we could see ourselves as these sieves—our space lattice, as it is called. And all that is necessary to break down the lattice, to

shake us into nothingness, is some agent that will set our atoms vibrating at such a rate that at last they break the unseen cords and fly off.

"The green ray of Yolara is such an agent. It set up in the dwarf that incredibly rapid rhythm that you saw and—shook him to atoms!"*

"They had a gun on the west front—a seventy-five," said O'Keefe, "that broke the ear-drums of everybody who fired it, no matter what protection they used. It looked like all the other seventy-fives—but there was something about its sound that did it. They had to recast it."

"It's practically the same thing," I replied. "By some freak its vibratory qualities had that effect. The deep whistle of the murdered Lusitania would, for instance, make the Singer Building shake to its foundations; while the Olympic did not affect the Singer at all but made the Woolworth shiver all through. This was because the dominant note of the Singer Building was that of the Lusitania's whistle and that of the Olympic the dominant note of the Woolworth. In each case they stimulated the atomic vibration of the particular building—"

I paused, aware all at once of an intense drowsiness. O'Keefe, yawning, reached down to unfasten his puttees.

"Lord, I'm sleepy!" he exclaimed. "Can't understand it—what you say—most—interesting—Lord!" he yawned again; straightened. "What made Reddy take such a shine to the von?" he asked.

"Thanaroa," I answered, fighting to keep my eyes open.

"What?"

"When Lugur spoke that name I saw Von Hetzdorp signal him. Thanaroa is, I suspect, the original form of the name of Tangaroa, the greatest god of the Polynesians. There's a secret cult to him in the islands. Von Hetzdorp may belong to it—he knows it any way. Lugur recognized the signal and despite his surprise answered it."

"The Heinie gave him the high sign, eh?" mused Larry. "How could they both know it?"

"The cult is a very ancient one. Undoubtedly it had its origin in the dim beginnings before these people migrated here," I replied. "It's a link—one—of the few links between up there and the lost past—"

"Trouble then," mumbled Larry. "Hell brewing! I smell it— Say, Doc, is this sleepiness natural? Wonder where my—gas mask—is—" he added, half incoherently.

But I myself was struggling now desperately against the drugged slumber pressing down upon me.

"Lakla!" I heard O'Keefe murmur, "Lakla of the golden eyes—no, Eilidh—the fair!" He made an immense effort, half raised himself, grinned faintly.

"Thought this was paradise when I first saw it, Doc," he sighed. "But I know now, if it is, no-man's land is the greatest place on earth for a honeymoon. They—they've got us, Doc—" He sank back. "Good luck, old boy, wherever you're going." His hand waved feebly. "Glad—knew—you. Hope—see—you—'gain—"

His voice trailed into silence. Fighting, fighting with every fiber of brain and nerve against the sleep—I felt myself being steadily overcome. But before oblivion rushed down upon me I seemed to see upon the gray screened wall nearest the Irishman an oval of rosy light begin to glow; watched, as my falling lids inexorably fell, a flame-tipped shadow waver on it; thicken; con-

* It is a matter of pride to me that upon so few known facts I was enabled to make so accurate an analysis of the vibratory ray; later observations of it only confirming my impromptu hypothesis. The substance emitting it was, of course, one of the radioactive group of elements—but with their potential destructivity raised to the *n*th degree. The X-ray burn, that terrible injury suffered by so many experimenters with radium and the Roentgen ray, resembles its action, but the effect of the latter is infinitely slow compared to the swift destruction wreaked by the green ray. The atrophy, or shrinking of tissue, caused by a long and careless exposure to the X-ray, is unquestionably a dissolution and rearrangement of atoms begun by the vibratory energy of the light. A remarkable example of this is one of America's greatest experts in radiology and the high frequency field. His left arm is the size of a six-year-old child's; the right immensely powerful. Bone, sinew, and muscle, all, of the left had dwindled away—a process taking ten years, where the almost exactly similar tissue destruction of the dwarf was practically instantaneous.

dense—and there looking down upon Larry, her eyes great golden stars in which intensest curiosity and shy tenderness struggled, sweet mouth half smiling, was the girl of the Moon Pool's Chamber, the girl whom the green dwarf had named—Lakla; the vision Larry had invoked before that sleep which I could no longer deny had claimed him—

And did I see about and behind her a cloud of other eyes—not those phosphorescent saucers of the frog woman's enormous eyes—*triangular*—pools of shining jet flecked with little rushing, flickering ruby flames.

Closer she came—closer—the eyes were over us.

Then oblivion indeed!

CHAPTER XV.

YOLARA OF MURIA VS. THE O'KEEFE.

I AWAKENED with all the familiar, homely sensation of a shade having been pulled up in a darkened room. I thrilled with a wonderful sense of deep rest and restored resiliency. The ebon shadow had vanished from above and down into the room was pouring the silvery light. From the fountain pool came a mighty splashing and shouts of laughter. I jumped over and drew the curtain. O'Keefe and Rador were swimming a wild race: the dwarf like an otter, outdistancing and playing around the Irishman at will.

Then, suddenly, I was conscious of an odd surprise; exactly what I suppose a man must feel who goes to sleep believing that he will either never awaken or, if he does, in extremely unusual situation and upon awakening finds not only everything the same but really much pleasanter. Had that overpowering sleep—and now I confess that my struggle against it had been largely inspired by fear that it was the abnormal slumber which Throckmartin had described as having heralded the approach of the Dweller before it had carried away Thora and Stanton—had that sleep been after all nothing but natural reaction of tired nerves and brains?

And that last vision of the golden-eyed girl bending over Larry — and the little cloud of flame-flecked eyes shaped like lance points? Had they also been delusions of an overstressed mind? Well, they might have been, I could not tell. At any rate, I decided, I would speak about them to O'Keefe once we were alone again—and then giving myself up to the urge of buoyant well-being I shouted like a boy, stripped and joined the two in the Pool. The water was warm and I felt the unwonted tingling of life in every vein increase: something from it seemed to pulse through the skin, carrying a clean vigorous vitality that toned every fiber. Tiring at last, we swam to the edge and drew ourselves out. The waters, I then noted, had another peculiar quality —almost at once they dried or were absorbed. The green dwarf quickly clothed himself and Larry rather carefully donned his uniform.

"The *Ajyo Maie* has summoned us, Doc," he said. "We're to—well—I suppose you'd call it breakfast with her. After that, Rador tells me, we're to have a session with the Council of Nine. I suppose Yolara is as curious as any lady of—the upper world, as you might put it—and just naturally can't wait," he added.

He gave himself a last shake, patted the automatic hidden under his left arm, whistled cheerfully.

"After you, my dear *Alphonse*," he said to Rador, with a low bow. The dwarf laughed, bent in an absurd imitation of Larry's mocking courtesy and started ahead of us to the house of the priestess. When he had gone a little way on the orchid-walled path I whispered to O'Keefe:

"Larry, when you were failing off to sleep—did you think you saw anything?"

"See anything!" he grinned. "Doc, sleep hit me like a Hun shell. I thought they were pulling the gas on us. I—I had some intention of bidding you tender farewells," he continued, half sheepishly. "I think I did start 'em, didn't I?"

"And I appreciated them," I nodded. "But did you see anything?"

"No!" he almost shouted. "I tell you I was hit by that sleep like a fly swatted by Goliath. But wait a minute—" he hesitated. "I had a queer sort of dream—"

"What was it?" I asked, eagerly.

"Well," he answered, slowly, "I suppose it was because I'd been thinking of—Golden Eyes. Anyway, I thought she came through the wall and leaned over me—yes, and put one of those long white hands of hers on my head—I couldn't raise my lids—but in some queerish way I could see her. Then it got real dreamish. She had eyes all about her; a whole little cloud of them—"

"Like these, Larry," I asked. I drew a pencil from my pocket and sketched the high triangles of flame-flecked blackness I had seen in my own vision.

"How did you know that!" he cried, in utter amazement. Rador turned back toward us. I slipped the paper in my pocket.

"Later," I answered. "Not now. When we're alone."

But through me went a little glow of reassurance. Whatever the maze through which we were moving; whatever of menacing evil lurking there—the Golden Girl was clearly watching over us; watching with whatever unknown powers she could muster. It had been no dream, that vision; and as certain as I was of that, just as certain was I that nothing malign lay hidden in the Golden Girl, nothing of menace to us, only good. And I wished sincerely that I could think the same of the lovely witch whose summons we were obeying!

We passed the pillared entrance. In the great hall were the same green dwarfs, this time introduced to us by a variety of names. Each saluted, throwing the right hand high above the head. We went through a long, bowered corridor and stopped before a door that seemed to be sliced from a monolith of pale jade—high, narrow, set in a wall of opal.

Rador stamped twice and the same supernally sweet, silver bell tones of—yesterday, I must call it, although in that place of eternal day the term is meaningless—bade us enter. The door slipped aside. The chamber was small, the opal walls screening it on three sides, the black opacity covering it, the fourth side opening out into a delicious little walled garden, a mass of the fragrant, luminous blooms and delicately colored fruit. Facing it was a small table of reddish wood and from the omnipresent cushions heaped around it arose to greet us—Yolara.

Larry drew in his breath with an involuntary gasp of admiration and bowed low. My own admiration was as frank—and the priestess was well pleased with our homage.

She was swathed in the filmy, half-revelant webs, now of palest blue. The corn-silk hair was caught within a wide-meshed golden net in which sparkled tiny brilliants, like blended sapphires and diamonds. Her own azure eyes sparkled as brightly as they, and I noted again in their clear depths the half-eager approval as they rested upon O'Keefe's lithe, well-knit figure and his keen, clean-cut face. The high-arched, slender feet rested upon soft sandals whose gauzy withes laced the exquisitely formed leg to just below the dimpled knee.

"Some giddy wonder!" exclaimed Larry, looking at me and placing a hand over his heart. "Put *her* on a New York roof and she'd empty Broadway. Dramatic sense too well developed though for comfort. Soft pedal on that stuff—I don't want any more of those Songar matinées. Take the cue from me, Doc."

He turned to Yolara, whose face was somewhat puzzled.

"I said, O lady whose shining hair is a web for hearts, that in our world your beauty would dazzle the sight of men as would a little woman sun!" he said, in the florid imagery to which the tongue lends itself so well.

A tiny flush stole up through the translucent skin. The blue eyes softened and she waved us toward the cushions. Black-haired maids stole in, placing before us the fruits, the little loaves and a steaming drink somewhat the color and odor of chocolate. I was conscious of outrageous hunger.

"What are you named, strangers?" she asked.

"This man is named Goodwin," said O'Keefe. "As for me, call me Larry.

"Nothing like getting acquainted quick," he said to me—but kept his eyes upon Yolara as though he were voicing another honeyed phrase. And so she took it, for: "You must teach me your tongue," she said.

"Then shall I have two words where now I have one to tell you of your loveliness," he answered her.

"And also that 'll take time," he spoke to me. "Essential occupation out of which we can't be drafted to make these fun loving folk any Roman holiday. Get me!"

"*Larree*," mused Yolara. "I like the sound. It is sweet—" and indeed it was as she spoke it.

"And what is your land named, *Larree?*" she continued. "And Goodwin's?" She caught the sound perfectly.

"My land, O lady of loveliness, is two—Ireland and America; his but one—America."

She repeated the two names—slowly, over and over. We seized the opportunity to attack the food; halting half guiltily as she spoke again.

"Oh, but you are hungry!" she cried. "Eat then." She leaned her chin upon her hands and regarded us, whole fountains of questions brimming up in her eyes.

"How is it, *Larree*, that *you* have two countries and Goodwin but one?" she asked, at last unable to keep silent longer.

"I was born in Ireland; he in America. But I have dwelt long in his land and my heart loves each," he said.

She nodded, understandingly.

"Are all the men of Ireland like you, *Larree?* As all the men here are like Lugur or Rador? I like to look at you," she went on, with naive frankness. "I am tired of men like Lugur and Rador. But they are strong," she added, swiftly. "Lugur can hold up twenty in his two arms and raise six with but one hand."

We could not understand her numerals and she raised white fingers to illustrate.

"That is little, O lady, to the men of Ireland," replied O'Keefe. "Lo, I have seen one of my race hold up ten times twenty of our—what call you that swift thing in which Rador brought us here?"

"Corial," said she.

"Hold up ten times twenty of our *corials* with but two fingers—and these corials of ours—

"Coria," said she.

"And these coria of ours are each greater in weight than ten of yours. Yea, and I have seen another with but one blow of his hand raise hell!

"And so I have," he murmured to me. "And both at Forty-Second and Fifth Avenue, N. Y.—U. S. A."

Yolara considered all this with manifest doubt."

"Hell?" she inquired at last. "I know not the word."

"Well," answered O'Keefe. "Say Muria then. In many ways they are, I gather, O heart's delight, one and the same."

Now the doubt in the blue eyes was strong indeed. She shook her head.

"None of our men can do *that!*" she answered, at length. "Nor do I think you could, *Larree*."

"Oh, no," said Larry easily. "I never tried to be that strong. I fly," he added, casually.

The priestess rose to her feet, gazing at him with startled eyes.

"Fly!" she repeated incredulously. "Like a *Zitia?* A bird?"

Larry nodded—and then seeing the dawning command in her eyes, went on hastily.

"Not with my own wings, Yolara. In a—a corial that moves through—what's the word for air, Doc—well, through this—" He made a wide gesture up toward the nebulous haze above us. He took a pencil and on a white cloth made a hasty sketch of an airplane. "In a—a corial like this—" She regarded the sketch gravely, thrust a hand down into her girdle and brought forth a keen-bladed poniard; cut Larry's markings out and placed the fragment carefully aside.

"That I can understand," she said.

"Remarkably intelligent young woman," muttered O'Keefe. "Hope I'm not giving anything away—but she had me."

"Do you have a God in Ireland and America?" she asked. Larry nodded. "What is he called?" she continued.

"He is called the Prince of Peace," answered Larry, and his tone was curiously reverent. "But a false god challenged him and placed a yoke upon his people; and so he has gone to battle that peace may come again to his world where now there is no peace."

She considered this.

"Is your god winning?" she asked.

"He surely is!" Larry's conviction was so profound that it impressed her, clearly.

"Does your god dwell with you, like—" She hesitated. "Or afar, like Thanaroa?"

"He dwells in the heart of each of his followers, Yolara," answered the Irishman gravely.

"Yes, so does Thanaroa—but—" she hesitated again, skeptically. "He must have been afar when that other god put the yoke on his people," she concluded. "Now, the Shining—" and again she caught herself.

"But what are your women like, *Larree?* Are they like me? And how many have loved you?"

"In all Ireland and America there is none like you, Yolara," he answered. "And take that any way you please," he whispered in English. She took it, it was evident, as it most pleased her.

"Do you have goddesses?" she asked.

"Every woman in Ireland and America, is a goddess," he answered.

"Now *that* I do not believe." There was both anger and mockery in her eyes. "I know women, *Larree*—and if that were so there would be no peace for men."

"There isn't!" said O'Keefe. The anger died out and she laughed, sweetly, understandingly.

"And which goddess do you worship, *Larree?*"

"You!" said Larry O'Keefe, boldly.

"Larry! Larry!" I whispered. "Be careful. It's high explosive."

But the priestess was laughing — little trills of sweet bell notes; and pleasure was in each note.

"You are indeed bold, *Larree,*" she said, "to offer me your worship. Yet am I pleased by your boldness. Still—Lugur is strong: and you are not of those who—what did you say—have tried. And your wings are not here—*Larree!*"

Again her laughter rang out. The Irishman flushed; it was touché for Yolara!

"Fear not for me with Lugur," he said, grimly. "Rather fear for him!"

The laughter died; she looked at him searchingly; approval again in her eyes; a little enigmatic smile about her mouth—so sweet and so cruel.

"Well—we shall see," she murmured. "You say you battle in your world. With what?"

"Oh, with this and with that," answered Larry, airily. "We manage—"

"Have you the *Keth*—I mean that with which I sent Songar into the nothingness?" she asked swiftly.

"See what's she's driving at?" O'Keefe spoke to me, swiftly. "Well I do! Gray matter in that lady's head. But here's where the O'Keefe lands.

"I said," he turned to her, "O voice of silver fire, that your spirit is high even as your beauty—and searched out men's souls as does your loveliness their hearts. And now listen, Yolara, for what I speak is truth"—into his eyes came the far-away gaze; into his voice the Irish softness—"Lo, in my land of Ireland, this many of your life's length agone—see"—he raised his ten fingers, clenched and unclenched them times twenty—"the mighty men of my race, the Taitha-da-Dainn, could send men out into the nothingness even as do you with the *Keth.* And this they did by their harpings, and by words spoken—words of power, O Yolara, that have their power still—and by pipings and by slaying sounds.

"There was Cravetheen who played swift flames from his harp, flying flames that ate those they were sent against. And there was Dalua, of Hy Brasil, whose pipes played away from man and beast and all living things their shadows—and at last played them to shadows too, so that wherever Dalua went his shadows that had been men and beast followed like a storm of little rustling leaves; yea, and Bél the Harper, who could make women's hearts run like wax and men's hearts flame to ashes and whose harpings could shatter strong cliffs and bow great trees to the sod—"

His eyes were bright, dream filled: she shrank a little from him, faint pallor on the perfect skin.

"And they could make as well as destroy, those men of Ireland," he said. "There was Ulad of the Dreams. And Ulad took a sprig of fair white blossoms

and warmed it on his heart and blew upon it—and what had been but flowers stood rosy before him—a woman, Fand the Lovely. But Fand sinned against Ulad, and lo! he breathed upon her again, and again she was but white blossoms that the wind took and scattered! I say to you, Yolara, that these things were and are—in Ireland." His voice rang strong. "And I have seen men as many as those that are in your great chamber this many times over"—he clenched his hands once more, perhaps a dozen times—"blasted into nothingness before your *Keth* could even have touched them. Yea—and rocks as mighty as those through which we came lifted up and shattered before the lids could fall over your blue eyes. And this is truth, Yolara—all truth! Stay—have you that little cone of the *Keth* with which you destroyed Songar?"

She nodded, gazing at him, fascinated, fear and puzzlement contending.

"Then use it." He took a vase of crystal from the table, placed it on the threshold that led into the garden. "Use it on this—and I will show you."

"I will use it upon one of the *ladala*—" she began eagerly.

The exaltation dropped from him; there was a touch of horror in the eyes he turned to her; her own dropped before it.

"It shall be as you say," she said hurriedly. She drew the shining cone from her breast; leveled it at the vase. The green ray leaped forth, spread over the crystal, but before its action could even be begun, a flash of light shot from O'Keefe's hand, his automatic spat and the trembling vase flew into fragments. As quickly as he had drawn it, he thrust the pistol back into place and stood there empty handed, looking at her sternly. From the anteroom came shouting, a rush of feet.

Yolara's face was white, her eyes strained—but her voice was unshaken as she called to the clamoring guards:

"It is nothing—go to your places!"

But when the sound of their return had ceased she stared tensely at the Irishman—then looked again at the shattered vase.

"It is true!" she cried, "but see, the *Keth* is—alive!"

I followed her pointing finger. Each broken bit of the crystal was vibrating, shaking its particles out into space. Broken it the bullet of Larry's had—but not released it from the grip of the disintegrating force. The priestess's face was triumphant.

"But what matters it, O shining urn of beauty—what matters it to the vase that is broken what happens to its fragments?" asked Larry, gravely—and pointedly.

The triumph died from her face and for a space she was silent; brooding.

"Next," whispered O'Keefe to me. "Lots of surprises in the little box; keep your eye on the opening and see what comes out."

We had not long to wait. There was a sparkle of anger about Yolara, something too of injured pride. She clapped her hands; whispered to the maid who answered her summons, and then sat back regarding us, maliciously.

"You have answered me as to your strength—but you have not proved it; answered me as to your God—and left me doubtful indeed; but the *Keth* you *have* answered. Now answer this!" she said.

She pointed out into the garden. I saw a flowering branch suddenly bend and snap as though a hand had broken it—but no hand was there! Saw then another and another bend and break, a little tree sway and fall—and closer and closer to us came the trail of snapping boughs while down into the garden poured the silvery light revealing—nothing! Now a great ewer beside a pillar rose swiftly in air and hurled itself crashing at my feet. Cushions close to us swirled about as though in the vortex of a whirlwind.

And unseen hands held my arms in a mighty clutch fast to my sides, another gripped my throat and I felt a needle-sharp poniard point pierce my shirt, touch the skin just over my heart.

"Larry!" I cried, despairingly. I twisted my head; saw that he too was caught in this grip of the invisible. But his face was calm, even amused.

"Keep cool, Doc!" he said. "Remember—she wants to learn the language!"

Now from Yolara burst chime upon

chime of mocking laughter. She gave a command—the hands loosened, the poniard withdrew from my heart; suddenly as I had been caught I was free—and unpleasantly weak and shaky.

"Have you *that* in Ireland, *Larree!*" cried the priestess—and once more trembled with laughter.

"A good play, Yolara." His voice was as calm as his face. "But they did that in Ireland even before Dalua piped away his first man's shadow. There's a tree there, Yolara, with little red berries and it's called the rowan tree. And if you take the berries and squeeze them on your eyes and hands when the moon is just so, there's nobody can see you, at all. It's old in Ireland, Yolara! And in Goodwin's land they make ships—coria that go on water—so you can pass by them and see only sea and sky; and those water coria are each of them many times greater than this whole palace of yours."

But the priestess laughed on.

"It did get me a little," whispered Larry. "That wasn't quite up to my mark. But, God! If we could find it out and take it back to the front!"

"Not so, *Larree!*" Yolara gasped, through her laughter. "Not so! Goodwin's cry betrayed you!"

Her good humor had entirely returned; she was like a mischievous child pleased over some successful trick; and like a child she cried—"I'll show you!"—signaled again; whispered to the maid who, quickly returning, laid before her a long metal case. Yolara took from her girdle something that looked like a small pencil, pressed it and shot a thin stream of light for all the world like an electric flash, upon its hasp. The lid flew open. Out of it she drew three flat, oval crystals, faint rose in hue. She handed one to O'Keefe and one to me.

"Look!" she commanded, placing the third before her own eyes. I peered through the stone and instantly there leaped into sight, out of thin air—six grinning dwarfs! Each was covered from top of head to soles of feet in a web so tenuous that through it their bodies were plain. The gauzy stuff seemed to vibrate—its strands to run together like quicksilver. I snatched the crystal from my eyes and—the chamber was empty! Put it back—and there were the grinning six!

Yolara gave another sign and they disappeared, even from the crystals.

"It is what they wear, *Larree,*" explained Yolara, graciously. "It is something that came to us from—the ancient ones. But we have so few"—she sighed—"and the secret of their making is well-nigh lost—it is difficult to make"—she hesitated—"but almost are we upon the verge of refinding its ease."

"Such treasures must be two-edged swords, Yolara," commented O'Keefe. "For how know you that one within them creeps not to you with hand eager to strike?"

"There is no danger," she said indifferently. "I am the keeper of them—and I know always where they are. Besides, they cannot pass through the blackness. When one wears them and tries to pass, the darkness sucks the light out of him as thirsty ground does water! And at last he is naught but one of those shadows of which you speak, *Larree*—although the robe itself is not harmed. I will have one of the *ladala* don one and show you," she added, brightly.

"No! No!" cried O'Keefe. She regarded him, amused.

"And now no more," abruptly. "You two are to appear before the council at a certain time—but fear nothing. You, Goodwin, go with Rador about our city and increase your wisdom. But you, *Larree,* await me here in my garden—" she smiled at him, provocatively—maliciously, too. "For shall not one who has resisted a world of goddesses be given all chance to worship when at last he finds his own?"

She laughed—whole heartedly and was gone. And at that moment I liked Yolara better than ever I had before and—alas—better than ever I was to in the future.

I noted Rador standing outside the open jade door and started to go, but O'Keefe caught me by the arm.

"Wait a minute," he urged. "About Golden Eyes—you were going to tell me something—it's been on my mind all through that little sparring match."

I told him of the vision that had passed through my closing lids. He listened gravely and then laughed.

"Hell of a lot of privacy in this place!" he grinned. "Ladies who can walk through walls and others with regular invisible cloaks to let 'em flit wherever they please. Oh, well, don't let it get on your nerves, Doc. Remember — everything's natural! That robe stuff is just camouflage of course. But Lord, if we could only get a piece of it!"

"The material simply admits all light-vibrations, or perhaps curves them, just as the opaque screens cut them off," I answered. "A man under the X-ray is partly invisible; this makes him wholly so. He doesn't register, as the people of the motion-picture profession say."

"I doped that out myself as soon as I had my first peep," he said. "But you want to keep remembering—it's all natural! Just keep saying that to yourself. They've got a bag of tricks and they keep pulling them. When we get on to 'em all we'll be all right—just as we were with the Huns."

I began to be irritated—why this repeated warning to me, who knew only fact?

"And as for their Shining One— Say!" Larry snorted. "I'd like to set the O'Keefe banshee up against it. I'll bet that old resourceful Irish body would give it the first three bites and a strangle hold and wallop it before it knew it had 'em."

Rador beckoned me.

"I'm glad Golden Eyes is on the job, no matter how unconventional her visits are—but I wish she'd show her hand soon," sighed Larry.

Then the mercurial Celtic mind went back to that other picture he had drawn.

"If our banshee ever takes it into its head to land here to help me out instead of ushering me out— Wow! Boy! Howdy!"

I heard him still chuckling gleefully over this vision as I passed along the opal wall with the green dwarf, bound for my first excursion.

Would I come across any trace of Throckmartin? Did I dare even to hint to Rador the real reason we had invaded this enigmatic land?

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.

LOVE AND LOGIC

BY BERTON BRALEY

I LOVED a girl in days of yore—
A girl who said me nay
Because she loved another more;
That's why I went away!

And then I wandered everywhere
About this earthly ball,
And met a lot of maidens fair
Who held my heart in thrall.

For there were girls in Kankakee,
And girls in Rio, too;
Wherever chance has landed me
Were pretty girls to woo;

In Boston town or far Japan,
In Panama and Nome;
But each one loved another man—
And that's why I came home!

Billy Buck Hensley and Art

by William H. Hamby

BILLY BUCK HENSLEY had drifted into Taos, New Mexico, without bringing any complimentary clippings from the local papers where he had been before.

He was lank, and had thin, hollow cheeks and mild blue eyes that seemed always filled with regret over the sinfulness of mankind. He bought a little two-room adobe house in the most retiring part of the sleepy, ancient village, and proceeded to attract as little attention as possible.

He never sat in front of the livery stable and related detailed accounts of his killings, either of men or beasts or ladies; and he was not at all offensive to either Mexican or white labor, as he carefully avoided entering into competition with them. He had only one trait that might bring him into the spotlight of the community's awareness—he was avaricious.

A man greedy for money is pretty sure to attract attention—and it almost invariably is not eulogistic.

Taos is about the size of an Indiana county seat that has lost the court-house, and is thirty miles off the railroad—which is very well, for it is not much of a railroad anyway. The town is very old and sleeps at the foot of the mountains, beside the Red Willow Creek, and is still inhabited mostly by Indians and Mexicans.

The few Americans who have eddied into this pool of forgetfulness are of three sorts: tradesmen who are trying to build up a future, artists who are trying to live in the present, and the rest who are trying to bury a past.

Billy Buck Hensley was neither an artist nor a tradesman.

As Long Ben's six-cylinder substitute for a stage started down the precarious trail of the cañon of the Rio Grande, the handsome girl with the air of self-support grabbed the wistful, brown-eyed one by the wrist and gasped: "Oh—oh-o!"

"Don't be scared." The wistful one put her left hand over the tense fingers and smiled. "It is only a thousand feet to the bottom—and Long Ben always makes it safely."

The other girl gave one horrified glance over the wheel of the machine, down—down to the thread of a stream among the rocks below; shut her eyes and lips and shuddered.

"I've been over it a number of times," comforted the other girl. "It is really not very dangerous. It is like a lot of other things that look deadly until you get to them, and then you get through very well."

An hour later when Long Ben's stage emerged snorting from the other side of the cañon and headed straight across the mesa toward Taos, the two girls were good friends.

"I am a saleswoman, but I have never

been this way before—and never again!" said the businesslike one when she could breathe easy without fearing to lose her soul before the next breath. "I am traveling for Tidel Bits—a new soda cracker."

"I ought to be a good customer." The other's soft brown eyes looked off and smiled at the radiant glory of color over the red mesa. "I live on soda crackers, mostly."

"You are an artist, aren't you?" asked the breezy one.

"Yes." The lighted brown eyes came back from the desert in surprise. "How did you know?"

"Crackers and art always go together, don't they? Isn't it funny," she laughed with good-natured raillery, "I sell crackers and live on strawberries and beef steaks, while you paint luscious fruit and lowing kine and live on soda crackers."

"Do you find your work pleasant?" asked the artist.

"Well, I should say," replied the saleswoman. "It is a fine job, lots of fun. I get almost as many proposals as I do orders for crackers—but I know how to handle them."

It was a good thing she did, for almost before her baggage was on the sidewalk in front of the adobe hotel, two drummers, the hotel proprietor, and a county official were all angling in her direction to try to be of service.

"I'll be up to your studio to-night," she said over her shoulder to her traveling companion. "I'm going to tell you something that will surprise you."

It was a coolish evening, although it was May, for Taos is seven thousand feet high, and the guests of the adobe hotel all sat around the stove in the front room waiting for supper. The saleswoman's feet were on the fender of the stove as she sat listening to the traveling dentist from Denver, the drug drummer and the cattle buyer discussing how near each had come to killing somebody who had done him dirt.

"You know that fellow that bought the Mexican's house north of the old church?" a local drug clerk remarked to the landlord.

"Yep, I know him," replied the hotel man. "He eats one meal a month here, and from the way he eats it ought to last him a month. Guess he's about the stingiest white man this side of Iowa."

"He's gone plumb bugs," said the clerk. "Came up to the drug-store Tuesday and bought a quart-bottle of hair restorer; made me swear it held exactly a quart and no more. Jorgin saw him pouring it on the backs of his dogs yesterday."

"Maybe he is doing it to save shearing them," broke in the facetious drummer.

"No, he is nutty. Been shut up in his 'dobe house for three days; won't let even the grocer boy come in."

II.

When the girl—she had registered as *Nancy Daniels*—put on her coat after supper, the drug clerk, the dentist from Denver, the bank cashier, who had dropped in, and the hotel man all managed in one way or another to suggest they loved to walk; that Taos was very interesting in the starlight, and each of them knew most thoroughly the historical spots.

But Nancy suggested that four men who enjoyed walking so much take it together. She was merely going on a little errand and preferred to go alone.

The artist girl—her name was Macey Stanton—was prodding around in the cupboard of her studio hunting for tea and crackers when Nancy came in. She found the tea, but no crackers.

The practical Nancy saw it was not carelessness or forgetfulness—but poverty. The girl was out of money.

They sat by a snapping fire—pine knots are plentiful in Taos—and drank tea. The artist girl's naturally happy face was marked with worry.

"I'm glad you like your work," she said in a warm, sympathetic voice. "I love mine; I've been so happy here; and I thought I could stay on until I had become famous. But some things have happened. I don't know—"

Nancy, who had ruddy hair, soft, full lips and smooth, velvety cheeks, was looking at the slender girl. She had recognized her the moment they got into the stage together at the junction. She had come to tell her.

"You used to live in a large farmhouse

on the hill," said Nancy, still watching Miss Stanton's face.

"Yes!" The artist turned her eyes quickly from the fire.

"And there was a cabin full of ratty, hungry kids in a cabin down in the valley. You built the most wonderful playhouse in the woods about half-way down the hill; and used to spend hours down there playing with those bare-legged, tousle-headed young uns."

The artist's eyes were opening wider and wider as she looked intently at her visitor.

"And," continued Nancy, "there was always something to eat—a lot of it—in the playhouse, which you pretended the fairies brought. But you could not fool me with fairies—I knew the taste; it came from the Stanton kitchen."

The artist jumped from her chair, threw her arms about the other's shoulders and gave her a tremendous hug.

"You are Nancy. No, you can't be that wild, lovely woods rowdy, Nancy Daniels! Yet you must be!"

Nancy nodded vigorously and swallowed and wiped her eyes. In a moment she turned it into a laugh.

"Excuse my feelings, but you are the first person who wears skirts that has tried to hug me in a long, long time."

These two girls, unlike in every way but one, their deeply buried love for warm human fellowship, held hands and talked over the fourteen years since they had played together on the hill.

"We moved to town," Macey Stanton said. "And father bought the bank. I went away to school; later to an art academy at Philadelphia and learned to paint—I always loved it, you know.

"Father died. I was the only child, and he left me the stock in the bank—twenty thousand dollars. It was paying me about three thousand dollars a year then.

"I came out here and joined the Western artist colony, to paint Indians and this wonderful color. I was beginning really to do some very good work, when the bank failed and left me without any income. It paid all the depositors, I understand; but the stockholders lost every dollar. It was all I had."

"What was the matter with the bank?" asked the practical Nancy. "Somebody steal?"

"No, I think not. Just bad loans, I guess. The cashier was blamed, I understand, for bad judgment; but there was no charge against him."

"Who was he?"

"Sanders Combs," answered Macey.

The Daniels girl nodded.

"I knew him. I think I knew about everybody in the hills. He was four years older than we were, and absolutely the yellowest pup unpoisoned.

"I hated him. He stole the first jew's-harp I ever had, and when I caught him with it he threw it in the creek and lied out of it. I'll bet you he stole your money."

"No," Macey shook her head; "they would have arrested him if he had."

Nancy noisily snorted at the simplicity of this explanation.

"But tell me all about yourself, Nancy." She gave the smooth, plump hand of the once little outlaw waif an affectionate pat. "It is so good to see you again; I always loved you."

Tears were threatening in Nancy's eyes again, and the artist turned lightly.

"If you get so many proposals, why haven't you married?"

"Family pride," answered Nancy. "Old man Daniels, my father, is in the penitentiary for stealing hogs; one of my brothers was shot as a moonshiner; my youngest sister is in the reform school—and my eldest one ought to be.

"Not quite the sort of an aggregation to introduce a husband to, is it?"

"You poor girl." The artist squeezed the other girl's hand.

III.

EARLY next morning Nancy Daniels established an agency for Tidel Bit Biscuits with the main grocery-store in the village, and started out to canvass the town for orders.

It was so easy for Nancy to take orders that there was no temptation to skip anybody. She took them clean—Mexicans, Indians, artists, tradesmen, renegade whites;

and all alike gave her orders for from twenty-five cents to two dollars' worth of the new crackers.

In due course she appeared at the door of the two-room adobe house at the extreme edge of the village, north of the old church.

The door was closely shut, and there was the sound of a voice inside. She paused a moment and listened. Perhaps this was the fellow they had said at the hotel was crazy.

She was not at all scared, but she had never sold a crazy man any crackers, and was not sure of her lead.

"Twenty-two hundred and fifty, twenty-two hundred and fifty-one, twenty-two hundred and fifty-two," the voice mumbled tiredly but distinctly.

Nancy Daniels knocked on the door three times. The mumbling stopped; there was silence inside. She knocked again. There was the shuffling of feet approaching the door, but the door did not open.

The third time she knocked, and a peeved, vexed voice broke out inside:

"Ohellanddamnation! go off and let me be, I'm busy."

Nancy smiled and knocked louder. Slowly, but angrily, the heavy door scraped back a foot, and the long, lean face of Billy Buck Hensley showed in the crack. He started to swear again, but before he got it out the girl on the step gave him a smile that simply froze up all his venom.

Billy Buck had avoided women, not as a matter of taste, but of economy. Then, too, the sort who would have anything to do with him were not dazzling enough to make a fellow's head spin. But this one on the door-step—well, better critics than B. B. had canceled almost a sure thing poker game just to sit around the office stove at the hotel and look at her.

"What you want?" he asked, and then, in a gulping panic, lest he had said it too roughly, he managed a lean grin and added: "My house ain't in shape to receive company."

"Oh, that is all right." She gave a brisk nod of comradeship and smiled. "I know how that is—I keep my own room just a sight. I merely wanted to come in a minute to give you some samples of a new delicious food I am introducing."

Billy Buck moistened his lips and glanced uneasily behind him. That smile and delicious food were too scarce to let get away. He opened the door wider, admitted the girl and looked sheepishly about the room.

She wondered if he was crazy. There was a row of navy beans all the way around the wall; rows about two inches apart all over the bed, and more long rows back and forth across the floor, and circles of them on the three-stool chairs.

Billy Buck knew some explanation was necessary, and began by clearing his throat a couple of times and looking sidewise out of the door.

"You see it's that bean-guessin' contest."

"The what?" Nancy had been studying him so closely she had scarcely understood what he said.

"Why, ain't you seen it in the Santa Fé papers? That drug-store fellow is offering three hundred dollars cash to the person that comes nearest guessin' the number of navy beans in a quart-jar in his window.

"I made up my mind to just fool them town smart Alecks and get that three hundred dollars. So I bought a bottle that holds exactly a quart and filled it full of beans, and I been countin' 'em ever since."

He stopped and shook his head sadly. "Ah," thought Nancy, "now I have it."

There had been few things in the hills which escaped that little bare-legged outlaw. She remembered this fellow now. He had a farm down by Forker, and beat his sister once because she sold a dozen chickens and bought a pair of shoes. His real name was Bart Blakely.

"The worst of it is"—the fellow was rubbing his lank jaw doubtfully—"I counted 'em four times, and they don't come out the same at all. I'm going to keep on countin' 'em until I get 'em the same three times."

Nancy did not offer to sell him crackers—she gave him a large-sized box. She stayed a half-hour, and on leaving shook hands, and giving him a very inclusive smile, remarked:

"Mr. Hensley, I'm coming back about supper-time with a package of our famous flour, and show you how to make pancakes."

Billy Buck changed from foot to foot, his mouth opened slightly. He put out his hand against the door-jamb. He did not know what to say. But, no matter what her scheme was, he wanted her to come.

IV.

BILLY BUCK HENSLEY'S two-room adobe house had several good points—the rooms had the dignity of largeness and simplicity, the floor was fairly even, and there was a good fireplace.

In half an hour Nancy Daniels had it looking quite comfortable, and then she turned to the supper problem. In spite of his penuriousness, she found the kitchen pretty well stocked with food supplies.

Billy Buck sat by the fire with his head turned so that he could watch her through the kitchen door. He rubbed his lean face with a sort of sly-dog thrill of gratified guilt at having a handsome young woman alone in his house after lamp-light.

The supper—well, Billy Buck had never anywhere along this gullied veil of tears eaten anything like that supper. The mountain air gives one an appetite anyway. It even started him talking, guardedly, yet he told a good deal about himself.

It was nearly nine o'clock when, the dishes all washed and everything in order, she bade him good night, shook hands with him and gave his hand a friendly pressure.

"We poor working people have to be good to each other and cheer each other up," she laughed. "I've had such an interesting evening."

Billy Buck hesitated between whether to try to kiss her now or to ask her to come back: hesitated and was lost, for she slipped out of the door like a whiff of wind from the pines and was gone.

Next morning Nancy Daniels went to the bank to cash a draft the company had sent her for her expense account. She chose a time when the bank would not be busy.

There was only one person in it—the cashier, Simmons, who had been ambitious to show her Taos by starlight.

She spent a quarter of an hour at the window, her arm, a plump, smooth, white arm, on the window-ledge, her hand playing with a bit of paper through the little wicket. She gave him quip for quip, and meaning smile for meaning smile.

"Yes," she said, "I've done well here. I have taken an order at almost every house but one—that fellow's they say is crazy—Hensley, I believe. I suppose it would do no good to get an order from him, as he is too poor to pay for it."

"Poor!" The exclamation was involuntary. "Don't fool yourself about that. If this town knew what I know about B. B. Hensley it would sit up and take notice."

"Is that so?" she said with no special interest. "I supposed he was very poor."

"He is supposed to be, and I'm not supposed to give him away. I've kept his deposit in dead secret, but if you can get old B. B.'s name on an order, or a check, no matter what the figures are, don't you worry about it not going through."

The Daniels girl went to the hotel, wrote four letters, packed her grip, paid her bill and left.

Macey Stanton was outdoors, down among the cottonwood that lined the Red Willow Creek near her studio, painting industriously when she heard an automobile stop in the road. She brought her eyes from the model—an Indian girl with her arms full of willows—around to the machine, saw a young woman alight and unload three suit-cases. It was Nancy Daniels. The artist dismissed the model and hastened to the studio.

"I like this country." There was almost worshipful admiration in the Daniels girl's eyes as she looked into the artist's wistful face. "I want to visit you a while."

The artist had taken both the girl's hands and her eyes lighted with the memory of the fun she used to have with this imp. But quickly a look of distress shadowed her face.

"Don't mind my obvious appetite," laughed the shrewd Nancy. "I'll tend to the groceries and the cooking."

"Nancy Daniels," said Macey Stanton with much severity as they sat down to supper that evening, "I don't believe you are staying in Taos because of me at all; I believe it is some man."

"Possibly," admitted Nancy, parting her lips enough to show her fine white teeth. "But, anyway, I'm staying."

"Not in the notion of marrying?" Even an artist has the feminine curiosity and interest in the subject.

"Oh," replied Nancy lightly, "I have no prejudice about marrying—if I find sufficient inducement."

V.

HAVE you ever seen a second-year widower, when in that state known to female gossips as "beginning to look around," suddenly and unexpectedly get a warm smile from a plump, pretty school marm fifteen years younger than he?

Billy Buck Hensley was worse than that. He hung around the post-office, he ventured into the hotel, he fairly haunted the road that ran from the village past Miss Stanton's studio, a mile north. He even bought a new suit of clothes, a box of shoe-polish, and astonished the barber by having his hair trimmed.

Nancy did not discourage him, although she did not cook another supper for him. When he waylaid her near the studio as she started on her morning walk to town for supplies, she let him walk with her—even stopped to saunter or to look at an unusually long willow or a clump of blue flowers.

Billy Buck was not a gifted conversationalist, but he managed to say several hopeful things about poverty. It seemed to him that two people might live very comfortably on a limited expense account.

But at this Nancy shook her head sadly, decidedly, and sighed.

"I've seen this happy poverty business tried out to the limit. And it is just about as successful as an automobile with three busted tires and no gasoline.

"I got plenty sick of being poor before I went to work for myself. No man looks good enough to make a soup-bone, oleomargarine and the family wash look like happiness to me. If ever I marry it will be to some man that is smart enough to get more money than I do."

Whereupon Billy Buck would chew the end of a green twig for a hundred yards and then remark guardedly.

"Sometimes folks ain't as poor as they are supposed to be."

"That is so, but it takes something more than a hint to prove it."

In three weeks Billy Buck was driven to the very precipice of rashness. He could not eat or sleep, or enjoy even economy. He spent most all day hanging around the cottonwood near the studio just to get a glimpse of Nancy Daniels.

One morning Nancy got three letters. Billy Buck was in the post-office at the time—he usually managed to be—and pretended to be filling out a money-order blank on the little board desk at one side of the office. But he saw those letters.

That afternoon he met Nancy far up the Red Willow Road. She suggested that instead of walking to the village they go on up the road to the Indian pueblos.

B. B.'s heart thumped hard at this—for that meant a four-mile walk. Surely she did not despise him or she would not thus put herself in his company.

For an hour the girl was abstracted, absentminded. She stopped several times to cut a long willow-switch with a small penknife. At last she suggested they sit down in the shade of a big cottonwood and rest.

She took off her hat and leaned her head against the tree. Her ruddy hair against the white bark made an impression on Hensley that almost ran into rhyme.

Nancy sighed and lifted her arm rather wearily and let it rest on her head.

"I've got to go back to work to-morrow," she said.

Billy Buck started haltingly for the precipice, then went over with a rush. Why did she need to go back at all? He wasn't poor. He just was saving, and pretended to be, to keep from being annoyed by beggars. He had money, plenty of money. Wouldn't she marry him?

But the girl shook her head disparagingly.

"What you call lots of money might not seem like much to me. Besides, you say you are saving. What I want is to have plenty, so I can buy everything I want."

"You can," declared Billy Buck rashly.

"I got really a lot of money, and you can spend all you want."

"I am independent," held out Nancy. "I am used to having my own money, and I never could stand to have a man dole out a dollar at a time to me.

"If I marry, a man must put his money as much in my name as his; my check must be honored the same as his: I don't want no rows over money."

Billy Buck's lean throat went through some convulsions: but his eyes were upon the girl.

"I—that would be all right—we'd do that. You can have everything—if you'll marry me."

That evening, as the two girls sat before the fire, Nancy remarked quite casually:

"I'm going to be married to-morrow noon, and I want you to help me pick some things for the house."

"Married?" the artist girl really gasped. "Why—to whom?"

"Billy Buck Hensley."

"I never heard of him," said Macey seriously.

"No, my dear, you seldom hear of anybody—and they don't hear of you. Billy Buck doesn't know you exist. But he will.

"My intended has one good quality—he has plenty of money. I am going to spend some of it to-morrow, and I want you to help me."

And she went into brief but clear and emphatic directions.

That night Hensley rode seven miles down the creek to a shack of a ranch-house. The human specimen in it looked in the lamp-light across the table even less ornamental than Billy Buck.

After some parley B. B. rubbed his lean face, and shook his head.

"No, for a fact you don't look like a preacher." Then he jerked up his head with a new thought. "But you'll do all right for a justice of the peace."

Billy Buck rode back with vast satisfaction, prompted by a feeling of devilish shrewdness. He would go any limit necessary to get her—but a fellow was not called on to be foolhardy.

On his return he stopped at a long red-roofed house—one of the best in town—and routed the bank cashier out of bed.

"Simmons," he said solemnly, "I'm goin' to get married."

"Is that so?" The cashier tried to control his vexation at being awakened from a sound sleep. "Well, good luck, old man."

"What I wanted to tell you," said Hensley soberly, "is this: She insists on havin' a free hand with the money. I'm goin' to let her spend free one day.

"To-morrow you cash any checks she brings in, but after that don't cash nothin' unless I'm right there to O. K. it. Understand?"

"Yes, I understand." Simmons yawned and turned back into the house.

For the first time in many moons Billy Buck chuckled—actually chuckled—as he turned up the road by the old church to his adobe house. It took a smooth one to get ahead of him, it did, it did!

At eight o'clock next morning Nancy Daniels appeared at the Hensley door, smiling and pert.

"Old lazy bones," she said playfully, "I've come to get the house straightened up for our wedding."

At nine she had done what she could with the battered furniture, and looked at it ruefully.

"B. B.," she said judicially, "I can't be married in a house that looks like this—much less live in it. We are going to have some new furniture, anyway. Let's get it and fix things up right for the wedding."

"All right," lavishly assented Hensley. "Just as you say."

"You leave it all to me, and I'll do it up right," she advised.

"That suits me to a gnat's heel," he agreed readily.

"Write out four checks and sign your name to them, but leave them blank. I'll go up to the stores and get what we need this morning."

Hensley hesitated for only a moment.

"The stage has already gone," he said to himself. "No other train from the junction until the eleven o'clock one to-morrow. If she tried to get away with any money I could catch her."

"I'll promise not to spend a dollar on

myself. It will all be for the house," she said guilelessly, reading his hesitancy.

"Oh, that's all right." He hastened to sign the four checks.

VI.

MACEY STANTON, according to promise, met Nancy at the bank at ten o'clock with fifteen of her paintings. Nancy set them out one at a time, exclaimed over their beauty, and bought ten, giving a check for them, and seeing the check was cashed on the spot.

Nancy next went to the furniture-store and bought three chairs, and after that invested a little at the hardware-and-grocery store. All the things were delivered by eleven o'clock. The wedding was set for four in the afternoon.

Billy Buck Hensley had braced himself for a shock at her wild extravagance, but when the furniture and kitchen supplies came, he was fairly gloating over the smallness of the purchases, although he refrained from asking, he knew it could not have been over fifty dollars.

And the pictures, of course she wanted some pictures, but these cloth things, without even frames, must have been cheap, probably two dollars apiece. All told he could not see that she had blowed more than a hundred dollars—and that was getting off very light.

And to-morrow the check-book would be in his hands again.

Nancy was busy arranging the new furniture and planning where to hang the pictures. Billy Buck looked over her shoulder as she stood studying one of Macey Stanton's best paintings.

"What did you get that thing for?" demanded B. B. in a premonitory tone of husbandly authority. "I hate Indians."

"I don't," said Nancy smoothly, "and I love that picture. It is wonderful. It is real art. Nothing in Denver as good as that."

"What did it cost?" Billy Buck felt a sort of ticklish uneasiness in the depths of his economical anatomy.

"A thousand dollars," replied Nancy casually.

Billy Buck gulped, moistened his lips, gulped and swallowed again.

"Hellanddamnation! you didn't pay a thousand dollars for that pile of stuff," he waved at the canvases.

"A thousand dollars for each of them—ten thousand for the lot; and they are worth it."

Billy Buck was not of the murderous type, otherwise Nancy would have perished in her tracks. As it was he merely fumbled at his throat as if trying to relieve his breathing apparatus. When he did get his voice he croaked with fearful hope:

"You are just jokin' me, ain't you?"

"No." Nancy turned and gave him a straight, truthful look. "That is exactly what I paid. I gave Miss Stanton, the artist, a check for ten thousand dollars."

"But they won't cash it; Simmons knows me; he wouldn't cash it." This was the last fearful hope.

"But he did," said Nancy, resuming her work as if this small matter was disposed of.

Then Buck's anger rose up and blotted out of his eyes all of Nancy's alluring plump comeliness.

He had been cheated, deceived, robbed. He was a fool, the awfulest fool in the world, and this traveling cracker-pedler had taken him in, stolen ten thousand dollars from him. No doubt the girls had fixed it up together, and she would run away with half the money.

"Well," Billy Buck tried to speak with the iron of command in his voice, "you take the things back and have her return the money. I won't stand for nothin' like that."

Nancy remarked over her shoulder: "You have already stood for it. And as soon as we are married I'm going to help you spend the rest."

"Married?" Billy Buck croaked. "Hellanddamnation! I wouldn't marry you if—if I loved you to death."

"Is that so?" Nancy turned slowly on him, the picture in her hand. Then she laughed.

"Well, I guess I will live over it."

"You'll live over it in jail if you don't get my money back. I won't be robbed like that."

"Listen," and Nancy faced him squarely. "You never guessed, Bart Blakely, that I knew you the first day I saw you."

At the mention of his real name, Billy Buck's mouth worked like that of a drowning fish, his lank jaws grew pasty yellow, and he collapsed into a chair.

"And do you know who the girl is I bought those pictures from? Miss Stanton—who lost twenty thousand dollars in the bank you and Sanders Combs looted.

"Oh, I've got the whole thing. You and Combs fixed it up—you gave a mortgage on one thousand head of cattle you did not own, got thirty thousand dollars, and skipped out. Then, when the bank broke, Combs drifted out to Denver, and you two divided that thirty thousand.

"Now you are good for ten years in the pen—unless you do as I say."

There was a fire in Nancy's eyes that set Billy Buck's heart to palpitating in an entirely different way.

He did as she said, and did it before a notary, and the next morning Billy Buck Hensley went quietly out, drew his remaining five thousand dollars from the bank, and disappeared.

Macey Stanton, still dazed and troubled over a lot of things—that ten thousand partly, and her friend's marriage to that unspeakable creature mostly, saw Nancy coming up the road, bareheaded, swinging her hat by a string, and singing gaily.

"You seem happy," Macey went out to meet her.

"I am; I've just lost my intended husband."

Macey gasped. Then Nancy began to laugh and collapsed on the grass and told the whole story.

"You see that ten thousand is merely half your money that they stole. I'm going to Denver to-morrow and get that other ten thousand for you—

"But," she shook her head dolefully, "I hope I won't have to become engaged to him—it hurts my family pride."

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AN ALLEGORY

BY MELBA PARKER

A YOUNG god sat in the Temple of Dreams,
And maidens knelt at his feet,
And they brought him gifts
From their heart's storehouse,
And the passion flower so sweet.
So sweet!

But the young god sat in the Temple of Dreams,
And neither smiled nor inclined his head;
And tiring of one
So superior and cold,
The maidens one by one fled.
They fled!

And each one sought a god for herself
Who was not so cold and grand.
The end of the tale
I'm sure you've guessed,
For each chose a common man.
A man!

Leave It To Lydia

by Frank Lapham

CHAPTER I.

HAL COMES HOME.

EVEN before he left the train Hal realized it was growing cold. Several times while climbing the grade which made up the last twenty miles, the antiquated engine had come to a gasping halt—to manufacture, as the talkative conductor put it, a "leetle more steam." In the cars the passengers watched, with American stoicism, the fantastic frosting of the window-panes, and stamped their broganned feet to drive the blood into those chilly members.

It was therefore, without regret, when the coaches creaked into Union, that Hal, bag in hand, swung himself to the loosely boarded platform. He strode into the faded station and called through the ticket-window to a visibly startled depot-master.

"Hello, Lem." And he laughed aloud at the wide-eyed astonishment of the grizzled old man.

"I'm a catfish if it ain't little Hal!" shouted the bewildered man. He swung open the door of his boxlike office and advanced on the younger man with an outstretched, wrinkled hand.

Hal, still smiling—half at the oldster's surprise and half at his own gladness—gripped the other's palm.

"Little Hal is right," he said.

"Hev—hev you—" The agent stopped. "Folks know you're comin'?" he asked.

"I telegraphed father in the city. I guess the folks out here haven't got word yet."

The other man hesitated awkwardly. "Heard from 'em lately?"

"Not in a couple of months. I've skipped around quite a bit. There's probably a bundle of mail trying to catch up."

"H-m."

Hal inwardly smiled. These natives were a great lot; he had been away so long he had almost forgotten their queerness.

"I suppose everybody's all right, Lem?"

The old man eyed him with curious swiftness. "Why—I guess so."

"Lois?" He was aware in an instant that his voice had held a certain eagerness. "And old Mrs. Trowbridge?" he added.

"Yes. Yes, I guess they are."

"I'm going to tramp it, Lem." He buttoned his great coat. "I'll send some one down in the morning for the bag."

"Miss Lois," said the other without moving, "has grown into a young lady—a mighty fine young lady."

"She must be." A great gladness—the joy of being home—surged through him.

"Yep—a fine young lady."

"Well, I'll be getting along, Lem."

The old man followed him toward the door uncertainly.

"You haven't heard from 'em in two months?"

"It's a long time." A vague trouble crept into him. "I say, Lem," he broke in sharply, "you're sure they're all right?"

"Why—" Again that stammering hesitancy. "They say," he blurted out, "that she's going to marry your father!"

"Who?"

"Miss Lois."

Hal was seized with an almost irresistible impulse to laugh.

"Oh, come, Lem. That sounds like the Ladies' Sewing Circle."

"I—I guess," stuttered Lem, "that it's true."

The old man's visible reluctance to hammer home his certainty sank ominously into Hal's very being. It was utterly preposterous—and yet it was true. He knew it was true! Emotions, surging, ill-defined, crowded his brain, and through it all he was conscious that he must show no sign. His rather dark, strong face, as he turned toward his informant, showed nothing but pure astonishment.

"So that's it?" he said. "You broke it to me as if it were a funeral instead of a wedding," he added with some lightness.

"We— all of us, were kinder surprised." Behind an evident curiosity Hal caught the kindliness of the man. Old Lem was not sure whether or not he was inflicting a hurt —and not knowing, was fearfully certain that he had.

"My father was a young-looking man—and I imagine six years hasn't made a great change in him." Hal wondered if he were speaking naturally. "He isn't fifty yet, you know. I suppose," he added hurriedly, "that the difference in their ages caused all the comment."

"It seems only yesterday she used to gallop down for the mail on that little bay hoss, her long legs swinging, half the time clear o' the stirrups, her black curls tumblin' over her face and shoulders." He paused. "Her legs ain't so long now," he added illogically.

Hal, without attempting to define the impulse, knew he must get away from this old man who so feared to hurt him.

"Good-by, Lem." He lifted his stern, young face to the deep-lined features of the other. "Thanks, Lem," he said gently.

The cold bit into his cheeks as he headed into the wind. He kept to the middle of the road where the snow was packed solid from the country traffic. The oblique sun of late afternoon, glinting on the hard, polished track, sent up a tiny brilliant nimbus that danced ever just ahead. There was not a vehicle in sight, and not a sound to be heard, save the brush of the winter wind as it swished through the flanking vines.

He wondered with vague apprehension at the tumult that had seized him. Why should he be so unspeakably upset? He did not love Lois: how could he? She was barely sixteen when he had left for Oxford, and he at the time had just reached twenty. One doesn't fall in love with a child! And his father—that great old fellow! It came to him with a sort of relieved shock, that the thing had made no difference in his affection for the older man. He was not angry nor—and infinitely more appalling—disgusted. His mother had died at his birth—which, now at this later development, absolved his father of any possible charge of undue haste.

An unanalyzable emotion, futile and distracting, made him wish that Lois, at her father's death, had never been intrusted to their care. He told himself that it wasn't the disparity of ages, it wasn't because it was his father, it was—what was it? He knew only that he was stunned—and miserable.

It struck him suddenly that he could not fancy her in her coming rôle. The thing couldn't be visualized. She was, at the time of his leaving, a slight, buoyant creature—a slim creature of leaping spirits. His father already had begun to get heavy —a squarely built man, full of big business and a leaning at night for a quiet book and an easy chair.

She was youth; and he was middle age. She was full of life, of mad impulses, longing, and timidity; his father calm with the knowledge of years.

He caught himself wishing that he had not used the past year and a half in touring continental Europe—and then wondering why, if he did not love the girl, he would thus cut away the most interesting

months of his life. As he neared his destination he was seized with a growing concern at meeting her. What would he say? Wouldn't his very bearing savor of reproach—a reproach he had no right to display? A word—half an oath, half a prayer—escaped him.

A turn in the glistening road brought him within sight of the house, a great, white, rambling affair, which lay well back in a wonderful locust grove. Unconsciously he halted. This was his home; it had been calling him with ever-increasing urge for weeks. He had longed to wander again through the acres it dominated, to lounge before the great fireplaces, and in the tiny, cluttered room he called his "fort." All this he had wanted mightily—and now that he had reached his goal, he was reluctant to enter.

Slowly he began to climb the winding grade which led to the great veranda. Once at the door he paused, and then, angry at his hesitancy, lifted and let fall the shining knocker: it gave out a note, half wooden, half metallic.

The door was opened by a plump old woman. A relief so tremendous assailed him that a sharp exclamation passed his lips. Only then did he realize how deep was his fear that Lois would be the one to meet him.

"Hello! Aunt Sophy," he said. Every one called Mrs. Trowbridge Aunt Sophy.

She gazed at him, unbelief written in her face. A fragile pink tinted her cheeks—and then fled, leaving her doubly pale.

"Hal!" she stammered. "Hal!"

He took her in his arms and kissed her, for she had mothered him all his life.

"Well, Aunt Sophy, do I get in?" In her amazement she had kept him in the doorway.

And once in the hall, "Oh, Hal! If you only knew how—" As if suddenly struck by a terrifying thought, she stopped, and then, to Hal's great distress, she began very softly to cry.

She followed him presently to his room.

"You got our letters right along?" Old Mrs. Trowbridge's voice held a beseeching note.

"Up until two months ago." And noting the frightened, helpless look which crept into her eyes, he laid his hands on her shoulders. "Don't try to tell me, Aunt Sophy. I know." And he told her of his meeting with the old station-agent at the depot.

From the pocket of her starched, white apron, she drew a handkerchief: with it she dabbed her eyes.

"My poor Hal."

Her attitude was so precisely identical with that of the old depot-master that, in spite of his misery, Hal laughed.

"Why—poor Hal?"

"I—I don't know. You two were always together—were so close before you went away. She did nothing but talk 'Hal' the first few years. And then she stopped." Her clear old eyes left his face. "I thought it was because she had become a woman, and was beginning to—to"—she groped for the word—"to realize—things."

"And it was merely because she was no longer interested." A slight bitterness crept into his voice.

Mrs. Trowbridge met him with brave eyes.

"I don't know," she said queerly.

"You don't know what?"

"I don't know whether or not she had stopped being interested."

Mrs. Trowbridge finished up with a slight gasp—as if she had overstepped the mark.

Hal paced restlessly to the window and stared out into the growing dusk. "If—" he halted abruptly. There was a sleigh coming up the drive. "Here is father." His voice shook with an almost imperceptible tremor.

"He must have come up on the other road—and drove over."

With a swift stride he came beside her. "Where is Lois?"

"She's over to Maude Ranscome's. She—she'll be home to dinner." She turned toward the doorway—but once on the threshold she paused. "Are you coming down; or will I tell him to—to come up?"

He caught at the opportunity for a mo-

ment or two, alone. "I'll be down—directly."

When she had gone he dropped into a chair. His father had, of course, taken the L. and D., because the other route had offered a chance of the two meeting. It proved that, like the others, the older man was uncertain what effect the news would have on him—Hal—and in consequence was glad to escape the telling. Hal, slumped deep in the broad-armed chair and stared perplexedly ahead. It was utterly unlike his father, to—

With an impatient exclamation he got to his feet and started for the staircase.

John Hammond, as Hal entered the living-room, was pacing before the fireplace; his dark head with its sprinkling of gray sunk forward reflectively on his chest. It occurred to Hal, with a curious inner disturbance, that this man, with his square, vigorous frame and alert stride, was indeed not old.

The other turned and saw him in the doorway. And then they had met in the center of the room with hands tightly clasped. Both were very white and silent and glad.

"We've missed you, Hal," was all his father said.

As they, seated before the fire, talked about his long absence, it flashed on Hal that his former despondency had somehow flown. He was conscious now of an intense desire to make the situation as easy as possible for his father. They had talked, only generally, of Lois, with the result that the older man was showing an ever-increasing agitation.

Hal wondered uncomfortably if the other were waiting for him to speak. Had Aunt Sophy—a dull flush crept into his cheeks. His father *knew;* Aunt Sophy had told him—and he was miserably uncertain of what lay behind Hal's silence.

He got to his feet and crossed the intervening space.

"I've been so busy telling experiences that I've neglected to congratulate you."

His father grasped his outstretched hand and stared, without a word, into his face.

"Hal." He broke the long pause with a quiet voice. "Hal, I purposely avoided coming up from the city with you this afternoon. I want to tell you why."

Hal laughed: he felt immediately that it was a pretty successful laugh, too; and sank again into his chair.

"You wanted some one else to break the news of your engagement?"

His father nodded. "How did you know?" he asked with a certain tenseness.

"Every one seems to fear the effect the news will have on me. I conclude, naturally, that you are obsessed in a similar way." He leaned forward. "Dad, would you mind telling me—for all of them—the reason for such concern in my case?"

When his father spoke it was almost to ignore his question.

"Several weeks after—after it happened—the engagement, I mean—I suddenly wondered whether or not you had felt a regard—whether or not you were in love with Lois." His eyes burned deep into Hal's own. "I have had no rest since," he added simply.

"When I was a boy, I used to tell you things. Perhaps you will remember. I think it was because you played with me as if you were a boy yourself." Hal, in his earnestness, arose, and, with engaging candor, confronted the man who listened so eagerly. "I think, therefore, you will believe me now, when I say—I've never thought of Lois in that light."

His father got to his feet and caught him by the shoulders. In his face there showed a great relief.

"You can't know what it means for me to hear that," he said.

CHAPTER II.

LITTLE LOIS.

IT was while Hal was dressing for dinner that Lois came in.

He heard his father greet her in the hall below, and without stopping to reason why, he slipped out of his room and peered down the wide staircase to view their meeting. The girl's back was toward him, but he could see they were talking easily. His father spoke his name, and he heard the girl let go a soft exclamation. He slid

back to his room. It was only then that he realized what lay back of his somewhat questionable action.

He wanted to see—he put it to himself thus crudely—the manner in which these two would meet.

It came to him with dull insistence, that he had not been in the strictest sense of the word, truthful. He had told his father that he had never thought of Lois as a wife. In the matter of words, it was true enough. He had never put the thing to himself thus concretely; but hadn't he, subconsciously, understood it through the years of his youth and early manhood? It was like a tiny spark growing quietly, unnoticed, into a flame.

He caught himself wishing that his meeting with Lois would take place before a third person—his father, or Mrs. Trowbridge, or both. It would be best to wait until just before the dinner-hour to go down again. There was a peculiar security in the presence of numbers. But security—real or fancied—was denied him.

He met Lois at the top of the stairway. He had come out of his room as the girl, running up lightly, had mounted the last step. The meeting was so unexpected that both, instinctively, halted.

"Oh, Hal!" she breathed. Her hands stretched toward him compellingly.

He caught her close, and she, clinging, unashamed, met his lips.

"I'm so glad you're back," she said muffledly.

It seemed to him that above the unspeakable pounding of his heart he caught a hint of appeal in her voice. He tried in vain to hold his own voice steady when he replied.

"I'm glad to get home, Lois."

There was a tear on her cheek as she stepped away, and a few clear drops trembling still on her lashes. She had become very beautiful. Hal wondered, as he took her amazedly in, at the mere physical pain he was enduring.

She was not large, and yet she gave a curious impression of strength.

Her early buoyancy had given way to something quieter—a virility that showed in her every move. Her dark and sometime rebellious curls were gathered up on her small head—except where a defiant, blue-black ringlet, here and there, had slipped its bounds.

"I suppose you've heard about—about—"

"Yes," he said quite gently.

She turned on him a pair of unfathomable blue eyes.

"He has been so good to me—all these years—I—I—"

"Yes?"

"I felt as if—I—"

"I've no right to expect an explanation, Lois." He could have cried aloud as he realized the clumsiness of the remark.

She whitened slowly, and her face, which had held a queer expectancy, grew rigid. Then, without a word, she turned and made her way down the stairway.

"Lois! I—"

She wheeled when half-way down the flight.

"Aren't you coming to dinner?" she asked lightly.

He was thankful when the meal was finished. Afterward he remembered that he had laughed and talked a great deal with Lois—and that his father had looked with great content on this seeming evidence of good spirits.

It was late when he again reached his room, but he did not prepare directly for bed. He peered from the window and followed the windings of the white moonlit road down the valley. It was very beautiful—he thought absently. To-morrow he would tramp around and again get familiar with the old haunts. The thought proved to be full of pain. He had planned to have Lois accompany him to the places they had both, a few years back, frequented.

Rather wearily he drew back. "Little Lois," he murmured, "is a woman." The color surged into his dark cheeks. "A beautiful woman," he said aloud.

The morning dawned clear and still. It was scarcely light when Hal descended to the floor below, but he found Lois and his father at the breakfast table.

"Just in time, son," his father greeted him, and then noticing Hal's astonishment

at the early appearance of the girl, he chuckled: "Oh, she generally has a day's work finished by this time. Sit down."

As he complied, Lois smiled from across the table. "How did it feel to sleep once more in the old house?" she asked softly.

"Great!" he lied. He had not slept any worth mentioning. It came to him that he was becoming dangerously adept in the art of prevarication.

"I won't be able to get home again until to-morrow night." His father pushed back from his plate. "You'll have to make up for your long absence by amusing Lois for a few days."

Involuntarily, Hal lifted his eyes to the girl's face. She smiled, it seemed to him, reassuringly.

"I thought," he said with some hesitancy, "I would go down with you and get in harness. I rather hoped you would need me."

An evident delight was visible in the older man. "I need you all right; but there's no great hurry. I'll be out of town to-day and possibly to-morrow."

"Peter is waiting with the sleigh." The girl was facing the window.

Hal looked at his watch. "It's a trifle after the hour. I suppose you use the same old seven thirty?"

"Yes." The older man nodded his thanks to the man who had brought him his great coat. "Why?" he asked, struggling into the sleeves, "don't you two do some skating? I noticed the kids had cleaned a good stretch of the pond as I drove past yesterday."

It fairly frightened Hall to find himself so eager to accept the suggestion.

"Fine," he said. "Unless it's too cold for Lois," he added doubtfully.

The girl smiled a disclaimer. "It will be splendid. There's not a hint of any wind."

"Well—good-by. No, don't get up," as Hal made as if to move. "Aunt Sophy will let me out. She always does." And with a friendly smile at both, he stamped out into the hall.

It was past nine o'clock when they reached the pond, for it was a full mile from the house, and despite the cold, they had not hurried. There was that piece of land Hal's father had given him, a three-acre lot, bounded on one side by a swift-running brook—which they must survey.

"What a dandy spot for a house." And then he had flamed scarlet.

"We'd better go. It's too cold to stand," she stammered.

The ice was smooth and hard from the continued frost. He adjusted her skates, and then watched her glide swiftly away. She skated free as a boy, her strong, short-skirted figure slightly inclined like that of a runner waiting for the shot.

He presently bore down on her with fierce speed, and then when within a few feet, finished up in a shower of splintered ice.

She laughed at the cry of alarm which had escaped her.

"So you're up to old tricks, sir."

"Lois—isn't it glorious?" His dark eyes sparkled into the blue of her own.

She nodded, speechless. And then, with a swift curving stroke, she was behind him. He felt a small, gloved hand grasp him on either side, just above the hip. And then her voice sounded close to his ear.

"Strike out, Hal! Fast! You remember the way—we did—before—we'd skate on—and on."

Slowly at first, but with ever-growing speed, they swayed rhythmically into stride. The pond was long and narrow, and of the upper half only a path had been cleared of the snow. Into the comparative narrowness of the last stretch they dizzily sped. Once at the end he turned sharply, and the girl, glowing, gleeful, brought up at his side in a swirl of flying snow.

"Oh!" she panted, "if you knew how I've missed you? Nobody else can skate fast enough," she added hurriedly.

"Shall we try it again?" There was a spot of red in either cheek. He wanted again the joy of that mad journey—with the clutch of her hands at his side.

"Yes—no! Wait till I can breathe! Isn't it wonderful? We shall stay all morning."

He laughed. "Remember—it's a long walk home!"

"We should have brought a sled. Then you could have dragged me—like you—"

"How you did bully me?"

"Did I really?"

"Horribly." Then to his consternation he saw that somehow he had hurt her.

"Is that the reas—" She wheeled and skated slowly away.

Two arrowlike strokes and he was beside her.

"Why, Lois—Lois, you must have known I wasn't serious!"

She lifted a face which had grown suddenly radiant.

"Weren't you—*really*, this time?"

"Lord, no!"

"I thought maybe—" she stopped. "Come—we'll try it again!"

She seemed to be tireless that morning; as for him, he wondered whether or not he would ever again be so absolutely happy. She raced him; pelted him with soft snow, and inveigled him finally into an improvised game of hockey. It was while playing at the last, with the rough sticks he had cut out of the bush which fringed the banks, that she hit him a sounding thwack on the shin.

The pain was sharp, but the comical yell which threatened to burst forth, never passed his lips. The girl, white to the lips, was staring at him out of wide eyes.

"Hal, I've hurt you!"

"Not a little bit," he assured her.

"I'll never play it again," she cried with sudden passion. She took the offending stick in both hands and broke it viciously across her knee. The effort cost her her balance, and she went down in a crumpled heap on the ice, which set them both to laughing.

But on him her sudden flare-up had a quieting effect, for it sent his mind leaping back to an incident of their childhood. He had been boxing in the barn with a boy chum. His adversary had, with a swift-telling jab, brought the blood gushing from his nostrils. She, at the time, crying with rage, had sprung at his opponent and fairly smothered that astonished youngster under a fusillade of wicked blows. "How dare you make him bleed?" she had panted.

He remembered how, in boyish disgust at a female taking his part, he had joined his erstwhile antagonist in upbraiding her; and also how, later in the day, in silent recognition of the motive behind her disgraceful exhibition, he had placed in her courageous little hands a boxwood top she long had coveted.

She had always refused to have him hurt. She had fought against that possibility ever—she was fighting against it now.

The wondrous significance of it all sank deep into his heart and set his very flesh to singing. It was a swift, unbelievable glimmer of the truth, and it left him stunned. It came on him, too, like a monstrous, unsupportable burden, that he must not speak, from his new knowledge.

In all honor his lips must remain locked.

In his travail he involuntarily lifted his eyes to her face. It was a distinct shock to find her queerly regarding him. They were by now skating slowly, side by side. As their eyes met, her face went crimson and then white.

"You're thinking what a despicable temper I've got!"

He shook his head. It would have taken too much courage to speak just then.

"You were!"

"I was thinking," he burst out recklessly, "that you never could stand to see me hurt!"

"Oh!" Her pace increased perceptibly. "Well, some one had to look out for you. You were always smashing yourself up," she said over her shoulder.

He tried to fall in with her lightness.

"If I remember correctly, you needed quite a bit of watching yourself."

"What a pair we must have made."

"Do you remember the time you got stuck in the old cherry-tree, hanging by your knees. You had to holler for—"

"I did not!" she blazed.

He laughed. "Well, maybe—"

"Yes, I did," she said suddenly. "Do you remember when you smashed your finger lugging that big rock up to the cave to make the fireplace?"

"Lord, yes." He pulled off his glove and eyed the sometime crippled digit solicitously. "It hurts yet."

She caught his arm with sudden impetuousness.

"Hal, let's go and see if it's there yet."

"What? The finger?"

"Silly!"

"It will make us late for lunch."

"Such things didn't use to bother you much."

"You'll have to make our peace with Aunt Sophy."

"Coward! Come!"

CHAPTER III.

A GREAT LITTLE FIXER.

THREE minutes later they scaled a three-railed fence and headed up the slope of a ten-acre field toward the real climb beyond. Here the snow, untouched by travel, lay deep and soft, and the pair, when they had reached the crest of the sharp ascent, stood slightly panting. As if by previous agreement, they both had wheeled in their tracks and now stood side by side, absorbing the view their vantage offered.

Across the valley and atop the further ridge the stiff, leafless trees stood out on a certain bold promontory, like a stubborn pompadour on some colossal head. Just below, and seeming ridiculously near, was the lake they had left, a long, white oval with the thread of the cleared course running lengthwise through the center.

"The lake," said Lois laughing, "looks like a platter with a crack in it. I'm going to bring Lydia up to glimpse this view."

"And who is Lydia?"

"Lydia Marley is a girl I met at school. You'll find her very—well—different."

"Different?"

"Yes, she—says things." She paused thoughtfully. "She was taking a special course—in art."

"I take it, then, that she is coming on a visit."

"She is quite a bit older than—either of us." She spoke the least bit abruptly.

"Are you trying to warn me against the girl, *Lydia?*" he laughed.

"No." They had paused for their survey on the edge of a pine grove, and now without further word she turned and led the way through the wood.

They presently rounded the ice-mantled flank of a tremendous boulder and plunged beneath the shelflike entrance into a shallow recess. The cave, years before, had been but a great niche in the side of the hill; but the snows and rains of several decades had thatched over the place with a medley of rocks and débris until it had become a sort of gigantic pigeon-hole.

A foot or two past the entrance they halted, while Hal, with his cap, dusted the thin snow which had filtered in from off the remains of a rude fireplace.

When he had done he pointed funnily to a good-sized stone which alone formed one side of the childish work.

"There's the beast. How the deuce did I lug that thing in?"

"You were always stronger than the other boys." She smiled wickedly. "You use to like me to tell you that."

He chuckled. "I do yet."

A trifle later, in the furthest recess of the cave, he picked up what had once been an air-rifle. Now the little weapon was so rotten with years that it fell apart in his hands. So occupied was he with the flood of memories his find had evoked that he was only dimly conscious that the girl had also stooped to the ground.

"Look, Lois!" he said. "And I looked for this thing for two months! Remember?"

But the girl, without a reply, held to view a small round object. It was a horseshoe nail bent to fit the finger, a rusted, age-eaten trinket.

"Why, that's the ring I—" He stopped, for the girl was fumbling helplessly for her handkerchief.

"I don't—know why it should make me cry," she said frightenedly.

She wheeled and made for the mouth of the cave. "Come!" Her voice sounded sharp over her shoulder. "We're late now."

Neither of them spoke during the long climb down to the road, and then the girl, without changing the pace, turned toward him.

"I think you'll like her," she said.

His face revealed the blankness of his mind. "Who?"

"Lydia."

"Oh!"

He had completely forgotten Lydia.

When the slender, fur-clad Miss Marley stepped, two days later, from the train at Union, she landed literally into the outstretched arms of the waiting Lois.

"Oh, Lydia, I was so afraid you couldn't come."

Lydia kissed her—and then held her away.

"Ravishing as ever," she said critically; "but a trifle more ethereal. I always had an idea that naked little man-child with the arrows would shoot an extra one into you for luck." And then noting the flaming face of the other: "Don't mind me, Lois. I'm an awful brute."

"I don't mind—Lydia," returned Lois confusedly.

"That," thought Lydia, "was a lie." And then aloud: "Of course you don't, my dear."

She let Lois pilot her across the platform and into the waiting sleigh. The boy, at the horse's head, released his charge, and in another instant they were flying smoothly past the pines which lined the road.

"Oh, Lydia, I'm so glad you're here." Lois for a second took her attention from the road to give it to the figure beside her. "What a wonderful coat—you extravagant girl. You look charming in it—though."

Lydia laughed with real amusement. "Why is it when a woman passes thirty you youngsters keep telling her how splendid she looks."

"But Lydia, you are—"

"Certainly I am. That's the reason I'm so successful."

"Then you are doing well?"

"Splendidly. I paint very bad pictures, and sell them very readily." She laughed again into the astonished eyes of the other. "It may not be good art, but it's certainly good salesmanship."

"Just what do you mean?" asked Lois blankly.

"I mean that I trade on the weakness of man, to put it roughly. So do you—though perhaps less consciously."

"Why, Lydia!"

"How shocking—eh?" Her musical laugh pealed out. "But I'm at least honest about it—with you. That should again gain me a credit."

"Do you mean—"

"Just this: if it's necessary to flatter a man to sell a picture—why, I flatter him. Sometimes I merely have to smile. Once," she said reflectively, "I cried. Those few tears—I don't begrudge them—got me a glorious price."

"But Lydia," protested Lois, "you're getting money without giving a return."

"Thanks." She faced Lois with pseudo indignance. "When you buy from a retailer, you're paying for the goods plus the price of his effort to sell them; when I market a picture I charge a price that includes the cost of the salesman's effort; only I'm the salesman."

Lois eyed her solemnly. "Lydia, you may be able to fool men—but you can't fool me—I'm a woman, and I know you're—good."

"Humph." Lydia shrugged her shoulders. "Let's talk about something else. Your love affair, for instance. What did you do," she demanded, "the first time he kissed you?"

Lois visibly started, sat rigid. "Who?" she asked with difficulty.

"Who? Why the man you're going to marry, who else?"

"Why—he—he didn't—"

"He didn't what?"

"Kiss me," blazed Lois indignantly.

"Oh!"

To be liked, one as a rule, must be hopelessly ordinary! This is in no wise difficult; one has merely to listen with great readiness, smile often and at the right moment, and speak well of one's neighbors—without strict regard for the truth. Lydia was universally liked; also she was not ordinary, she was simply acute.

Having lost both of her parents before she had reached her teens, Lydia was taken over by a maiden aunt, a good and stupid lady in whom there quickly developed, even

at that early day, a nervous awe at the precocity of her small charge. Lydia in this environment came rapidly to the conclusion that goodness and stupidity were, in a fashion, synonymous; and realizing, matter of factly, the mental gulf that yawned between this dear, obtuse spinster and herself, argued with some show of reason that she herself must be very bad indeed.

Her ability to pierce through, with calm discernment, the fog of camouflage and show, that blanketed a number of her associates, was during her girlhood a source of real distress. Later this power to locate actualities afforded the girl her keenest delight in life.

When she met Lois at the college where her palpitating aunt, with visible relief, had shipped her, she, with characteristic spontaneity, had labeled her new friend the nicest girl she—Lydia—had ever met. Here was one she argued without guile. One who was simple, intelligent, and beautiful—and not, in the most abused sense of the word, deep. And so their early acquaintance had, in consequence, ripened into something finer than mere intimacy.

During those school days Lydia had learned from her new friend all concerning her early life, her guardian, Mrs. Trowbridge and Hal and the hamlet of Union. Wherefore Lydia, being a thoughtful young person, had pieced out the information of the trusting Lois with certain subtle deductions of her own, until the pattern of the latter's affairs stood glaringly revealed.

Lois's letter announcing her engagement to Hal's father had given Lydia serious doubts concerning her own infallibility—for the message which the little missive had carried set completely at naught the older girl's conclusions.

It was when the first note was followed by a second, which urged her rather vehemently, she thought, to spend a fortnight at Union, Lydia, with celerity, assented. She would go and she would see.

It seemed to her as they drove through the fine winter afternoon that she was beginning to see already. Lois was not riotously happy—a child could sense so much. She had not mentioned the name of her fiancé even once. Lydia stole a sidelong glance at the girl who held the reins. Yes, Lois was actually thinner, yet somehow more beautiful. It came to Lydia, with sudden shock, that the girl was more beautiful because she was sad.

"How's the son?" she asked. "There is a son, isn't there—a boy?" It struck her immediately that it might be cruel to ask that question.

"Yes." Lois visibly faltered. "He isn't a boy. He is three years older than myself."

"I remember. He went to Oxford—or Cambridge, didn't he?"

"Yes. He's home now."

"I seem to recollect that you were great friends once."

"We are yet."

Lydia let go a careless little chuckle. "Do you know I had, years ago, builded up the neatest romance about you two." Now she knew she was cruel.

"Hal," Lois managed to articulate, "was always like a brother to me."

Lydia, musing on the other's rejoinder, wondered how, if Hal was like a brother, Lois's feelings toward his father could be anything but filial.

"When is the happy day?" she said.

"Why—soon." She turned a pair of tragic pleading eyes on her visitor. "Oh, Lydia, will you stay till it's—over?"

"I'll do anything you want—honey!" Lydia's voice could soften wonderfully.

Lois took the reins in her left hand, and with the other brushed her eyes.

"You—you're a dear, Lydia!" she said gratefully.

To Lydia the evening, in spite of the pain in Lois's deep eyes, was delightful. Here was a company of people, a situation, which offered to her keen and sympathetic self, something to analyze, something with which to grapple. Hal's father had somewhat unexpectedly returned, and Lydia, to her astonishment, had immediately liked him.

She liked the clumsy efforts of the older man to keep his joy and pride in his son from becoming apparent to any others. She liked the calm, courteous tone with which he addressed Aunt Sophy; his willingness

to shake off the burden of the day and enter into the subdued jollity of the evening; his essentially masculine grunt of contentment as he, directly following dinner, sank into the snug, yielding seat of a great easy chair.

But that which gave her the deepest satisfaction was his bearing toward Lois. He was delightfully paternal.

"It strikes me," she mused as she made ready for bed, "that there's something about this whole business that needs fixing—and I'm a great little fixer." There, in the solitude of the cheerful room, she let go a queer little sound. "Some little fixer!"

Hal, she thought, was rather magnificent with his dark, strong face and wonderful body; but in the scheme, which was gradually building in her busy brain, he was something of an unknown quantity. If he were adversely affected by the turn of affairs, he had to her given no sign. She felt that he was made up of subtler stuff than the others, and to the vague challenge of her powers that he presented she gladly responded.

Yes, the principal difficulty was Hal!

She understood him well enough, despite the few hours she had known him, to realize that one of his fineness would give—could give—no inkling of what really was in his heart.

As for Lois—her rather pitiful—"Oh, Lydia, will you stay till it's over!" had been ringing in her ears for hours. Lois was consumed by a passion almost desperate in its intensity, and not for the man she was to marry. The engagement, Lydia thought, must have been a hideous accident.

The man, Hal's father, was charming, though. She caught herself acknowledging that his mature reflectiveness was more appealing to her than the more vehement ideas of the younger man. She blushed and moved hastily away from the mirror in which she had caught a glimpse of her flaming face.

"I guess," she whispered later in the dark, "that I'll have to grab off papa myself!"

And then, with the serene celerity of one who had come to a great and good decision, Lydia went to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

"A DEEP ONE."

HAL the following morning was met in lower hall by an agitated Mrs. Trowbridge.

"It wouldn't take a wizard, Aunt Sophy, to see that you have something on your mind," he laughed. "What is it?"

"It's that girl—Lydia Marley." Mrs. Trowbridge radiated mystery. "She's a deep one—she is!" She shook her head pityingly at Hal's evident amusement.

"Why, Aunt Sophy, she's the greatest fun I've ever bumped into!"

"She's a deep one!" reiterated the other stubbornly.

"She is extraordinarily clever."

Mrs. Trowbridge glanced with great caution up and down the hall and moved over closer.

"This morning," she whispered, "I had to go up to Lois's room. While I was there *she* came in. After they had talked a minute Lois told her she'd have to be away the best part of the day. She promised that helpless Mrs. Stanard to mind her baby so she (Mrs. Stanard) could go to Belton. I don't know what that woman would do if she—"

"Yes, Aunt Sophy, but that isn't—"

"If she had three or four more youngsters," continued Mrs. Trowbridge firmly. "Wait! I'm coming to Miss Lydia," as Hal again attempted to break in. "That foolish Lois told her that you would look out for her, all right! And what do you think that—that woman said?"

Hal shook his head after grave deliberation.

"She said," burst out Aunt Sophy, "that she'd been trying to cook up a scheme to get that beautiful Hal to herself."

Hal would have cut out his tongue rather than laugh at the moment.

"Yes—but—"

"That beautiful Hal! What a thing for a—a woman to say. She's considerably

older than you, Hal." Her tone betrayed a real anxiety.

"Yes, Aunt Sophy—but you've no idea how wise I've become," he murmured soberly.

When she had gone he laughed long and silently. Aunt Sophy was exercising the same fierce guardianship that she had always displayed. He was far from resenting her interference in his affairs: rather it touched him, for it was unmistakably born out of her love.

Later in the morning, as he waited while Lydia made ready for the tramp on which they had agreed, the words of the old lady recurred to him. "She's a deep one—she is!" She was deep—and clever. Hal felt a vague belief that her presence would go far toward making the next few weeks endurable.

"I've been warned against you," he laughed as they struck briskly up the hard, white road.

Her clear, gray eyes swept his face. "Aunt Sophy?" she asked.

He nodded with mock severity.

"She says you're—deep!"

Lydia looked thoughtfully ahead. "I'll have to try to line her up on my side."

"On your side?"

He noticed that his query had brought a faint pink into her smooth cheeks.

"It bothers me to be disliked," she said composedly.

"Oh, but she doesn't dislike you! She is simply concerned about me. To her I'm still a stripling, and therefore unable to cope with a woman of your beauty and brains. Can't you see she's paying you a tremendous compliment?"

"But," asked Lydia demurely, "if I've got beauty and brains—and she doesn't dislike me, why should she object to my capturing you?"

Behind her lightness he was conscious of her subtlety. It made him cautious in his rejoinder.

"Perhaps it's just the Fabian policy—of prudence."

Lydia Marley ignored his reply. "Maybe," she continued, "that she has other plans for you."

"I'm honestly at loss to know what her 'plan' could be." He caught himself flushing.

"Perhaps an effort on my part to learn her intentions in regard to you would be the wise thing. It may be"—she smiled—"that we could pool our plans."

"Ah! Then you have plans?" he cut in quickly.

"Am I not scheming to get you in my toils?"

He grinned his delight in her nimble wit. "But that's Aunt Sophy's fearful idea. Don't you see—you are pulling directly apart, and, that being the case, of what benefit would it be for you two to pool your plans?"

"You are asking me to show my hand," she laughed.

"Then"—he persisted—"you have a hand and you are convinced that it doesn't wholly conflict with the one Aunt Sophy holds."

Lydia lifted the subject back to what she evidently considered safer territory.

"I wonder what gave her the idea that I was dangerous," she mused.

"Didn't you only this morning speak of me as 'that beautiful Hal'?"

Again her quick glance covered him, but she gave no hint of perturbation.

"You are rather splendid—you know."

"Am I?" he chuckled. "I didn't know."

"I quite wonder that Lois, poor child, didn't fall in love with you!"

Despite his control, her daring considerably startled him.

"Poor child?" he managed to articulate.

"Oh! I meant that a person of her comparative susceptibility might have been rather bowled over by—by one of your—well, magnificence."

"It's just as well—isn't it—that she wasn't?" He felt his reply to be stammering and weak. This slim, good-looking woman, without a doubt, had an inkling of how matters stood with him; well—what was she after? With something like desperation he pulled himself together.

"Oh, you mean," she was saying, "because of your father's interest—"

"Indeed, no. I mean simply that it leaves *me* free for you to—so to speak—work on."

"And therefore to worry poor Aunt Sophy half to death! Shame!"

"But I told Aunt Sophy that she *needn't* worry—that I'd grown very wise."

"She probably didn't believe it."

"Not in the least," he chuckled.

Under his guidance they presently turned off the highway and struck across the field he and Lois had traversed a few days before.

"Lois spoke of showing you the view you'll get at the top of this climb, but she won't mind, I guess, if I anticipate her."

"It's perfectly wonderful!" she breathed a bit later. And then her intense practicality leaped again to the fore. "I'll paint it and sell the thing to—let me see—old Fairfax, I guess. I suppose I'll have to prod him some."

His laughter rang out spontaneously into the clear, cold air.

"I begin to think Aunt Sophy was right?" he gasped.

"Right in concluding that you were in danger?"

"Oh, Lord, no! I mean about you being clever—yes—and deep!"

"Lois thinks I'm — impossible!" said Lydia reflectively.

"It doesn't interfere then with her caring for you."

She shook her head in acknowledgment. "I think that is because I'm so immensely fond of her. I would do anything," she added simply, "to keep her from being unhappy."

"My father is a very good—" He stopped, for his remark, as did her own, seemed to imply that there was a chance for Lois to be miserable.

"He is — wonderful!" Again a slight rush of color entered her cheeks.

"If Aunt Sophy had heard that," he laughed, "she would be doubly vigilant."

Her slender, graceful figure moved a few paces down the slope.

"Shall we go?" she called back over her shoulder.

During the remainder of the descent they talked very little. It occurred to Hal that she was thinking rather intensely about something; for her retorts from sparkling, daring *repartee* had dwindled to mere monosyllables. He wondered why he had not resented her evident attempts to probe him.

It came to him with bewildering certainty that he was willing, even eager, to put his case unreservedly into her hands. But, why?

Was it because of a vague idea that she could help him? What help could she—could any one offer that would not be in the nature of a campaign against his father? The thought filled him with deep despondency.

He began to doubt the wisdom of remaining at Union—to stay where every landmark held an association, a memory, which he must not harbor. The fact of Lois's unhappiness—for he was convinced that she was unhappy—made any thought of remaining all the more unendurable. A slow resentment gripped him at the mental picture of the once-joyous girl drifting inexorably into a union from which every atom of her youthful body shrank. Was her sacrifice right? Was his renunciation even sensible? Then the strong quizzical face of his father flashed into his mind's-eye. If it had been any one else but the best chap in the world!

A groan escaped him, and, startled by the sound into the present, he lifted his eyes to the girl at his side. He found her gravely regarding him.

"Poor Hal!" And again softly: "Poor Hal!"

Unconsciously they had halted. There was no use of further dissimulation—that he knew. His drawn, white face, with its lines of misery, must drive home to her the truth.

"I did not want you—any one—to know," he stammered hoarsely.

Her arm went round his shoulder. "I know. Oh, Hal, if only I could help you!"

"Come!" He shook her off roughly. "There's no good in my playing the calf!"

"The one obstacle," she murmured reflectively as they trudged on, "is, of course, your father."

"It's quite enough, isn't it?" But his cynicism was followed by a rush of contrition. "Forgive me! I am grateful—and you're really helping me now."

"Oh, swear a little, if you want!" Her warm eyes covered him with their sympathy. "It probably can't better matters any, but it might help you."

"Lois must never know!" he burst out after a pause. "You won't—"

She stopped him. "And a minute ago you told me I was clever," she said with real reproach.

"I think I better go—right off. To-morrow, perhaps," he said.

It came to him even in his misery that he was leaning on her—that his remark had been really a question.

"I can understand why you would want to go. But—don't—just yet, anyway."

"What good can come out of my staying, of seeing her day after day—"

"Perhaps no good. But—stay!" Her eyes, no longer calm but pleading, held him with a curious fascination. "Oh, trust me! Please trust me!"

He strode quickly ahead and then stopped and waited for her to come up.

"I do trust you—somehow," he said brokenly.

Later he was the least bit angry at his weakness—as he put it. He should have brazened the thing out. Yet he could not deny that since the telling he had felt immeasurably better. In Lydia's search for the truth there had been much impudence—but also there had been an underlying assurance that carried its own powerful justification. Then later yet there came that five-minute talk with Lois: it had left him filled with mingled grief and exultation.

They had found themselves together in the library, and he had taken the opportunity to tell her of his tramp over the hills with Lydia.

"So you see"—he finished—"that I've basely deprived you of the pleasure of showing off our most inspiring landscape."

Her face showed her conflicting emotions. "You—were up—there? Did you show her"—her lips were quivering—"the cave?"

"No!" The denial burst from him swiftly. "No! I—"

"Oh!" Her face was glowing wonderfully. "Oh—that's all right!" and then, as if frightened by her own incoherence, she turned and fled.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE BRINK.

BEFORE the end of the week Lydia, it seemed to Hal, had made herself indispensable to them all. Even Mrs. Trowbridge had grudgingly acknowledged that she "was good company" and that "she had a way with her." She was ever having a friendly tilt with his father and the man with his clear, blunt, and really logical insight had often proved the victor.

It had occurred to Hal who, despite his trouble, had remained an interested listener, that in several of the discussions she had not pressed her case with characteristic vigor. Perhaps a deeper pleasure than winning her point lay in witnessing the boyish delight of her adversary when he felt he had scored.

Yes, decidedly the advent of Lydia Marley had been a happy one for them all, but Hal, despite his acknowledged gratitude at her efforts to comfort, felt he could not drift on as he was doing. It was unthinkable.

The nearness of Lois, her presence in the same room, would set his very pulses throbbing.

Time and again he wondered at the physical torture he was suffering. He must get away! But would his going afford him any relief? It would, at any rate, keep him from playing the fool—the dishonorable fool!

He had approached his father, had spoken of his readiness to enter the latter's business, but the older man had held him good-naturedly off.

"Wait for a couple of weeks, Hal. You will get plenty of it. I don't mind telling you that I anticipate taking things easy when you're thoroughly broken in."

"But, father, I'm keen on it. I'm anxious to—"

"Sure, I know. But you'll find, though, that there's damn little joy in the office. The pleasure comes only after you feel yourself master of all the intricacies. Be-

fore then it's — well, it's nerve-wearing drudgery."

That for the time had ended it. Hal had feared to press his father lest by his insistence he should give the other an idea of his extremity. But the next night there happened an incident which set him wildly in search of an excuse to get away—to put between Lois and himself sufficient distance to make impossible a recurrence of his altogether outrageous lapse.

Lois had proposed that they take advantage of the bright moonlight and go coasting. To the scheme Lydia and himself had readily assented—to the apparent, though momentary, chagrin of his father, who, at the time, lay sprawled in a comfortable chair and enjoying hugely a spirited argument with their redoubtable visitor.

The older man, after long uncertainty, shook his head. "Not me," he said, his eyes wandering contently over his reclined frame. "This chair has tempted me and I've weakly fallen. Besides, I've got my slippers on." Lydia, by the way, had brought him the slippers.

"I'd just as leave stay in—and fight," she said as he demurred.

But to this John Hammond would not listen. "You go. We'll have it out when you come in. Anyway, your going will give me an opportunity to perfect my case," he chuckled.

And so the three slid into the white, silent night towing a bob-sled, upon which Hal, in an orgy of repairing, had spent the greater part of the morning. The brilliant, low-hanging moon painted their shadows as they walked in grotesque blackness on the silver snow. They were part of the great unreality, it seemed to Hal.

"The earth," cut in Lydia softly, "is nothing but a fancy. *This* is real."

"There is none save us"—Lois's voice was dreamy—"except the great winged monsters that crash through the forest seeking their prey. "We'll go on day by day and sleep at night in the caves. And our beds shall be of pine-boughs."

"And I," mused Hal, "will seek at low tide the mammoth mollusk, or, club in hand, stalk the unwary herd—that we may eat."

Lydia caught him up swiftly. "And we, your women, at dusk shall gather wood for the cooking, and when we wrangle for your favor you shall soundly beat us both. Oh, Lord—*some* job!"

"Lydia," Lois cried out half-angrily, "you've spoiled it all!"

"Excuse me!" Lydia was comically meek. "But I couldn't wish anything like that on the boy."

A quarter of a mile further and they turned sharply to the right and began ascending the hard-traveled highway which flowed over the hill to the west. Half-way to the summit the road curved sharply north and then again west, a double turn with a twenty-foot bank on either side—a result of grading a few years before.

"It strikes me," said Hal, grinning, "that this loop-the-loop is going to give us a little excitement before we're through tonight."

Lydia thoughtfully eyed the hard-packed surface they trod.

"It's fast going, too," she said. "And I don't want any 'sacred to the memory' slab over me just yet!"

Lois let go a half-indignant ejaculation. "Hal didn't find any trouble navigating this hill ten years ago."

"May he have retained his cunning. May his right hand know whither the left steereth. May he be calm in this my—" Lydia's mirth sounded out in the night. "Remember, Lois, you hauled me into this mess!"

They had all shouted with glee during that first reckless descent. Even Lydia, when they reached the bottom of the drop, was eager to try it again. Once more, at the summit, Hal paused to impress on the two the correct method of throwing their weight on the turns.

"And if you, Lois," he added, "must grab something, hold me around the waist. I need most of my arms for the wheel."

Lydia, in the rear, watched the girl with choking apprehension as she complied. She could see the latter as the bob gathered speed, slide close to the man. She could see, too, her arms go round him tightly, and the dark head in the white worsted tam-o'-shanter drop between his wide

shoulders. Lois had obeyed with a vengeance. The girl was mad!

Once at the bottom Hal proposed strainedly that they call it a night and go. To attempt again that breakneck descent, encircled by the arms of the woman he loved, would be sheer madness.

"Oh, Hal—once more!" pleaded Lois. In that vague white light he could see that her eyes were lustrous with unshed tears.

Without a word he turned and began the long ascent, his companions following silently at his heels. The utter disregard that Lois, in her passion, had shown for the presence of a third, drove it home that she must be suffering what he had found so insupportable. The thought was exquisite torment.

As he was about to take his place at the wheel, Lois grasped his arms.

"Let me take you down," she demanded.

Despite an accompanying sense of the absurdity of the thought, there flashed on him, clear and terrible, the story of Ethan Frome; where Ethan and the girl he loved, overwrought by their hopeless yearning, had sent the sled on which they were coasting into a tree at the foot of a fearful declivity.

As if she understood what lay behind his startled eyes, Lois reassuringly nodded.

"You forget—Lydia!" she murmured.

"What about Lydia?" that lady insisted.

"I'm trying to explain to Hal that because of you I'll be doubly careful."

It was clear to Hal that she had read what was in his mind, and, knowing, could see no further need of concealment.

He turned to Lydia. "Shall we risk it?" he asked lightly.

Lydia's grave, clear eyes covered them both.

"I'll try anything—once!" she said.

It was just before they had reached the second turn that Hal realized something was wrong. In place of the swift, smooth rush there had commenced a strange grinding, and the bob was working, despite the girl's visible efforts, toward the edge of the road.

Hal, who was directly behind her, shouted above the roar of their passage.

"Left, Lois! To the left!"

The girl lugged desperately at the wheel.

"I can't!" she gasped. "The rope—under the runner!"

And then, before he could reach around her to grasp the wheel, the bob, at a terrifying angle, shot up the steep incline that bordered the road. They shuddered to a halt, and, for a sickening instant, hung—and then with an ominous crash the heavy sled went over.

Hal, after describing a long arc through the air, picked himself unhurt from out a deep snowdrift. Fifty yards back Lydia, who evidently had dropped off when the bob had left the beaten track, was clambering to her feet—seemingly intact.

A paralyzing fear gripped him. "Lois!"

They found her just below the heavy sled, her white face and closed eyes upturned to the moon's pale light.

Beside the motionless girl he dropped on his knees.

"Lois! Lois!"

Unconscious of Lydia, who had limped to the spot, he gathered Lois in his arms. "Oh, my girl—my girl!" On her unresponsive eyes and lips his kisses rained.

But the need of the senseless girl brought him quickly to himself. He searched her head and body for a sign of her hurt.

"See if—if there's anything broken!" he quavered of Lydia.

"That girl," said Lydia presently, "has fainted! Rub her hands!"

Under their combined efforts, Lois, after an anxious interval, opened a pair of bewildered eyes. Unconscious yet of the ministrations of the two, she stared gropingly skyward; then, as if stunned by a horrible recollection, she let go a little moan and struggled to regain her footing.

"Hal!" she wailed. "Hal—where are you?"

Lydia leaned close. Her tears showed in her voice as she answered.

"Hal isn't hurt, Lois. Neither am I," she added with a whimsical note.

"I am here, d— Lois!" He slid an arm under her neck and gently raised her. "Oh, Lois! you're not—hurt—are you?"

"I—I don't think so." Her face dropped into her hands. "Oh, I saw you thrown—you were flying head first—"

"Yes—and I landed the same way—in five feet of snow." He laughed shakily.

In spite of her protestation that she was unhurt, Hal insisted that Lois ride home. "You, too," he added, turning to Lydia. "You were limping as you came up. I'll run you both to the house."

Professing fear of a resulting stiffness, Lydia refused. Together she and Hal bundled the unwilling Lois on the bob, and, catching up the long fateful rope, started for the house.

As they neared their destination Hal leaned very close.

"You say," he murmured jerkily, "I let—myself—go. Don't tell Lois. It would make things worse—for us—both!"

Her eyes swimming, Lydia shook her head.

"Poor Hal!" and her hand slipped along the rope and tightly closed over his own.

CHAPTER VI.

LYDIA DRIVES THE CAR.

TO Lydia the next morning, Hal, dressed for a trip, announced his intentions of leaving for the city.

"I may stay over until to-morrow," he said, refusing to meet her startled, inquiring eyes. He spoke further of looking up an old friend with whom, years before, he had entered Oxford.

Lydia met him later outside his room, where he had gone for his bag.

"Why are you going?" she asked abruptly.

The color rushed up under his bronzed skin. "Oh, I'd like to see old Billy, Lydia!"

"Don't do anything you'll feel sorry about later!" Lydia faced him, unsmiling.

He stepped in close. "Just what do you mean?"

"Men have a disposition when they are heart-sore to seek solace!" Lydia said slowly.

"What a wise little woman it is!" Despite his lightness there was an increased burning in his cheeks.

"Oh, Hal—don't—you said you'd trust me!" she blurted out.

"Don't be foolish!" His tone was brusk.

Her steady gray eyes held him. "You know whether or not I'm foolish. Please, Hal!"

He lowered his bag to the floor and grasped her hands.

"Listen, Lydia, I'm just a man! There's nothing stupendous about me. I'm simply normal. In your silly books men stay on the scene, gloriously eating their hearts out in silence! Me!—I'm running away—that's all."

"When are you coming back?"

"Maybe to-morrow."

She slipped back, her eyes shining with conviction. "I think—you'll be back to-night. I'll expect you." Looking back from the stairs toward which she had turned she called over her shoulder: "I'll be waiting for you."

She did not follow him as he descended the stairs. For a moment she lingered and then, wheeling, crossed the threshold into her own room and dropped on the couch at the window. There was much to think about.

A full hour had elapsed before she got to her feet—sixty minutes of deliberation.

"As the hero in the movie puts it: 'I'll do it!'" she whispered.

At the finish of a leisurely search she came upon Lois seated in the living-room. An open book lay on the girl's knees, but Lois was staring absently out of the window into the brilliant winter day. As Lydia approached she greeted her with a vague smile.

"What shall we do to-day, Lydia?"

Lydia sank luxuriously into a great upholstered chair. "Oh, let's talk for a while, anyway!" A smile of amusement at Lois's evident relief was successfully repressed.

"I wonder," broke in Lois irrelevently, "Why Hal went to the city."

"Oh, he's probably weary of so many petticoats! He wants, more than likely, to get out with the boys."

Lois's blue eyes lifted quickly. "Why, Hal doesn't even—drink!"

"What's that got to do with it?"

It took the other some time to digest this.

"What do men do," she asked slowly, "when they go out—as you put it?"

Lydia laughed a trifle maliciously.

"Oh, they, as a rule, get hold of a couple of girls—chorus girls—and fill them up with terrapin—and cocktails!"

Lois's features took on added gravity.

"But that would mean—more petticoats, wouldn't it?" she asked, after a lengthy pause.

"Yes—but a different kind."

"What kind?"

An expressive shrug of her shoulders accompanied Lydia's reply. "How can one tell?"

A slight pallor crept into the other's face. "Do you mean," she said strangely, "that they wouldn't be—nice?"

"Oh, they'd be nice enough—silk, perhaps!" she added with a mischievous laugh.

The color surged angrily into Lois's smooth cheeks.

"Hal is too—fine," she burst out, "to—to—" She stopped. "When is he coming back?"

"My dear Lois—do you think Hal confides his plans to me?"

She felt the blue eyes searching her with angry suspicion.

"I heard you both talking in the upper hall a few minutes before he went." Her voice was sharp with fear and distrust.

Lydia fought off an almost irresistible impulse to gather the miserable girl into her arms. "I think," she said gently, "that he'll be back to-night."

"Did he tell you so?"

It was then it flashed on Lydia that Lois was jealous—jealous of her (Lydia). Knowing the truth, the girl's imaginings were to her friend ludicrous; but the pain in Lois's eyes stifled the smile that threatened her lips.

"No," she said soberly.

Despite the fact that Lydia's reply deepened the uncertainty of Hal's intentions, Lois showed an evident relief. It occurred to Lydia that what mattered altogether was whether or not Hal had confided in one other than his old playmate. The green-eyed serpent was for the time, at least, tranquilized. She started as she realized Lois was speaking.

"Did Hal—was he frightened when I—fainted last night?" she was saying. A curious, slightly, defiant note hardened her voice.

"Why, he was, of course — splendid!" Lydia felt creeping through her a sort of dismay.

"What do you mean," demanded Lois, "by splendid?"

"Why—why—he—we felt you over for—for broken bits!"

"Lydia!" Lois was crimson to the eyes.

The other's confusion brought Lydia easily to herself. "Oh, I did most of that!" she laughed. "I meant to show that Hal didn't lose his head—much!"

"Much?" persisted Lois.

"Of course he was—we were frightened!"

"After I came to—my face—burned—my lips—"

Lydia, breathless, waited with peculiar dread for more.

"Why was that?" the other asked.

"Perhaps—it was the blood rushing back to the head. You know one faints because the—"

"Yes," broke in Lois impatiently. Her eyes keen with inquiry probed Lydia's face. "It didn't seem as if I were altogether unconscious, but able, in a dazed way, to hear—and—feel!"

"Yes?" breathed Lydia.

"It seemed as if—as if—somebody—" She colored again violently.

"Yes?" Lydia braced herself for the shock.

The girl hesitated. "I—can't remember. It's all hazy—like a dream!"

"Sometimes," said Lydia, "a person recovering consciousness will have the awfulest hallucinations."

Lois turned to the window. "They weren't, in my case, so—so awful."

Here to Lydia's great deliverance Lois let drop the subject, and Lydia, feeling about the knees like one who had been lifted back from a precipice, cast about for an easy entrance into a topic of her own choosing. Her eyes wandered carelessly up the length of the great room, over the polished hardwood floors, the heavy French doors which opened into the sitting-room—a chamber in size almost equal to the one which now held them.

"What a place for a dance you have here, Lois," she murmured.

As if the remark had awakened joyous memories, Lois perceptibly brightened.

"Years ago—before Hal went to Europe—we had innumerable parties."

"Why not have one now?" said Lydia carelessly.

"A party?"

"Why not? In my honor," added Lydia, with a funny little moue.

"I suppose we could."

"Could you scrape up enough people to furnish a real party?"

"Easily." Lois was beginning to show more animation. "We'd ask the Ranscomes, the Maltbies, and the two nephews who are staying with them. And there's the Wendels—five of them—the three Marlowe girls. Let me get a paper and a pencil."

A little later Lois straightened up from the white slip on her knees.

"I wonder," she began, "whether or not Hal is familiar with the new dances?"

"Leave it to little Hal," chuckled Lydia.

"I could teach him between now and the party," said Lois dreamily. "You could play for us, Lydia."

"You forget the Victrola, dear," Lydia responded dryly. "Maybe I could help you teach him."

Lois bent again to her work. "More than likely he won't need either of us," she said without raising her eyes.

That night when Lydia reached her room she threw off her frock and replaced it with a warm gray robe. In the grate a coal fire was brightly burning, and the girl, after a successful search for a time-table, dropped into a chair that faced the warm, yellow glow.

"One-two at Union," she murmured, and then glanced at the round ivory clock on the dresser. "He can't possibly be here before one-thirty. Two hours to wait."

Out of a medley of magazines, which lay scattered on the small table, she selected one and settled herself to read. But her mind, reverting back to her conversation with Lois, kept her eyes from the printed page.

She wondered if, after all, it wouldn't be feasible, merciful, to acquaint Lois with her plans. Lois was miserable—so miserable that she could read in Lydia's genuine liking for Hal something deeper. Why not tell the girl that she was laboring, even now, for her happiness. Why not tell her—now?

The thought brought her up in her chair. For a single irresolute moment she hesitated—and then sank back. It would be unfair to the man—to Hal's father. Lydia's sharp features softened wonderfully.

"He's got to see—for himself. He's got to realize that it's best for all—best for himself." A surge of red accompanied the thought. "And best for me," she murmured half aloud.

She recalled the older man's real dismay a few days back when she had spoken even vaguely of getting back to her work. "Why not work here?" he had asked. "You brought paints—and things—didn't you?" He had accompanied her to the top of the ridge the Sunday before and whistled admiring as she, with clear strokes, had outlined in black the panorama before them. Yes, even now he was interested. Unconsciously he had shown his preference in a quick attendance on her small-talk. Hers was the gift of making him comfortable in mind and body—a fact over which she had mused with satisfied wonder.

"It must be brought to him that he needs me," she thought. She must leave Union for a day or so—any pretext would do—and then note the effect of her absence.

And thus she mused until the fire became low. At twenty minutes past one she pulled her chair to the window and fixed her somewhat anxious eyes on the white road, which dipped so gracefully over the rise ahead. The moon was two hours old, and under its pale, oblique light the land showed unsubstantial, unreal. Like a fantom with its spreading shadow trailing, an animal bounded silently down the road. Even in the distorting light, she recognized in the huge creature one of the dogs from the house. "Is he going to meet Hal?" she wondered.

And then over the brow of the hill, black and tall in the moonlight, there strode a

man, with a dog at his heels. Once at the foot of the drive he stopped and lifted his face to the house. Lydia saw his arms swiftly raise, and then in a resigning gesture fall to his sides.

The waiting girl got to her feet and sped silently into the hall and down to the floor below. In a response to her eager tugging, the door swung in as the man mounted the steps.

"You see," she whispered, "I did wait."

"Yes." He eyed her with a peculiar helplessness. "I—I don't know why I came back," he said.

She waited until he had divested himself of his coat and hat—then led the way up the staircase. In front of her door she halted until he came up. "I'm so glad, Hal."

Her slim white hands caught his face and pulled it down. Then she kissed his forehead. "I'm so glad!" And then, smiling, sleepy, she watched him until the door of the den closed on his straight young figure.

A faint creak behind her brought her swiftly about. In the half-open doorway Lois was standing—Lois, pale and rigid and with hard, shining eyes. As if fascinated, each for a tense moment faced the other. Then Lois, without dropping her angry gaze, slowly closed herself in.

In Lydia, after the first white shock of dismay, there welled a great pity. She turned to the door which loomed forbiddingly between herself and the unhappy girl—but on the very threshold halted. In a frenzy of doubt, her hands met at her breast and worked jerkily.

"I can't! I've got to be sure!" came the passionate thought.

She turned and moved silently to her room.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN A WOMAN LOVES A MAN.

AFTER a night of fitful dozing, Lydia reached the breakfast room next morning at the moment Mr. Hammond slid into his place at the table. From the latter she learned that Hal, evidently wearied with the trip and late hours of the day before, was still sleeping. Lois, Mr. Hammond said, was clinging to her room with a bad headache.

"I've got to go in to-day," said Lydia as she dropped into her chair.

The man let his fork clatter to his plate.

"Going in? To the city?" Lydia could have shouted with glee at the consternation he unreservedly showed.

"Yes, I've been rather reckless in my disloyal neglect of certain duties."

"You'll be—you're coming back—"

"Why—yes—I—"

Relievedly he sank back in his chair. "Of course you're coming back. There's that party you and Lois were so full of at dinner last night. You'll be back to-night—I'll wait for you."

"Hardly that early; perhaps to-morrow night."

He grunted his discontent. "But you're going down with me this morning," he said suddenly, and his dark, keen eyes went over her sensibly clad figure.

"I counted on that pleasure," she laughed.

"I'll cancel my usual game of whist and take the coach with you."

Lydia's clear cheeks showed a tinge of pink.

"Good! I'll not deny you the joy of playing a martyr."

That was all there was said at the time concerning her proposed absence; but the dismay of the man at her leaving was responsible for the idea that sent her, directly the meal was finished, speeding up the staircase to the door before which, the night before, she had so miserably hesitated. Without waiting for a response to her tap, she pushed her way in and clicked the latch behind her.

With her heavy black hair tumbling in disorder about her white face and neck, Lois lay, a bent, huddled figure; one round arm half bare to the shoulder, curved up and over the pillow and tapered to a hand which tightly clenched a corner of the sheeted mattress.

Beside the bed, with its coverlets in eloquent disarray, Lydia dropped to her knees.

"Lois dear."

The other made no sign.

"Lois dear — I know — I understand." She caught the unresisting hand in her warm fingers. "Don't misconstrue what you saw last night. I was only glad that he had come—could come back—to you, Lois."

Lois lifted herself slowly on one elbow and opened a pair of tragic eyes.

"To me?" Her tone was dull, unbelieving.

Lydia brought her close. "Didn't I tell you—I understood—everything?"

A long look, and Lois flung herself sobbing in the other's arms. "Oh, Lydia—what shall I do? What shall I do?"

Her voice, so childlike in its agony, brought the tears to Lydia's eyes.

"Let *me* have the doing, honey," she choked.

"Why—did you—kiss him?"

"I just told you why. I was glad. When a woman loves a man she doesn't kiss his forehead." Something of her old manner crept into her voice. "Would *you*, for instance, have kissed his forehead?" She laughed shakily.

Lois hid a flaming face in the pillow.

"You see," said Lydia.

An interval of silence, and then Lois pushed herself to a sitting posture.

"Yes, I see," she said steadily. "It's—true. I love him. I'll always love him—even though I'm—" Half in anger, half in supplication, her arms went out to her friend. "What have you got to offer me? You've probed me—you know—my very heart. What are you going to do?" she wailed.

"Do? Well, for one thing, I'm going away to-day." Lydia could be wonderfully gentle.

Lois caught her by the shoulders. "You said—you said you'd wait until it was—over.

"I'm coming back — possibly to-morrow."

"I want you to note," added Lydia tremulously, "the effect of my absence."

"Effect of your absence? On whom?"

Lydia turned toward the window. "Mr. Hammond."

Wide-eyed, fairly ludicrous in her bewilderment, Lois stared.

"Mr. Hammond! Hal's father!"

Lydia nodded. A flower pink bloomed in her cheeks.

"You're doing it," began Lois brokenly, "for me. You're sacrificing—" With an imperious gesture Lydia stopped her. "What if—it isn't—a sacrifice?"

"To think—" Lois caught her tightly against her breast. "Oh, Lydia—you've—you've saved me!" she sobbed. And then, as if in quick revulsion at her thoughtlessness: "I'm a selfish beast—to—"

"Hush, honey. You're not saved yet," said Lydia, shakily practical.

"I didn't dream—"

"Neither does he—yet." A little laugh bubbled over. "Poor men—when we females don our hunting jackets."

She leaped to her feet and dusted lightly her knees. "I've got to go, Lois." She bent to the other's lips. "Good-by, dear. Don't worry—and keep your eyes open!" She sped to the door as John Hammond's voice floated up from below. At the threshold she was halted by Lois calling her name.

"Yes, Lois."

The face of the girl on the bed was radiant. "Nothing. Only, you're a dear, Lydia," she said.

After leaving Lois, it flashed on Lydia that now there could be for her no retreat. She was definitely committed. The bridge behind her had been burned. A feeling of fear assailed her at the thought. In her chosen pathway there seemed to appear obstacles that heretofore had remained unnoticed or unrecognized.

In mounting the waiting sleigh her foot, slippery with its coating of snow, slid with her weight from the step. The big hand under her shoulder tightened its hold and broke what promised to be a dangerous fall.

"You've forgotten your rubbers," he rejoined to her gasp of thanks. "I'll get 'em. No, I'll get them, Pete. Sit still."

When he had gone Lydia eyed reflectively the offending step. "I might have slit my chin open on the way down." She shuddered. "He must be frightfully strong," she added.

"I seen him chuck a pig over a four-rail fence—and not so long ago," Pete ruminated admiringly. "He's a man."

A little later, when they were speeding along the white road, she leaned close to John Hammond's ear.

"Pete says you're a man," she chuckled.

"He's a subtle one—that Pete," he grunted. "I wonder how he guessed it?"

"He saw you throwing pigs over four-rail fences."

He perceptibly reddened.

"Pig—not pigs. I was trying to shoo the stupid beast back in the run, and he wouldn't shoo!"

Lydia's eyes, bright with mischief, lingered on the man's flushed face. "It is said," she murmured, "that strong men are usually the most mild."

"You've been with us long enough to recognize the perfection of my disposition."

"I've heard it said, also, that they are apt to be lazy."

"I am entirely lazy," he acknowledged.

"The strong man," pursued Lydia, laughing, "shows an inclination for a warm fire, a deep-cushioned chair, a good book—yes, a decidedly intellectual book."

"And a clever woman who'll make him prove the reasonableness of his established opinions," broke in the man quickly.

"It serves me right," chuckled Lydia. "It's lovely of you, though, to call me 'clever.'"

John Hammond stared straight ahead. "Can't you possibly get back to-night?" he asked with sudden irrelevance.

"Impossible. I've got to see Huxley—he's the editor of *Idea*—to-morrow morning at ten—about a cover I'm to do for him."

"Honestly now, aren't you just a bit bored with Union?"

"Bored?" A sort of inward elation thrilled her as she faced him. "Bored! Why, you poor unseeing person, you haven't an inkling of all the little excitements I've encountered."

"No," he said in a final dry acknowledgment. "I guess I haven't. But if your stay thus far has been so full of spine-shivers, I'm certain enough that you'll never be able to stand the unspeakable strain of the coming party."

"I expect the party to induce tremendous spine-shivers, as you call them," she said calmly.

In his eyes, as he searched her face, there showed a speculative gleam.

"I shouldn't wonder," he murmured, "if you were deep."

Lydia groaned in deep self-commiseration. "Aunt Sophy—again. She thinks I'm setting my cap for poor Hal."

"And — aren't you?" he asked quizzically.

"Mercy—no! I'd feel as if I'd have to hear his prayers o' nights."

There was so much real joy in his answering laugh that Lydia, to hide a comprehending smile, turned quickly aside. It struck her as inconceivable that such a man could any longer hide from himself the self-evident truth. It was clear to her that he had not stopped to consider the possible nature of their future relations. Of Lois he scarcely ever spoke, and when he did it was simply with quiet affection. Was it possible that he had not noticed the change in the girl?

As if sensing her thought, he abruptly turned.

"Was Lois feeling pretty badly this morning?" he asked.

"She was—but she seemed considerably better when I left," said Lydia naively.

On reaching the city he handed her into a waiting cab, and then with a muscular hand stayed for a moment the closing of the vehicle door.

"Got a phone?"

"Yes—but—"

"What's the number?" And then as she with great submission told him, he jotted the figures on a leaf of his note-book.

"I'll call you up at three," he said shortly.

"But I—"

"Won't you be in?"

"Yes, but—"

"All right, I'll ring you." He swung the door home. "Good-by," he called through the glass.

In prompt accordance with his earlier promise, he called up at the agreed time.

"I want to take you to see Sothern—to-night," came the voice from the receiver.

Underlying his habitual terseness there sounded a new eagerness which set the girl slightly trembling. Alone in her room in the intervening hours between their parting and now, she had experienced an inner turbulence which strangely frightened her. She had not known it would be like this.

"No," she answered softly. If she were to go it would mean the throttling of her plans.

"Why not?"

She hesitated. "I've got to think up an idea or two before morning, and experience tells me that the theater won't help any," she returned finally.

"How about to-morrow? There's a matinée. We could have a bite to eat—and then trot out to Union."

"All—all right," she stammered. That would give her twenty-four hours—long enough for the fact of her absence to sink home.

"Good! I'll call for you at quarter of two."

"I'll be ready."

"Good-by—Lydia."

"Good-by," she whispered. He had never before used her given name.

He did not hang up immediately, but waited as if for something further. Then the listening girl caught the faint click of the receiver as it settled slowly in place.

CHAPTER VIII.

TANGLES AND TRUTH.

SHE was ready and waiting the following day by one-thirty. The morning had gone smoothly enough. Huxley, the editor, had given her an order for two covers. He had also asked her where the devil she'd been hiding—and had followed the scolding with an invitation to lunch. The first she laughed at; the second she declined, offering her theater engagement as an adequate excuse.

"I wish," the dynamic little man had said, "that you'd take yourself and your work more seriously. You're clever, I tell you! Too damned clever!"

"I'm too clever to take myself seriously—do you mean?"

He grunted his appreciation, and fastened on her his keen blue eyes. "You haven't told me where you've been."

"I've been visiting—in the country." She could feel the red creep into her cheeks.

"H-m!" His chunky little figure settled back in the swivel chair, but his eyes still searched her own. "Thinking of getting married, are you?" he barked suddenly.

Despite her incriminating color, she managed to throw him a light retort before backing out of his small, cluttered office.

But he had followed her to the door, and to her great discomfiture had for another moment held her.

"So you *are*," he chuckled. "I'm glad of it." And as she fled up the long corridor to the elevator he sent after her speeding figure a parting shot. "I'll bet he's over forty and under fifty! How's that?"

The words of the merry editor came home to her now as fully clothed; she sank to a velours-covered couch to await the summons of her bell.

"Of course he meant that that would be my idea of the correct age." A tender smile curled her lips. "Dear fat little Huxley—you're right."

A bell tinkled on her desk. She got to her feet and, crossing the room, lifted the receiver to her ear. From the switchboard below a voice announced the arrival of Mr. Hammond.

He was frankly glad to see her, but beyond a murmured greeting, said nothing until they both were seated into the waiting taxi.

"It's not going to be Sothern," he said. "He's working in the 'Merchant of Venice,' and that *Portia* person rather frightens me."

Sunk well back into the comfortable seat, she smiled. He had so unconsciously taken it for granted that the change of plan would not displease her.

"What's it to be?" she asked.

"Shaw."

"Shaw—at the Neighborhood Theater?" She was suddenly delighted.

"Yes. They've put on 'Major Barbara.'"

"I like that Shaw man—even if he does wear long whiskers and gives us a bald-

headed *Antony* and a *Cleopatra* human enough to be annoyed at her lover's billiard head."

But he was regarding her with curious anxiety.

"Where's your bag? You're going out with me, you know."

"My bag is at the station. I checked it this morning," she explained hurriedly.

"Oh!"

Out of the tail of her eye she watched him sink back relievedly to the cushions. Against the pale afternoon light which streaked the tiny pane, his strong profile stood out a clear black silhouette. He slowly turned as if in response to some compelling inner urge, and though her eyes had left his face she knew he was steadily regarding her; and in the ensuing throbbing silence she knew, too, that the truth had penetrated deep into his heart.

It was perhaps the first time she had suffered a real fright. Certainly never before had she experienced an emotion which, as now, numbed her usually alert brain and left her helpless to meet a rapidly developing situation.

"Did you leave—" She groped distractedly for a word. "The folks — are they well?"

"Yes—they are well."

"And was Lois relieved of—of her headache?" she managed to articulate.

"Yes—she's all right." He spoke like a man who was turning over in his mind something new and tremendous.

"We must be nearly there—aren't we?" She tried to pick out a landmark in the street. "Do please look!" Her voice was sharpened by a feverish note.

Like one who had been stirred out of deep musing, he bewilderedly complied, and then, as if realizing that his own ferment had been in a measure communicated to his companion, he answered quietly.

"Yes—we've already turned into Grand Street."

Despite the cleverness of the players, Lydia failed miserably to get "Major Barbara." Long afterward, in living over again the memorable day, she found it possible to recall but a single circumstance connected with the performance: the ever-recurring desire to tuck a rebellious brown lock which persisted in escaping the shabby bands of the heroine's Salvation Army hat.

Quite manifest, too, was her companion's preoccupation; and Lydia, noting the deepening furrows between his fixed eyes, knew, with sudden pitying intuition, that his speculations were not unmixed with pain. "The old dear thinks he's in a woful mess," she thought, and she blinked rapidly to stay an accompanying onrush of tears.

They dined within a stone's throw of Herald Square—at a little French restaurant with a smoky interior, three shabby capable vocalists, red-shaded candlesticks on each table, good food, and a stout, fiercely mustached manager who faithfully made his round to inquire of each guest concerning the quality of his serving.

This last bore down on Lydia and her companion before they were fairly seated. His dark, moist face wreathed itself into a series of amiable wrinkles.

"You have been here before?" he inquired. "Maybe it is I—"

"Our first offense," said John Hammond absently.

"You will come again!" His black eyes rolled wildly toward the ceiling. "Our dishes—they are— But wait! You shall see!" And he waddled off in an enthusiastic search of a waitress.

"He isn't real," chuckled the girl. The incident had wonderfully restored her to her usual self.

"Nothing about this—all—is real," the man said slowly.

Lydia's nervous fingers fumbled with her serviette.

"I hope that isn't true of the dinner."

"Rather that than have it substantial enough to dispel all of the illusion—" His voice held the slightest quiver.

"What did you think of the play?" she broke in desperately.

"It was well done," he said with some vagueness.

"Wasn't it?"

His face, which almost imperceptibly had paled, was inclined toward the snowy cloth which stretched between them. When he spoke the words came low and steady.

"It struck me, more than anything else, how hopeless it would be, in real life, to clear up a tangle as Shavian characters do, by simply telling the plain, ungilded truth."

"I'm afraid I didn't get anything half so weighty out of it."

"Perhaps that's because you aren't at present in a tangle."

"Maybe—" She glanced helplessly about. "Oh, here comes the soup!" A tray-laden girl stopped at the table. "Saved by a waitress," thought Lydia, gulping hard.

She was literally astounded that the man, though now in possession of the truth as to his own case, had failed utterly to recognize that she too must have knowledge of his passion. It had evaded him that his altered bearing, his eagerness to be with her, that the present outing itself, must be freighted with telltale significance for her; and *his* was a mind notably keen! She smiled.

"Won't you share it?" Like one who had sensed that his mood was out of concert with the occasion, he was striving for a lighter note.

"Share what?"

"Whatever engendered that smile."

"Oh!" Lydia faintly colored. "It was probably a childish delight in the surroundings. I think," she added casually, "that Lois would like this sort of thing."

"Do you? It hadn't occurred to me."

Lydia, feeling like a lately burned youngster who was recklessly returning to the forbidden flame, plunged deeper.

"You said—didn't you—that Lois was herself again?"

"She has never looked better than she has the past day or two." The brown, muscular hand, reaching just then for the water glass, trembled almost imperceptibly.

A little gurgle escaped Lydia. "And why not? Presently she will be married. Between now and then is the most stupendous period she'll ever pass through. Dreams, dressmakers, adulation, decoration, self-searchings—Lois is having the time of her life!"

She threw a glance at the man opposite. He was staring into his plate.

"She's a dear unselfish little duck—to let me borrow you to-night. What did she say—when you told her, I mean?"

"I did not tell her," said the man inertly.

Despite the sudden panic that gripped her, she plunged doggedly on.

"Oh man, where is thy memory? I can perhaps count myself fortunate—" She broke off as the man, white and with eyes strangely burning, leaned over the table.

"I did not forget!" he said.

Caught up by the wave of her swiftly rising dismay, she half pushed back her chair, and then, confronted by the fact of the half-finished meal and the probable protest by the watchful manager that would follow any attempt at a premature departure, she sank back in the seat.

"It doesn't matter, I suppose," she laughed.

"Do you mind," said the man, "if we go—now?"

"Why—why—"

"Do you mind?" he repeated gently.

Speechless, she shook her head.

He looked at his watch, and then beckoned to the black mustache a few aisles away.

"I find," he said to the anxious Frenchman, "that the food, as you said, is excellent. Unfortunately we are obliged to hurry for a train. You will understand."

"But the coffee! Our coffee—" In a gesture half-joyous, half-despairing, the little man's hands flew up and out with palms upturned.

"We are sorry—but must save the pleasure for another time."

Not until they were settled in a taxi which threaded the white-lighted streets toward the terminal did he speak again. He was staring straight ahead, and the girl, shrunk back against the cushion, did not even try to suppress the tears which forced a way between her closed lids.

"I love you," he said softly. "I want you to know. Perhaps I am doing wrong. It does not seem so—now. My engagement to Lois—it was not premeditated—it happened one day—she seemed to expect it, and I—"

As he stopped, Lydia knew he had

turned. She fumbled helplessly for her handkerchief, but his arm passed before her; his right hand caught her wrist.

"I love you," he whispered. "Does it mean anything to you?"

He was drawing her close now; her half-averted face was on his breast, and then his arms crept round her yielding body.

"Lydia." His breath warmed her cheek.

The girl's face, a vague white flower in the dim interior, was slowly lifted to his lips. There was nothing in the world but the man in whose arms she was held.

"I love you," she breathed.

Neither spoke after that first caress. Lydia did not even think; she was content to lie in his arms and drink deeply of the sweetest cup life had ever offered her. It was new and wonderful. She had never known the terrifying strength of a real passion; she had experienced an intellectual sympathy for the opposite sex; but now her very soul was singing. It was a communion; she felt as if every act or thought of this man was *hers*. *He* was hers!

The little machine came to a jolting halt and startled them apart. The driver's gloved hand fumbled clumsily for the handle on the door.

"Station!" he shouted down hoarsely.

Not until they were skurrying down the thinly populated concourse did Lydia realize the full import of what had taken place. Then the significance of it all rooted her in her tracks.

"What am I doing—going out there with you—now?" she choked.

"God knows, Lydia!" he said.

The white misery of his face brought back to her the true situation. Her arm hooked confidently around his own.

"And *I* know." Her eyes, despite their unshed tears, were calm and beautiful. "Come, John."

CHAPTER IX.

LOIS DECIDES.

THE morning before the night scheduled for the party found Lydia in a cautious search for Mrs. Trowbridge—cautious because Lydia wanted the older woman very much alone. She managed rather neatly to confront the latter, at last, in a tiny storeroom which opened off the up-stairs hall. The old lady, at the time, was bending over a long and pleasantly scented cedar chest. After a second's hesitation in the doorway, the girl moved noiselessly forward and secured the startled housekeeper's attention by slipping a warm hand under the ample chin and turning the shrewd, kindly face to meet her own.

"Aunt Sophy—do you like me—now?"

For a fleeting instant the other's round face was unfathomable in its blankness, and then the hairlike wrinkle about the small blue eyes deepened in a prophecy of the smile to follow. She reached up and patted the girl's cheek.

"I'm afraid I do," she admitted. "But you're a—an imp—just the same."

"There are good imps—too—aren't there?" asked Lydia thoughtfully.

"Too?" Mrs. Trowbridge laughed. "No. All imps are bad—very bad. It's the fairies who are good."

"Fairy—that's the word." She sat down on the great chest and eyed reflectively the plump little figure.

"The good fairy who always appears when the princess is sore beset." She smiled into the shrewd old eyes. "That's the part I want to play. And I—I want you to help me."

"You want me to help? I suppose," added the old lady bluntly, "that you've got your princess all picked out."

"Yes." Lydia felt the real disturbance behind the pseudo sharpness of the other's tone. "She won't ask me who it is," she thought with sudden conviction.

Mrs. Trowbridge made a great show of smoothing the already unwrinkled surface of her spotless apron.

"And just where does any help from me come in?" she asked, without looking up.

Lydia faced her with steady eyes. "If you were to see to it that there was a light—a dim light—in the conservatory tonight, that the door leading to the conservatory from the porch was unlocked, that nobody wandered into the conservatory from the window off the back parlor, if it happened that—that Lois and Hal

were already there—if you did all this, I should say you were playing your part."

The woman showed no emotion, but after a thoughtful pause shook her head.

"I said I liked you. Not that I trusted you," she said slowly.

"But you do." Lydia's voice was low.

And then, without warning, old Mrs. Trowbridge began to cry. She made no effort to stop or dry her tears, and the swiftly forming drops rolled unheeded down the round, finely wrinkled cheeks.

"Oh, Lydia! We can't do anything—but look on and see—this thing come to pass!"

The girl scraped an angry hand across her eye.

"Shucks!" she choked. "Will you do it?"

"I—I—don't see—"

"Will you do it?" she repeated.

"Yes!" snapped the old lady defiantly.

Lydia, in a single ecstatic leap, covered the intervening space and, wrapping her arms around the plump frame, kissed first one cheek and then the other.

"You—you're an old sport," she breathed. "And now, for smaller game."

"Smaller game" in the shape of Lois was found seated in the latter's room pressing a pensive nose against a pane which looked out on a snowy landscape. Of what had happened during that eventful two-day sojourn in the city Lydia had given the younger girl no hint.

In consequence Lois, in the nervous grip of commingling hope and fear, had displayed, alternately, wild gaiety and morbid passivity. She turned with pathetic expectancy as Lydia entered.

"Am I about to learn something concerning myself?" she asked ironically. As if her words had fanned a fierce inner flame, she bounded to her feet. "I feel like a child, with all this—"

Lydia stopped her with a humble gesture.

"I know, honey. It has all been so—demned mysterious." She gently forced the girl into the vacated chair. "But I didn't know—couldn't know—how to go ahead until—well, everything depends pretty much on you now."

The anger in the girl's eyes gave place to frightened inquiry.

"Yes?"

"And you've got to get over feeling like a child, honey," quavered Lydia. "It's a woman's job you've got to fill now—to-night."

The lithe young figure stiffened against the back of the chair.

"What am I to do?"

Lydia moved slowly to the window and stared unseeingly at the tiny flakes which were beginning to aimlessly drift from the leaden sky.

"What *would* you do to straighten this mess out?" she asked without turning, and after a pause.

"I don't know." Lois relaxed wearily into her old lethargy. "I know only that I can't go on with it."

"It's merely a matter of convincing John Hammond you're not in love with him." Lydia's face was still toward the window.

"Why, Lydia!" The girl, with wonder written in every feature, rose slowly from her chair. "Why, Lydia, if that is all, I'll just *tell* him."

"Yes," murmured Lydia, turning, "and then have him wondering all the rest of his days if you were secretly eating your heart out."

"But if I told *him*—"

"He'd no doubt think you were doing for me."

"For you?"

Lydia bravely nodded.

Lois came close. With an eager grip she caught the other's arm.

"Then he knows you—you care for him?"

"I reckon he does," trembled Lydia.

Almost reverently Lois kissed her. The caress, absurd perhaps in itself, told Lydia something of the deep relief which prompted it.

"I'll do whatever you want, Lydia dear." The girl's eyes were wet.

"If you could manage to have that heart-hungry Hal put his arms around you to-night, it—"

"Lydia!"

"It ought to be easy enough to bring

about," said Lydia practically. "And I wouldn't call it, in your case, such an intolerable experience," she twinkled.

"But how," began the flaming Lois, "will—"

"Will you do it?"

"Must I employ barmaid tactics to—"

"Will you do it?" repeated Lydia inexorably.

"Yes."

Lydia kissed the crimson cheek. "You're a—young sport." She moved blithely toward the door. "Make it the conservatory, honey," she called back. "It's a wonderful place for a love-scene."

CHAPTER X.

"WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?"

"I THINK this is one you promised me, Lois." It struck Hal, as he paused before the glowing girl, that she had never looked so beautiful. There was in the full, free poise of the lithe young figure a hint of expectancy which curiously held him.

"Come," he said.

After a half-dozen steps had brought them well away from the laughing group which had encircled them, the girl with a sudden pressure of strong fingers on his shoulder brought the dance to a halt.

"Do you mind if we slip away and—sit it out?" she whispered.

He noticed she had in that few seconds become very white.

"Why, no. You aren't ill, Lois?"

"No." As if taking in for an instant the entire subdued and comfortable pageant, the joyous whirling young people, the several groups of conversing middle-aged, she paused.

Then, with a look he'd never before seen on a woman's face, she turned and led the way toward the half-darkened corner where a French window opened into the conservatory.

In their leisurely flight they came on Aunt Sophy, who evidently had been dozing in the huge leather chair which set well out of the light and flanking the window through which they must pass.

"Having a good time, children?" she beamed. "What time is it, Hal—half past ten yet?" And then as the other confirmed her fears she jumped with funny alacrity to her feet. "I've got to get started on the victuals."

They waited until the stout, stiffly starched figure disappeared into the hall, and then pushed a way into the dim, rosy glow of the softly illuminated plant-house.

It was the girl who gently swung the curtained window home.

As if with a definite object she crossed to where a marble-white narcissus lifted its heavy-scented petals from a glazed Japanese dish.

She bent to the perfect blossom as if in supplication, her cheeks as pale as the bloom they caressed, her features standing out in cameo clearness against the green of a trellised vine beyond.

Hal, full of the sense of things impending, stood silently watching her. His intuition told him of her intense inner excitement, an emotion which gave her leaning figure the appearance of having been suddenly checked in the outset of a mad flight.

A few swift steps brought him close.

"What is it you are trying to tell me, Lois?"

As she turned her dark eyes were lifted slowly to his own.

"Ever since a certain night, two weeks back, I've been wondering—"

"Yes—"

"And suffering—"

He was standing before the oblong table which held the heavy lamp; and now his hands, which had been loosely hanging, reached back and clenched over the polished top.

"Why, Lois—Lois," he stammered.

"It is only when one sees what might have come out of the past that the present becomes so—so unendurable," she continued in a low, steady voice.

He could only dumbly stare; any attempt to dissimulate, to misunderstand, would have been impossible, repugnant. In the whirl of his emotions one thing only stood out clear and tangible—the white, tragic, uplifted face of the girl.

"You'll remember the night—we went coasting?" Her hand went up to his shoulder; the action brought her close. "Why did you look at me—so—when I urged you for the wheel? Why, if you did not care, would the thing flash into your mind that already had entered mine? Tell me!" She was slightly panting now. "Why, if you did not care, did you do—what you did—when you thought me unconscious? I didn't realize, until after—it came back to me like a—a dream." The great eyes, violet dark in the dim light, never left his face.

His fingers dug into the mahogany surface of the table.

"It's true," he said heavily. "I love you. I wanted to go—"

"Why didn't you write to me—while you were away? Why did you let this—this thing come about? It's all so cruel—and futile!"

"I didn't know; I didn't realize— You were only a girl. Lois," he broke in hoarsely, "this is madness!"

"No—the other is madness."

She was crying now, and, as he helplessly watched, she moved slowly past him to the wicker chair drawn up to the lamp on the opposite side of the table. Here she stopped and then, with a little sob, sank to the cushioned seat, her face buried in one white arm, the other reaching back in a heart-pulling appeal to the waiting man.

And then—just how Hal never knew—he was on his knees before the green wicker chair, his face crushed against her cheek.

Which sufficiently explains why neither heard the almost soundless opening of the porch door and the subsequent noiseless entrance of two people—one a slim, pink-cheeked woman who looked ready either to laugh or cry, or both; the second a squarely built man with a sprinkling of gray in an otherwise black head, and a grin, half delighted, half sheepish, curling the mustached lips.

When Lydia, from the center of an animated group, caught sight of Aunt Sophy making significant gestures from the doorway, she gave no sign save a slight answering nod.

A moment later, however, by resorting to tactics similar to those of the older woman, she managed to get John Hammond alone in the hall.

"Come out on the veranda for a moment," she murmured mysteriously.

As they passed the old-fashioned hat-rack he caught up a shawl and laid it over her white shoulders.

"Now what?" he demanded.

But it was not until they had turned the southwest corner of the house that she spoke.

"Do you love me?"

His only answer was to crush her close.

"Oh!" she gasped.

"Is this what you brought me out here for?"

"No. I—" She half pulled away. "I'm going to show you something that will horribly hurt your vanity. Come—softly."

It struck Lydia that she had never seen anything quite so fine as the bearing of the boy as he accepted the situation. He had from his knees, on being confronted with the pair, surveyed them long and thoughtfully and without a sign of confusion. "The thing," mused Lydia, "is too big for that."

And then he got to his feet and faced the older man.

"When I told you I did not love Lois, I believed I was telling the truth." His eyes wandered toward the girl curled up in the chair with her face still hidden in her arm. "I was wrong; as I look back, I think I have always cared. When I realized, I wanted to go—perhaps you will remember—but let myself be persuaded to stay. I thought I could remain and show no signs. You see I was too weak."

"Hal dear," quavered Lydia, "don't be such a liar. If Lois hadn't made you, you never would have opened your mouth. And don't you, John, try to explain; you'd probably say things for which I'd never forgive you."

She was smiling, but her eyes were brimming with tears.

"Hal, I'm going to marry your father. I'm going to offer up myself, so that you

The Grouch

by E. J. Rath

Author of "Too Many Crooks," "When the Devil Was Sick," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

IT was the night before the opening of the fishing season, and out on the pond the bass were leaping; but John William Higgins was worried by the fear that some other fisherman would discover the lake on Pop Brundage's farm that for six summers he had considered his own. And when Mame Brundage—she was eighteen, a reader of the "society" news in the Sunday supplements and preferred being called Marigold—visited him in his shack that evening, she told him that a woman boarder was going to occupy the cottage near the farmhouse.

When Miss Louise Dean arrived she said that she had come in search of rest. Next day she had a chat with Higgins, leaving him a little breathless. Then she met a man, on his way to the Brundage home, who told her that he was Augustus J. Tilley, a naturalist. When she told him her name, he replied: "Certainly; of course"—which surprised Miss Dean.

Mame had decided to marry a wealthy man. So when another guest—Mr. March, handsome and well-groomed, but decidedly peevish—arrived and was assigned to the cabin on the hill, she thought her *Prince Charming* had come at last. But March said that he had come "to be let alone," and earned his nickname, "the Grouch."

Tilley and Higgins had an argument about the relative merits of fishing and bug hunting—and about which amusement was most likely to interest Miss Dean. Higgins thought that he had won, for she spent the next morning in his boat, learning the art of bass fishing. They saw March watching them from the shore, but when they landed, he went away angry.

Mame decided that it was impossible that March did not love her, and stuck to that belief in spite of discouragements. Knock, her mischievous young brother, was employed by all the people concerned to keep watch on the others.

One night, after Higgins had been calling on her, Miss Dean walked part way to his shack with him, and on her return caught her foot between the boards of a footbridge. The Grouch, with very bad grace, helped her get free.

Tilley sent a telegram, at which Mame managed to get a glance, and to learn that it was about some one staying out late, and that it contained the words: "Send further instructions. Worried about . . . sit . . ." She guessed that the last word was "situation." When she told March about it, he snapped: "What the devil do I care about Tilley's telegrams?"—and slammed the door.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SPORTING PROPOSITION.

SAVE for the heart-throbs she registered in her diary, which she deemed it her maidenly duty to keep inviolate from the world, Mame Brundage had long since discovered that it was exquisite torture to keep anything to herself. When it came to holding her tongue, she was no hand at it, as her mother always said.

For that reason, Mame's first impulse was to spread the news of Tilley's telegram. Naturally, the first person to be told was the Grouch, and having done that Mame considered that her task was only begun.

Tilley himself was the next person she met; but when it came to the point of disclosing to the author of the telegram her knowledge of its guilty contents, Mame hesitated. The fact that she was not supposed to have seen the message did not serve as a deterrent, for she did not feel that there had been any lack of ethics on her own part; Joe Gildersleeve had shown it to her.

But Mame wondered if it were wise, at least for the present, to put Tilley on his guard. She had no idea what might develop if she remained silent and watched him, and it seemed to her that the truly clever thing to do was to wait, keeping him

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in ignorance the while. It required tremendous self-control to follow such a policy; the making of the resolution involved acute pangs. Yet she managed it, very greatly to her own amazement.

"It was a dollar and sixty-two cents," said Mame, as she counted the change into his hand. "I'd no idea it would be so expensive."

It was the nearest she came to giving any indication that she knew the telegram was going a long way. Tilley pocketed the change, thanked her and remained unaware of the fact that she was studying him with a knowing look.

Having thus steeled herself against obedience to primitive impulse, Mame went down to the cottage, strengthened in resolution and with the odd feeling of having suddenly acquired additional merit in her own eyes.

She greeted Miss Dean with a composure really superb; she felt a sense of superiority that was rooted in the possession of secret knowledge. Miss Dean appeared to observe nothing peculiar in her behavior, from which Mame gathered that she was carrying off the affair very well.

Poor Miss Dean! Little did she know or dream that, when Mame Brundage entered the cottage, Suspicion walked in with her.

"What you goin' to do to-day?" asked Mame, as she set about her chores with patient resignation.

"I really haven't decided," said Miss Dean. "That's why I like it up here. You plan nothing; things just happen."

Mame looked at her sharply; it seemed as if there was a poorly concealed significance in the remark. Something had happened last night!

"What kind of things?" inquired Mame, averting her face, for fear of betrayal.

"Nice things; unexpected things; oh, extraordinary things!"

"Like what, for instance?"

"Like making people furious," said Miss Dean.

"Who've you been makin' furious?"

"So many I can't begin to tell you. I've been making people furious all my life. I love to!"

Miss Dean began whistling, and Mame frowned.

"I can't see any good in gettin' people mad at you."

"No? Perhaps you've never tried, Marigold. Why, it's as much fun as making people fall in love with you."

Mame paused in her sweeping.

"Honest?" she asked, in a surprised tone.

"Truly. You must never let people be neutral. Either they must love you madly or hate you fiercely. That is, if you really have a soul."

This was a new philosophy to Mame, and for a moment it puzzled her. Then slowly understanding came.

"I guess you mean like those vampires in the movies," she said.

"You've hit it exactly, Marigold."

So Miss Dean was a vampire! Mame compressed her lips and resumed with the broom. She had not expected a confession of this kind.

"Where you goin'?" she asked a moment later, as Miss Dean picked up her parasol and book.

"I'm going hunting."

"Huntin'! What you goin' to hunt?"

"A man."

Mame gasped at the shameless declaration.

"A man!" she echoed.

"Yes. I suppose there are some left, aren't there?"

"Why, I—" Suddenly Mame felt herself turning pale. "Which—which man you goin' to hunt?"

"I don't know. Really, I'm not at all particular. I told you I don't plan things up here. I simply go hunting, that's all. And if I have luck—"

Miss Dean blew a kiss into the air and the sentence remained unfinished.

"And if you get him will you make him furious?" asked Mame, in an awed voice.

"That I cannot tell. It will probably depend on my mood, and I never know what that will be five minutes in advance. Well, I'm going, Marigold. Wish me luck."

As she passed out the door Mame called desperately:

"Mr. Higgins is up to the lake this mornin'."

"An excellent suggestion. Thank you," said Miss Dean.

Mame stood in the doorway, breathing deeply, as the lady of the cottage strolled placidly across the meadow.

"I—I saved Mr. March!" she whispered. Later she was talking rapidly to herself.

"She's the first vampire I ever met. I always knew there was something very strange about her. Now I'm gettin' to understand what it is. I must say, she don't mind talkin' about it. But I suppose if one is a vampire one gets brazen. It seems to have a killin' effect on one's finer nature.

"There—I must remember that, so I can write it in my diary. It's queer how things like that come to me; the worst part is, I forget so many of 'em. A vampire! Well, so long as she just vampires around Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley it ain't anything to me. Neither one of 'em is in my life.

"And she can go vampirin' around pop, if she wants to; he ain't liable to take her serious. But if she starts tryin'—"

Mame paused and shuddered.

"I wonder," she mused, "if it ain't my Christian duty to give him a warnin'?"

It seemed that Miss Dean had decided to accept Mame's suggestion as to a victim, for she took her walk in the direction of the lake, where it was a certainty that Higgins could be found at almost any time. Even though he had taken to calling at the cottage, he was still faithful to his lake by day.

But Miss Dean had been preceded to the lake by another, and while she was still some distance from the goal the other person was already engaged in conversation with the fisherman.

Just what had decided the Grouch to take his morning walk in this direction he himself did not know. When he left the cabin he had no victim in view; he only feared that if he remained there he would receive a visit from Mame Brundage as soon as her morning's work was done.

Higgins was admiring an extremely lively red-eye that swam captive in a large pailful of water. The Grouch also was examining the prize, but without enthusiasm.

"What are you keeping him for?" he asked.

"Well, I just happened to have the pail in the boat, and when I landed this boy he was such a beaut that I wanted to watch him for a while. He was just barely hooked and that's all. He isn't hurt any; I never used gang-hooks in my life. Ain't he a bird?"

"Looks like all the rest," said the Grouch.

"Oh, no, he doesn't. They're just as different from each other as people," declared Higgins knowingly. "Look at the build of him. Believe me, he's got speed and power.

"Trained to the minute. He hasn't spoiled himself overeating. And he was some baby to land!"

"Found him hard to catch, eh?"

"It was quite a trick," admitted Higgins modestly.

The Grouch laughed harshly.

"Where's the trick in catching fish out of a lake that's alive with them?" he demanded.

Higgins turned and regarded him with a puzzled expression.

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean just what I say. I was clear enough, wasn't I? If a lake's full of fish you're bound to catch some of them. Even the armless wonder could do that."

The fisherman flushed with quick indignation.

"You wouldn't expect a man to go fishing where there were *no* fish, would you?" he retorted. "If I went fishing down in the mill-pond you'd say I was crazy, wouldn't you?"

The Grouch regarded the fisherman with sudden interest.

"What mill-pond?" he asked.

"Brundage's. There's an old one down in the woods a ways. That is, it used to be a mill-pond. The mill burned down years ago. Now it's just nothing."

"And it hasn't any fish in it?"

"Not even a sucker."

The Grouch was thinking rapidly, as he could upon occasion. There was a gleam of evil joy in his stern eyes.

"No; I wouldn't expect you to go fishing where there wasn't even one fish," he agreed. "But, on the other hand, I don't

see why you waste your time pulling them out of a lake so crowded with fish that they nudge each other ashore."

"Waste my time, eh? Don't kid yourself. I don't go around hauling 'em in wholesale. I don't run a fish-market. I give 'em all a fair chance. I handicap myself."

The Grouch laughed again.

"I notice you pick out a well-stocked lake," he observed.

"Well, I've caught 'em in lakes that weren't so well stocked," declared Higgins warmly. "I've caught 'em where other people failed. I've caught fish where they told me I hadn't a Chinaman's chance."

"Oh, I suppose you can catch any fish in the world," sneered the Grouch.

"You've said it. Give me the right tackle and I'll catch any fish that ever swam!"

The Grouch felt that his victim was now upon the brink. *He smiled.*

"Any fish that ever swam? Is that the idea?"

"Providing he's a fish that 'll bite on a hook," said Higgins.

The Grouch nodded and glanced into the pail. Then he pointed at the red-eye.

"That one bit on a hook, didn't it?" he asked.

"You bet he did."

"All right. I want to see you catch him."

"Huh!" chuckled Higgins. "He is caught."

"I want to see you catch him again."

"What? Out of the pail?"

The Grouch shook his head and smiled grimly.

"No. Out of the mill-pond."

Higgins wrinkled his forehead and only stared.

"And just to make it interesting, I'll bet you a hundred you can't do it," added the Grouch.

He had a faculty of producing irritation in others without half trying, and now he irritated Higgins.

"Come through with the whole idea," said Higgins. "What's the proposition? I don't get it yet."

"Oh, it's simple. You can catch any fish that ever swam, provided he bites on a hook. Well, we happen to have one, and we know he'll bite. So we take him down to the mill-pond, where there are no fish at all, and we put him in. Then we have one fish in the pond. And I'll bet you a hundred you can't catch him."

The fisherman became thoughtful.

"Of course, I'll make it more than a hundred, if you like," observed the Grouch carelessly. "The exact amount doesn't concern me particularly. What I'm trying to show is that you're not so much of a fisher*man as you think you are."*

The Grouch made a sweeping gesture toward the lake.

"Any boob can go out there and catch fish," he said. "You couldn't fall overboard without hitting one. But you take a pond with only one fish in it—well, there's a *sporting proposition.*

"If you can get away with that, I'll say you're a passable fisherman. But this other stuff—bunk! Why, you're only a fishmonger now."

Higgins's big hands were clenched, and he was beginning to perspire.

"You must be nutty!" he exclaimed. *"Nobody ever heard of such a proposition."*

The Grouch smiled wearily.

"Certainly not. I just invented it," he said. "But it's my notion that it's fairly sporty. Still, if you're not game, why that's your affair. Only in that case don't talk so much about knowing how to fish. If you don't like the bet I'll give you odds—two to one—a hundred to fifty."

Higgins glared truculently.

"Any time limit on it?" he demanded.

"Oh, yes; there ought to be a time limit. I don't expect you to fish for him all summer. What do you want for two to one, anyhow? Suppose we say three hours' fishing time."

"Four," said Higgins.

"Anything to oblige you. Four it is. Are you on?"

"I'm on!" shouted Higgins.

"A hundred to fifty," said the Grouch.

"Not on your life! I'm asking odds of nobody," declared the fisherman, belligerently. "A hundred even!"

"Right."

At this point another voice entered the conversation.

" Fine! I think it's splendid of you, Mr. Higgins. I knew you'd take the bet."

The Grouch whirled and found Miss Dean standing almost at his elbow. But she was not looking at him; she was gazing raptly at the fisherman. Higgins, equally surprised, coughed and grinned.

" You heard it, did you?" he asked.

" Most of it," she assented. " I didn't want to be a listener, but I didn't want to interrupt you, either. And you'll win, too, Mr. Higgins. I just know it."

Very deliberately the Grouch studied Miss Dean from head to feet, particularly as to feet, as though half expecting to find her standing in her stockings. Miss Dean was aware of the scrutiny, but bore it with the utmost composure.

In fact, she took no notice of it, but continued to regard Mr. Higgins with frankly admiring eyes.

" A hundred even he doesn't win," snapped the Grouch mechanically.

Miss Dean glanced at him coldly, but with no sign of recognition.

" When do you put the fish in the pond, Mr. Higgins?" she asked.

" We'd better take him down there now," said the fisherman. " He isn't doing himself any good in that pail. I was going to put him back in the lake, anyhow; but that won't happen till I catch him again."

He picked up the pail.

" I want him marked," said the Grouch.

Miss Dean made a scornful exclamation.

" There's sportsmanship for you!" she said, but she was addressing Higgins. " He won't take your word that there are no fish in the pond."

" Well, he is marked," declared Higgins. " There's a hole in his upper jaw, where the hook went through."

The Grouch nodded.

" All right. I'll know him again," he said. " Where's your pond?"

Higgins led the way, with Miss Dean following and the Grouch striding along in the rear. It was not a long walk to the mill-pond, although the path was overgrown from disuse and was not always easy for a lady to travel. At the difficult place Higgins helped her gallantly, while the Grouch merely stood and scowled.

The pond was not an extensive piece of water. Anybody could have walked around it in five minutes. At one end there was an ancient dam and the foundations of a mill. Drawn out on the dam was a doubtful-looking skiff. The trio walked over and inspected it.

" It's good enough," said Higgins, nodding.

The Grouch surveyed the pond with a critical eye.

" Not a very big one," he remarked.

" Welching?" asked Higgins.

" Never did yet. I'll double the bet."

Miss Dean clutched at the fisherman's' sleeve and shook her head.

" I don't think it's a small pond. I think it's very large," she said.

And in truth the pond looked larger to Higgins than ever before. Compared with the fish in the pail, it was an enormous pond.

" Want to double?" inquired the Grouch.

" The bet's made now. Can't be changed," said Higgins.

" Suits me. In with your fish."

Miss Dean stayed the fisherman's arm as he raised the pail.

" Let me," she said. " Just for luck."

Higgins surrendered the pail.

" It's like launching a ship," said Miss Dean. " And they always christen ships. Don't you think we ought to give him a name?"

" Good idea," nodded Higgins.

" Silly," said the Grouch.

But Miss Dean was trying to think of an appropriate name, and ignored the comments of those about her.

" It ought to be something appropriate," she mused aloud. " You suggest something, Mr. Higgins."

He scratched his head and thought.

" I'm no good at picking names," he confessed. " You pick one."

" I'm trying to," she said. " Let's see; we might—"

" Call him Tilley. He's a fish," said the Grouch.

Miss Dean bent her head and chewed her lip. She wanted to scream, and she did not dare to show her face.

" That suits me fine," declared Higgins,

with a grin. "Call him Tilley and watch him get the hook."

She raised the pail and tilted it over the edge of the dam.

"I christen thee 'Mr. Tilley,'" she said.

An instant later Mr. Tilley disappeared in the depths.

"Well," remarked the Grouch, "when do you start fishing?"

"To-morrow morning at six o'clock," answered Higgins promptly.

"Six o'clock!"

"You didn't expect me to start to-day, did you? That fish wants time to recuperate and get used to things. I guess I've got a right to choose my time. I always fish early. To-morrow at six."

The Grouch shrugged.

"You keep funny hours," he said, "but we'll let it stand that way. Going to invite Tilley?"

Miss Dean turned abruptly and walked away, her handkerchief pressed against her lips.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO THE VICTOR THE SPOILS.

HIGGINS sat in the leaky skiff, having launched it from its resting-place on the dam. He studied his watch. It lacked three minutes of the appointed hour.

No fisherman was ever better armed for a grueling encounter. He had set up three rods, which were carefully laid across the seats. Two of them were rigged for flies and, after a study of the gray morning, Higgins had employed his expert judgment in selecting the lures.

The third rod was for bait. On the floor of the skiff were two tin cans, one containing a dozen of Knock Brundage's fancy selected frogs, the other a crawling mass of hellgrammites. A landing net lay within the fisherman's reach.

The Grouch was there, too, standing on the dam and inspecting the contents of the skiff with contemptuous eyes. He had slept badly and risen at a diabolical hour, so that his temper was none of the best.

"Why don't you get a gill net and sweep the pond?" he asked.

Higgins smiled contentedly, for his confidence was high.

"Getting ready to pay the bet?" he inquired.

"Don't praise yourself. I won't have to pay it. I'll double it."

"You said that before."

"Well, it goes. Now or any time later. Going to fish with both hands, I take it."

"Only one rod at a time; don't get nervous," advised Higgins.

"Use 'em all, if you like. I'd recommend it. You'll need 'em."

Higgins ignored the comment and glanced at the spot where the path reached the edge of the pond. Miss Dean had not yet appeared. He wished she could be there to witness the first cast and then, soon afterward, the triumph of his skill.

"Only half a minute more," he said, examining his watch again.

"I'll throw in the half-minute. Go to it," drawled the Grouch, as he turned and walked off the dam. "Call me when you land Mr. Tilley."

He picked out a large tree that stood close to the edge of the pond, sat down, leaned his back against it, closed his eyes and prepared for sleep. It was an insult, deliberately planned, and Higgins recognized it as such.

"I'll wake him up when I slap him in the face with Mr. Tilley," he growled, as he pushed the skiff out into the pond and picked up one of the fly-rods.

As his watch indicated six o'clock he poised the rod aloft; then, with a quick, smooth movement of his powerful wrist, dropped the fly gently into the placid water, fifty feet from the skiff.

Half an hour later he was still engaged in this business, but was employing the other rod, from which he cast a larger and brighter fly of different hue. It was his firm intention, if fortune attended him, to capture Mr. Tilley on a fly; this not only appealed to his sense of sportsmanship, but there was something entirely appropriate, he thought, in ensnaring the namesake of the naturalist with a specimen of the insect kingdom, even though it were an artificial one.

During this half-hour he propelled the

skiff into every section of the pond, lingering hopefully where a patch of reeds rose above the water; but as yet there had been no response to his seductive skill.

Seven o'clock came and Higgins laid aside his fly-rod with a sigh. There was nothing the matter with his confidence; he sighed merely because it seemed that he would be compelled to resort to the bait-can, and thus effect capture in a manner certain, but not quite so clean and snappy.

He impaled a hellgrammite upon a hook and resumed his round of the pond. As he passed the Grouch the latter opened one eye cautiously and grinned. He was quite wide-awake, and had been from the beginning, but he did not wish the fisherman to know that; he felt that it would be much more irritating for him to show the complete oblivion that comes from slumber.

With the arrival of seven thirty came Miss Dean, dressed in a fresh blue gingham and looking as pleasant as the morning itself, which had changed from gray to gold and was becoming brighter every minute.

She waved her parasol at the fisherman, and he made an answering gesture. Presently he maneuvered the boat close to where she stood.

"Anything yet?" she asked.

"No; I've been postponing it," said Higgins gallantly. "I wanted you to see the show."

"You mean you haven't fished at all; that you've wasted a whole hour and a half?"

"Oh, not exactly that. I've just been prospecting around. Now I'm going to get down to business."

She smiled and nodded, so that Higgins was certain she believed him.

"Any bites?" she inquired.

"Er—not yet."

"Is the Grouch here?"

Higgins pointed across the pond, and Miss Dean, after a brief study of the recumbent Grouch, smiled again, this time with a curious expression.

"Was he here at the very start, Mr. Higgins?"

Higgins nodded, not very graciously, and Miss Dean acknowledged the news with a slight rise of her eyebrows.

"Well, you go right ahead," she advised. "I'll find a seat and I won't interrupt."

"Wish me luck," said Higgins, as he picked up a frog harness and delved into the second pail.

"All the luck possible," replied Miss Dean energetically.

Now the Grouch spied the lady of the cottage the instant she appeared at the edge of the pond, but he gave no sign that he was aware of her presence. He continued to feign slumber and thus exhibit his contempt for the whole affair.

He was there merely to exasperate the fisherman and collect the bet. As Higgins completed each round of the pond, the Grouch would gently nod his head and softly grunt his satisfaction. He relied implicitly on his faith that Mr. Tilley would remain safe in the depths, probably nursing a sore mouth and quite incurious concerning the occupation of his one-time captor.

At eight o'clock Higgins went back to hellgrammites, and at eight thirty he was trying flies again. There was a certain solemnity on his round countenance that did not ordinarily reside there; besides that, there were anxious wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. He was not yet alarmed, but he was surprised.

"I wish they hadn't christened him Tilley," he muttered.

As he passed Miss Dean she nodded to him encouragingly and Higgins had an inspiration.

"Say," he said, "would you like to get in? I think you're lucky."

"I'd be delighted."

He ran the skiff ashore and baled out some of the water.

"You may find it a bit damp," he apologized, "but if you keep your feet on that bit of board you probably won't get 'em wet."

"Don't worry about me," she assured him, as she stepped into the boat and took the stern seat. "Go right ahead and fish."

Higgins did, without further loss of time. Minutes were beginning to assume a new value to him.

As the skiff passed the Grouch he aroused himself and opened his eyes wide.

"What time is it?" he called.

"Eight forty-five," replied Higgins, in a tone that was not too cordial.

"Double the bet," yawned the Grouch.

Higgins flushed, but disdained to answer.

"At nine o'clock it 'll be two to one," added the Grouch.

"When I want odds I'll ask for them."

"You'll be asking; don't worry. I'd try frogs again, if I were you. You're not fishing among a crowd now; remember, there's only one Tilley."

Higgins scowled and stuck stubbornly to his fly-rod. As the skiff moved onward he said to Miss Dean, in a low voice:

"You just wait. He'll be fooled yet."

"I'm sure of it," she assured him, nodding.

"Honest? You mean that?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Then we can't lose," said Higgins earnestly.

He said "we" in a manner that implied Miss Dean's partnership in the enterprise, even though she had no pecuniary interest in the wager that was to prove the humiliation of the Grouch. But although her confidence served to rehabilitate his own, Higgins nevertheless switched back to frogs when the boat reached the far side of the pond.

"*On this kind of a day,*" *he explained,* "it's better to use live bait."

"Of course," she assented.

At nine o'clock a voice called across the water:

"Well, it's two to one now."

"Shut up!" answered Higgins.

The Grouch smiled tolerantly and began to whistle.

"He'd better not count his chickens yet," grumbled Higgins, in a tone that was far from amiable. "He's due for an awful surprise."

"He certainly is," said Miss Dean, smiling.

Ten minutes later Higgins was criticising the quality of Knock Brundage's frogs. He explained that they were too large; that they lacked animation, and that they were of such small endurance that they did not long survive the captivity of harness.

Miss Dean agreed to all of this; she was quite sure they were an indifferent lot. A short time after that Higgins pointed out that the hellgrammites were too small and immature; that it was difficult to place them on a hook, and that they would not remain so placed, even when ignored by "Mr. Tilley."

"That was a bum name we gave him," he added.

"But you agreed to it," Miss Dean reminded him.

"I know. But I think it's a hoodoo. I haven't even had a rise out of him."

At nine-thirty the Grouch strolled out on the dam to meet the advancing skiff.

"Offering three to one now," he said in a surprisingly pleasant voice.

Higgins was bailing the boat again and did not look up, but he flushed deeply.

During all the time Miss Dean had been at the scene of the struggle the Grouch had not once addressed her, nor paid the slightest apparent attention to her. She, in turn, quite ignored his presence. More than once their glances met, but they did not appear to see each other.

"How about three to one?" asked the Grouch. "You've only got half an hour left."

"Say, will you stop talking to me?" demanded Higgins.

"*I'm only offering* to do the sporty thing," said the Grouch. "I don't want you to go around crying about the bet after it's over."

Higgins swung the skiff about with a vicious lunge of his oar and resumed his fishing.

"Isn't he unpleasant?" commented Miss Dean.

"He's unholy," said Higgins.

At nine forty-five the Grouch offered four to one; he even declared he would pay four to one if he lost, no matter whether Higgins accepted the proposed arrangement or not.

But he said it in such a manner as to make it clear that he regarded the offer in the light of a gratuity. He was blandly insulting and Higgins raged.

The fisherman was now standing in the boat, which rocked ominously as he sent his frog flying in all directions with powerful casts. Miss Dean held fast to both

gunwales and regarded him anxiously. The Grouch stood on the dam and laughed.

"Why don't you go overboard after him?" he asked.

"I—I'm almost afraid you will," whispered Miss Dean to the fisherman.

Higgins glanced despairingly at his watch and continued to cast viciously.

"Ten to one," called the voice from the dam.

The fisherman swore softly and forgot to apologize.

"Looks like I'd lose," he said grimly.

"Oh, I don't believe you will," declared Miss Dean with calm confidence.

"You don't understand. I've been at it now for nearly four hours, and not even a rise. It's—it's darn queer."

"It's queer," she agreed. "But don't you give up. I'm still confident."

The Grouch had taken to whistling again, and every note was a pæan of sheer joy. Miss Dean heard him, but took no notice, other than to smile mysteriously.

At nine fifty-five the Grouch was cheerfully announcing an offer of fifty to one, which he said would stand good until the end of the contest. There was no taker.

Higgins made his last stand in the center of the pond, from which point he dropped a fresh frog right and left, as far as his tireless wrist could send it. It was a gallant display, but it went without reward.

"Ten o'clock!"

It was the victory song of the Grouch.

Higgins looked at his own watch, sighed heavily, and began reeling in his line. He looked at Miss Dean tragically, and found her smiling.

"Tough luck," he mumbled.

"I want you to row over to the dam," she said quietly.

He picked up the oars and obeyed. The Grouch was waiting for them, with fine condescension in his manner.

"Pay at your convenience, Higgins," he said. "No hurry, you know."

Miss Dean looked calmly up at the Grouch as she stepped ashore and measured glances with him.

"Mr. Higgins is not going to pay the bet at all," she announced.

"Indeed? He welches, then?"

Higgins interrupted hastily.

"Oh, you're wrong, Miss Dean. I lost and I'll pay."

Then, turning to the Grouch: "Don't you call me a welcher."

"Mr. Higgins has not lost the bet," said Miss Dean, still regarding the Grouch with steady eyes.

The Grouch bowed low with mock surprise.

"I'll let Higgins decide whether he lost," he said.

"No, you won't. You'll permit me to decide, if you please. And I say that he hasn't lost."

The fisherman looked perplexed.

"Much obliged, Miss Dean," he said, "but I lost. There's nothing to argue about."

"Ah, but there is," declared the lady mysteriously.

"That being the case, we'll listen," said the Grouch ironically, as he bowed again.

"Thank you; I'm sure you'll be interested," replied Miss Dean. "Now, as I understood the bet, Mr. Higgins was to catch a certain fish placed in this pond, within a time limit of four hours."

Both gentlemen nodded.

"Very well. In that case the bet depended entirely on the fish being in the pond. You'll admit that, won't you?"

"I admit it," said the Grouch.

"If the fish wasn't there, then there couldn't be a bet, could there?"

"No. That's admitted."

Miss Dean turned and surveyed the pond for an instant, and then placidly remarked:

"Well, there isn't any fish in that pond."

The Grouch stared for a moment and then smiled sardonically.

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?" he observed. "Just because he couldn't catch it, it isn't there. That's the way you're going to squirm out of the bet, I suppose.

"Oh, fine! Why, both of you saw the fish put in, and I think you'll admit there isn't any way for it to get out. You'll have to think of something better."

"It's not in the pond," repeated Miss Dean.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Grouch irritably. "Do you claim that, Higgins?"

Higgins shook his head and looked at Miss Dean with a puzzled expression.

"There! He doesn't claim it," said the Grouch.

"Nevertheless, I claim it," observed Miss Dean quietly. "And I'll bet you a hundred dollars even that it isn't in the pond."

"You mean to stand there and tell me that 'Tilley' isn't in that pond?"

"And to back my assertion," she said.

There was a challenge in Miss Dean's eyes that the Grouch did not miss.

"Oh, rot!" he exclaimed. "How can you prove it, even if Tilley isn't there?"

"If I say I can prove it, will you make the bet?"

"A hundred even," nodded the Grouch. "And I'll pay when you prove it."

Miss Dean smiled an acknowledgment.

"Follow me!" she commanded.

Leading the way along the dam to the shore, she walked directly to a thicket of bushes, opened a clear space with her arms, and lifted out a tin pail.

"Look!" was all she said.

They looked. In the pail was a red-eye, and in his upper lip were the marks of two holes.

"Is that Mr. Tilley?" she asked.

Higgins picked the fish out of the pail, examined it, and nodded his head. The Grouch likewise examined it, and, after a pause, nodded.

"Mr. Tilley," unhappily, was dead, but they recognized him.

"What — what the devil does this mean?" demanded the Grouch.

"I don't understand anything about it," confessed Higgins, shaking his head.

"Then listen," said Miss Dean. "It was I who caught 'Mr. Tilley.'"

The Grouch gasped.

"I didn't do it deliberately," she said. "But I did it, just the same. It happened yesterday afternoon, late. I'll tell you how.

"I got talking to Knock about catching fish; I had the bet in my mind, of course. And Knock told me about how he could catch a bass on a piece of red flannel.

"I never heard of such a thing, and I didn't believe it. It made me very curious. So I asked him to lend me his fishing-pole."

As she said "pole," Higgins winced involuntarily.

"And then he got me a piece of red flannel. I believe it came from one of Mr. Brundage's shirts; but, of course, that's just a side issue. I intended to go up to the lake and try it, but I knew Mr. Higgins was there, and I thought he might laugh at me. So I came here to the pond to experiment."

Higgins and the Grouch stood in breathless silence.

"I didn't really expect to catch 'Mr. Tilley,'" she went on. "I hadn't the least idea of it. But I did want to play with that piece of red flannel.

"So I walked out on the dam and threw it out into the water. Nothing happened, so I pulled it in and threw it again. I did that about six times.

"And then—then I caught Mr. Tilley."

Miss Dean paused and looked at her audience.

"When I found I had caught him," she said, "I was terribly excited. I knew that I must put him right back. I hauled him ashore as fast as I could, so that I could get the hook out of his mouth. He flopped around terribly; I couldn't get hold of him at all.

"After I'd been trying for a while and only got my fingers pricked on his fins, I managed to get my foot on him. I'm afraid it didn't do him any good, because I had to press hard to hold him. Finally I did manage to get the hook loose.

"But—but Mr. Tilley was dead. It was all very unpleasant, and I'm sorry about it. So I put him in a pail and hid him in the bushes, and now Mr. March owes me a hundred dollars."

She beamed pleasantly upon the Grouch as she concluded her explanation.

"But," said Higgins slowly, "if you knew he wasn't in the pond, why did you let me go on fishing?"

There was a note of sincere reproach in his voice.

"I didn't plan to do that at all," said Miss Dean. "I expected to explain things before you started in this morning. But I overslept, you see; and when I arrived here the contest had begun. And Mr. March

seemed to be so terribly confident that he was going to win, when I knew, of course, that he couldn't, that I decided to let it go right on. I thought it would be nice to surprise him."

She glanced casually at the stormy face of the Grouch, and then smiled at the fisherman.

"Now you understand why I was so sure you couldn't lose the bet," she added. "Isn't it odd that I should turn out to be the winner?"

"Winner?" barked the Grouch. "You haven't won anything. You can't make a bet on a sure thing. You *knew* Tilley wasn't in the pond.

"That's no bet. Anybody'll tell you that."

"You offered to pay when I proved it," she observed.

"That's nothing. A bet involves a hazard. Nobody can bet on a sure thing."

"Welching?" asked Miss Dean sweetly.

The Grouch turned purple.

"Pay at your convenience. No hurry, you know," she said, as she quoted his own words.

"I won't stand for it!" he cried. "I'll never—"

"I think we'll go, Mr. Higgins," and Miss Dean linked her hand within his arm. "I've missed my breakfast at the farmhouse. Would you mind cooking me some? I'll help. But I warn you that I have an atrocious appetite."

As she led Higgins away from the battlefield, she called back to the Grouch:

"A check will do nicely, thank you. I'm almost certain it will be good."

CHAPTER XV.

A FLASH IN THE DARK.

WHEN Augustus J. Tilley learned of the affair at the mill-pond he became as one suffering from a secret grief. Mame Brundage told him about it, Mame having a version that came from Higgins, who, recovering from the shock of his four-hour travail, underwent a reaction that made him as jubilant as if victory had been his.

The triumph of Miss Dean and the dismay of the Grouch were suitably emphasized by the fisherman, and when she repeated the tale, Mame left a still wider margin of contrast, although she expressed her firm conviction that Mr. March had been the victim of a transaction that would not stand the white light of examination.

Tilley went away by himself and brooded. He took with him a butterfly-net of home manufacture, in order to give his errand the similitude of something it was not. He had no intention of pursuing butterflies or any other insects: he wanted to be alone, where he could consider his troubles unmolested.

He considered them for a long time, at the end of which life was no brighter than at the beginning. Not only was he disappointed in Miss Louise Dean, but he was deeply concerned at her conduct.

He admitted to himself that he did not understand her, and that she was more inexplicable to-day than on the morning of their first meeting. What troubled him most of all was the fact that she had apparently been a party to an exploit intended to hold him up to ridicule, for it seemed singularly wanton that a common fish should have been lightly named in his doubtful honor.

It hurt him doubly that Miss Dean had been the author of the name, for so he had been assured by Mame, who had seen fit to revise that part of Higgins's story. For a time he had been placing faith in the sincerity and friendship of the lady of the cottage; now he found himself shaken and unhappy.

His lonely walk took him as far as the village, and while there he visited the railroad station and sent another telegram, for which Joe Gildersleeve charged him a dollar and twenty-eight cents.

He said if there was an answer it need not be sent out to the farm; that he would call again in the morning, and that it could be held for him. Among other things in that telegram, Tilley said:

"No answer to my last wire. Things worse. Must hear from you."

Nearing the farm on his return journey, he stopped by the roadside to recover his

butterfly-net, which he had hidden behind a stone wall, and then made his entrance to the Brundage property by way of a short cut through the orchard, not caring to run the risk of meeting anybody who might be walking on the road. He was in no mood for meetings.

In his room, with the door locked, the naturalist went to one of his grips and unpacked a small camera, the mechanism of which he examined with an expert and careful eye. Next he unwrapped a folding tripod and assured himself that it was in proper condition. After that he loaded the camera with a single plate and devoted himself to overhauling some other photographic apparatus that also came out of his grip.

Satisfied at last with the result of his labors, he lay down on the bed, in the hope that he might be able to soothe his anxious mind in sleep.

"I don't like it, but it's my duty," he muttered.

He was still lying there, staring at the ceiling, when the supper bell rang. In the dining-room, which was merely one end of the same apartment that contained the kitchen, he confronted Miss Dean, cool and gracious, and apparently ignorant that he was aware of the unhappy episode of the mill-pond.

She greeted him so pleasantly that he was almost disarmed, and she chatted so light-heartedly about inconsequential matters that it was difficult for him to remember that he had steeled himself to the execution of a stern but necessary act.

After supper he waited until dusk before he left the farmhouse, and then it was with a large paper package tucked under his arm. He made his exit inconspicuously; yet it was unlikely that any one would have taken more than passing notice of him, even if they met him, because Tilley was a person to whom the carrying of bundles was as natural as the wearing of clothing.

Without a bundle he always suggested an incomplete object, while a paper parcel invariably set him off and finished the picture in a most satisfying manner.

His walk took him across the meadow, not along the path that led to the cottage, but on a tangent course, so that he reached the creek at a considerable distance from Miss Dean's domicil. He effected a crossing by means of a series of stepping-stones he had discovered some days previously, and when safely ashore again, continued his walk until he knew that he was hidden from sight in a grove of birches.

Then he began circling to the left, picking his way easily among the trees, until he arrived at a point in the rear of the cottage, where his line of progress intersected a well-worn path.

Here he stopped and made a careful study of his surroundings. It proved that the place suited his purpose, for he unwrapped his bundle and took therefrom the camera, the tripod, and accessories necessary to his plans.

He set the tripod firmly on its legs behind a clump of bushes, half a dozen feet from the path, and then mounted the camera, sighting as well as he could in the dim light to make sure that the lens was focused on a spot about twenty feet distant along the path.

Then he busied himself with a flash-light attachment, which he affixed to a tree that stood close to the tripod. To the flash-light trigger he tied a piece of stout twine. Going up the path to a selected point, he passed the twine around the trunk of a birch, then crossed the path with it and tied the end firmly to another tree. When he had completed this operation there was a taut string stretched across the path, about six inches above the ground.

"What you doin'?" inquired an eager voice.

Tilley jumped violently and discovered Knock Brundage standing within a few feet of him.

"I been watchin'. What you doin'?" repeated Knock.

"I—I'm getting ready to take a photograph," stammered the naturalist.

"What of?"

Tilley had a natural impulse to tell the Brundage torment it was none of his business, but he reflected rapidly that another course would be wiser.

"I'm going to photograph an animal," he said.

"What kind?"

"A wild animal."

Knock's eyes widened so that they shone in the gloom.

"A wild one!" he exclaimed. "They ain't no wild ones round here, exceptin' woodchucks an' skunks an' squirls."

Tilley was about to say that a woodchuck was exactly what he was after, but decided an instant later that a woodchuck was not sufficiently wild to inspire in Knock a wholesome resolution to keep away from the place.

"It's a wilder animal than any of those," he said.

"A bear?" gasped Knock.

"Exactly. A bear."

Knock uttered a low whistle of awe, but soon rallied.

"Pop says they ain't been no bears around here for years an' years," he declared.

"Your father hasn't been looking for them, then," said Tilley boldly. "I happen to know there is at least one."

"Gee! You seen him?"

"Only his tracks."

"Where? Here?"

"Right on this path," answered Tilley, in a sepulchral voice.

Knock looked quickly behind him and saw a bush that looked far too much like a bear.

"Gee!" he whispered. "A big bear?"

"Yes. A very large one."

"Is—is he round anywheres now?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

Knock could feel that his scalp was getting too small.

"What you want to take his picture for? Why don't you shoot him?" he asked in a hushed tone.

"I want his picture first. After that, perhaps—"

"I'm goin' to tell my pop, an' he'll shoot him. He'll shoot him right through the head."

"You're not to tell your father anything about it," declared Tilley hastily. "Not until I get my picture."

"Will you get it to-night?"

"Perhaps."

"You goin' to stay here and take it?"

"No. The picture will take itself. I'm going away from here now."

"So'm I," declared Knock hastily. "Gee!"

Tilley made a final examination of the camera, aided by an electric pocket-torch, then snapped off the light and opened the lens. It was very dark in the birch grove, and as he picked his way along the path in the direction of the cottage, he became aware that Knock was holding fast to his coat.

"I bet you it's an awful big bear," the boy was saying. "I bet he's taller 'n you are. I bet he eats an awful lot. Gee! Do you s'pose he'd eat Miss Dean?"

Knock had in mind the fact that the path they were treading in the deep gloom led from the rear of the cottage to a spring that lay about a hundred yards distant, and that Miss Dean was in the habit of visiting the spring whenever she was thirsty, preferring it to the well water at the farmhouse.

"Miss Dean, she sometimes goes out to the spring after dark," he said in an awed voice. "She told Mame she did. She ain't 'fraid of the dark. She ain't scared of *anything*.

"I bet maybe she wouldn't be scared of the bear. Gee! I wouldn't go up there after dark."

This frank declaration of timidity was exactly as Tilley wished. He wanted Knock Brundage to keep away from the path, and it was with that in view that he had adopted Knock's imaginary bear and invested it with an atmosphere of reality.

The naturalist knew as well as Knock Brundage that Miss Dean frequented the path to the spring. He knew more than that, too; he knew that Higgins sometimes trod the same path. And he knew, still further, that on at least one occasion the solitary figure of the Grouch had wandered through the birch woods after dusk, in a most mysterious fashion.

These things he knew, because he had gone afield himself, and had seen with his own eyes.

"I bet you," Knock was saying in a more confident tone, "Miss Dean 'd shoot that bear herself if she had pop's gun. He's

got a gun that 'll shoot anything. You know what he shot once? He shot—"

"Keep still," commanded Tilley.

The dim outline of the cottage appeared before them, and the naturalist veered off so as to pass around it, out of earshot. Knock was still clinging to him.

They made the crossing of the creek by the stepping-stones, for Tilley was scrupulous to avoid the little bridge, because of its proximity to the cottage. In the meadow again, the naturalist halted.

"You'd better go home to bed," he advised Knock.

The latter hesitated.

"He—he won't be between here an' the farmhouse?"

"No; he's back in the woods," said Tilley reassuringly.

"Ain't you comin'?"

"Not yet. And don't say anything to your father or anybody about the bear. Not till I get the picture. Understand?"

"Sure. I understand. Only— Say, you're sure he don't go out in the medder?"

Knock was staring at the dark expanse with uneasy eyes.

"Absolutely. I'll be right here watching. Hurry along, now. Wait—here's a dime."

Knock mechanically transferred the dime to his pocket and drew a deep breath.

"I'm goin' to run," he said. "If you see anythin' comin', you stop it, will you?"

"I'll stop it. Run, now!"

The Brundage child disappeared in the darkness, traveling at the best pace his legs could afford. Tilley walked a little distance along the bank of the creek and then sat down. Opposite him was the birch grove.

It was ten o'clock, and another was walking abroad in the night. The Grouch, as usual, could not sleep. For that matter, he did not want to sleep. It had been an extremely trying day, and he was determined to spend a liberal amount of time in morose reflection upon its events.

Of late he had taken to walking among the birches, because in that manner he could make a complete circuit of the cottage, which it had become his whim to do, although he was careful never to approach it as closely as on the evening when Miss Dean caught her foot between the boards of the bridge.

The Grouch, wandering slowly among the trees, came to the path that ran between the cottage and the spring, and there he paused. It was his habit to pause there, whenever he reached this point in his nocturnal journeys.

For some reason, he took a sort of gloomy satisfaction, standing there in the dark silence, thinking disagreeable thoughts and tugging at his short mustache in nervous preoccupation.

The Grouch's ears were keen, and his pause was of less than a minute's duration when he heard a footstep on the path, quite close to him. Somebody was coming from the direction of the spring.

Very quietly he stepped aside and flattened himself against one of the birches, not more than a yard from the path. The steps were nearer now and he could hear the faint swish of a skirt. He drew a deep breath and held it, for the last thing in the world that he desired was discovery.

Now the walker was opposite him and he could barely discern the outline of her figure. She was moving slowly, all too slowly to suit the Grouch, who was beginning to experience discomfort in his lungs. And then certain events happened with bewildering speed.

He heard her foot trip against something, then a low exclamation of surprise. An instant later she seemed to have lost her balance, for she lurched heavily and fell against him.

And then the heavens appeared to open in a burst of white flame. There was a muffled report and a smell of acrid smoke, followed instantly by a blood-curdling shriek.

Everything was instantly black again—blacker than before—and the Grouch stood with a limp and unconscious lady in his arms.

"Hell!" he growled.

For several seconds he stood there, clinging helplessly to his burden and trying to put his thoughts in order. Then he shook the lady rather sharply.

"Buck up!" he commanded.

But she did not buck up, for she did not hear him. She lay still and rather sprawly in his arms, not even appearing to breathe. Suddenly the Grouch recollected himself.

The situation was impossible; he did not quite understand what had happened, but he did not propose to be blamed for it or to be associated with it in any way whatever.

So he lifted the lady into a more convenient position and started along the path with her, walking as rapidly as the darkness permitted. He had not covered half the distance to the cottage when he discovered that she was heavier than he thought and that he was considerably out of training.

He remembered having seen a fireman carry a factory girl down a ladder and he imitated the fireman as well as he could. Now his burden rode across his shoulder, like a loosely filled sack of meal; ungraceful, unromantic, but quite scientific, from the standpoint of a rescue.

All the Grouch asked was to get her to the cottage before she knew what was happening to her. He moved along very briskly, considering the darkness and the uncertainty of the path, swearing gently from time to time.

Of course, he could have dropped her at any time and effected an easy escape; but despite the fact that he was a grouch he was also a gentleman, although rarely a pleasant one. He spurned the impulse to rid himself of his burden and hurried onward.

The cottage confronted him, and he hastened around to the porch at the front, for there was only one entrance. There was no light within. Staggering up the steps, he crossed the porch and entered.

His shin struck against the point of a rocker and, with a muffled curse, he groped with a free hand until he located the chair, into which he dropped his unconscious lady more hastily than tenderly.

Then he paused, bent over and listened. It was evident that the shock of being abruptly dumped into the rocking-chair was having an effect calculated to produce speedy revival, for she was breathing audibly and her lips were beginning to murmur. In another minute she would be quite conscious.

The Grouch straightened up quickly, walked out of the cottage, crossed the bridge on tiptoe and hurried across the meadow, mopping his forehead as he went.

"She'll get over it," he muttered. "Handy thing sometimes to have 'em faint."

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.

TO AN ANXIOUS INQUIRER

BY ARTHUR POWELL

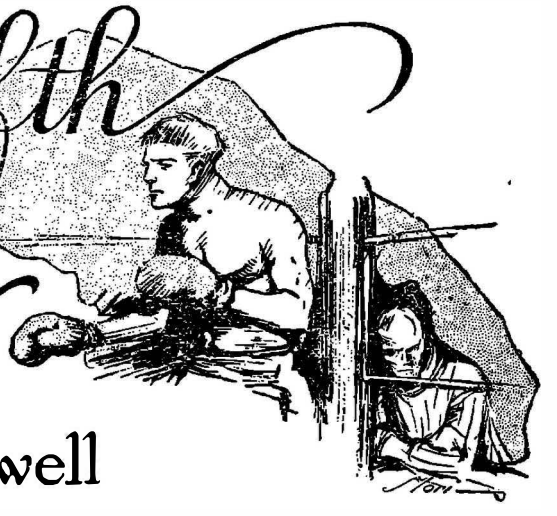
I—QUESTION.

HOW may the busy wife compete
With maidenhood in spring?
The caught seems never quite so sweet
As is the cageless thing!

II—ANSWER.

Cook well and wisely. Fickle minds
Must have their hour to roam.
But manly hunger always finds
The path that leads it home!

The Fifth Round



by E. S. Pladwell

IT was the people of the State of California who halted the rising career of little Danny Dale, but they committed their crime in all innocence. Not realizing the results to Danny, they went to the polls and voted in favor of a statute abolishing all prize-fights. Fistically inclined persons might thereafter indulge in gentlemanly "boxing contests" at not more than four rounds per contest, but that was all.

Before the law cast its blight in August of 1915, Danny Dale was rated highly. Six months later he was among the mediocre.

In the old days he had smashed his joyous way into the ranks of stars. Budding aspirants he had worn down because of his fighting heart and wonderful vitality; champions had been given the battles of their lives; near-champions had suffered many a heartbreak. The little blond Irishman was clean-living, well proportioned, and stout of heart, lacking only the quickness and the heady science that makes champions. Even at that he was climbing. And then the people of the State of California hit him with a new law.

Billy Kane diagnosed the trouble a half-year later in the dressing-room of a San Francisco pavilion, after Danny had put up his usual battle and the other gentleman-boxer had won the decision.

In the days of prosperity the tall and well-educated Billy Kane had been Danny's manager. Danny had a way of keeping friends. Though his nose was flattened, his ears were huge, and his heavy forehead and massive jaw gave him an indescribably low-brow appearance. But Danny had a winning smile. Children and dogs liked him. Business men trusted him. Fight-fans approved of him because a yellow streak was impossible. In and out of the ring Danny had a clean record. Billy Kane swore by him and sometimes at him.

"Confound it, if you'd only speed up!" wailed the irritated Kane as Danny was thoughtfully putting on his street clothes. "Why—why—why can't you nail these fellows?"

"Huh!" grunted the frowning Danny.

Kane fumbled with his watch-chain and looked at the little fighter thoughtfully. "Well," he hazarded, trying to make his voice gentle, "if you can't even lick these third-raters, maybe it's time to resign. You've built up a decent little drayage business out of your earnings, anyhow. You should worry about fights!"

A hurt look came into Danny's blue eyes, for he loved the fighting game. Also, the draying business was a sore problem. It kept him from winning laurels out of the State.

"Can't lick 'em?" he echoed resentfully. "Why, there ain't a one I couldn't take to pieces in ten rounds!"

"Yes," retorted Billy, "in ten rounds! That's just it. It takes you that long to get started. In a finish fight you'd make

these tramps jump out of the ring, but now every pretty dancing-master in the city waltzes around you for a few minutes and then grabs the money!"

"They won't stand up!" argued the depressed little fighter.

"Sure not. Why should they? They want to box pretty and take away the coin. These are not prize-fights. Prize-fights are naughty! These are boxing-contests.

"Take to-night, for instance. What happened? This man Burns smiled and bowed to the audience and then poked three jabs into your face. You tried to walk into him. Did you walk into him? No! He was away from there, dancing all around you. Then you laid back and tried to knock him cold. You seem to have brutal instincts at times. But did your brutal instincts get you anywhere? They did not. By the time your wild swing was over he was behind you, tapping at your ears like a woodpecker and piling up his points. That's the way the whole boxing contest went. I said contest out of courtesy to you."

The satire went over Danny's head, and his friend sighed. "Why don't you quit?" pleaded Kane. "The fans are getting restless! Any one else would have been down and out long ago. Why not quit?"

Danny was looking intently at a shoe in his hand, concealing the hurt look in his eyes. Kane had never hinted at retirement before.

"Mebbe I will quit," sighed the little fighter. "Wait till after my next scrap—two weeks from now. Mebbe I'll want to retire then, anyhow."

Billy nodded understandingly. He knew what Dale meant.

Danny's was not the handsome countenance of a Romeo, but his heart had placed him in the soft rôle of a wooer despite his cave-man face. The other party in the Tehama Street romance was Miss Mamie Dorgan, who worked in the Universal Department Store.

Mamie Dorgan possessed regular features, wavy brown hair, a trim figure, and a dimpled chin. She wore a two-dollar hat, an eight-dollar suit, nine-dollar silk stockings, and twelve-dollar patent-leather shoes. She knew the names of all the movie heroes, danced beautifully, read the problem-stories in the magazines, and simply annihilated chocolates. Cold analysts might have said that Mamie was not worth the winning, but they would have been wrong. She did not know how to nag, scold, vex, lecture, or backbite. She went on her placid way, chewing gum.

Danny had found himself in a supplicating rôle when this vision was near him. He touched her as if afraid to hurt her, and when she spoke he felt little thrills tingling all over him. She seemed to favor him, too. That was the miracle of it!

And then arrived the dark-haired Frank Weaver.

He called himself "Battling" Weaver. Admirers termed him a clever boy and a comer. He was fast, shifty, and nimble. On his social side he had the soft-toned suavity of a Pullman porter, the dancing ability of a cabaret patron, and the small-talk agility of a patter-artist. His hair was curly, his jaw was pointed, his eyes were appraising, and his clothes were more than up-to-date. After he began to visit a certain Tehama Street residence regularly, Danny Dale felt sick at heart.

"He's a snide!" Danny had said to his pal. "He's all front and nothin' inside. And yet girls fall for that sort of thing! I wouldn't care so much if he was a high-class fella, but he ain't. I don't know what to do. If I tell her what I think, she'll call me jealous, and mebbe give me the go-by! If I punch his nose, maybe she'll give him sympathy. I don't know what to do. Maybe I am jealous, at that. I dunno." Danny was striving to be fair.

"Well, you'll get him in the ring in a few weeks," the thoughtful Kane had suggested. "Go after him, then! Or—why not rush her before he goes too far! That's the stuff! Force things!"

Danny looked unimpressed.

"Put it right up to her!" urged Billy, who was a bachelor himself, but had theories. "That's what I'd do. I'd just say, 'Look here! I'm tired of stalling around. Get your hat on. You're going to get married right now!' That's about what I'd do. Women like the rough stuff!

She can't any more than throw you out, anyhow!"

Danny had deferred to his friend's superior wisdom, but found himself strangely timid when the time came. Miss Dorgan ably performed the rough stuff herself.

She intimated that she liked Danny and Frank equally, and that each had attractions which the other lacked. She admitted frankly that she did not know which to choose. She then spoke of her loathing of the prize-fighting business, but held that even in that vile occupation she preferred to see a person make good. She liked men who succeeded.

From this point she hinted that the gentleman who won the coming dispute would probably be the lucky man, neglecting to mention that she had gleaned this aged idea from sundry reading-matter, beginning with "Ivanhoe" and working down. To her it was novel and highly exciting. It put Mamie Dorgan on a par with *Lady Rowena*. It made her the center of a real, thrilling, flesh-and-blood romance that would make the other girls purple with envy.

Thus Danny Dale found himself with a new motive when next he walked from the dressing-room and climbed through the ropes into the familiar environment of the ring.

Danny always arrived with a feeling of exhilaration. He loved the game. He liked the feel of resin on his feet, tight gloves on his hands, and black trunks about his otherwise nude body. He liked the clatter of massed feet and the hum of many voices within the great pavilion. He liked the smell of cigar-smoke that drifted about the half-darkened place, and the yells of soda-pop venders, and the familiar faces of sporting-writers at the press-table under the ring. He liked the barking voice of the announcer who introduced him and his competitor to the clapping, expectant crowd at the end of six other bouts. He enjoyed the feeling of being the head-liner on the program. He was satisfied with the thrill in his own body. He knew he was fit for any contest.

Billy Kane and a less cultured friend ministered to Danny while he relaxed in his corner and nodded to acquaintances in the audience.

"Don't try to box!" warned the crafty Kane while tying on the gloves. "Make him swap punches. If you can't do that, back him up, anyhow. Maybe you can get the decision just on aggressiveness. Keep after him!"

"Never mind about that!" promised the frowning Danny as he eyed his shrewd-looking, dark-faced opponent in the green bath-robe and green trunks in the other corner. "Mebbe the ring won't be big enough for him!"

It sounded like bombast, but it was only self-confidence. In a fight Danny was a fighter. At such times his grin was gone. He was all berserk. Kane knew that, but he also knew the other man's record in these short bouts. Weaver's light blows were often numerous enough to cut a man to pieces.

"Don't be too confident!" warned Billy. "That's a clever boy. He's just like a fly. Try to pin him down. That's all I ask—pin him down!"

Sarcastic confirmation of Kane's estimate followed from another source, making Danny angry and rebellious.

"Hey, Dale!" yelled a reporter. "Want me to hold Weaver so you can hit him?"

Danny did not deign to reply, but the sarcasm hurt. So people believed he was slowing up! He walked grimly into the center of the ring at the call of the referee, listened to a few instructions, and then heard the clang of the gong. The fight was on. Four thousand men and a few women in the audience craned forward to watch two white bodies struggle under the slanting light over the ring.

Danny ran forward, and the tips of his gloves met those of Weaver. Eye gazed at eye appraisingly. There was a stern, personal element to this fight, but it was put aside for the moment. It was now a matter of technique and workmanship. Weaver snapped out a left that glanced off Danny's glove. Dale stepped forward to close in, but the other shifted away and swung another left that landed in the stomach. Some one in the audience yelled shrilly.

Danny crouched and walked ahead. The other backed away. Dale rushed, flailing with both fists, but the other ducked and jumped sidewise. Danny kept walking forward wherever the other was standing. He cracked a sudden fist into the man's ribs, but Weaver was away in an instant, and snapped a quick glove from the side into Danny's eye. Danny swung, but the man was gone. Weaver feinted with the left and hit with the right. Dale parried quickly enough and still tried to walk into the man, holding his head low. The other struck again and danced sidewise. Soon he began to make it a regular performance. He hit twice and dodged, then came back and repeated. It was one-two and jump.

Dale started swinging inward with each hand, trying to catch the other within the cross-fire. But the gloves only struck the air. Weaver ducked under them and tapped Danny from the side. Dale changed his tactics, driving upward a rain of uppercuts and trying to bore in.

The first one landed on the cheek. The crack of the blow sounded through the pavilion. Some one in the audience said, "Oh!"

But Weaver smiled, foiled the other uppercuts easily, and slapped a glove into Danny's mouth, jumping away. Danny rushed, lashing with both arms and landing on the other's gloves or chest. Weaver danced backward. He caromed off the ropes at an angle, and started after Dale from another direction. Again Dale rushed in, getting a blow on the forehead and giving one in the side in return.

Weaver danced in again tantalizingly, but he misjudged his next move. He was too near the edge when he started. Danny took his blow on the stomach and then walked straight into him, backing him to the ropes. Danny smashed a right into the man's side, then swung with a mighty left toward the jaw.

"*Oof!*" yelled the crowd when the crunch came.

But it was only a glancing blow, though it made Weaver see stars, take thought, and clinch. The referee was just breaking them when the gong rang.

"That's the stuff!" advised the smiling Billy Kane, while Dale relaxed himself in his chair and the other second waved a cooling towel. "Get him into a corner! Then get busy! If you can make him swap punches, it's all off!"

But Danny did not get the man into the corner in that round or the next. The cautious, shifty Weaver had learned his lesson. It was one-two and jump; one-two and jump. Every time Dale got too close Weaver would dodge toward the center of the ring till Danny made him retreat toward some other corner, where he would shift out again. Time after time Danny worked his man almost into position, disregarding the nimble gloves, striving only to smash into that sardonic, confident, grinning face.

But the man was too quick. He danced toward danger almost as if to tantalize. Then he shifted out again. His blows hit Dale from every direction. They came like rain. Once or twice Danny ripped a fist into the body or the dodging head, but they never landed quite right, even though the thud of each powerful blow smacked through the pavilion.

"Stand up, you yellow mutt!" snarled Danny at length as he doggedly backed the man up.

"Stand up nothing!" jeered the other. "I'm going to win, you truck-horse!" And he grinned.

Dale reached a vicious hook toward the taunting face, but it wasn't there. Danny rushed, swinging his arms from every direction. The other danced out of it and snapped two more into Danny's face. The little blond fighter rushed and rushed and rushed. The blows of the other opened his lip and nearly closed his left eye, but once Danny slammed a right into the kidneys that made Weaver wince, and once he nearly knocked the man down.

It happened in the third round. The shifty Weaver dodged to the right, tapped Danny twice on the chest, then dodged to Danny's left. Dale reached out his left arm rigidly. It prevented the other from dodging for an instant. It touched his ear and held him in position just long enough for Danny to reach out a crushing right fist.

The pulverizing smash could be heard

beyond the far doorway. It put a horrible look in Weaver's eyes for a second, and sent him reeling backward. Danny was on him instantly, but Weaver was equally experienced. Though dazed, he twisted out from under a hard swing, regained his balance, clinched for a time to save himself, and then started tapping Danny again from the side.

"It's a draw, so far!" observed the optimistic Billy at the end of the third round. "He's given you five blows for one, but yours hurt. He's tiring. He's dancing himself out. Keep after him. You know what's at stake!"

In a way Danny had forgotten the matter, so intent was he on the business on hand; but now he resolved to force a decision. He knew the other would also put forth his mightiest efforts. It was the fourth and last round, where every boxer tries his best.

Danny uppercut and swung, rushing like a wild man. He remembered now his loathing for this other person. The latter had a sneer on his face that Dale longed to wipe out. Weaver dodged out of Danny's way and hit a hard crack over the ear. It was the worst he had struck yet. Dale countered with a left-handed swing that landed on the other's quick forearm. Weaver uppercut and reddened Danny's nose. Dale swung some more. The other struck him twice on the head and jumped sidewise. Danny forced him into a clinch again and jabbed at him viciously while looking over the bare shoulder at the audience.

They were mostly standing up, howling. Four big men near the ring were up on chairs, waving their arms. Loud yells of "Down in front!" were echoing through that section of the dark pavilion.

The referee stepped between the swirling fighters to clear them. Weaver danced in. He snapped two gloves into the face of the blond fighter, then bounced back as if on rubber.

Danny rushed forward. He collected himself for a paralyzing swing. His left glove described a wide arc. Weaver ducked under it. The swing met empty air just as Weaver slapped in a whack to the ear. Danny's effort threw him off balance. His toe caught that of the other and he tripped and went sprawling.

"*Yow!*" shrieked some one in the vast assemblage.

A roar and a gust of talk swept through the pavilion. The whole audience was standing on chairs now. Danny jumped to his feet and rushed in. He took a straight left to the face. His right arm lashed forward. The other's forearm made it glance down, and it only raised a welt on the sweaty bare chest. Weaver grinned and cut in another quick blow to the face. Danny set his teeth and walked forward with ferocious intent.

He wanted to smash that grinning face, pulverize it, grind it into the ground. He wanted to land one mighty blow—just one. The other was tiring a little. Danny knew it. Two more rounds and the man could be worn down. Three more and he would be rolling limply on the floor. Danny prayed for time, but he knew he could not have it.

And, mean time, the panting Weaver's hair was still neatly parted, his face was without a mark and his sneering smile was more triumphant than ever. By all outward appearances he was winning hands down. Danny's face was battered, but he did not care for that. All he wanted was one good blow!

One-two came Weaver's fists on Danny's face and chest. Dale set himself for a mighty smash, but Weaver was away. One-two came the whacks again. Danny rushed into them. It gave them more impact, but he didn't care. He swung upward. The vicious blow was aimed for the chin, but it hit the forehead. One-two came Weaver's blows again. Danny walked forward and set himself grimly. The gong rang.

The noise clanged into Danny's consciousness like the crack of doom. And yet was it doom? He put his arms to his side and looked about, fearful of the verdict and yet wondering. He found himself trembling. Billy Kane beckoned him to his corner, and he walked there mechanically and sat down to have his face sponged; but he did not look at his helpers. He was watching slips of paper handed

into the ring by the two judges. The third judge was the referee.

Danny feared the verdict subconsciously, and yet when the referee walked over to Weaver and raised his right arm the action made Danny choke. A great roar arose from the standing crowd. Thunders of applause shook the building. Then the crowd started filing out, kicking chairs aside lustily and yelling "Good fight!"

The unthinkable had come true! Frank Weaver had won!

A patting, caressing hand, owned by a friend, touched Danny's shoulder. Dale looked down, stunned by the consciousness of defeat, and ashamed to let Kane see the anguish in his eyes. He drooped his head and hunched his shoulders, but soon he gathered himself together and arose.

"Oh, well," he said, finding his voice strangely hoarse, "I guess this is my last fight! Let's go!"

Billy patted his shoulder again, and together they went to the dressing-room, where Danny silently donned his clothes. Kane said nothing. Words would have been useless. The catastrophe was too complete.

Danny had lost his fight, his career, and his girl. Kane was only thankful that Weaver had kept silent, and left the ring without giving Danny a passing sneer.

Sorrowfully and wordlessly the pair left the now-deserted pavilion and walked up the street. They plodded onward glumly for nearly a block, past rows of houses and cheap shops long since closed for the night. They came to a swinging-door, where light was thrown across the sidewalk. Inside was the hum of lively voices, some of which were recognized. The place was a rendezvous for fighters, trainers, managers, pavilion attendants, and "sports."

Dale hesitated for an instant. Billy tugged at his arm, but Danny stopped, cocking his head a trifle. "Wait a minute!" he said. "I think I hear somethin'!"

It was true. Out of the ruck of talk came a loud, high-pitched, self-assertive voice boasting of triumph.

"He only touched me once!" came the sound. "Only once, by a fluke! Grudge fight? Sure it was. There's a chicken he's stuck on, but she'll give him the run now! Sure I'll get her! Good-looking jane, too! Him? That truck-horse? I could take him on any day in the week!"

Danny felt his blood get hot at this public announcement of a woman's conquest. It came like the lash of a whip. Trembling with wrath, he started to walk in, but Kane shook his arm.

"Lay off!" hissed Billy. "Don't get rash!"

"Well, I won't stand for that stuff!" snarled Danny.

"Oh, pass it up!" advised his friend. "It's only hot air!"

But Danny was past arguing with. His mind was in a sort of desperate battle-fog. He had lost everything and had nothing more to lose. He did not care about anything now. His heart was broken. He felt as if he would gladly butt his head against all creation. Even Kane was a side-issue. Danny tore away from the grasp of his friend savagely.

"Lemme alone!" he snarled, breaking through the swinging-doors.

Kane had never seen Danny in this mood. Without a word he let the little fighter go, and followed him inside, past a coterie of promoters, sports, fighters, managers, and writers. Danny headed straight for the back room, where the stylishly dressed Weaver, sitting on a card-table, was holding forth to a collection of boxers and ring-attendants.

The talk stopped suddenly. There was an awkward silence when Danny pushed through the crowd. Something in the little fighter's attitude commanded attention and he got it. He walked straight up to Weaver, and the latter slid off the card-table quietly to face him. There was a strange tension in the room.

"So you'd take me on any day in the week!" said Danny, his eyes narrowed.

Weaver looked around at the mass of faces watching him. If he backed down now, he knew it would blight his reputation forever.

"I guess I can," he answered easily. "What's it to you?"

"And you're mentionin' ladies," insisted Danny, "like a yellow dog!"

Weaver tossed the charge aside. "Aw, you're sore!" he sneered. "Don't bother me! You've been licked once! What more do you want? On your way—on your way!"

Danny's face flushed. He was almost crying with rage. "Licked?" he snarled. "Licked by a cheap dancin'-master like you? Huh! You couldn't lick me in a million years!"

"Nix—nix!" pleaded a burly promoter, trying to get between them. "The fight's over! Forget it!"

"Forget it?" roared Dale madly. "Forget it with this false-alarm braggin' about me?" He cracked the palm of his hand into Weaver's face. "That's how I forget it!" he shouted.

The slap made Weaver jump. He crouched into a defensive attitude. The promoter and the others tried to get between them. It looked like fight. Kane grabbed Danny's arm.

"Lay off!" hissed Kane. "Come on—quit it!"

"Lemme alone!" snarled Danny, jerking away.

"Hey!" yelled the owner of the place from the front. "Cut that out! If you wanna fight, go into the alley! And he jerked a thumb toward a rear door.

"That's what I'm after!" yelled Danny. His voice arose to oratorical pitch, and he addressed the whole crowd. "I want you gents to know officially that I'm through the fight game to-night! Through for good an' all! But before I quit I'm goin' to knock the tar out of one tinhorn snide that oughta be in the ash-can! Come on, you!" This to Weaver.

"Yes, you will!" snarled Weaver. "I'm not going to fool with you this time, Dale!"

"*Wow!* So Danny Dale's through!" exclaimed a spectacled sports-writer. "I saw him fight the champ and all the rest. What's the matter with Danny?"

"Plain disgust, I guess!" answered Kane. "He's liable to kill that Weaver fellow!"

"I'm not so sure," demurred the writer. "Weaver's clever!"

"Yes," said Billy shortly and scathingly —"clever!"

Weaver was going through the doorway. He had to. The whole Pacific Coast boxing profession would have talked if he hadn't. Friends of both parties had tried to dissuade them, but Danny was inflexible. He had taken the bit in his teeth. Weaver was scorched by a string of insults that would have made a corpse fight.

A duel between two such men was worth seeing, and the whole crowd followed into the enclosed alley, where a flare or two was kindly provided by the management. The police were far away, and, as all were warned against shouting or yelling, it was safe. Weaver took off his coat and collar and vest, and so did Danny. The others marked off a space with ropes. The heavy jowled owner of the place appointed himself referee. No words were used. Danny had said enough to get this thing started, and that was all he wanted.

It began as a brilliant exhibition of fistic science by Weaver, who meant business. He danced, jabbed, side-stepped, uppercut, swung and feinted with dazzling agility. He ran around Danny. He punched him from every angle. He hit his nose and made it bleed; he jabbed into that injured eye and made it purple; he whacked into Dale's ear and made it buzz. He made Danny look like a chopping-block!

But Dale walked forward relentlessly, keeping the other on the go. Once he struck Weaver heavily in the stomach and twice over the kidneys, but the man laughed harshly and kept tapping. Danny's face got redder all the time.

"Aw, take him out!" shouted some one.

"Shut up!" hissed Kane. "The fight hasn't begun yet!"

At the end of five minutes of whirlwind effort Weaver had a baffled look in his eyes. He had punched this chopping-block so many times he was getting tired. He did not know his blows lacked steam, but Danny knew. Danny was not aiming at Weaver's face yet. He was biding his own sweet time.

A hunted look was in Weaver's eyes after five minutes more. Though his face was untouched and Danny's was a horrible sight, endurance was reaching its limit. There were no rounds and no rests. And

still this inexorable battler kept him moving.

In five minutes more a look of horror was in Weaver's staring eyes. By now the blows were raining on him, not on Dale. It was *bang! bang! bang!* with each blow measured carefully and coolly.

"And he calls himself Battling Weaver!" came a sarcastic voice from the crowd.

Panting and straining, Weaver tried to clinch, but that only got him into worse trouble. Then he endeavored to play the one-two and jump, but it was getting slow, while the silent, unyielding Dale seemed stronger than ever. It made Weaver rabid. Half-shrieking in rage, he threw every ounce into his effort and whacked away ferociously from every angle, trying to discourage that battered, but relentless, block of steel in front of him.

Danny waited until Weaver was through, and then he really started to fight.

He smashed into the man's mouth and cut it wide open. He tore into the stomach and doubled him up. He banged into the straight nose and broke it. He crushed into the ears and made them sing. He slammed a mighty fist into each eye and closed it.

Gone was ring science and caution now. Gone was everything but the savage ferocity of an outraged fighting man. It was *slam! slam! slam!* He swung a pulverizing blow that knocked the teeth back into the man's mouth; he crashed his fists into the closing eyes again; he banged into the wind and doubled Weaver up. The man's face was a wreck, but Danny kept on, urged by his cold anger, tearing that once sneering face into ribbons. Weaver was stunned almost into insensibility.

"Stop it!" yelled a voice. "For the love of Mike, stop it!"

"No!" whined Danny. "No—no!"

He slammed another pole-ax blow over the man's heart. Weaver's head wabbled. A glazed look came into his eyes. But Danny did not care. It was primitive ferocity now. The fighting had become delirium. He set himself for a mighty blow. He measured the distance to the pointed chin and drew his powerful right arm backward. A big hand grabbed his wrist and held it.

"Cut that out, you little devil!" shouted the owner of the place. "Wadd'ye goin' to do? Kill him?"

"I don't care!" sobbed Danny. "Lemme go!"

"Nix!" roared the other. "Let him be! He's licked!"

Weaver put up his arms as he wabbled about helplessly. Danny thought it meant defiance. He tore away from his mentor and set himself again.

"All right!" panted Dale. "This is to a finish!"

"No!" gurgled Weaver, staggering to a wall for support and covering up his face weakly. "No—" His voice mumbled off and his knees gave away. Danny Dale was struggling in the arms of the referee.

"Come on!" shouted Billy Kane, grabbing Dale's arm and shaking him out of his berserk trance. "Wake up! The fight's over! Hear me? Come on! Get your face washed!"

The fighting light faded from Danny's eyes. He nodded dumbly, half-surprised at himself, and let his friend lead him away. Somehow he felt relieved, as if his world had changed for the better. He didn't know why, but he felt it. His whole body ached, but he did not care. His faith in himself had been justified. He had never been beaten except by the law of the State of California.

Next morning, early, Dale presented himself at a certain Tehama Street residence. Though his face was bruised and a patch was over one eye, his other eye and his whole attitude betrayed something masterful and determined and decisive—something Mamie Dorgan had never seen before in him. Unconsciously she thrilled to it.

"Come on!" he ordered. "Get your hat on! We're goin' to get married this instant!"

Mamie flushed, but there was a battle-light in Danny's dominating eye that she could not gainsay.

"All—right!" she answered slowly. And then, to be fair: "Did—did you win the fight?"

"I did!" said Danny. "I won! The boxing-contest, no; the fight—yes!"

A Shortage in Perfumes

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "The Green Sachem," "Trail of the Otter Pelts," "Dancing Laura," etc.

A "JANIE FRETE" STORY

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONSCIENCE OF HIS RACE.

WHEN Savanilla saw Derry Navror leave in so great a hurry, with some of the temperate zone fear of being seen in a compromising circumstance, she laughed. It was the gay, light laugh with which very reasoning women regard men who give way to their fears and feelings—never once dreaming from whence and by whom the flattering appellation of "reasoning beings" was applied to masculines.

Savanilla could well afford to laugh, having twisted Navror around her finger—having sent Captain Taulk away, his secret thought emptied into her willing ears. She had reaped through the unguarded fields where lay the harvests of traffic and trade, and from Taulk she had obtained the secret information, from Navror she had wormed the hidden fact.

Gaily she made the simple preparations which were necessary. As she flew about, her mind gloried in its opportunity. The longings of ages of passion had endured through the generations of her blood.

Away back yonder, somewhere, there had been a *grandee*, or a French nobleman, who had sought his fame and fortune down the Spanish main, and that man's ambition had survived through centuries of heterogeneous admixture of bloods, through Indian slave from Andean mines, through buccaneers and slave-traders of African ships, through Caribbean cannibals and beach-combers and traders and traffickers, and among the attractive women of a dozen periods of oppression, war, adventure, submission, rebellion, heroic wars, tragic peace, true love, wayward vice, and wandering instability, until now Savanilla, a pretty island girl, saw before her the opportunity of a hundred lifetimes.

"Ah! I shall escape!" she whispered breathlessly. "I have the means, and I shall be beautiful—with raiment according to my deserts, and the simple jewels that would add to the revelation of the luster of my skin, and the fire in my eyes!

"With fortune, I shall be frugal and circumspect, and wander forth to those gay cities, where I know they await me, and where I shall live the fifteen years that my beauty shall survive, and then—and then I shall come back to my islands, and be a nice, fat old lady, and it may be I shall be content, since I have lived!"

So she threw together the few things that she had need of, and she brought forth a little hoard which, in thrift, she had succeeded in accumulating. With great circumspection she made her way down the

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island to the harbor, where Janie Frete's copper-bottomed motor-boat was anchored, and running out to it in a little dugout canoe, she quickly hauled in the anchor, and in the dark night, ran to sea.

Returning along shore to her cabin, she carried on board all the things that she knew she needed, and then, throwing a kiss at the lovely gloom of the island trees, she steered from it, away to the northwest, where stands the world that all the islanders look to, as the United States to its metropolis, Great Britain to London, and all the world to Paris.

"Ahoa!" she cried joyously, when clear of the land, with the gay, luminous deep about her, with the green fires breaking in the night whitecaps, and with the play of the phosphorescent lights wandering through the heaps of the running seas, and lying in the hollows of the trembling troughs.

Standing at the wheel in the cabin pilothouse, which jutted just above the raised deck in the bow, she steered her course for Cuba, with Havana as her destination.

In Havana she would enter upon the career which she had planned. There she would learn to be beautiful, like the loveliest ladies in all the foreign lands, but more so, because she was neither French nor Spanish, but both, and yet possessed of some English, and a trace of Teuton, and with the rest, no doubt, the stern dignity of some remote sun-god Inca, the thrift of some remote, invisible Hebrew, and the proud insubordination of an Inca.

She knew! The looking-glass had told her the secret of her own people. She was more than Sorilla, who was Creole and golden tropical; she was more than that baffling, rosy, blue-eyed, sternly and rigorously intelligent and intellectual Janie Frete; Savanilla had in mind lines of thought and absence of conscience, and certainty of divination unknown to all or any of her sisters, as fortunate in their inheritance of ability, more fortunate in their circumspection and determination of habit and custom.

So Savanilla, having pirated Janie Frete's motor-boat, having seized upon Janie Frete's inheritance from Prolney Coswill, and fully aware of the intricacies of the one and the value of the other, sallied forth, as her remote ancestors had sallied forth with the profits of a raiding cruise upon the Spanish main, or across the boundless oceans, to find the gaieties and excitements which men of murder, men of loot, men of brutal instinct must needs look forward to, having no other hope or passion or longing.

So Savanilla sailed forth, alert and alive to her opportunities, her mind eager and her head full of a thousand dreams, but not knowing much beyond the horizon she had always known.

She had waited in patience for the day when she would go. Never had she questioned for a moment the belief that she would depart, and be the *grande dame*, beautiful rival of wives and sweethearts.

Having learned no better, she dreamed as great dreams as she could, and her ambition was as high, and higher, than she had ever known.

All day and all night, till she was a tired and worried girl, she held that course which she knew was right. In the dawn, off to the northward, her eyes caught sight of an island, and steering to it, she found a sheltered harbor, and dropped her anchor to rest.

She saw back among the palms a pretty little cabin, painted white, and with a wide porch. She was too tired to think more about it, so she turned in to enjoy a peaceful sleep.

Toward the day's end a voice hailed from alongside, and Savanilla started up, and stepped outside to look around, in some confusion, with her hair in two long braids, and in Janie's own *robe de nuit*, which had been nearest at hand.

A low whistle of astonishment greeted her, as she blinked unseeing, but decidedly seeable, there in the sunshine. She soon saw the whistling boy, and regarded him with interest.

He was a smooth-shaven, well-tanned, alert-looking young man. His eyes were blue, he was tall, and he was smiling. Without embarrassment she gazed at him as he stared.

"*Voila!*" she smiled.

"I behold!" he cried out, looking past

her into the cabin, as if wondering about her companions.

"Oh, I am alone," she declared, and he half frowned as he replied in French:

"You—alone? How can that be?"

"Because I had no one to come with me."

"Did you ask anybody?" he demanded.

"Not yet." She shook her head.

"Then ask me!" he demanded. "I'll—I'll—"

"Would you really like to go with me?" she parried.

He turned and looked at that white cabin amid the palms. He wet his lips and stared at her slim and shapely feet and ankles. He, too, must needs hesitate when challenged in that tropical way.

He looked to be, and he was, one of those north-temperate-zone men, who could not possibly get the view-point of the Antilles instantly. She understood, having heard strange stories about these slow-wits from the north—slow, reluctant, but, oh, such faithful men!

"Why—why—" he cried explosively. "I don't know—but—you see—"

"Is it possible you could have any doubts about whether you would *like* to go with me?" she emphasized.

"Like to—good Lord!" he gasped. "But—"

"Perhaps you have somebody else there?"

"Oh—no! Not that—I'm alone, except—"

"Except what?"

"Why, two or three servants, and the people here; it's my island."

"Oh, you don't want to leave your island?"

"Yes, that—and—" He stopped in confusion.

"How old are you?" she asked, as if she were about forty.

"Twenty-two."

"Very young." She shook her head.

"But you're—"

"Nineteen," she said gravely.

"Three years younger than I am!" he jeered.

"Oh, no!" she denied him. "You are from the United States, or Boston, or New York, or some foreign country like that, where men are young at twenty-five; but down here we are old at seventeen."

She sat down on the locker near him, and gazed curiously at his small, fine hands, at the rolling curl of his pompadour, at the gay blue of his eyes, and at the fairness of his countenance. He was a beautiful boy.

Her resolution was already wavering. What would beauty be in Havana? What would wealth do for her there?

She speculated on the terrible stories of what happened to some of the pretty girls who swam to Havana!

"What are doing here?" she asked.

"Why—spending the winter down here," he admitted. "I've got to go to work next fall—"

"To work?" she asked, disappointed.

"Yes," he replied gravely. "A man must work—some."

On his finger flashed a beautiful diamond; in his cravat was a lustrous pearl; his little runabout motor-boat cost no less than three hundred dollars gold, and probably five hundred dollars; that cabin was beautifully and newly built.

Savanilla's thought searched through her memory for more information about these terribly, uncomfortably, unnecessarily industrious people of the north. In theory, she adored energy and determination and resolution; in fact, she was amused by this youth's assertion of the necessity of working.

"Well?" she asked, with an inflection of voice, a gleam of her eyes a tilt of her head, a shrug of her shoulders.

He had fled from the raw, bitter cold, from the snow that tangled his feet, from the hum and bustle of industry, making the excuse that he needed rest and recuperation.

Already the languorous softness and caressing touch of the West Indian atmosphere had fastened upon his being, giving him horror of the rank cold and hard grit of the north; now the habit of conscience, the sturdiness of virtue, the inheritance of morality began to crumble in that presence, exotic in his experience, and when he raised his face from the defeat in his heart, having struggled vainly, and feebly against it

all, she read her answer in the willing submission of his expression.

"I would go anywhere in the world with you!" he half choked, and Savanilla smiled, perhaps the most beautiful smile in all her life.

"I, too, am giving up my dreams!" she replied, for she knew the thought that weighed heavily on his heart.

She slipped from the hands he reached toward her, and closed and bolted the cabin door behind her. Then she brought out Janie's wardrobe, and she picked the gayest of the garments, and the shapeliest of the shoes, the brightest of the flowered stockings, and the sweetest of the several perfumes.

When she emerged she found that the motor-boat had been towed in to a dock, up the harbor, and that the youth was there, waiting for her. He was a splendid-looking man, breathless in his alien adventure.

When he saw her, in the full charm of her island beauty, with those garments which were of his own people, he reached both hands to seize her trim and radiant form, abandoned, now, to the fascination, the delight, and the poison of this alluring kingdom of the fairy isles.

As she stepped upon the splash-board of the engine pit, Savanilla turned to look toward the sea over a point of silvery-sheening sands. In that direction was the great world, with its hosts and glamour, and far-renown.

Stopping here, she abandoned all that, all her dreams of fame—but not, what she had held through all, her hope of love, the sacrifice which she demanded, and which she would, in return, make.

He kissed her as if it hurt—and she rejoiced! They walked up to the cabin and sat in great, green wicker chairs, almost in silence. Suddenly he turned, and with a wry face asked:

"What is your name, sweetheart?"

"Savanilla!" she laughed. "But you need not tell me yours."

"Wha—what!" he whispered. "You—you don't demand to know my name?"

"No." She shook her head, staring at the gravel walk that led down to the harbor. "You need not—unless you wish. You see—I know what you are thinking.

"You do not know what I might do, if, loving you, I were mad with jealousy. You wonder about your own people, back north. Perhaps there is some other girl there, some pale, pink girl—"

"No—no—never!" he cried. "But—"

"I am no one, not even down here. I am white, though—all white. In my veins flows generations of wild men, wild women! I, too, am wild.

"Nothing matters to me. I've thought it all out. I belong nowhere—"

"You belong right here, with me!" he exclaimed. "My name is Robert Clauthen. My mother was an actress, and when she scooted, the old man shifted me from private home to boarding-school, and then to the Gold Coast, just to keep me out of his way.

"Anyhow, he married my mother. He had that much self-respect. He's no good, not much, from what I read of him in the sporting columns, and so on. I don't know him very well, and—God! I've been lonesome—all my life I've been a lost dog.

"I've always been on the level, though. I had to be. I thought, perhaps, I could get shut of—of something down here. But I can't.

"I suppose you'll think I'm a queer Dick. But I wish—I don't know whether you'll want to or not. But I wish—"

Savanilla looked at him, and saw his cheeks reddening, saw the tenderness in his eyes, felt the inspiration of the adamant goodness in the depths of his soul. She half smiled, while her own eyes glistened with the recognition of a man who was above temptation—and yet—

"You wish I'd go away, and not—not bother you?" she asked.

"Yes!" he nodded, and she rose to her feet. "Yes! I wish you'd go away, if—if—"

"If what?"

"If you will not marry me!"

She turned from him as if she had been struck a blow. She drew up taut as a lily-stalk and blossom. He walked up to her and put his arms around her.

"You will marry me, won't you?" he

whispered. "I've been looking for you—everywhere! New Orleans and Paris and Madrid, and Havana—all over, and you came here to me! You will, won't you?"

"I'll have to," she admitted. "I knew I would, the moment I saw you. I don't want to—but—"

"It's the only way." He shook his head. "I mean for us."

"But I'm bad!" she cried, with sudden realization.

"Yes?" he asked, curiously.

"Not some ways!" she exclaimed. "But—that boat isn't mine, nor the treasure in it! I'm a—I'm a pirate!"

"Not yours—what—how do you mean?" he asked, amused.

"I stole it," she admitted, her chin quivering. "I knew better. But I was—oh, I wanted to get away—go somewhere!"

"We'll take it back," he chuckled. "Where do you get married, down on these islands, anyhow?"

"Mostly you don't," she answered, thoughtfully. "But there's lots of places—alcaldes, justices, priests, missionaries, and so on—"

"We'll take the first one we come to!" he laughed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WHITE VOODOO.

JANIE saw what her quick temper had let her into. The idea of having that wretch hunting for her had startled her so that she had determined, on the instant, to capture the motor-boat and leave the two men there, while she and Sorilla returned homeward.

Taulk had balked her.

Now she was this wretched man's captive, and he was carrying her away, helplessly in his power. She did not know what to make of him.

A few years before she had met him in Boston. He was queer, with the queerness which one finds in some of those old, inbred, back-country New England families. For a little time he had attracted and amused her, and one day she had incautiously taken a ride with him up the road toward Concord, and out to Walden Pond, where Thoreau wrote his account of simplicity and inexpensiveness of living.

Reading Thoreau had led her to the purchase of Two Canoe Island, on the St. Lawrence, and when Jocum Lasweston asked her to run out there in the then almost novel conveyance of an automobile, she readily accepted, although she had noticed an uncomfortable light in the depths of his eyes.

They took the old pathway, walked down into the famous bean-field, and each added a big cobble to the heap of stones which admirers have been stacking up there for years, on the old cabin site. Then they went down to the shore to survey the surroundings.

Janie, stirred as always by the thought that there a great man had lived; that there a fine soul had come to maturity, was looking about in awe when her companion disclosed himself in the depravity with which the granite hills and the inheritance of far-off cruelties of the old slave-and-rum-trade days, seems to have afflicted upon the tragic people of the Lasweston type.

Coolly enough, now, she recalled the man's character. He was gray, now, and looked much older than he was. He had lost his knack of looking neat, and the depravity which she had seen lurking in his eyes there at Walden, now had printed its mark upon his very expression, on his bearing, and in the torpid lizardlike quality of his dull eyes.

Captive of such a wretch, Janie could only wait developments. It was not her first jeopardy, and the only question that was in her mind was his exact intentions, and his destination.

In neither case did she have much information from which to build an idea of his plans. At Walden she had acted precipitately and indignantly, and had returned home alone.

Later, he had met her in the Back Bay station, and quietly told her that he would some day have his revenge. He had shown his memory of her in his look, when she had sought to hold him up.

Now he held his course, and between glances at the sun and compass and the

sea ahead, he would look at her with a twisting, satisfied smile.

They were still headed on one course, when the sunset and night flared blackly over the sea. The skipper did not strike any lights, not even to smoke a pipe.

The man had never smoked. The fact but added to the chill inhumanness of his snakelike rigidity.

Janie, getting all the rest she could, let herself drift into sleep. How long she slept she could not guess. It was just dawn when she awakened.

Her captor had stopped the motor, and the boat was in almost smooth water. Astern, she could see a coral reef; she could hear the man's footsteps on the cabin and she heard him lift over the anchor, ready to cast it into the little harborlike refuse behind the breakwater of coral.

The man slid down into the pit and peered in at his captive reflectively.

"I guess I'll take you ashore now," he said, speaking for the first time.

He caught her up in his arms and carried her to the bow, and, jumping into the shallow water, waded ashore with her. It was a sand cay, with a few palms, many palmettos, some low shrubbery, and a few scattered herbs and grasses, all surrounded by the gray-white sand.

He took her up to the height of the island, carrying her over his shoulder like a bag of meal, and for this Janie was very grateful, for her hands, bound at the wrists, hung against his pistol holster, and she drew his pistol and tucked it into her shirtwaist, with such a feeling of gladness as she had always experienced when fortune smiled particularly on her.

He threw her down on the sand, ran a short line to a palm, and tied her to the tree by the wrist bonds. It was but a temporary expedient.

Quite casually he cut the line that bound her ankles together, and returned to the boat where he brought up a number of strange and remarkable things.

He had a long, green robe, a red scarf, a yellow collar, white cords and yellow tassels, a crown, and several brass, fireplace tools, including an andiron, a pair of tongs, a stand to hold them, a shovel, and a brush.

Putting these down, he returned and brought up a high, brass tripod, which he stood up over a level place on the sand, and when Janie looked at the chain dangling from that tripod, her hand went to the pistol butt, under her waist, and did not leave it again.

When she looked around she saw charred sticks and smoky stones and crumbling shells under the palmettos, and she realized that this place had been used before, but the fireplace had been carefully swept over.

Now the man brought out wood and kindlings, and put them under the tripod, but did not light them. He went down to the boat once more, and in that interval Janie was exceedingly active with her hands.

When he returned he carried a mallet, beautifully ornamented with inlaid silver and pearl, and two wonderful knives, one long and broad-bladed, the other short and narrow.

He put on his robe and collar, his black mortarboard, and his ropes and tassels. He mumbled under his breath, his fingers trembling and nervously touching the lengths of the two knives with a leathered stick.

Janie had seen just about all she could stand, and whatever curiosity she had had regarding the purpose of the madman was by this time fully satisfied. Suddenly the man turned on her as if he knew her thoughts, and raising his mallet, advanced, reciting some tragic nonsense.

"You can take your choice, young lady!" he suddenly exclaimed.

The captive, freed now, leveled the 38-caliber muzzle of his own automatic at his waistline, and smiled. Jocum Lasweston, alias Captain Hickory, stopped and blinked. This was not according to the ceremony.

That fact dawned upon him, with a good deal of the nature of a blow on the head. While he hesitated, Janie backed from his presence, slipped through the palmettos, and in a few jumps was on the deck of the motor-boat.

The madman started down on the run.

"I give you your choice. You can die or—"

The pistol had merely suspended his

mental processes. Janie cut the man's cry in two with a pistol shot. The bullet clipped through his fingers, where he held that awful, gleaming knife.

He dropped the knife and mallet with a scream, and Janie threw the anchor up on board the motor-boat, ran aft and started the motor, caught the reverse lever and backed out through the fairway in the coral reef.

Captain Hickory, mad dervish that he was, leaped and screamed and danced upon the sandy shore, waving his hands in the air, and looking helplessly at the mangled fingers which he had to show for his scheming and planning. Janie, with but a contemptuous glance at him, looked away to the open sea and the far horizons.

Happily the motor-boat had the government charts of the West Indies, and Janie had only to recall about the course they had followed, to locate herself near enough among the sand cays. She picked up the turtle island, and, with the compass to go by, left the island of her adventure behind, laughing at the fool who had planned so much and executed so feebly the scheme of his life.

It had taken fifteen or eighteen hours to come to the sand cay; it would take her as long to go back, and very likely much longer, because there were currents and tides and the wind, whose strength she did not know, and could only steer by guess according to the chart, which told averages, but hardly the currents of the moment.

Moreover, she had to worry about the amount of gas in the tank, and this worry became so acute that she set the wheel in its becket, and sounded the tank. It had twenty-five gallons, or about two hundred miles in it.

Besides, she discovered two half-barrel reserve supplies, which were largely responsible for the loggy feeling of the boat in the sea, though it was a good wave rider, and would weather a fair gale, at the least.

Janie had few compunctions about the capture of the motor-boat, naturally. She hoped there wasn't any water within six feet of the surface of the sand on the cay, and the hope was very reasonable.

She had to laugh at the simplicity of the man she had marooned, with his talk about giving her a choice, especially the choice between being hung up a high brass tripod and listening to his garbling ideas.

"He must have thought I was a Haiti voodooster," she said to herself. "I suppose that's the game he's been working down here, to live! Probably some ignorant people of color regard him with awe!"

Mostly her thoughts looked ahead—as usual. She wondered in what relationship she would find Sorilla and Captain Taulk. Sorilla, being an island girl, and having the rifle—which she no doubt had fled to, would have rather the advantage, since she was familiar with island necessities and opportunities.

Janie, remembering Captain Taulk's many abilities, and his rather neglectful ideals, knew that there were many possibilities ahead of her, and she looked ahead with lively interest. The thing that had brought her down the line had not quite slipped her thoughts, however.

She had little regard for the commercial honesty of any of the associates or acquaintances. Navror had hesitated, Sorilla had schemed, Taulk had lurked, and Savanilla had perhaps betrayed Janie's own little safeguards. Janie must needs keep her own wits clear, and not forget that somewhere and somehow, she had a prize coming to her.

Growing sleepy, she sat the wheel in beckets, and caught cat-naps from which the slap of sharp-pitching seas awakened her. Night fell, and she held to the course, and, toward morning, she was on the *qui vive*, searching for the low, level island, with its patches of jungle and wide, tawny prairies, which, perhaps, had another mystery and another romance to its history.

She discovered land just after sunrise. It was away to the northward, and when she turned up to it, she recognized the flat lands. She was on the wrong side, however, and after a look around, she decided that the shortest way was around the west side.

Accordingly, she coasted along the shore, and within two hours saw a lone palm which she easily recognized.

She went along the shore, turned in at

the little creek, and quietly made fast against the steep bank. Then she stepped ashore and walked along the beach until she arrived at the little tent, where she found coals and charred wood smoldering. Just beyond, standing together and seeing nothing but each other, were Captain Taulk and Sorilla.

He had his arms around her, and her face was turned up, willingly to receive the kisses which he lavished upon her lips.

Janie looked at the spectacle rather startled. She had surmised that Derry Navror was not a broad enough, intelligent enough man to hold Sorilla indefinitely. At the same time she was rather shocked to see this definite declaration of mutual love under so bright and blue a sky, in the presence of a wicked-eyed old shark that lurked along the edge of the surf, and right where the immeasurable horizon and the multitudinous sea was witness.

Janie, whatever her own experiences, could not help but feel embarrassed to see such open courtship, even though the two thought themselves alone.

"Now I suppose Derry'll want me for a witness!" she grumbled, turning back to her motor-boat. "Anyhow, I haven't seen anything!"

Going back to her motor-boat, her thoughts turned to poor Derry. The man had always been half-a-failure. Somehow, somewhere, he had lacked. He wasn't a successful sweetheart, nor a successful adventurer, nor a successful husband.

Somewhere he was lacking, and, though she pitied him, Janie knew the truth; Sorilla was already disappointed in the white man from the north; Sorilla could not fail to demand that her husband be fit to be a king, when at best Navror was merely a sort of second mate, a weakling, whatever his apparent qualifications.

Janie brushed out her footprints, and then blew the signal whistle of the motor-boat. Taulk and Sorilla came running. They stopped short, when they recognized Janie, who jumped ashore and went up to Sorilla, and the two embraced.

"Janie Frete!" Taulk cried, "I wonder if you could forgive my cowardice? Till I learned from Sorilla, here, who that scoundrel was, I had no idea of what he was. He had—we had—"

"A scheme?" Janie smiled. "Really, it doesn't matter, Captain Taulk. I'm so glad to be back among friends that I don't know what to do! You've been all right—good children."

Sorilla stared, and Captain Taulk's color changed to a deeper, redder shade. Janie gazed at them with all the grim suspicion of a habitual chaperon; but there was a twinkle in her eyes, and the two saw it. Of course they misunderstood, for the moment.

"I think we'd better beat it for home!" Janie declared. "We'll bring down the camping outfit."

Taulk unshipped his hammock under the old canvas, and the two young women brought away the tent and the utensils. They went on board the boat, and casting off the lines, headed forthwith out to sea, bound for Sorilla's island.

When they landed they learned from the people of the little settlement that Navror had gone his way: that some one had pirated Janie's motor-boat; that Savanilla had abandoned her cabin up the island, and that no one knew where she was. In fact, the island had more to talk about than had been enjoyed there in many a year.

"The Captain Navror, he put an iron barrel into the white north lady's boat," some one said. "And it was not again put away. Some say that in that iron barrel is the wealth of the Indies, and that—"

"How about it, Capain Taulk?" Janie turned to him. "What's there to it?"

"A good deal to it!" he replied. "That barrel may be worth a hundred thousand dollars, and perhaps as little as fifty thousand."

"A very nice bit of pin money," Janie commented.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SHIP OF THE SHARK.

DERRY NAVROR aimed, but he did not shoot. He saw the flubdubbery of the vicious little man, his knife and mallet, his brass tripod, and his mocks

ery of vestments jumble into a tangled heap as Janie shot the knife grip from his hand.

He knew the wretch, who preyed on whom he could. He had been tempted to kill the fellow, two or three years before, because he knew Captain Lasweston was a voodoo, and there is no degenerate quite so bad as white voodoo.

While Lasweston bounded with pain, Janie slipped away, and before Navror realized she had had time to go far, he saw her in the mad captain's boat, taking her departure.

From watching her, he looked for the frantic captain, but he could see him nowhere around. In a moment, as if between two winks, the little old fellow had disappeared among the palmettos.

Navror looked around uneasily. He caught his rifle more firmly in his hands. He was in a thicket, and, while it concealed him, it might conceal an assailant within a yard of him, unseen. He looked around cautiously, crouching, and backed away from the shining brass tripod and the savage trumperies around it.

A fear had settled upon him. His breath grew short, and he took to glancing over his shoulders as he crept along. He was on his way to his own boat, but he made his way slowly and with great caution. He listened for any cry, or any other sound that would reveal the whereabouts of that strange, heartless scoundrel.

He came down to the edge of the low canopy and stopped short, with an angry oath. There was his motor-boat under headway, and in the stern stood the voodoo priest, driving triumphantly out into the open sea, with his hand on the wheel, steering.

Navror had taken too much time; he had been too long about the return to his own boat; he was marooned, now, and he threw up his rifle, took a woodsman's quick aim and fired a 30-30 bullet over the breakers at the pirate, who had stolen a woman. The pirate bounded forward, turned and struggled up against the thing that had struck him.

As he went down, Navror saw the man's hands fumbling at the wheel, and saw, the next minute, that the becket had been dropped upon one of the spokes. He stood there with his jaws agape, as he saw his motor-boat rocking and pitching along, but coming up into its course every time it fell away. He saw the wounded man stand erect, and then fall over the splash-board, and lie there inert.

Under the stern the propeller whirled around, leaving a narrow white streak of a wake. In a minute or two, it was out beyond the heave of the seas upon the island shallows. Beyond the breakers the sea was rolling without white caps.

The boat rocked and plowed along, with its dead man skipper and its turning motor, at more than seven miles an hour. With a cry, Navror ran across the island and looked after Janie, and he saw a dim fleck miles away, which he was not quite sure was the girl, making her escape good.

"What the devil—ain't this hell?" he asked himself, and as if to emphasize his predicament, a thirst assailed his throat. He ran up to the tripod and its little brass shovel. He went prospecting up and down the long, narrow cay, and wherever he looked, there was not one sign of spring or water hole.

"I got to dig!" he said, and he began to dig. There may be more difficult jobs than digging a water hole in loose, caving island sand, but Navror did not remember ever having one as bad. He dug deep, and for hours.

He managed to get a wide, rather deep basin in the ground, and after striking a dark, soggy sand, he rejoiced to find that water was coming in. Upon tasting it he was well pleased, but too well satisfied.

It wasn't salt water, but it wasn't exactly fresh water. It had the taste of brack, but he could drink it. At least, he would not die of thirst.

Navror climbed up out of the spring-pit, and wiped the sweat from his forehead. He was alone and marooned on a desolate little sand cay in the wide seas, but he need not worry overmuch. Sooner or later some one would come along and carry him away, homeward.

Perhaps it would be a turtler, or a pleasure hunter, or any one of a score or more

casual island roamers. No one would come there in regular course, but chance would not fail to favor him.

Navror had adventured too far not to know how to take care of himself. Driftwood cast up on the beaches would keep the little fire which the unspeakable white voodoo had built, and the curious brass tripod would serve very nicely for a bunk in a hut he had yet to build.

He went to work immediately. The scene of the near tragedy was as good a place as any for Navror to build his hut. He cleared away a very small space among the palmettos, and put up four light posts. He put cross pieces at the tops, which sloped sharply to the rear of the frame.

Then he laid poles on top and covered them with a thousand of the broad leaves, shingling the roof so that any rain would run down the slope. He tied poles across the rear and on both sides, to which he fastened countless palm leaves, to keep out the wind. Inside he put down forks of stout wood, and along these laid the brass rods. Between them, he stretched many poles and covered them with a thick mattress of leaves.

He ran an extension fly of leaves and sticks over the fire, and built a convenient back of lumps of coral, and sand-filled shells, making an enclosed fireplace, in which he rapidly cooked a number of the rather insipid but thoroughly palatable shellfish, oysters and mussels which abounded along the line of the sea waves.

Derry Navror, possessing a good deal of ingenuity, having had much experience, and having a temperate zone energy, rapidly made himself a shelter-home which was much better than most of the huts built by the indolent and careless islanders of the shanty-type.

He slept as comfortably as any one could have slept, and for three or four days he found so much to do that he had little time to reflect on the situation in which he had found himself.

But the time came at last when he could think of nothing useful to do, and at that same moment he recalled that he had gone forth to find Sorilla and Janie.

He had unaccountably found Janie. He had been just in time to rescue her, if she had been in need of rescuing, which she had not, having proved competent to take care of herself.

Where then was Sorilla?

He had but little on which to build his imaginings. Had the two quarreled, and had Sorilla betrayed Janie into the hands of the voodoo captain?

It was not unlikely. Sorilla's habit of mind was such that she would not hesitate to rid herself of any one she disliked—in any way.

In full career, with a thousand things to do, Navror had had little time to reflect seriously on the things that he had witnessed, and especially he had given little attention to the life which he had followed those several years.

Now he had all the time there was, and he could swing in a vine hammock which he made, and ponder on the questions of his own existence.

There was little to regret. He had done what he had done. The desperate moments he had confronted, when it was his life or another's, did not worry him in the least. Of course, in the background of his mind there were faces he would like to forget and he was sorry that he had seen Lagniano, after killing him.

The dead man's face was an uncomfortable memory, which refused to be banished. However, it was customary down there in case of attack to make a defense, and if Lagniano had not had in mind to kill the rival for the hand of Sorilla, Navror would not have been obliged to kill him.

Navror, with calm thought, decided that he had not been such a very bad man; in fact he congratulated himself on being quite a decent sort of fellow.

At the same time, as he thought of Sorilla, his sensation was decidedly painful.

He wondered where Sorilla was? He wondered if she would send out or bring out expeditions in search of him? She ought to, of course. He had gone in search of her—with a gun!

He had decided that for his own honor's sake, somebody would have to be killed, or at least needed killing. He assured himself that it was not Sorilla against whom

his indignation had stirred. His thought ran to that Captain Taulk, that northerner, that scoundrel who had flirted—with whom Sorilla had flirted!

Navror took to walking along the beach of his little sand cay, and he circled clear around it, restlessly, walking along on his toes, like a cat, and looking from under his eyebrows, or even through his shaggy brows, because the sunlight was very bright, and the flare of the snowy breakers was painful to his vision.

At the same time, it was not only the sunshine that bothered him; he had plenty to eat, and he could have rested in the shade of the palms all day long—only his thoughts were of the kind that drove him down to the water's edge, or up over the point where he could look far and wide across a beautiful, deserted sea.

Only when one has seen an ocean without ship, smoke or sail, can he imagine the loneliness of it. Navror could see no sight of humanity in any direction. If any craft passed in range of his island, he happened to miss it.

He knew that he was to one side of the various courses of that part of the great island chain. The ships, the pleasure craft, the fishermen, turtlers and even the beachcombers in their makeshift boats would seldom come that way, away out on the brink of the vast deeps, and yet not out quite far enough to be in the line of the traffic north and south.

Here the wakes of the sea crossed one another and followed one another, as deer follow runways, or automobiles follow good roads. Yet, anywhere a little boat or a big tramp steamer might hop over the fence and come across lots to this island, or to its mate, or sister, which was just a little way distant—with a lazy shark lurking in the shallow channel.

Any minute, any second, a boat might leap into sight—like a deer on a prairie. But no boat leaped into view. It was indeed disappointing.

Navror, his eyes scanning the far waters, saw shadows and specters and glimpses of things, but when he fixed his gaze upon any point, what he had seen he could not see again, except that he saw the gray lengths of sharks and, several times, whales that blew and breached.

Watching those sea monsters awakened a feeling of expectancy, of questioning, of wondering as if he had something just under the surface of his mind which he could not catch or bring forth. There were things which he wanted to remember, but could not.

Yet, just when he was fixing up the fire, or cooking fish, or doing something else, he would have the thought full-fledged, and determine to remember it and plan it all out—by and by. Then, by and by, in his hammock, he would strive in vain to drag the recalcitrant idea from its hiding place.

The shark between his island and the other one rolled up on the seas that followed down the shore. The water was quite shallow, but it was a favorite resting place of the pig-eyed brute. Exasperated by its quizzical expectation, Navror sought an elevation in a palm, and watched his chance till the shark rode in its channel in the froth of a breaking roller.

That left five or six feet of the shark's body in the white foam—a black terror in that setting. Navror flashed his sights well back of the eyes and high up, pulling the trigger like a bird-shooter.

The shark turned a somersault, flopped up and down and around like a hooked bass—but such a bass! Twenty-five or thirty feet long, perhaps, and instead of jumping three feet out of water, it reared up twenty feet, dancing on its tail. Navror yelled with glee, taunting the brute.

The shark began to roll over and over like a log, and rolled itself half out of water and well up on the sand, over a cropping of coral. The waves breaking there were the most beautiful Navror had ever seen.

The foam was bright pink, instead of white, and as waves met backwash, they heaved up in a bouquet of pink and white so lovely that he knew this was one of the things he had left home to see.

He went down to the water's edge and stared at the thing he had killed. The pencil-like bullet had discovered the spinal cord, or the brain, or some other fatal place to penetrate. The old scoundrel was only about six feet through at the largest di-

ameter, but it was as long as a house—as long as a—

"Hy!" Navror yelped, with sudden realization. "He's got a good hide!"

No doubt about it! There may be smoother, softer, prettier hides than a shark's, but any cabinetmaker knows that a shark has a hide that is a hide.

The sharkskin is the original hobnailed boot of commerce. It is covered all over with little lumps and bumps and chunks, and the cabinetmaker wishing to put an extra fine polish on a particularly fine piece of wood, takes a small piece of sharkskin, and wipes over the wood, and the shark hide serves every purpose of sandpaper, and then some.

A pair of shoe soles made out of sharkskin will outlast several uppers, they say, and anyhow, Navror had once made a set of sandals out of sharkskin, and put them on a pack-horse's sore hoofs, and the horse wore them four years, or something like that.

The marooned man tentatively stuck his knife into the shark, near the gills, and the shark turned a somersault, a sort of spasmodic quiver that tossed Navror twenty feet, and he was lying on the beach when he came to from the shock.

Happily for him, the tide was going out, instead of coming in—what little tide there was on the island. Had it been coming in, he would have floated out into the sea, drowned, and his romance in life would have ended right there.

The sun was near down, and Navror scrambled painfully to his feet and staggered up to his hut, where he fell upon his cot and suffered. He had been struck a terrible blow, and he could not be sure that his ribs were not broken, that his back was not twisted, that his neck was not dislocated.

He had been inspired with an idea, but he could not think what it was. The shark had knocked the idea a good deal further that it had knocked him. In the morning he went down to look at the shark again, trying to think what idea he had had—it was a monstrous good idea, but he had forgotten it, or almost forgotten it, something that that shark would be good for.

There it lay, that huge brute of the seas, man-eater, no doubt, and destroyer of any edible living thing. For hours he stared at the huge carcass, trying to remember just what notion had struck him when he ran up so incautiously within range of the fins of the monster.

Late in the day he remembered. With a cry, he fell upon the brute with his knife, and began to flay it. It was such a task as one man seldom willingly attempts.

He felt that his life might depend on his skinning that great, rounded carcass, from gills to the tail. He set about it with determination and with much skill. Having skinned wild bulls, llamas, tapirs, twenty-foot snakes, crocodiles and other, but smaller, sharks, he was undaunted.

He dragged the hide, which would weigh nearly six hundred pounds, up the beach, first one end, then the other. He scraped out the inside with all the implements at his command, including the big knives of the voodoo. He propped the hide up and braced it apart, inside, with a frame of poles and sticks and timbers.

He could take no time to rest or to sleep. In that condition the skin was workable—just about. But if it ever dried, he couldn't work it, not without fats and oils and greases, none of which he possessed.

He trimmed the front end of the skin, and sewed it up. He punched holes, and used sharkskin for thread, for rope, for anything he needed.

A true genius in the beach-combing line, nothing daunted Derry Navror! In a week, he stood back from the most remarkable structure which he had ever witnessed, unless it was a bull-boat, down in Paraguay.

He had, now, a private yacht, twenty-seven feet long, with a model that would have made a whale laugh. But it was a boat, nevertheless, and all he needed was to slide it down the poles and launch it, which he did with some misgivings.

The boat rode like duck, or, say, an empty barrel. He had to put in about six hundred pounds of sand and coral for ballast. He put in all the coconuts on the island, and everything else which he wanted to eat.

Then, with the voodoo's brass tripod for

a mast, and about fifteen square-feet of sharkskin for a sail, and the detached tail, sewed to a pole for a rudder, Derry Navror, with deprecatory grins, took a look at the sun and then at the weather, and finally pulled up the stone that served as an anchor, and with a bow of good-by to his islands, set forth, as he said: "By guess an' by gum," to sail the seas for civilization.

He had had just about all he could stand of the lonely island living, and he couldn't head for home too soon.

"I'll be darned glad to see Sorilla!" he told himself. "She'll be back by this time. All the matter with her was that she was jealous of Janie, and wanted to get shut of her!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TREASURE OF THE CASH.

SO the dreams of Savanilla, instead of being realized, led her to an entirely different kind of a romance; the man whose appearance had captivated her was possessed of the conscience of his fathers, and if she had been born without a conscience, but a mere uncommon sense, the sudden love she felt for this fluent-tongued Robert Clauthen overcame her wish for the bright lights of gaiety and led her to accept with resignation the quieter, but prettier and more certain happiness which the funny, but lovable Yankee offered her—on his own conditions.

They had a mad holiday, a rare courtship, and a wedding ceremony which wholly satisfied the whimsical virtue of the man from the north, and then they set forth in Janie's motor-boat, with the treasure cast, to return it, trusting that they would find some other means of passage homeward, when the pirated craft had been returned to its rightful owner.

There may be a prettier honeymoon than one afloat in Exhuma Sound under the gay skies and on the playful seas. Possibly there are people who know better how to love than Savanilla, who loved her man, or Clauthen, who loved his laughing sweetheart.

At least, they were satisfied, and they listened to the clicking flight of the flying fish, to the cries of the fair weather sea birds, and to the chuckling of the waves—imagining, between them, all the stories of the Arabians, the folklore of the Danes, the hero tales of Asgard, the romance of civilization, the fancies of the pale Grecians and the laughing melodies of the black men.

They sailed in the seas where jinn hovered around them, and the old men of the deeps let them go by until they sighted a motor-boat circling around and around in most puzzling and inexplicable course—swinging now to port, now to starboard, again in the trough of the sea, and then headlong over the swells.

"Do not go to it!" choked Savanilla," I am afraid! The witches still live in these islands, and there are strange happenings along these wild seas!"

But her husband would not listen, and he steered up to the meandering craft, and it nearly rammed their own boat, in one of its most startling evolutions.

They saw the steering wheel turning back and forth at the whim of the waves against the rudder. They saw that the cabin was empty, but they could not see the motor which was running steadily.

No one was visible in the boat, and its mystery was the greater and the chill menace of the thing settled on Savanilla's heart, but Clauthen was of the unsuperstitious north, and by skilful steering, managed to get his boat alongside, jump into the pit of the stranger and stop the motor, which was running wild.

He looked about him with awe. No one was in the boat, but there was a stain on the engine pit floor which seemed unmistakable. While he waved a reassuring hand to Savanilla, at his own boat's wheel, he picked up the oilcloth and tossed it over the side. He caught up a bucket of water and flooded the deck along the splashboard, and scrubbed the stains there.

When Savanilla returned alongside he told her with truth that there was nothing to show what might have happened.

They steered the two boats, side by side, toward an island ahead of them, which Savanilla knew, and which was on the way to Sorilla's own group. In a harbor, they cast

anchor, and by the starlight dined and declared each to the other that they were more happy than all other lovers had been.

"I was a very foolish girl!" Savanilla confessed. "All our lives will be happy, now, because of your virtue!"

Savanilla puzzled over the runaway motor-boat. She surmised that some one had been fishing, and fallen overboard, or that the boat had escaped from an island, when a man tried the motor, leaving the gear shift in neutral—from which it slipped into ahead.

He accepted her guesses as likely enough, but he neglected to call her attention to a tiny bullet hole through the splash-board and another one, directly in line, but considerably larger, which had passed through the cabin, the cabin hatch, and lodged up in the bow, a considerably mushroomed bullet, with the butt just flush with the wood.

They had not had time to examine the craft, and loverlike, they had much rather sit in a luxuriously large wicker chair on the cabin of Janie's boat, in the warm, soft breezes of the island harbor, with the stars shining down on them propitiously, and the phosphorescent waters glowing on all sides of them, alive with wonderful fish and beautifully silvery, as if it was intended that nothing should be lacking for the delight of the lovers twain.

The drift motor-boat was hardly a treasure trove, although when he examined it more closely in the morning he found it contained a very good cruising outfit, with spare parts for the motor, plenty of line, small patent anchors and the marks of an old sailor's handicraft.

Not till Savanilla examined it, however, did they find any clue as to its identity. Savanilla, when she ventured to get down into the engine pit, recognized it.

"It's Navror's!" she cried. "Derry Navror's!"

"You know him?" he asked.

"Indeed—yes! Sorilla's husband!"

"And Sorilla?"

"The most beautiful woman—"

"No," he shook his head, decisively, "unless you are Sorilla!"

She laughed at the quick compliment, but as she laughed, the merriment died from her troubled eyes.

"I have seen much," she said. "Where is that man?"

"Why—there's no telling!"

"No telling!" she cried, harshly. "No telling—what was it you threw overboard, that I could not see it? What was it you washed from the running-board and splash-board? What else, but blood!"

He admitted the truth of her surmise.

"And that bullet?" She pointed with her finger.

"Yes," he nodded.

"Then Derry Navror is dead!"

"Who knows?" he asked.

"I do!" she cried, with feminine positiveness.

No one can quite overcome the dim mystery of the sea, the sudden flashing into view or some inexplicable thing, and then the slow withdrawing—still intangible—of what had seemed one thing, which was unquestionably another thing, but what other thing could not be told.

This motor-boat, still under power, without a guiding hand, was to Savanilla's mind a fascinating terror.

It was Derry Navror's motor-boat; the tragedy could not have happened, she thought, to any one but Derry Navror; the bullet had killed, for there was the stain on the projectile base when her husband picked it out of the wood with his knife; there was the blood which Clauthen had been unable completely to wash away.

"Then Sorilla has no man!" Savanilla cried, and she told Clauthen things that she knew; about the handsome stranger, Captain Taulk, and the arrival of Janie Frete, the immedate turmoil into which all those parts had been thrown because of the search for this treasure which they were now taking back to Sorilla's island.

"Whose is it?" he asked.

"The white girl's, for it was left to her as an inheritance," Savanilla explained.

Savanilla summoned fishermen from a settlement back on their island, and they hauled the tragic boat up on the beach, so as to protect the bottom from teredo worms. Then, in Janie's copper-sheathed boat, they continued on their course, like

West Indians taking their time. The distance was hardly a hundred miles, on the chart, but Savanilla steered to other islands and they picnicked under the stars.

When at last they ran into Savanilla's harbor their arrival was announced by the yells and screams of the youngsters, and Janie strolled down to the pole dock, and laughed as Savanilla ran to her, and with a thousand gestures, a million words, and innumerable expressions, told the story of her own sin and of her redemption by this man, this beautiful and fair-haired son of the north, whose goodness was unparalleled.

With the appalling frankness of the Spanish-American, she described his virture, and Clauthen, after listening a moment to this exposition, turned and fled, while Janie's laugh followed him, ringing in his ears long after she had resumed her listening to Savanilla's description of the paradise, the heaven, the garden of Eden which had fallen to her lot, when she deserved nothing of the kind, because she was, oh! so very, very bad!

"Look!" She waved at the motor-boat and at that iron cask. "I was a pirate—I stole these things!"

"Thank you for reforming the so-dreadful pirate!" Janie smiled. "And for bringing these things back to me. What's in that cask?"

"Oh!" Savanilla cried, as she saw Captain Taulk and Sorilla hurrying down the gravel walk from Sorilla's cottage, neglecting to answer Janie's question, and Taulk stopped, glaring.

"Is this the one, captain?" Sorilla asked, slyly, and, as Captain Taulk grimaced. "Just so—as I thought!"

"I refuse, positively, to drink to your health!" Taulk shook his finger at Savanilla.

"But I—I hail to yours!" Savanilla cried, laughing, but looking grave-eyed at Sorilla.

"What's on your mind?" Sorilla demanded, quickly.

"We found Derry Navror's motor-boat adrift, with no one in it, with a bullet in the cabin and blood stains in the pit and over the splash-board," Savanilla declared, and then gave a quick, graphic description of the motor-boat running wild upon the rocking seas.

"He—he had fallen overboard—shot!" Sorilla gasped, shivering. "You think—you *know* he's dead?"

"I do not know, Sorilla!" Savanilla shrugged her shoulders. "I know that he was shot, that we have the bullet, that his boat was out of sight of land, nearly, but these Yankee devils! Perhaps they die several times, and pop up again."

"He's dead." Taulk shook his head, as he turned to gaze fondly into the hesitating eyes of Sorilla. "And you, now, are free, Sorilla!"

He put his arm around her waist and kissed her. Janie, Savanilla, and Clauthen left them standing there, to walk up to the cottage. By and by, the two followed them, and they sat around the table on the wide balcony, sipping glasses full of fruit juices.

"Of course, Miss Frete," Taulk said, "I do not deserve the boon, but if I could have a bid on that treasure of yours, it would be rewarding evil for good."

"Yes?" Janie smiled, as if wholly off her guard.

"Yes," he said, "the temptation was very great. How great I cannot tell you in so many words, but throughout the whole world there was a scarcity of fixers in the perfumery trade.

"There is only one perfect blender, and—and through the regard of your friend, it fell to you. I confess that, as often happens in trade, we expected to deal with people ignorant of the real condition."

"Oh, that is common enough—purchase cheaply—"

"But you know the value. Will you consider forty dollars an ounce?"

Janie did not bat an eyelash. Instead, she considered—obviously. She looked at the tanned and handsome face of the man, and after a time, she laughed.

"I think probably you are offering too much," she said, frankly. "Of course, you mean for the first quality. However, there is always a second grade, or worse. I think that we can make a bargain.

"I don't know just how much there is, but we'll open up that cask—I know it's

perfectly horrid stuff to take care of, but you can go attend to that, and when you are ready, we'll come and see it. Certainly, I'll take forty dollars an ounce for first quality, and thirty-three fifty for the second."

"There is no third quality," Taulk remarked. "I know about how much there is—one of the men here, who knew Coswill, has told me. There are about 210 pounds first-class, and probably eighty of the second."

"Avoirdupois?"

"Yes."

"In round figures, then, about one hundred and seventy-seven thousand dollars?"

"Just about that," he nodded. "It 'll be best not to advertise the quantity found, however. The market is very sensitive, but as we've cornered the market, that will be a fair price.

"*Parfumeurs* all over the world are waiting for this news. I'll go and repack the stuff."

Taking two of the fishermen, Taulk rolled the iron cask down the beach a way, and opened it. The contents were emptied out on a number of big turtle half shells, and carefully washed and cleansed. Then the women walked down to look at it.

It was a very insignificant looking material. It was tough, gray and semilucid. Taulk tested it with a needle which he heated red-hot in an alcohol-lamp flame.

It melted its way in, and there was a faint, fragrant odor. A tiny crystal, dissolved in alcohol may possess the correct scent.

"None better was ever found!" Taulk said, with satisfaction. "We will lose nothing by the bargain, Miss Frete!"

"I'm glad of that," she nodded, "but I must insist that you add, for us three, our own perfume blend—we'll call it Sorilla!"

"I'll do it—for you Savanilla, and Sorilla, too!"

"I often wondered what ambergris looked like!" Clauthen remarked, almost inanely.

About a year later Janie was over at Cape Vincent after her mail, when a tall, rather interesting man approached her along the sidewalk. She stopped and gaped at him, her pretty mouth partly open, and her breath coming in gasps.

Ghosts were a new experience for her.

"Navror! Derry Navror!" she cried.

"Sure!" he chuckled, not quite easily. "Thought I'd drop in and say howdy to you!"

"But you're dead!" she exclaimed.

"That's all right—only don't mention it!" He drew a corn-colored cigarette from a case, and offered her one, which she accepted absently.

"Do come over to the island, and tell me all about it!" she demanded.

"Just what I was hoping to do!" he laughed.

They went to Janie's runabout launch, and when they were on the island-cabin's porch, she turned on him, almost angrily:

"Now tell me all about it!"

"There's not much," he grinned. "I made a sharkskin cruiser and went across to—just a moment. You remember the time that Captain Lasweston had you triced up?"

"You knew that?" Janie asked. "I told no one the details!"

"I was there in the palmettos—I'd just pulled down on him with my rifle when you let drive!"

"Oh—you saw—" Janie shrugged as she colored.

"I saw you beat it for his boat." Navror shook his head. "Then I got my wits—and he'd captured my boat. I shot him, but he slipped a becket on the wheel and the boat went on."

"Then it wasn't you who was shot!"

"Oh, no — but I killed a big shark, skinned it, made a canoe and I found my boat hauled up on an island. Of course, I took it and—"

"You went to Sorilla, then?" Janie asked, breathlessly.

"Oh, no! You see"—he colored a little—"you see, I heard she knew I was dead, that she'd married Taulk—I couldn't embarrass her, you know. So I just stayed dead."

"Derry!" Janie caught her breath. "Do you know that was awful—it was *decent* of you!"

"I've had quite a streak of luck." He awkwardly changed the subject. "Prol, you know, wanted to give you a good time. I thought—well, I thought perhaps you—perhaps—"

"You dear boy!" she laughed, springing to her feet. "Of course! But tell me about it?"

"Oh, nothing awful much." He shrugged his shoulders. "You remember the Esmeralda—that Spanish frigate that broke to pieces on Roman Cay? They had a lot of silver bricks on board, and I salvaged enough of them to clear a hundred thou'. That's all—"

"I tell you what you're going to do, first, before anything else is done," Janie declared emphatically. "I'm not going to have you spending all that money, and being poor. You're going to put seventy-five thousand into an annuity, or out at interest, and the rest—well, of course—"

"Too late!" he laughed, handing her a purple casket.

It contained a wonderful string of emeralds.

"Oh, oh!" Janie whispered, turning a radiant face toward him, "I'll—oh, I must give you a—a little kiss for that! And then we'll go down to Alexandria Bay to a dance, at friends I know there, and we'll—we'll just—just enjoy ourselves. Danyova's married, and she's just the gayest chaperon—"

"You could not please me better!" he nodded.

"And I'll keep these, till some time when you're broke, and then you'll draw a check on me!" she declared.

"No wonder we all love you!" he cried.

(The end.)

WHEN I GET TIME

BY BESSIE O'BYRNE

WHEN I get time,
I know what I will do—
I'll cut the leaves of all my books,
And read them through and through.

When I get time,
I'll write some letters then
That I have owed for weeks and weeks
To many, many men.

When I get time,
I'll pay those calls I owe,
And with those bills, those countless bills,
I will not be so slow.

When I get time,
I'll regulate my life
In such a way, perhaps I may
Get acquainted with my wife.

When I get time—
Oh, glorious dream of bliss!
A month, a year, ten years from now—
But I can't finish this—
I have no time!

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

FAR out on the broad Pacific lies a group of islands known as the Ladrones, or Marianas. Mere specks on the map, palm-crested bits of land against which the surf thunders incessantly, they have been the stage of many a bloody tragedy and of many a tropical romance.

The island of Guam—one of Uncle Sam's outlying woodlots—is the largest and best known of the group. Some of the other islands are inhabited by natives—the Chimoros, or Chamorros, much like the brown men of the Philippines—with here and there a white planter or trader; others are mere uninhabited volcanic islets. Perhaps it will better recall these islands to your mind to say that Spain handed over Guam to the United States at the end of the Spanish-American war, and at about the same time sold the rest of the group to Germany, who held them until the early days of the world war when, for strategic reasons, Japan seized them. What their future will be is one of the questions that will come before the Peace Conference.

But on the smaller islands the natives, disregarding the fortunes of kingdoms and the crash of empires, carry on their affairs in the same manner as they have from time immemorial. Under the mellow light of the tropic moon dark-skinned warriors sing weird love songs to dusky beauties; women gather the breadfruit and the coconut; men dive for pearls; the drums beat for war; babies are born, marriage feasts celebrated, people are carried to their graves—all with little interference from the white man. In fact, few people of our world know much of the real life of these islanders of the Pacific. When a writer *does* know them and their ways, and combines that knowledge with high skill as a yarn-spinner and a keen sense of the dramatic, a story much out of the ordinary and very well worth while is bound to result. Such is the four-part serial that starts in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY—

PUG-LY-GUG-LO

BY JOSEPH PETTEE COPP

Author of "Allatambour," etc.

If you read "Allatambour" you will remember Sergeant Alonzo Zuribar, the son of American parents, who was brought up as a native, and who resigned from the Guam constabulary to become the king of a cannibal tribe on an island not a hundred miles from American Guam. Mr. Copp's new story is another fast-moving tale of adventure, told by the "mild-mannered and peace-loving" Alonzo—traits of character that do not prevent him from getting into hair-raising situations, and fighting his way out with cunning and bravery worthy of a warrior of the Chimoros, among whom he had spent his boyhood. You will find pure delight on every page of this fascinating tale of romantic adventure.

"I DRINK to you," said the citizen of ancient Rome, sipping spiced wine from his bejeweled cup and passing it to his friend. "Have one with me," says the citizen of modern America, planting his elbows on the mahogany bar, feeling for the brass rail with his foot, and signaling for the white-coated bartender.

Will, in a few short years, our American "have

one with me" be as obsolete as the pledges of the old Romans, as forgotten as the flowery toasts that silk-clad gallants drank to their ladies fair two hundred years ago? We wonder—and we are not alone in wondering! It's one of the most popular indoor sports these days. Just now it looks as if in the future dipping the old oaken bucket into the well will be our favorite convivial pleasure, and "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes" our national wassail song.

But we didn't intend to talk about the rum *versus* water case. We just wanted to tell you about an exceptionally fine story—a complete novelette—that you will find in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Perhaps the authors' ideas about John Barleycorn will be yours—perhaps they won't. But any one who reads it will agree that

HAVE ONE WITH ME

BY WALDEMAR YOUNG and HAYDEN TALBOT

is a tale well worth reading. It's about the career of Jefferson Lee, a brilliant young lawyer, and his charming wife, and their friend Colonel Compton Gray. Jefferson was a moderate drinker—one of the "I can take it or leave it alone" sort—and what drinking did for him, and to him, makes a tensely dramatic story that you will enjoy from start to finish. And although it deals with one of the great topics of the day, we are publishing it because it is good fiction—not as a brief in the battle of the "wets" and the "drys."

PUBLICISTS and politicians have taken a malicious delight in showing up the weakness of the professorial character and the mirage of the academic mind. The legend has grown, sustained, not so much by direct evidence as fed by popular superstition. The glib politician has lived to see the despised professor beat him at his own job, and now comes Achmed Abdullah to take up the cudgels for the philosopher in a brilliant story, which you will find in next week's magazine, entitled "ACCORDING TO HERBERT SPENCER." This is a story of great distinction, written with equal skill and dramatic humor by a man who has come to be justly recognized as one of the masters of the art of short-story writing. Professor Lowell Cabot Day was a mild-mannered man, but he earned the title, "The wild-cat which devours his young." How? That's the story, which you will discover is both a joy and a gem.

THE generalizations of psychology are no more sure-fire than the generalizations of business. Both are necessary, not only to keep the professors employed, but to furnish our moral mentors with appropriate texts. Besides, they furnish simple mental pegs for those whose genius runs to tags. But how wofully wrong we may be in a snug summary of a human being when we have turned him over, and, like a piece of European baggage, covered him with appropriate labels. Mary Lerner's remarkable story, "THE LIVING CHILD," dramatically proves. This compelling tale, which we are publishing in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY, concerns a frail little woman, a very mouse of fragility, who by all the gages, not only of her big, brutal husband, but of psychology as well, should have been utterly crushed in spirit as well as body by the brutality of this super-egotist. But Ruth Janeway disposes of our petty theories as easily as she disposed of the burly form of her husband when he blocked her way to the—

EVEN a man who cannot abide a detective story will relish "THE SHADOW," by John D. Swain—and there are such singular people in this very singular world—because this is off the beaten detective track and has a dramatic and psychological interest quite apart from the detective angle. Swain's hero, the Parisian detective, Lapierre, won his colors, as you will, perhaps, recall, in the case of Raol Deshamais, and in this new instance of his prowess he proves that there are more ways than the old and the tried to convict a man. Get the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for next week, and see if you agree with his way. We do. If you don't, why not?

A LETTER PARTICULARLY WORTH READING

TO THE EDITOR:

We have been reading the story, "Koyala the Beautiful," which has been running in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and permit us to say that it is the best story ever published in any magazine of modern times. We have been friends of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the past six years, but never have we appreciated it as during the past months spent in the trenches, when, although sometimes our only light was afforded by star shells and flares, we followed the fortunes of *Peter Gross* and *Koyala* even (we regret to say it) to the neglect of stern duty.

During these long, winter evenings "over here" we have been spending our time in translating "Koyala the Beautiful" to the delightful French family with whom we are now living—translating it to the best of our ability, for our French is still somewhat limited. (Yvonne, the charming and *petite* eldest daughter, has become deeply infatuated with *Peter Gross*, and the height of her ambition is to meet the prototype of this character in real American life.)

Now we have a suggestion to make. Why not publish at least one story of each issue in French? We believe that this would not only help to disseminate some of our best literature among our firm friends, the French, but also to encourage the study of that delightful and musical tongue among our own good people of the U. S. A. Would not these results be worthy of the slight extra expense and trouble which it would cause the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, the most enlightened and

progressive magazine which is printed to-day? We beseech you to give this your earnest consideration.

Let us have more from the fluent pen of Achmed Abdullah; may Allah bless and guide his intellect in the production of many another tale as fascinating as "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms"!

And now one more request before we close. We came from the gold-fields of Baguio, the top of the Naguilian and Zig-Zag Trails in the far-off Philippines, to fight for France and freedom under the glorious folds of the Stars and Stripes; but now we are going to return to the haunts of civilization, and we would like to pick up the threads of our almost forgotten life in our native land by corresponding with some of the Heart to Heart circle.

A France et Amérique! Long may they live! And to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, may she help to bind the ties of closer friendship.

A. M. WICKLINE,
1st Sergeant, Co. C, 338th M. G. Bn.
H. J. HEINL,
Sergeant, Co. C, 338th M. G. Bn.
Company C, 338th Machine Gun Battalion,
A. P. O., 795 American E. F., France.

[Censored by D. B. Simmons, 2nd Lt. Inf., U. S. A.]

"JUST CAN'T GIVE IT UP"

TO THE EDITOR:

My ALL-STORY WEEKLY runs out the first of February. Find enclosed four dollars for one more year of first-class reading. I did think I could discontinue it. But as the time draws near for a new subscription, I just cannot give it up. Please give us some stories like "The Texan," also "The Untamed"; they were simply great, *and then some.* But say, now, you cannot leave *Tex* standing in the woods, smelling of a flower, all by his lonesome. Neither can you leave *Dan Barry* chasing a flock of wild geese. We have just got to have a sequel to both of those stories. They leave us feeling as if something was gone that we must find, so it is up to the author. "Broadway Bab" was a jolly good one.

My favorite authors are: England, Franklin, Brand, and oh, lots of others. Do not care for baseball or negro stories, although E. K. Means is all to the good in his line. Wishing you the best of luck the coming year, I am,

MISS CORA KINNER.

New York Halfway House, R 4,
Bath, Stur. Co., New York.

STORIES THAT LIGHTEN HEAVY HEARTS

TO THE EDITOR:

Well, I just can't help writing to express my thoughts in regard to the good old ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Really it's a dandy. I have no faults to find. Of course some things are not just to my liking, such as E. K. Means's stories. I always pass them up, but I notice in January 4 a letter from J. C. Pointerin, Montreal, Canada, and he remarks that E. K. Means makes many a heavy heart forget for a little their troubles.

I thank this person, man or lady, for this thought, as I had never looked at the subject in exactly that light before. *So by all means, Mr. Editor,* don't forget an E. K. Means story every other week or so. I can enjoy the others. Now, I would make a fuss about your prize-fights and ball games; but my, no; I don't think I will. Maybe they also lighten some one's heavy load. I like all of your serials, mostly. I don't care for those Mars and Moon Pool stories and other impossible tales, except *Tarzan.* I liked that and a few others of the impossible; but, thank you, no; I don't care for your stories of the future. I don't care what they will be doing in 1950. I prefer to wait and see. As for the Tod Robbins stories, I did like "The Terrible Three" very well, but I can't say the same for his other stories.

I, too, would like a sequel to "Koyala the Beautiful." I don't think it should stop there. That is the one and only real fault I can find with your authors; they leave the story so they can write another on the same subject. Now, that isn't right. I like to finish a story when it is finished; or, in other words, I like to have it finished when it closes. Now here are a few I like: *Tarzan* tales, *Wuggles, Semi-Dual.* Oh, well, I am taking up too much of your time, only I noticed a few words in the Talks about women liking mystery stories. Sure, we most all do; but the men most always follow the women's lead, and—oh well, 'nough said. I am not fond of your "different" stories, but now and then I find one that I can read. I always get my money's worth, anyway; but I like serials and novelettes best. Thanking you for your time and trouble to decipher this letter, I remain, an ALL-STORY WEEKLY fan,

MRS. W. E. T.

Sesser, Illinois.

"FIRST AND LAST—WESTERN STORIES"

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed please find one dollar post-office money order for your magazine, beginning October 26, 1918. Due to no dealer in books being here, I have missed all numbers since October 19, 1918. We were living in East Las Vegas, New Mexico. One evening—I think it was in December, 1916—we saw in a news store a picture of Douglas Fairbanks. He is a great favorite with my husband and I, so we bought the book. The story was by Octavus Roy Cohen and J. U. Giesy, "The Matrimaniac" (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, December 16 to 30, 1916); afterward saw the play. Been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY ever since, but used to read the *Cavalier.*

I think "The Sin That Was His" was great; such a wonderful brain that author must have.

My favorite writer is Edgar Rice Burroughs; would love to hear from him again. Next is Randall Parrish; "His Temporary Wife" was fine; can't we have a sequel to it, please? You have too many good stories to mention and take up space (if this does go to print). But first, last, and always, Western stories. An author would get good *food* for thought here in these lovely White Mountains, one hundred miles from a railroad on our main ocean-to-ocean highway. Good luck to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY always. You've furnished loads of cheer in my lonesome hours. Dr. E. K. Means's stories are great. My being a Floridian I understand and appreciate them. Ever an interested reader. MRS. C. E. KEITH.

P. O. Box 54,
Apache County,
Springville, Arizona.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Just a word to let you know how I love the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, my favorite authors being Max Brand, J. B. Hendryx, Jackson Gregory, Johnston McCulley, Rubey M. Ayers, and G. W. Ogden, although I like all authors and stories except S. G. Camp's. I just finished reading "The Untamed"; it needs a sequel as well as "The Texan," and both sure need a sequel. As ever, a lover and well-wisher of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY,

Winter Garden, Florida. MRS. L. E. SIMS.

Enclosed find ten cents, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for December 28, 1918. I am reading the serials, "Broadway Bab," "The Untamed," and "The Wicked Streak," and therefore am very anxious for this issue. I have the later issues, but will not read them until I get the missing number. I buy the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy*, and think both are better than magazines I have read at twice the price. I often wonder if *Munsey's Magazine* is anything like the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I think I'll have to try one some time and find out if it is; I'm missing a lot. The serials are all fine, for they always keep one wondering what will happen next. Here's to the Munsey magazines, each of them of interest to some one!

1087 Wade Street, G. M. PASSENHEIM.
Cincinnati, Ohio.

I am enclosing twelve cents to pay the cost of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for December 7, 1918. I have been reading it since it was called the *Cavalier*, then changed to the present name. I like it very much, and don't care to miss any of the stories. I missed getting the number that I sent for, and was trying for some time, but every news-dealer had sold them all out; so I thought that I would send for it, as I can't read what ones I have till I get it, and I wish you would please send it as soon as you can, as I miss it very much. This is the first time that I had any trouble of getting it, and I think it is a very fine magazine, and all the following stories I think are fine: "The Argus Pheasant," "Koyala the Beautiful," "Tarzan of the Apes," "White Tigers," "The Border Legion," "Diane of Star Hollow," "Steamboat Gold," "When Bearcat Went Dry," "The Black Butterfly," and quite a lot more, which are too numerous to mention. Also E. K. Means, *Semi-Dual*, and Achmed Abdullah stories I like very much. I will close now, hoping to receive my magazine soon.

JOSEPH F. N. DUTTON.
505 E. Westmoreland Street,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the last half-year, and like it better than any I ever read. I like "The Untamed" and also "The Wicked Streak" just fine, and hope you will have some more like them when they are out. I think for authors, Max Brand, Johnston McCulley, and Edgar Franklin are among the best, so here is hoping you will have some more like they have had lately. MISS GERTRUDE HANSON.

Box 417,
Plankinton, South Dakota.

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a long time, and want to say it is the best magazine on the market at any price; *The Argosy* is also very good. I take them both, and sure do enjoy reading every story, including the Heart to Heart Talks and Log-Book. Have just finished reading "Broadway Bab," and think it is the best ever, and hope you can give us another story as good soon. I read a great deal, and feel lost without my old side-kicks when I miss them at the news-stands. I will be very glad to hear from any of the readers of both magazines, from anywhere, or exchange post-card views, as this is my first attempt at writing to you. Wishing you every success, I am, faithfully yours,

MISS STELLA CHESLER.

1811 Kenneth Place,
St. Louis, Missouri.

Enclosed find two dollars, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, beginning November 16. The ALL-STORY WEEKLY is my favorite magazine, and will be as long as you print such stories as "The Texan," "Six Feet Four," "The Black Butterfly," and "The Argus Pheasant." Of course one cannot please everybody, but do you think that the majority of your readers enjoy stories which deal with the future, say, 2500 A.D.? Give us more of the "true-to-life" stories and less of the "impossible ones."

Marysville, California. ROSS GRIFFITH.

Enclosed find twenty cents, for which please send me one copy each of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy* for October 19, 1918. I

failed to get these two copies, and can't get along without them; the ALL-STORY WEEKLY especially, as I want the last of "Ready to Occupy," by Edgar Franklin, and the first of "White Tigers," by Perley Poore Sheehan. Now, just a word about your stories. I sure did like "The Black Butterfly." Please give us some more *Semi-Dual* and James B. Hendryx's stories. "The Texan" was fine. And oh, say, wasn't that "Claire," by Leslie Burton Blades, a corker? Oh boy! Let's hear from him again—soon. I also like H. Bedford-Jones's, W. E. Schutt's, and Max Brand's stories. Oh yes, I'm about to forget; by all means give us plenty of E. K. Means and a whole lot of "different" stories—novels and novelettes preferred. Be sure and send the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *Argosy* right away. I can hardly wait for the end of "Ready to Occupy." I remain, a satisfied reader,

MILLARD A. ADAMS.

Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I started reading your fine magazine early last summer, and write to thank you for all the fine stories of late. I think "The Substitute Millionaire" was great. *Mr. B.* sure was a queer Dick; no wonder *Jack* couldn't find him. To-day I finished reading "The Untamed," by Max Brand, and I have one fault to find with *Whistling Dan,* and that is, why didn't he marry *Kate* and take her along on his wild-goose chase; but being that he has gone, could not Max Brand give us a sequel that would bring him back "tamed"? Wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY all good luck for the coming year,

MRS. J. P. WELSH.

Zimmins, R. O.,
W. Ontario, Canada.

Have been reading your magazine since the story, "The Quitter," was published, and though I strayed from it for about a year, I am still a devoted admirer of your stories. I love serials and the novelettes; but the "different" stories are impossible. "Safe and Sane," "Draft of Eternity," and "The Planeteer" were beyond consideration. The best stories, in my estimation, were "Steamboat Gold," "The Triple Cross," "Suspense," "Broadway Bab," "The Texan," "Lady of the Night Wind," "Twenty-Six Clues," and the last and best of all is "The Untamed." Please let me know if there was a sequel to "The Quitter" and where I can get the book. I like the short stories, too, but I do not like the slangy stories of Samuel G. Camp. I have read one or two of his stories, but pass them by now. Wishing you all the possible luck in the universe, I remain, your devoted reader,

Chicago, Illinois. MRS. J. M. D.

NOTE: "The Quitter," by Jacob Fisher, published in the *All-Story Cavalier*, July 11 to August 1, 1914, was published in book form by the John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia, at $1.20 net. There has been no sequel.

Enclosed find check for one dollar for three months' renewal of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, to begin with January 25, 1919. I think the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is surely a fine magazine. The best mystery story you have published since I have become a reader was "Twenty-Six Clues," although "The Crimson Alibi" promises to be almost as good. "Everyman's Land" was sure a good story, but "The Texan" and "The Untamed" need sequels. Others that I liked in particular are "H. R. H. the Rider," "Broadway Bab," and "The Wicked Streak"; also "Ready to Occupy." Just keep the ALL-STORY WEEKLY up to the present standard and "all will be well" with me.

FERN J. WHITCOMB.

Minatare, Nebraska.

Faith, and I have just finished reading "The Untamed," by Max Brand. It was all I could do to wait on the last of it—though now that I have read the last I'm sorry as the *devil* that there isn't more of it to come. Anyway, "old top," see if you can't tickle *Brand* in the ribs and have him to cough up a bit more of his work.. As for myself, am a Texas *lad* up here in the State of Pennsylvania playing the part of a brakeman, and more than once have I chased callers away in order to read Max Brand; and hoping for more of his "real stuff" soon—I'm off for the hay.

Pitcairn, Pennsylvania. LIT L. BAKER.

Find enclosed forty cents, for which you will please send me your ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *Argosy* for Saturday, December 28, 1918, and both for Saturday, January 4, 1919. I was sick and missed the two numbers, and my husband has been to every news-stand in town looking for them, but if we are not right there waiting when they come in, we miss them. There is not a magazine sold that can come up with either the ALL-STORY WEEKLY or *Argosy*, and on the weeks I can't get them, I'm just lost. The serials are my favorites, and can say this last year there wasn't but one story that I couldn't wait for, and that was "Safe and Sane"; it seemed a little silly to me, but still the rest made up for it. I think "The Untamed" would make up for half a year of bad stories; it certainly is grand. But I know we have a lot of good things coming for this year. Wish me luck in getting my magazines regularly. I will be waiting anxiously for the postman to bring these books real soon. Put me down as a life-long friend and an ardent admirer of the dear old ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *Argosy*. I can't live without them.

MRS. PEARL HUGHES.

1206 Piggott Avenue,
E. St. Louis, Illinois.